

EFL Students' Difficulties in Writing Narrative Text

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Abstract

The purposes of this study are to identify the difficulties faced by students in writing narrative texts and to determine the factors that caused students' difficulties in writing narrative texts. This research used qualitative research with a case study method. Data were collected from observations, questionnaires, and documentation. The participants in this study were tenth-grade students of one public high school in Serang, Banten Province. From the results of the study, there are four difficulties most agreed upon by students in writing narrative texts, namely students' difficulties in (1) writing correct sentences, (2) using appropriate tenses, (3) using appropriate vocabulary, and (4) developing the ideas. Meanwhile, the factors causing students' difficulties in writing narrative texts that they are mostly agree with the limited vocabulary and they cannot write structured sentences in English. Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the difficulties faced by students in writing narrative texts are difficulties in grammar and vocabulary. Then, the factors that cause students difficulties in writing narrative texts are limited vocabulary and inability to understand the grammar well.

Keywords: narrative text, students' writing difficulties

Introduction

Writing is a communication method that defines language by writing signs and symbols, and it is one of the four language abilities. Writing is an essential skill for students to learn because it allows them to think critically and thoroughly, necessary for successful writing. According to Olshstein in Celce (2001), writing as a communication activity must be encouraged and nurtured in language learning courses. Students will obtain knowledge about how to write effectively and express and communicate ideas with others through writing.

Writing is regarded as a difficult skill due to the numerous aspects that it entails. According to Richards and Renandya (2020), the most difficult skill for second or foreign language learners to master is writing. It is difficult to choose words and combine them into good text. Students must also pay attention to grammatical sentences. As a result, students naturally believe that writing is difficult because they must pay attention to a variety of factors, including ideas, concepts, vocabulary, and grammar.

One of the Senior High schools that facilitate students to learn English is SMAN 1



Ciomas, Serang. In the 2013 curriculum syllabus, students learn the material of narrative text that was learned in tenth grade. A narrative text retells stories from the past in chronological order and sequence of events to entertain or inform the reader. In terms of competency standards, students must present oral and written narrative texts about folk legends while paying attention to social functions, text structures, and linguistic elements correctly and in context.

Based on the preliminary research, the researchers conducted interviews with several students of tenth grade SMAN 1 Ciomas and found several problems related to writing. The Tenth-grade students experience problems in writing narrative text. Some of them do not understand the mechanisms for writing narrative text. They lacked vocabulary, and they did not consider the narrative text's generic structure and language features. Some students are unable to arrange and develop their ideas in writing narrative text in English.

Many studies focus on investigating students' difficulties in writing narrative text. There are from Mulyani et al. (2019) focus on finding out the students' difficulties in writing narrative text. Aulia (2019) focuses on finding out the students' abilities and difficulties in writing narrative text. Then, Baa'syir (2013) focuses on finding out

common problems faced by students in writing narrative text. This study has similarities with those previous studies in which this study also describes students' difficulties in writing narrative text. However, this study also has differences from those previous studies since the researchers also investigated the factors that cause students' difficulties in writing narrative text. Besides, there are also differences in the setting and subject of the study.

Therefore, the researchers motivated in studying students' difficulties in writing narrative text. In this study, the researchers tried to determine the difficulties they face and the factors that cause their difficulties in writing narrative text, which is expected to help students to find the source of difficulties and causes of difficulties faced by students in writing narrative text.

Theoretical Review

Writing

Writing is the activity of producing and expressing. It means writing can producing words and sentences that are then expressed with the meaning of ideas, so writing skills are activities that transfer ideas through words and sentences to become knowledge. According to Nunan (2003) that writing is a place for inventing ideas, considering how to deliver them to the reader, and organizing



them into clear and good paragraphs. Furthermore, writing is a cerebral exercise in generating ideas. Consider how to communicate it and structure it into simple statements and paragraphs for the reader. It is a process and a product for writers to imagine, organize, compose, edit, and read.

Narrative Text

Writing is one way to put everything into words, including ideas and feelings. By the definition of a narrative text, it allows people to express their prior experiences in written language, particularly through stories. Knapp & Watkins (2005) explain that a narrative text is a sort of writing that describes a series of events that occur to a person or character. Characters can be people, animals, plants, or inanimate objects. Furthermore, Rebecca (2003) defines narrative text as a text that logically and chronologically relates a series of events created or experienced by particular elements. Grace and Sudarwati (2007) point out that the social role of narrative text is to entertain, amuse, and interact in diverse ways with actual or virtual events.

Generic structure of narrative text consists of orientation, complications, and resolution. Orientation denotes the introduction of the text's participants or characters and the location and ambiance of the scene. Complication, it delves into the

story's tension. It will depict the story's crisis, escalating crisis, and climax. The complication is the problem that has been raised. Resolution, it illustrates the situation following the resolution of the issues. The resolution is the final sequence of events in the story (Pardiyono, 2007). The language features of narrative text, according to Sudarwati & Rahmat (2007) consist of using noun phrase, making use of a relationship, use a time-and-place adverbial phrase, using the simple past tense, using material processes/action verbs, using verbal processes/saying verb, and using mental processes which consists of: thinking verbs, feeling verbs, and verbs of sense.

Narrative text consists of various kinds, namely: legend, fable, fairy tale, science fiction, mystery, romance, adventure, and horror. Harmer (2005) elaborates that there are four difficulties students have in writing text, namely. The first is grammar. The grammar of a language describes how words in that language can change shape and be joined into sentences. Many students have difficulty writing correct sentences. In most cases, students must concentrate on grammar rules. For example, the 'rule' states that affirmative sentences should be used, whereas negative sentences and questions should be avoided. The teacher must explain this rule to students (Harmer, 2005). The



second is vocabulary. According to Oladunjoye (2017), vocabulary is integral to language skills. If a person lacks vocabulary, he cannot express his ideas and thoughts. Vocabulary enters the students' difficulty in writing because these words have the meaning of synonyms and antonyms. Words have synonyms, which are the same or nearly the same. It is difficult to find a true synonym; for example, "costly and expensive" have the same meaning but differ slightly. Costly has a broader meaning for various uses, whereas "Expensive" can be used for a larger project and a larger number. The opposite of a word with the opposite meaning of a word is called an antonym. For example, cheap is the antonym of expensive.

The next is spelling. Kress (2005) says that spelling is simply a matter of spelling a letter of a word correctly, in which the sequence of letters can be remembered to make written words. One of the reasons English students struggle with spelling is that there is not always a clear connection between the sound of a word and how it's spoken. One phoneme or sound can have several spellings, such as paw, pour, daughter, and Sean. In contrast, when the spelling is the same but the sound is different (word, information, worry, correspond). Some students struggle with spelling because not all dialects of English spell the same word

in the same way. Reading, especially extensive reading is one method for helping students improve their spelling (Harmer, 2005). The last is punctuation. According to Ganeri (2013) that punctuation is a set of signs and symbols used in writing. Different author communities will have different punctuation requirements and layouts for communications such as letters, reports, and publicity. In this situation, the difference can be noticed in the way other languages are utilized or how commas are used instead of/as many periods in particular languages. However, many English writers and editors frown on comma 'overuse.' Some punctuation rules, such as capitalization of names, month, and the pronoun I, are unique to one or more languages (Harmer, 2005).

Based on the explanation above, students face various writing difficulties, including grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation. The researchers focused on all types of difficulties students faces in this study to examine their narrative text writing.

Writing Difficulties

Adas and Bakir (2013) identify several factors that cause student difficulty in writing; (1) students have limited vocabulary. So that students end up repeating the exact words, which can hinder creativity; (2) students do not use appropriate spelling, so their written text is limited to the terms they



know; (3) the present tense is the only one used in their writing; (4) the sentence structure is unstructured so that students' writing is difficult to understand; and (5) students are unwilling to share their work with other students and receive appropriate feedback.

Method

The researchers used qualitative research to analyze the difficulties faced by students in writing narrative text. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is a technique for examining and analyzing the meaning that individuals or groups attach to a social or human issue. The research used qualitative research with a case study method. Therefore, in this study, the researchers employed a qualitative approach in describing the data obtained as a result of a study.

This study was carried out at SMAN 1 Ciomas, Serang. Participants in this study are tenth-grade students of SMAN 1 Ciomas. Thus, the researchers selected 32 students from the tenth grade who have studied narrative text

To collect the data in this study, the researchers used observation, questionnaire, and supported by documentation. The researchers did an observation to get information about the actual condition of

students during the teaching and learning process and when students made narrative texts. Then, the researchers distributed a questionnaire to 32 students to get information about the difficulties and factors causing their difficulties in writing narrative texts. The questionnaire consisted of two parts, which included questions about students' difficulties and the factors causing students' difficulties in writing narrative texts. Next, the documentation was used to support the data. The documentation used in this study included the results of writing students' narrative texts in learning English, which is attached as evidence that the students have written the narrative text. In this study, the researchers did not analyze the results of the students' narrative texts because of the limited knowledge of the researchers to analyze the results of the students' narrative texts.

In qualitative research, data analysis is the collection of data from multiple sources to assess the data's validity. In this study, the researchers used Miles and Huberman's (2014) data analysis model, which states that while processing qualitative research data, three stages must be completed. Data reduction entails summarizing, sorting out the essential items, and searching for themes and patterns. In this study, the researchers reduces data from the results of observation and



questionnaires from the difficulties students face in writing narrative text based on Harmer's theory (2005) and the causal factors for students' difficulties in writing narrative text based on the theory of Adas and Bakir (2013). The next step is to present the data after it has been reduced. The data is shown in the form of a brief description. Data reduction was carried out systematically by compiling the data, followed by narrative writing of the data obtained in the field. The data is collected based on the focus of the research by entering the analysis results into notes. The information is compiled in a sentence explaining the findings obtained from the effects of observation and questionnaires in the field. After presenting the data, a conclusion is drawn. Then the data is verified by comparing it with existing theories.

Results

Students Difficulties in Writing Narrative Text

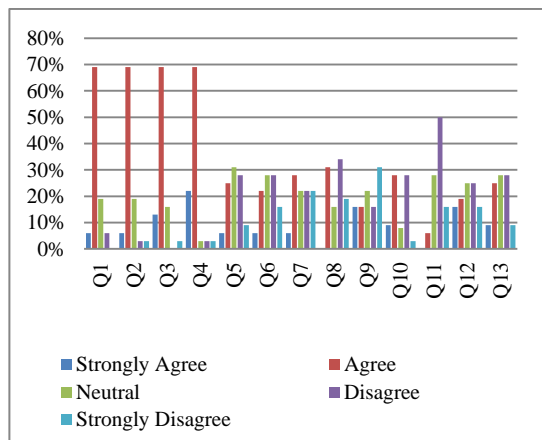
In this study, the researchers tried to find out what kind of difficulties that students faced in writing narrative text. This is supported by Harmer (2005). The data elaboration for each data collecting techniques can be seen as follows.

First, the researchers had observations to get information about the actual condition

of students during the teaching and learning process and when students made narrative texts. In this study, the researchers conducted observations in two meetings. Based on the observations from the two meetings, it was found that when the learning process seemed passive, the condition of students who were not active during the teaching and learning process took place more often when the teacher asked questions or when the teacher asked students to ask questions. Furthermore, when students wrote narrative texts, they could not write narrative texts in English, so they wrote narrative texts using Indonesian first; when writing narrative texts, students also seemed to have difficulty developing their ideas. In addition, students cannot translate the narrative text. They have to use a dictionary or Google Translate to translate the narrative text. Therefore, from the observations, it can be concluded that students seem to have some difficulties writing narrative text.

After observing, the researchers gave a questionnaire to 32 tenth-grade students at SMA N 1 Ciomas. The questionnaire was to investigate the students' difficulties in writing narrative texts. This consists of 13 statements of the difficulties that students faced in writing narrative texts and is shown in figure below.

Figure 1. The Students Difficulties in Writing



Based on figure above, it can be seen that most students have difficulty in writing narrative texts; this can be seen from the students' responses. Most of the students chose the Agree category with 37% (152 student responses). In addition, some students who choose the type strongly agree with a percentage of 9% (37 student responses). Then some students have no difficulty in writing narrative texts. It can be seen from the responses of students choosing the disagree category with a percentage of 21% (87 student responses) and the category strongly disagree with a total of 12% (50 student responses). Some students may not believe that they have difficulty in writing narrative text, which can be seen that there are 22% (90 student responses) who choose neutral. Through the results of the questionnaire, more students chose the "Agree" Option it shows that most students have difficulty writing narrative texts.

Based on the statements number one to thirteen about the difficulties that students face in writing narrative texts, the graph above shows that some students chose the option "Strongly agree," thus it can be said in this option that there are some students who have difficulty in writing narrative text can be seen in the image there are several statements that get the highest percentage in this option. First, it can be seen in figure above, "Students have difficulty in expressing their ideas." with a percentage of 22%. It shows that some students have difficulty in expressing their ideas because they have a limited vocabulary. It is supported by the theory from Harmer (2005), which states that another difficulty faced by students in writing texts is that students cannot express their ideas and thoughts if they lack vocabulary.

The next option in the questionnaire of difficulties these students face is "Agree" in this case; it indicates that students have difficulty writing narrative texts. In this questionnaire, four statements get high results among other statements with a percentage gain of 69% for each statement. The first statement can be seen in Figure above "Students have difficulty writing correct sentences." Based on the percentage results in the "Agree" option, the first statement in this questionnaire shows that most students have difficulty writing structured sentences



according to the correct grammar. It is in line with Harmer's (2005) theory that one of the students' difficulties is that many students have difficulty writing correct sentences. In most cases, students need to focus on grammatical rules. The second statement can be seen in figure above "Students have difficulty in using the appropriate tenses." Based on Sudarwati and Rahmat (2007), it is stated that in writing narrative text, students must use the past tense. So from the second statement, it can be said that students have difficulty using the past tense. They are supported by the findings of Muliyani et al. (2019) that students have difficulty using the past tense. The third statement can be seen in "Students have difficulty using the appropriate vocabulary." which also gets the highest percentage of the "Agree" option. This statement shows that most students cannot use the appropriate vocabulary in writing narrative texts. Similar to Ba'asyir's (2014) finding, students have difficulty finding the appropriate vocabulary. Furthermore, the statement that also gets a high percentage of this option can be seen in figure above "Students have difficulty expressing their idea." It means that the limited vocabulary that students have causes them to have difficulty expressing their ideas. It is similar to the theory from Harmer (2005), which states that another difficulty

faced by students in writing texts is that students cannot express their ideas and thoughts if they have limited vocabularies.

Then in this questionnaire about students' difficulties in writing narrative text also shows that some students choose the "Neutral" option, the highest gain in this option with a percentage of 31% can be seen in figure "Students have difficulty in distinguishing synonyms and antonyms." According to Harmer (2005) that students have difficulty in writing texts because these words have the meaning of synonyms and antonyms. Therefore, in this case, students must distinguish between synonyms and antonyms to find the correct synonyms or antonyms in writing texts. The results of this statement show that some students have relative difficulty distinguishing synonyms and antonyms, which means that some of these students do not find it difficult and do not find it easy to distinguish synonyms and antonyms in writing narrative texts.

In addition, there is another option that participants can choose from, namely the "Disagree" option, which also indicates that there are several statements that get a high percentage amount. It can be seen in figure above in the eleventh statement, "Students have difficulty in using capital letters." Get a high percentage yield on the "Disagree" option with a percentage of 50%. Thus, it can



be said from the results of the acquisition of these percentages that students do not have difficulty using capital letters in writing texts. The results of this statement are inversely proportional to the findings in Laia's research (2019) that he found that some students had difficulty using correct capitalization.

The last one is the "Strongly disagree" option which some students select. Of the thirteen statements on the questionnaire, the statements get a high percentage of this option from the other statements. It can be seen in figure "Students have limited understanding in the use of punctuation." In this statement, more students chose the option "Strongly disagree" with a percentage of 31%, which means that some of the students strongly disagree if they have limited understanding in using punctuation marks.

Based on the data above, it can be seen that the highest percentage was obtained in the "agree" option, so it can be said that most of the students did experience difficulties in writing narrative texts. The questionnaire results found that there were four statements in the "agree" option, which obtained the largest percentage of the other questionnaire statements, namely 69% for each statement. In this case, these four statements show the difficulties students face in writing narrative texts. Namely, students have difficulty writing correct sentences, students have

difficulty in using appropriate tenses, students have difficulty in using appropriate vocabulary, and students have difficulty expressing their ideas. Based on the difficulties faced by students above, it can be concluded that students have difficulties in grammar and vocabulary.

The results of this study regarding the difficulties that students face in writing narrative texts which have similarities to Harmer's theory (2005), there are four types of difficulties faced by students in writing texts and some difficulties faced by students in writing texts the same as the results of this study, namely students have difficulty in grammar and vocabulary. The results of this study are also similar as previous research from Ba'asyir (2014). This study found that students have difficulty finding appropriate vocabulary and make many grammar mistakes. However, the results of research on the difficulties that students face in writing narrative texts have differences with the results of previous study from Mulyani et al. (2019). Based on the results of this study, it was found that students had difficulties with language features, such as using past tenses, nouns, pronouns, process verbal, and direct speech. In addition, the results of this study are also different from Aulia's research (2019). Aulia found that students had difficulties in organizing their ideas.

The Difficulties Factors in Writing

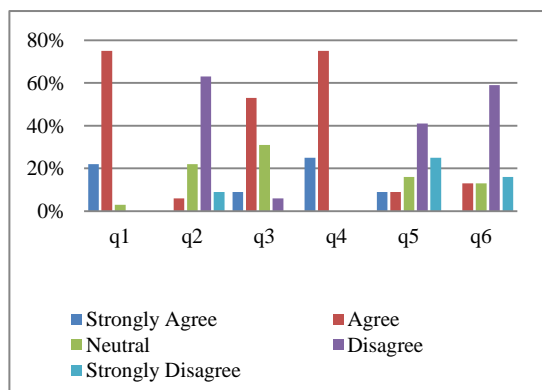
After the researchers found students' difficulties in writing narrative texts, the researchers also tried to find the factors that caused students' difficulties in writing narrative texts supported by Adas and Bakir's (2013). Based on the results of observations, it was found that students have difficulties in writing narrative texts in English and students have difficulties in developing ideas. It is in line with the theory from Harmer (2005) that students cannot develop their thoughts and ideas because they lack mastery of vocabulary. So from the results of observations, it can be concluded that the difficulties students face in writing narrative texts are caused by the lack of students' vocabulary mastery in writing narrative texts.

The researchers also gave a questionnaire to investigate the factors caused students' difficulties in writing narrative texts. The results are described below.

The figure above shows that most students choose the option "Strongly agree" with a percentage of 25% on the statement "Students cannot write structured sentences according to the correct grammar." This statement shows that 25% of students strongly agree that the factor causing the difficulties students face in writing narrative texts is that students cannot write structured sentences according to the correct grammar. So from this statement, it can also be said that students do not understand grammar well. It is in line with what Adas and Bakir (2013) stated that one of the factors causing students' difficulties in writing texts is the unstructured structure of the sentence.

The next option in the questionnaire about the causes of student difficulties is "Agree," wherein there are several statements that get high results among other statements. The first statement, "Students have a limited vocabulary," can be seen in the first statement. With a percentage of 75%, from the statement results, there were no students who chose the option to disagree or even strongly disagree. It shows that most students agree that students have limited vocabulary, which causes them to have difficulty writing narrative texts. In line with one of the identification results from Adas and Bakir (2013), one of the factors causing students' difficulties in writing texts is that students

Figure 2. The Difficulties Factors in Writing





have a limited vocabulary. Students end up repeating the same words. In addition, this result is also in line with one of the findings from Tetelambanua's research (2014) which found that one of the factors causing students' difficulties in writing narrative texts was due to lack of vocabulary mastery. Furthermore, in the fourth statement, "Students cannot write structured sentences according to correct grammar," with the same percentage as the first statement, which is 75%, besides this statement also gets the same percentage on the "strongly agree." It shows that students cannot write structured sentences according to the correct grammar, which is a factor causing students' difficulties in writing narrative texts. In other words, it can be concluded that students do not understand grammar well. It is in line with Tetelambanua's (2014) research findings that one of the factors that also cause students to have difficulty in writing narrative texts is the students' lack of knowledge about the structure of English sentences. Thus, students have difficulty in arranging sentences correctly.

The third option chosen by students is the "neutral" option. In this option, there is also a statement that gets a relatively high percentage of other statements with a fairly high percentage of 31% can be seen in the third statement, "Students only use the

present tense in writing texts." It can indicate that students do not often and only sometimes use the present tense in writing texts, which causes difficulties in writing narrative texts. It is also in line with the identification results from Adas and Bakir (2013) that one of the factors that cause students' difficulties in writing narrative texts is the use of the present tense, which is the only tense used in writing. Thus, it can also be said that students lack understanding of the tenses used in writing narrative texts.

In addition, there is another option that participants can choose, namely the "Disagree" option, which also gets a relatively high percentage. It can be seen in the third statement, "use of inappropriate spelling of words." with a percentage of 63%. It shows that most students do not agree that they cannot use the appropriate word spelling, which causes difficulties in writing narrative texts. Therefore, it can be said that most students are able to use the appropriate spelling of words. Thus, in this case, it is inversely proportional to the identification results of Adas and Bakir (2013) that the factors causing students' difficulties in writing narrative texts are students do not use appropriate spelling so that their written text is limited to the words they know.

The last option is "Strongly disagree," which also shows a fairly high result with a



percentage of 25%. It can be seen in the fifth statement, "Students do not share their writing text with friends to get feedback to improve their writing." which means that there are some students who strongly disagree that they do not share their writings with friends to get feedback. It is inversely proportional to improving their writing, which is the cause of their difficulties in writing narrative texts. From this, it can be seen that students have shared their writings with their friends and have received feedback to improve their writing so that this statement does not cause difficulties for students in writing narrative texts. In contrast to what was stated by Adas and Bakir (2013, one of the causes of students' difficulties in writing texts is that students do not want to share their work with other students and do not receive feedback to improve their writing.

Based on the results, two factors indicate the factor that causes most students to face difficulties in writing narrative texts. Namely, students have limited vocabulary. Students cannot write structured sentences according to the correct grammar. The findings of this study regarding the factors causing students' difficulties in writing narrative texts have similarities with the identification results from Adas and Bakir (2013) that several factors cause students' difficulties. This study found that the factors

that cause students' difficulties are students have limited vocabulary and cannot write structured sentences according to correct grammar. The results of this study also have similarities with the research results from Laia (2019). Laia's research also found the factors that cause students' difficulties in writing narrative texts: students do not have enough knowledge about English structure and lack of vocabulary. However, Apriani's research (2019) found different results from this study regarding the factors that cause students to have difficulty in writing narrative texts. The results of Apriani's research (2019) found that the factors causing students to have difficulty came from two factors, first from internal factors, such as some students never read or did English lessons, especially writing narrative texts and grammar at home, they did not understand the type of text well, especially in narrative texts; they are less interested in learning and using vocabulary in daily activities and less motivated to write in English and learn English well. Second, these also come from the external factors such as less motivated teachers, less attractiveness, and innovation in teaching methods.

Conclusion

Based on the result above, some conclusions can be drawn; students have difficulty in writing correct sentences, using



the appropriate tenses, using the appropriate vocabulary, and difficulty in expressing the ideas. These four difficulties were the most agreed-upon statements with 69% choosing the Agree option. Based on the difficulties students face above, it can be concluded that students have difficulties in grammar and vocabulary. Then, the study results also showed two factors causing students' difficulties in writing narrative texts; students have limited vocabulary and cannot write structured sentences according to correct grammar. Two factors that caused students' difficulties were the most agreed-upon statements with 75% of students each selecting the Agree option. It can be concluded that the cause of students' difficulties is limited vocabulary and students do not understand grammar well.

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