

## **STUDENTS' ABILITY AND DIFFICULTIES IN WRITING AT THE TENTH GRADE**

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### **Abstract**

The tenth-grade students in Indonesia had difficulties in writing and this was the background to conduct the study. EFL in Indonesia was one of the factors why students had difficulties in writing. There were some indicators to determine students' ability in writing. This study used five indicators which included content, organization, grammar, vocabulary and style & quality. The approach of the research used a mixed method (combined quantitative and qualitative data). Quantitative data was collected by using a test sheet. This instrument was used to measure students' ability in writing. Furthermore, qualitative data was collected by interview. This instrument was used to describe students' difficulties in writing. The subjects of the research consist of 20 students of High School and they were taken by using a random sampling technique. After collecting the data, quantitative data (test sheet) showed an average of 50.7. This score was an unacceptable-not category (below average). Furthermore, the students' difficulties in writing included internal factors and external factors. The first factors included the lack of organization mastery, developing ideas mastery, grammar mastery, and vocabulary mastery. Meanwhile, the second factors included English learning time was being very short, daily life, and inaccurate curriculum in learning writing. It was concluded students' ability was below average and this case was caused by external and internal factors

**Keywords**— ability, difficulties, students, writing

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### **Introduction**

Writing is a subject for students in the tenth grade in Indonesia. This skill has to be master by students besides speaking, listening, and reading. This skill needs a process to produce the product. The product is a communication between the reader and writer. Some genre of writing that studied at tenth grade students based on their curriculum such as; narrative writing, descriptive writing, procedure, report writing, and the others. Each writing has differences in organization, grammar, mechanics, content, style and others. This study highlights students' ability to write news items because this text was difficult to master for tenth-grade students.

Actually, there are some studies conducted to investigate students' difficulties in writing such as, (Rahmatusina, 2014), her study investigated students' difficulties in writing argumentative essays. The results of the study gave the conclusion that there were three points why students had difficulties in writing. They are linguistics, cognitive, and psychological.

Next, (Nasser, 2018) also investigated the difficulties of Iraq students in writing, the conclusion of the study stated that 1) the students got difficulties in arranging paragraph, 2) students got difficulties on grammar include vocabulary, tenses, article, and verbs, 3) students got stress from instructors, 4) the influence of mother tongue, and 5) lack of repetition, audiovisual, media and competition within the group.

The other side, (Belkhir, 2017) exposed that coherence and cohesion are the students' difficulties with EFL in writing because of the influence of their mother tongue, the lack of writing practice, and the lack of reading. (Irwan, 2018) also highlighted the students' writing ability in Indonesia, the ability of EFL students in Indonesia to write is still *adebatable* issue in research communities.

Based on the study results differences above, the writer was interested to investigate students' writing ability of EFL in Padangsidempuan. This study is deemed necessary because writing is considered an academic skill and the students have to have the ability in English effectively. (Masduqi, 2017) and (Husin, 2017) claimed students' writing ability is one of some success indicators in education. Considering the explanation before, this study investigated the level of students' writing ability and students' EFL difficulties in writing. To be clear, the formulation of the problem is written in two numbers which include:

1. To what extent are students' ability in writing at the tenth-grade students?
2. What are students' difficulties in writing in tenth-grade students?

## Literature Review

(Brown, 2010) confirms some indicators in writing which include organization, logical development of ideas, grammar, punctuation, spelling & mechanics, and style & quality of expression. This affirmation is supported by (Langan, 2012), writing is not only about arranging the words neatly but the writer has to consider the others such as generic structure, purpose, grammatical and others.

The most students have difficulties in getting the main idea, topic sentence, the supporting details, and they are not able to reach a conclusion (Maulida, 2022). These difficulties cause students' ability in writing to be low. The other side, (Taufiqurrochman, 2021) states the main problem of students' writing is caused by inadequate feedback on the writing itself. Teachers have an important part in giving feedback on the students' writing. Beside feedback, teachers also have a role as the motivator and resource. These three points are needed by students to improve students' writing ability in the classroom (Indrilla, 2018).

Students' difficulties in writing included (1) difficult to find ideas, develop ideas and organize them into good written, (2) difficult to organize ideas that have been developed into sustainable and meaningful sentences, and (3) the limited vocabulary that students have in compiling their ideas (Martha, 2018). This statement is linked to (Zahra, 2023), sometimes the ideas and feelings expressed by students, the readers are not able to comprehend. Students have problems in writing effectively, the lack of grammar mastery, vocabulary mastery, spelling mastery, punctuation mastery, and layout mastery. (Alwi, 2021) and (Sholeh, 2021) add that writing activities require full concentration to develop the ideas and feelings, through the media of language in the form of writing must be understood by readers.

When a person is able to express his thoughts or feelings in writing is called writing activities (Ibnian, 2011). (Abdul Hakim, 2021) terms writing is a series of one's activities to express ideas and convey them in written form to readers. Furthermore, (Hakim, 2022) states that teachers' skill in teaching writing and students' motivation are the important key to improve students' ability in writing. He adds that curriculum implementation also has influence on students' ability in writing.

Based on the explanations before, there are some factors why students have difficulties in writing. Before teacher chooses the right learning strategy in writing, it would be better if the English teacher knows in advance what problems students face in writing and why they get difficulties in writing. After the English teacher knows the students' problems, the teacher will be easier to choose the right learning strategy to solve students' problems. It's line with (Rusman, 2022) learning strategy is an important point to improve students' writing ability It's concluded that teacher has to know strategy learning in writing based on students' difficulties.

## Research Method

This research used a mixed method (combined qualitative and quantitative). Quantitative data was collected by using a test sheet. This instrument was used to measure

students' ability in writing. Furthermore, qualitative data was collected by interview. This instrument was used to describe students' difficulties in writing. The subjects of the research consist of 20 students in High School and they were taken by using a random sampling technique.

## Results and Discussion

### Results

There are two techniques on analyzing the data in this research, namely quantitative data and qualitative data. Quantitative data was used to answer the first problem, what extent the students' ability in writing. This analysis uses the tables, chart, and measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode). Then qualitative research was used to answer the second problem, what the students' difficulties in writing

#### a. Quantitative data

20 students were asked to write a text (news item text), results showed the range score of the students of 4 to 85. It means that the highest score was 85 and the lowest score was 4. Central tendency of students showed 1) the mean score was 50.7 (unacceptable- not), the median score was 66.5 (unacceptable- not), and the mode was 4 (college to level work). Furthermore, the score of mean, median, and mode describe in the table.1 below:

*Table 1. Students' Score of Mean, Median and Mode of Writing Ability*

| No. | Central Tendency | Score | Category              |
|-----|------------------|-------|-----------------------|
| 1.  | Mean             | 50.7  | Unacceptable-not      |
| 2.  | Median           | 66,5  | Unacceptable-not      |
| 3.  | Mode             | 4     | College to level work |

Next, the frequency distribution of students' ability in writing can be seen below:

*Table 2. Frequency Distribution Score of Students' Writing Ability*

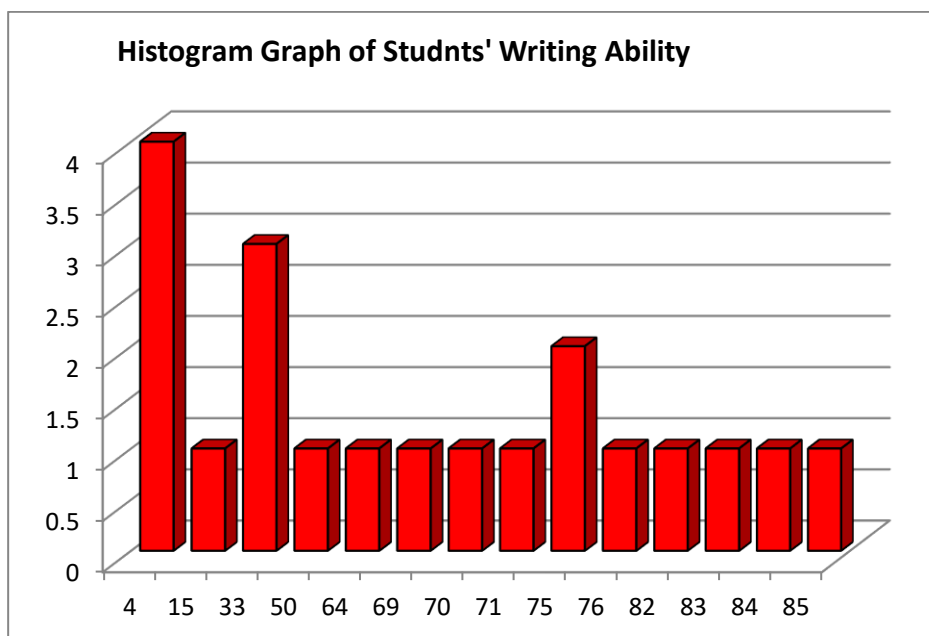
| No.   | Score | Frequency | Percentage | Category              |
|-------|-------|-----------|------------|-----------------------|
| 1.    | 4     | 4         | 20%        | Collage to Level Work |
| 2.    | 15    | 1         | 5%         | Collage to Level Work |
| 3.    | 33    | 3         | 15%        | Collage to Level Work |
| 4.    | 50    | 1         | 5%         | Collage to Level Work |
| 5.    | 64    | 1         | 5%         | Unacceptable Not      |
| 6.    | 69    | 1         | 5%         | Adequate to Fail      |
| 7.    | 70    | 1         | 5%         | Good to Adequate      |
| 8.    | 71    | 1         | 5%         | Good to Adequate      |
| 9.    | 75    | 2         | 10%        | Good to Adequate      |
| 10.   | 76    | 1         | 5%         | Good to Adequate      |
| 11.   | 82    | 1         | 5%         | Good to Adequate      |
| 12.   | 83    | 1         | 5%         | Good to Adequate      |
| 13.   | 84    | 1         | 5%         | Excelent to Good      |
| 14.   | 85    | 1         | 5%         | Excelent to Good      |
| Total |       | 20        | 100 %      |                       |

Frequency distribution table above showed, there were 4 students got score 4 (20%), 1 student got score 15 (5%), 3 students got score 33 (15%), 1 student got score 50 (5%), 1 student got score 33 (15%), 1 student got score 50 (5%), 1 student got score 64 (5%), 1 student got score 69 (5%), 2 student got score 70 (10%), 1 student got score 71 (5%), 2 student got score 75

(10%), 1 student got score 76 (5%), 1 student got score 82 (5%), 1 student got score 83 (5%), 1 student got score 84 (5%), and 1 student got score 85 (5%).

Therefore, to complete the explanation students' ability in writing would be seen histogram chart as follow:

*Graph.1. Histogram graph of students' writing ability*



**b. Qualitative data**

Qualitative data was collected by conducting interview to the students and English teacher. This instrument was used to know students' difficulties writing. The informant included students and English teacher. Based on interview with the students, their answers were grouped in four points.

1) Students didn't understand what the organization of writing.

*students 01*

*" I don't know where I begin and when I end the writing. Although the teacher had taught it in the class but I am still feel confusing ..... "*

*students 02*

*"I think the topic will be easier if the teacher ask me to tell before my students. I get difficulty to express idea in writing. .... "*

2) The lack of developing idea

*students 03*

*" I know the topic but I get difficulty to develop the idea ..... "*

*student 04*

*"It's so difficult to rewrite this topic although I know the incident thoroughly. .... "*

3) The lack of grammar

*students 05*

*" Actually I know the grammar but I am often wrong in using sentence, past tense or present, I am still confusing use verb, English frase is difference with Indonesian frase ..... "*

*student 06*

*"Grammar in writing feels more difficult than grammar in speaking ..... "*

4) The lack of vocabulary

*students 05*

*“Choosing the right words in writing is a particular difficulty for me because I am not used to using English in my daily life.....”*

student 06

*“My vocabulary is not enough to make good writing, it seems I have to learn better in vocabulary.....”*

Furthermore, the teacher of English gave explanation of students' difficulties in writing. *“Actually there are some factors why they had difficulties in writing. The factors include internal factors and external factors. Internal factors included 1) “They did not feel that the ability to write is very important so they were not motivated to learn to write. They felt speaking is easier than writing. Writing needs some rules which include organization, content, punctuation, capital letters and others. They felt speaking ability is enough to communicate in English, 2) The lack of vocabulary was one of factors why students' difficulties in writing. Students learned vocabulary by remembering word by word, today they remember their memory but tomorrow they will forget because they didn't use it in daily life, 3) Grammar also was one of some factors why students had difficulties in writing, the differential of English and Indonesian grammar make students got difficulties to master it, and 4) the lack of punctuation, figurative language and so on. This part also caused the students felt difficult to make a good writing. The students complained that writing is more difficult than speaking, they state that speaking did not use the role like comma, colon, full stop, capital letter and so on.*

*Besides internal factors, external factors also influence students' writing ability. These factors include 1) The time given for writing learning was not enough so English teachers have difficulty teaching so much material in a short time, 2) Daily life of the students didn't support students to improve students' writing ability, and 3) Inaccurate curriculum in learning writing in classroom causes English teachers have difficulties in choosing the right strategies and models.*

## **Discussion**

Based on the results above, there are some main problems of students in writing. These problems were found for giving a contribution to the teacher of English for EFL students. Based on quantitative data, students' writing ability was still unacceptable-not. It means 1) Shaky or minimally recognizable introduction ; organization can barely be seen; severe problems with ordering of ideas; lack of supporting evidence; conclusion weak or illogical; inadequate effort art organization, 2) Ideas complete; essay does not reflect careful thinking or was hurriedly written; inadequate effort i area of content, 3) Numerous serious grammar problems interfere with communication of the writer's ideas; grammar review of some areas clearly needed; difficult to read sentences, 4) Serious problems with format of paper, parts of essay not legible; errors in sentence punctuation and final punctuation; unacceptable to educated readers, and 5) Poor expression of ideas; problems in vocabulary; lacks variety of structure.

On the other side, qualitative data showed students had a lot of difficulties in writing. Their difficulties were divided into two parts. They are internal and external factors (Dewi, 2021). Internal factors included the lack of organization, developing ideas, grammar, and vocabulary. Furthermore, external factors included 1) the time given for learning English is not enough so English teachers have difficulty teaching so much material in a short time, 2) Daily life of the students don't support students to improve students' writing ability and 3) Inaccurate curriculum in learning writing in classroom is causes English teachers had difficulties in choosing the right strategies and models.

## **Conclusion**

Based on data analysis, conclusion includes:

1. Students' ability in writing is *unacceptable-not*. Based on grade in Indonesia, this category is almost the same to poor category or below average.
2. There are some main problems students' difficulties in writing. The problems were separated into two parts, internal and external factors. The first factors included the lack of organization mastery, developing idea mastery, grammar mastery, vocabulary mastery.



Meanwhile external factors included English learning time is very short, daily life, and inaccurate curriculum in learning writing.

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