

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the background of the study, which explains the reasons and significance of conducting the research. It also presents the identification of the problems, the scope and limitation of the study, the research questions, the objectives of the research, and the benefits expected from the study. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a clear foundation and direction for the research.

A. Background of the Study

English has become a global language, functioning as a medium of communication in various fields such as education, technology, business, and diplomacy. In Indonesia, English is taught as a compulsory subject at junior and senior high school levels to prepare students for global communication. Harmer (2015) emphasizes that learning English as a foreign language requires mastery of four key skills-listening, speaking, reading, and writing-each of which plays an essential role in communication. Among these skills, writing is considered the most complex to master because it demands not only linguistic knowledge but also the ability to organize ideas logically (Hyland, 2003). Writing in English as a foreign language (EFL) poses additional challenges for students, such as limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, and difficulties in expressing ideas coherently. As Byrne (1991) notes, writing is a process of encoding messages into written symbols, requiring careful thought and linguistic accuracy.

In the Indonesian junior high school curriculum, descriptive text is introduced to Grade VII and VIII students as part of the genre-based approach mandated by the 2013 Curriculum (Kurikulum 2013). Descriptive text aims to describe a person, place, object, or animal in detail, allowing readers to visualize the subject. According to Gerot and Wignell (1994), descriptive text is characterized by specific participants, present tense verbs, and descriptive adjectives. Despite its apparent simplicity, descriptive writing remains a challenge for many students. Research by Richards and Renandya (2002)

indicates that learners often struggle with generating ideas, organizing content, and applying correct grammar when writing descriptive texts. In the context of SMPN 1 Gambut, preliminary observations reveal that students tend to produce short, underdeveloped descriptions lacking clear structure and detail.

One of the main reasons for this difficulty is the lack of stimulating teaching media. Brown (2001) explains that motivation and interest are essential for successful language learning, and the absence of engaging materials can hinder student performance. When students are only given text-based prompts without visual support, they may find it difficult to imagine or describe the subject matter in detail. To address these challenges, educators have explored various teaching aids, including short illustrations. Short illustrations, in the form of pictures or sequential images, serve as visual prompts that help students conceptualize their ideas before writing. According to Wright (1989), pictures can motivate learners, provide a shared experience, and stimulate the use of language in a meaningful context. Short illustrations align with the principles of dual coding theory proposed by Paivio (1990), which states that combining verbal and visual information can enhance comprehension and memory retention. By using images alongside written tasks, students can form stronger mental representations of the subject they are describing.

In writing descriptive texts, short illustrations can play a crucial role in bridging the gap between students' ideas and their linguistic output. Harmer (2007) asserts that visual aids can serve as a springboard for language production, encouraging students to generate relevant vocabulary and organize their sentences logically. Previous studies have demonstrated the benefits of visual aids in EFL writing. For example, Yunus, Salehi, and John (2013) found that students who used picture series as writing prompts produced longer and more detailed compositions compared to those who relied on textual prompts. Similarly, Kasma and Supiani (2020) reported that visual media increased students' motivation and creativity in writing tasks. However, despite these promising findings, the use of short illustrations in writing classes is still underutilized in many Indonesian schools, including SMPN 1 Gambut. Teachers often focus on traditional teaching methods such as textbook

exercises, which may not fully engage students or address their learning needs.

In the context of SMPN 1 Gambut, integrating short illustrations into writing lessons offers a new opportunity to enhance students' engagement. Visual media can reduce cognitive load by providing clear contextual clues, enabling students to focus more on language production rather than on generating ideas from scratch (Sweller, 1994). Furthermore, the use of visual media in writing activities supports students' cognitive engagement. According to Mayer (2009) in his Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, combining words and pictures encourages deeper processing, which improves comprehension and facilitates language production. This is particularly important for young learners who benefit from concrete visual stimuli.

In the Indonesian context, several studies have highlighted the positive role of visual media in improving writing skills. For example, Arsyad (2011) explains that visual aids are effective in attracting students' attention, clarifying abstract concepts, and reinforcing learning. In the case of descriptive writing, this means that students can more easily identify key features of the object or person they are describing. Despite these benefits, the implementation of short illustrations in EFL classrooms often depends on the teacher's creativity and access to resources. Tomlinson (2011) points out that many teachers in developing countries rely heavily on textbooks and may not have sufficient training in creating or selecting appropriate visual materials for writing tasks. Another factor influencing the success of using short illustrations is the students' familiarity with the images. According to Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985), comprehensible input is crucial for language acquisition. If the images are unfamiliar or culturally irrelevant, students may struggle to connect them with meaningful language output.

To maximize effectiveness, the use of short illustrations should be integrated into a well-structured writing process. Seow (2002) outlines four main stages in process writing-planning, drafting, revising, and editing-which can be adapted when using visual prompts. For example, in the planning stage, students can discuss the illustration, brainstorm vocabulary, and outline their descriptions before writing. Additionally, the role of teacher feedback is

essential in this approach. Ferris (2003) emphasizes that timely and constructive feedback helps students refine their writing and address common errors. When using short illustrations, feedback can focus on how effectively students use descriptive language and organize their ideas. Collaboration can also enhance the benefits of using short illustrations. Johnson and Johnson (1999) found that cooperative learning fosters peer support, idea sharing, and increased motivation. In descriptive writing, students working together can exchange vocabulary, correct each other's grammar, and suggest additional details to make the writing more vivid. Ultimately, the integration of short illustrations in descriptive writing aligns with the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, which emphasizes meaningful communication and learner engagement (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). By making writing tasks more interactive and visually stimulating, short illustrations can transform writing from a monotonous exercise into an enjoyable and productive learning experience.

B. The identification of Problem

Many students face difficulties in generating ideas and organizing sentences when writing descriptive texts in English. Students' motivation in writing is low when no engaging media is used. The use of short illustrations in teaching writing descriptive texts is rarely applied in SMPN 1 Gambut, and its impact on students experiences has not been thoroughly investigated.

C. Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study is limited to exploring the experiences of Grade VIII students at SMPN 1 Gambut in using short illustrations for writing descriptive texts in English. It specifically focuses on identifying the challenges students face in composing descriptive texts and examining their experiences when short illustrations are integrated into the learning process. The research does not aim to measure the statistical improvement of students' writing scores nor to compare the effectiveness of short illustrations with other teaching methods. Instead, the scope is confined to understanding the qualitative aspects of students' engagement, perception, and learning experiences when exposed to this visual-based writing approach.

D. Research Questions

The researcher formulated the research problem as follows:

1. What are the students' challenges in English writing descriptive text?
2. How are the students' experiences in using short illustrations for English writing descriptive text?

E. Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to identify the challenges faced by Grade VIII students at SMPN 1 Gambut in writing descriptive texts in English and to describe their experiences in using short illustrations as medium for writing. Through this research, the study seeks to explore the specific difficulties students encounter in the writing process, such as generating ideas, organizing sentences, and applying appropriate vocabulary and grammar. In addition, it aims to capture students' perceptions and learning experiences when short illustrations are incorporated into classroom activities, thereby providing insights into the potential of visual media to enhance engagement and improve writing skills in the EFL context.

F. Benefits of Research

This research is expected to provide benefits for various parties, including:

1. For Students To improve their writing skills, motivation, and creativity by using visual media.
2. For Teachers To provide alternative teaching strategies that can enhance students' engagement in writing lessons.
3. For Researchers To serve as a reference for future studies related to the integration of visual media in EFL writing.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter discusses the conclusion of the study based on the research findings. It also provides recommendations for English teachers, students, and future researchers. The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the research results and offer suggestions for practical application and further research.

A. Conclusion

This research investigated the experiences of eighth-grade students at SMPN 1 Gambut in using short illustrations for writing descriptive texts. The findings showed that the integration of short illustrations successfully enhanced students' engagement and motivation in the learning process. Visual and narrative elements from the films helped students generate ideas more effectively, organize sentences coherently, and describe objects, characters, and settings with greater detail. The use of audiovisual input also supported the acquisition of vocabulary and grammar, which contributed to the improvement of their descriptive writing skills. Most students responded positively to the learning process, considering short illustrations as a medium that facilitated their understanding of the structure and purpose of descriptive texts. However, challenges such as limited vocabulary mastery, occasional grammar errors, and students' dependency on visual media were still encountered. In conclusion, the use of short illustrations in teaching descriptive texts can be regarded as an effective alternative medium that not only stimulates students' creativity and comprehension but also creates a more engaging and meaningful EFL writing learning experience.

B. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions outlined above, the researcher offers several recommendations aimed at various stakeholders, as follows:

1. For English Teachers:

Teachers are encouraged to integrate short illustrations into writing lessons regularly to create a more engaging atmosphere. Pre-teaching vocabulary, guiding students through the writing stages, and combining

visual media with collaborative learning activities will further improve students' writing performance.

2. For Students:

Students should actively participate by taking notes, brainstorming, or creating mind maps while watching short films to strengthen their descriptive abilities. They are also advised to expand their vocabulary through consistent practice and to use visual media as inspiration for independent writing beyond classroom activities.

3. For Future Researchers:

Future studies may adopt quantitative or mixed-method approaches to measure the statistical improvement of students' writing skills through short illustrations. Comparative studies with other visual media are also recommended to evaluate effectiveness across different contexts. Expanding the scope of research to other schools or levels of education will provide broader insights into the application of short illustrations in EFL writing.

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