

# Analysis of Fifth Grade Elementary School Students' Difficulties in Writing Essays

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## ABSTRACT

This research is motivated by the low writing ability, especially writing narrative essays among the fifth-grade elementary school students. This study aims to find out what difficulties are experienced by the students when writing narrative essays. This study used a descriptive method involving 20 students from an elementary school in one city in West Java. Data collection was conducted using writing tests, observations, and interviews. The results showed that there were four errors most frequently found in students' writing that cause difficulties for students in writing narrative essays. The errors included the use of punctuation marks (48.03%), spelling (37.01%), content organization (10.23%), and title writing (4.72%). Hence, the most difficult language aspect is the use of punctuation marks. Further discussion recommends that teachers take immediate correction and assistance to help students understand their mistakes in the hope to avoid the same mistakes in future.

**Keywords:** *Language difficulty, elementary school students, narrative essay, writing*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the skills that students must have. Suparno and Yunus (2009) defined writing as an activity to convey messages using written language media. Good writing skills will make learning process better and will have an impact on better learning outcomes as students can convey messages successfully. On the other hand, low writing skills may affect learning outcomes. Therefore, it follows that writing skills should be taught since early level of education. In carrying out writing activities, a student must be really focused and good at using vocabulary and language structures so that the message to be conveyed in writing can be received easily and there are no errors in communication. For this reason, students must be given activities about good writing and often practice writing so that their writing skills can develop well. Dymock (2007) stated that teaching students the structure of narrative text from first grade provides them with a foundation for comprehending the more complex narrative text encountered at upper primary and high school.

In the implementation, learning about writing in elementary schools has received less attention. The activity of writing essays, which is one aspect of the Indonesian language, is not managed seriously. This has an impact on the low essay writing skills of students, one

of which is learning to write narrative essays among fifth grade of elementary school students. This also happened at an elementary school where the researcher teaches. After conducting early observations and interviews with classroom teachers, the researcher found that the narrative writing skills of fifth grade still very low. This is the basis for conducting this research, which is to analyze the difficulties faced by students in writing narrative essays. With this research, it is hoped that it can be a reference so that it contributes to the improvement of teaching writing narrative essays for elementary school students.

Narrative essay is one of several types of writing. Akhadiyah (1993) divided the types of essays into four types, namely narrative essays, descriptions, expositions, and arguments. Narrative essay (story) is a form of discourse that tries to narrate an event or event so that it appears as if the reader saw or experienced the event himself. Description essay (painting) is an attempt to describe in words the outward appearance or nature of an object. Through description, a writer tries to transfer the impressions of observations and feelings to the reader by revealing the nature and all the details that exist in an object. On the other hand, exposition essay (exposure) is an essay that tries to explain or explain something that can expand one's view or knowledge. Finally,

argumentation (persuasion) is an essay that tries to prove something by presenting convincing reasons.

Most teaching writing involves five stages of writing process, including pre-writing, writing, revising, editing, and publishing (Haryadi & Zamzani, 1997). In pre-writing stage, students are asked to write the title of the essay, write the character, write the setting and plot of the story, find ideas, and begin to imagine the stages they will write in a narrative essay with the theme of the vacation (starting from preparation before the vacation, during the vacations, and at the end of the vacations). At stage of writing, students will begin to describe ideas into sentences. Furthermore, these sentences will be assembled into paragraphs and students will arrange them to become a complete essay. In this stage, a wide range of linguistic knowledge is required, ranging from the use of good vocabulary, the use of proper punctuation and so on. Furthermore, in the revising stage, after students have finished writing narrative essays, students are asked to re-examine their writing carefully. Then, in the editing stage, if at the time of checking his writing and finding errors, students must correct the mistakes. At the final stage of publishing, after students are absolutely sure of the narrative essays they have made and students are asked to read and tell their respective narrative essays in front of other students.

Pujiono (2013) states that narrative essays are essays that contain a series of events that make up the storyline. So, in narrative essays, the storyline or chronology is very important. For this reason, writing the time or setting is very important so that the story we convey can be well structured. In narrative writing, the main goal is for the reader to feel or experience directly the events of the story that we convey. For this reason, we must use standard and easy to understand vocabulary and also use proper punctuation. The more vocabulary mastery students have, the better their writing will be, on the other hand students with little vocabulary knowledge will have difficulty in writing essays, and it will result in their writing not being better. The vocabulary mastery ability of each student is definitely different, but to improve vocabulary knowledge one way is by reading, so students must be diligent in reading in order to increase their vocabulary knowledge.

Harsiati (2017) states that the structure of narrative essay consists of orientation, complication, and resolution. Orientation is the introduction of characters, setting, time, and conflict. In orientation, students must introduce the characters in the story, write down the setting (place and time), and events that occur in the story. In other words, in the orientation section the reader has been able to find answers to who, where, and when a story happened. In this section, students also have to explain who is in the stories they make, because in this study the theme is about vacations, students must write down who is doing the vacations. Students must also

write down the time and place of the vacation. Furthermore, in complications, students present what events they did. Starting from the time of preparation before the vacations, during the vacations, students must write down what events or events they did, and the writing of these events must be really well organized, meaning that the chronology must be correct. Resolution is the final part of the story text. At this stage students will write about how the end of their vacation was and write down the impressions they felt about their vacation.

Oktoma (2017) conducted a study on the process type in students' narrative text. It involves twenty first graders of Department of English Education, University of Kuningan. This study raises two problems: the process types appear in students' narrative texts and the errors of the process types occur in students' narrative texts. This research used a descriptive qualitative method to describe the data. The process types found in students' narrative texts were material, mental, verbal, and relational process. Material process was the dominant type found in students' narrative texts. However, material process is also the dominant error occurred in students' narrative texts

Although there are many studies on students' mistakes or difficulties in writing essays, only a few studies discuss the difficulties of writing in elementary school levels. Babayigit (2019) conducted a study on the effect of creative writing activities on the reading and writing attitudes of fourth grade students. The research uses a one group pre-test-post-test design with quantitative research methods. The population in his study were fourth grade students studying in the Sorgun district of Yozgat province in Turkey. as many as 35 students became the sample. Creative writing activities are realized for students for two months. The results of his research show that creative writing activities lead to an increase in reading, writing and language learning attitudes of fourth grade elementary school students. Based on this research, doing writing activities continuously will make students' writing skills better. This finding is also similar to Göçen's (2019).

Grenner, Johansson, van de Weijer, and Sahlén (2020) conducted a study to examine whether self-efficacy factors for writing can affect writing performance. The subjects in the study were 55 grade 5 elementary school students. The results showed that the students showed strong self-efficacy, which increased significantly after the intervention. Girls and boys showed similar self-efficacy, although girls' text quality was higher. There was a moderate correlation between self-efficacy and writing performance before and after the intervention. This shows that it is important to instill an attitude of self-efficacy in elementary school students, so that with this attitude it is hoped that students will be more confident in writing a narrative essay.

Despite the studies mentioned above, fewer studies are found in Indonesian elementary school students' writing. Writing narrative essay, in fact, is also part of students' learning in fifth grade of elementary school students in Indonesia. By conducting this research, it is hoped that any difficulties faced by elementary school students can be identified. Then the results of this study can be used as one of the considerations for conducting research related to narrative essays, especially research on learning models, learning media used to overcome difficulties or to improve students' narrative essay writing skills.

**2. METHOD**

**2.1 Design**

In this study using a descriptive method. The data obtained in this study is qualitative data. This study aims to find out what difficulties are faced by fifth grade students when writing narrative essays.

**2.2 Subject**

The subjects in this study were twenty students of fifth grade students at an elementary school in Karawang Regency.

**2.3 Data Collection**

Data collection techniques used are writing tests, observations, and interviews. The writing test in this study was in the form of a result sheet for writing student narrative essays with the same theme, namely "vacation". Observations were made by analyzing the results of students' writing. Interviews were conducted with homeroom teachers regarding the low skills of students' narrative writing skills

**3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

After analyzing the results of student writing in the form of a narrative essay with a vacation theme. The researcher found that there were empathy or errors that were mostly made by students. The four errors were: incorrect title writing, incorrect use of punctuation marks, incorrect spelling of words, and incomplete content organization.

There are some of the students' narrative essays with the theme of vacation as seen in Figure 2, Figure 3, and Figure 4. The researcher then sorted the four errors starting from the most to the least as seen in Table 1.

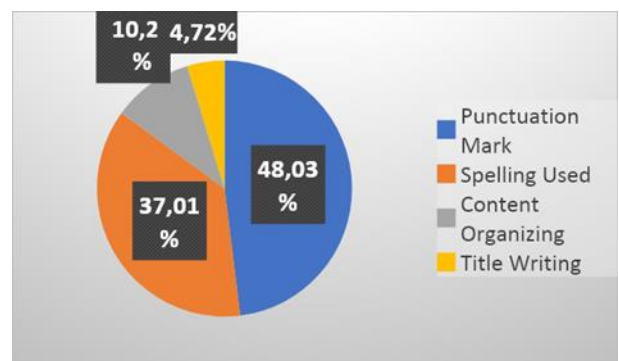
Figure 1 shows a presentation of the mistakes made by students. Students' mistakes in writing narrative essays are an indication of student difficulties. The more errors found, the higher the level of student difficulty.

Otherwise, the fewer errors found, the lower the difficulties faced by students.

First, errors in the use of punctuation marks, there are still many students who make mistakes, ranging from not using punctuation marks (period, comma, colon, and others). There were 61 errors or about 48.03% made by students. Even though the use of punctuation marks is very important in writing narrative essays, because if the use of punctuation is not appropriate, then the reader will find it difficult to catch the message in the writing or narrative essay and can result in misunderstanding the content of the story.

**Table 1.** The student error in writing narrative essay

No	Name	Title	Spelling Used	Punctuation Mark	Content Organization
1	Adil	1		6	2
2	Andre		4	5	2
3	Beni		2	3	1
4	Dapin			3	
5	Fahma		1	5	
6	Indah	1	3	2	
7	Jesika				1
8	Khalis	1			
9	Nada		2		
10	Nayla	1	2	6	
11	Niken	1	10	4	2
12	Pera		5	3	1
13	Rizky			6	1
14	Silvi		2		1
15	Tegar		3	5	2
16	Tiana		1	5	
17	Tika		2	1	
18	Winda		3	2	
19	Wulan	1	2	3	
20	Zahran		5	2	
	Total	6	47	61	13
	%	4,72%	37,01%	48,03%	10,03%



**Figure 1** Frequency of error in writing narrative essays.

**Table 2.** The student error in use of punctuation mark

No	Name	Punctuation Mark		
		Period (.)	Comma (,)	Colon (:)
1.	Adil	4	2	
2.	Andre	5		
3.	Beni	3		
4.	Dapin	2	1	
5.	Fahma	5		
6.	Indah		2	
7.	Jesika			
8.	Khalis			
9.	Nada			
10.	Nayla	4	2	
11.	Niken	1	3	
12.	Pera	2		1
13.	Rizky	4	1	1
14.	Silvi			
15.	Tegar	3	2	
16.	Tiana	1	4	
17.	Tika			1
18.	Winda	2		
19.	Wulan	3		
20.	Zahran	2		
	Total	41	17	3
	%	67%	28%	5%

Table 2 shows that the most students make mistakes in the use of punctuation marks, namely the full stop, comma, and colon. The use of periods is the most common, even though the use of periods is very important in an essay. A sentence must end with a period. But there were still many students who do not use a full stop. Furthermore, errors in the use of commas, although not as much as in dot errors, but commas are also important in writing, because with good use of commas, writing will be easier to understand.

And the last error in the use of punctuation marks is the use of double dots, there were students who did not use colons in their writing, even though they should use colons when mentioning various types of objects or places. After conducting question and answer sessions with students about the difficulties in using punctuation marks, there were two things that caused it, namely first, and most of all, students forgot to use punctuation marks. Second, students do not know how to use punctuation when writing an essay. To reduce errors in writing punctuation, the teacher should inform and remind the importance of using punctuation before students write narrative essays.

**Table 3.** The student error in spelling used

No	Name	Spelling Used		
		Wrong Words	Short Words	Capital Letters
1.	Adil			
2.	Andre	bersma	yg	2
3.	Beni		dgn,dgn	
4.	Dapin			
5.	Fahma		lain2	
6.	Indah		dll, barang2, yg	
7.	Jesika			
8.	Khalis			
9.	Nada			2
10.	Nayla	sampe, cape	yg	
11.	Niken	ngantri, degan, pulan	liat2x, yg	5
12.	Pera	ate, pemandangan		2
13.	Rizky			
14.	Silvi		yg, yg	
15.	Tegar	sepedah, seger	yg	
16.	Tiana		yg	
17.	Tika	nyampe		1
18.	Winda		yg, dll	1
19.	Wulan		yg	1
20.	Zahran	berngkat, nyampe	makan2	2
	Total	13	18	16
	%	28%	38%	34%

Second, the most common mistakes are misspelling. In spelling, there are also quite a lot of errors, ranging from the use of incorrect or incomplete words, the use of words that are not in accordance with the standards, and the use of abbreviations. There were 47 errors in terms of incorrect spelling of words or around 37.01%.

Table 3 shows that in general there are three types of errors in the use of words, namely: incorrect spelling of words, shortened words and capital letters.

Of the three mistakes, the most common thing is an abbreviated word. There are about 18 abbreviated words and of the 18 words the most is (yg, dgn, dll.). Most students write the abbreviated word "yg" when students should write "yang" which means "which". Next the word "dgn" which should be written "dengan" which means 'with'. And the last is the word "dll" which should be written with "dan lain-lain" which means 'and other'.

After further investigation, it turns out that the reason many students used short words when writing essays is that they were used to writing in short words in their daily learning activities. So not only when writing narrative essays, but during other learning students are accustomed to writing abbreviated words with the excuse that they are faster when writing. Just as in the previous use of punctuation marks, to reduce errors in word writing, before the activity of writing narrative essays the teacher must remind students not to use abbreviated words as much as possible.

As for the use of words that are not spelled correctly, for example “*bersma*” should be *bersama* which means “together”, “*sampe*” should be “*sampai*” which means “until”. In this case, most of the students made mistakes in spelling words due to lack of concentration, rush, and poor vocabulary mastery. To reduce the occurrence of errors in spelling words, the teacher must remind students to use standard words that are in accordance with standard spelling. In addition, the teacher must ask students to re-examine their writing carefully and if they find a wrong word then correct the wrong word before they collect the results of their essay.

**Table 4.** The student error in content organization

No	Name	Content Organization		
		Character	Setting	Plot
1.	Adil			x
2.	Andre	x		x
3.	Beni		x	
4.	Dapin			x
5.	Fahma			
6.	Indah			
7.	Jesika	x		
8.	Khalis			
9.	Nada			
10.	Nayla			
11.	Niken	x		x
12.	Pera			x
13.	Rizky		x	
14.	Silvi		x	x
15.	Tegar	x		
16.	Tiana			
17.	Tika			
18.	Winda			
19.	Wulan			
20.	Zahran			
	Total	4	3	6
	percentage	31%	23%	46%

Third, errors in content organization (see Table 4). There are several mistakes made, As said earlier that in the organization the content must include, characters, setting, plot, and point of view. As for the theme, in this study students used the same theme in writing narrative essays, namely "vacation". There are 13 errors or about 10.23% starting from the characterizations that are not quite right, settings that are not told and the plot is not quite right.

In this content organization error, students make mistakes in the characterization, setting, and plot. In writing the characters, there were some students who did not write down all the characters completely.

For example, there is an essay that talked about a vacation with his friends, but the names of his friends were not mentioned, even though it would be better if the names of his friends were mentioned, unless he wrote down his friends, which means plural or more than one friend. For writing the setting that is not right, there were a few students who do not write down the setting, be it time or place. Most students forgot to write down the time setting. To reduce students making mistakes in writing organizational content, the teacher must emphasize the importance of writing characters and writing settings in narrative essays.

Fourth, there are only a few errors in writing the title, that is, there are 6 errors or about 4.72% who make mistakes in writing the title. Among them are titles which were not appropriate, and did not use titles. Because at the time of writing this narrative essay, students were given the same theme about "vacation", so almost all students wrote the title correctly. For an example of an inaccurate title, an essay by a student (Indah) with the title “*Liburan ke kolam berenang*”, the correct title should be “*Liburan ke kolam renang*” which means “Vacation to the swimming pool”, meaning that there is a slight error in writing swimming.

There are three examples of a narrative essay by student named Fahma, Pera, and Tika. From the Figure 2, it can be seen that the writing of the title is correct. And also from the organizational content, it is also complete, including characters, setting and plot. The characters in this narrative essay are clearly written, namely, him, and his family. The settings are also written down. And the error lies in the use of punctuation and spelling of words that are not correct.

Those marked in red are spelling errors, where what is written is an abbreviated word "lain2" which should be written with "lain-lain". While those colored in blue indicate errors in the use of punctuation marks. There should be a point (.) in each gap marked in blue. This shows that from the narrative essay above there are errors in the form of 1 spelling and 5 errors in punctuation, while the title and content organization are correct.



*Happy Panya*

Nama: Fahma f kls: v (lima)  
Liburan ke jati Luhur

Pada hari libur saya dan keluarga pergi ke jati luhur. saya kesana pukul 08.00. saya menyiapkan makanan dan lain-lain. saya kesana menaiki mobil. saya di sana melihat pemandangan laut/lair dan sebagainya. Setelah itu saya menaiki perahu bersama keluarga saya. Saya berfoto-foto setelah itu saya ke rumah makan yg ada di sana saya dan keluarga saya memakan ikan dan nasi juga kelapa muda. Setelah itu saya pulang sore hari saya membeli buah tangan untuk kakak saya dan nenek saya. Saat di perjalanan saya melihat pemandangan yg sangat indah. Akhirnya saya sampai di rumah dengan selamat, senang juga aman.

Selesai

**Figure 2** The results of a student's narrative essay named Fahma.

From the Figure 3, it can be seen that there are many errors in spelling, which are marked in red. There are five errors in spelling, namely three errors in the initial writing of sentences that should be capitalized. The writing of the word "ate" which should say "tante" which means "aunt", and the writing of "pemandangan" which should be "pemandangan" which means view.

Berlibur ke pantai

Pada hari libur sekolah saya bersama sodara saya pergi ke pantai parangtritis, saya pergi kesana bersama Ayah, Ibu, kaka, adik, bibi, paman, ate dan lain-lainnya. saya pergi kesana pada pukul 09.00 pagi, saya kesana berangkat pakai mobil avanza.

Di sepanjang perjalanan saya melihat pemandangan yang sangat indah dan melihat hewan-hewan.

pada pukul 05.00 saya berhenti di masjid, dan saya sholat subuh di masjid bersama sodara dan keluarga saya. setelah saya sholat saya sarapan sampai pukul 06.00 pagi. setelah itu saya melanjutkan perjalanan....

dan akhirnya saya pun sampai di pantai, saya pergi ke pantai, setelah lama saya pergi ke hotel untuk menginap selama 1 hari. disana saya dan ~~ibu~~ teh windi pergi ke kolam berenang dan ke pantai. setelah liburannya puas saya tidur pukul 10.00, pada saat pagi saya mandi ke kolam berenang bersama teh windi dan sarapan, setelah sudah saya pulang pukul 07.15 pagi dan liburan saya sangat senang dan seru. saya pulang dengan selamat.

**Figure 3** The result of a student narrative essay named Pera.

Berlibur ke taman kota

Saya dan keluarga akan merencanakan pergi berlibur ke taman kota besok hari minggu. lalu di pagi hari saya dan keluarga mempersiapkan bekal berupa nasi, buah-buahan, dan makanan yg berupa cemilan yg terpenting saya membawa minum. beberapa jam kemudian saya sudah mau nyampe ke taman kota.

Saya sedang menuju pulang ke rumah, saya tidak sengaja melihat Supermarket yg ada di pinggir jalan. Saya dan keluarga saya langsung masuk dengan sopan dan santun. Saya membeli bermacam-macam makanan yg ada di supermarket. lalu beberapa jam. saya sampai di rumah dengan selamat.

**Figure 4** The result of a student narrative essay named Tika.

The article in Figure 4 shows that the essay is good starting from writing the title, using punctuation and organization of content. There are only two errors in the spelling used, the first in writing the day of "Minggu", the first letter should use capital letters because it shows the name of the day. In addition, there is an inappropriate use of the word, namely "nyampe" should be written with "sampai" which mean "until".

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis, there are four errors that are most commonly found and make it difficult for students to write narrative essays. Among them: the use of punctuation, the spelling used, the organization of the content, and the writing of the title.

First, students have difficulty in using punctuation marks, and the most incorrect punctuation marks are: period (.), comma (,) colon (:). Most students forget to use these punctuation marks. To reduce this error the teacher should remind the importance of using punctuation before students start writing essays. The second is the misspelling of the word. There are 3 difficulties for students in spelling writing, namely: wrong words, abbreviated words, and writing capital letters. Students are used to writing with abbreviated words in everyday learning. To overcome this difficulty, students must reduce their habit of writing short words in each lesson. Meanwhile, to overcome words that are spelled incorrectly usually occurs due to lack of concentration and in a hurry. To overcome this is to ask students to concentrate and recheck the results of their writing. The third is the difficulty in organizational content, although there are only a few difficulties in this regard, it still has to be improved by emphasizing the importance (characters, setting, and plot) in writing narrative essays. Fourth is the difficulty in writing the title. For writing the title the teacher must tell the students that the title must be related to the theme. So, the same theme will make the title easy to write correctly.

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