



An Analysis of Eighth-Grade Students' Recount Text Writing Ability

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ABSTRACT

English has developed into a global language that plays a vital role in education, communication, and access to information. Among the four English language skills, writing is considered a complex skill that requires students to organize ideas, apply appropriate grammar, and convey meaning coherently. This study aimed to analyze eighth-grade students' ability in writing recount texts at the junior high school level. The research employed a descriptive qualitative approach, which allowed the researcher to examine students' writing performance in depth using multiple sources of data. The participants of this study consisted of 21 eighth-grade students. Data were collected through students' written recount texts and analyzed based on four key writing aspects: content, organization, grammar, and mechanics. The findings revealed that students' overall ability in writing recount texts was still relatively low, with common difficulties found in organizing ideas, using correct grammatical structures, and applying appropriate writing mechanics. These results indicate that students have not yet developed sufficient mastery of recount text writing conventions. This study contributes to the field of English language education by providing insights into students' writing abilities and highlighting areas that require instructional improvement. The findings are expected to assist teachers in designing more effective writing instruction and support students in developing better writing skills, particularly in recount text composition.

KATA KUNCI

permainan bahasa,
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ABSTRAK

Bahasa Inggris telah berkembang menjadi bahasa global yang berperan penting dalam pendidikan, komunikasi, dan akses informasi. Di antara empat keterampilan berbahasa Inggris, menulis merupakan keterampilan yang kompleks karena menuntut kemampuan mengorganisasi ide, menggunakan tata bahasa yang tepat, dan menyampaikan makna secara koheren. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kemampuan siswa kelas VIII dalam menulis teks recount di tingkat sekolah menengah pertama. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif yang memungkinkan peneliti mengkaji kemampuan menulis siswa secara mendalam melalui berbagai sumber data. Subjek penelitian terdiri atas 21 siswa kelas VIII. Data dikumpulkan melalui hasil tulisan teks recount siswa dan dianalisis berdasarkan empat aspek penilaian, yaitu isi, organisasi, tata bahasa, dan mekanik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kemampuan menulis teks recount siswa masih tergolong rendah, dengan kesulitan utama pada pengembangan ide, penggunaan struktur tata bahasa yang tepat, serta penerapan mekanik penulisan. Temuan ini diharapkan dapat memberikan kontribusi bagi pembelajaran bahasa Inggris dengan membantu guru merancang pembelajaran menulis yang lebih efektif dan terarah.

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Introduction

English is a compulsory subject in the Indonesian education system and is taught across all levels of formal education, from junior high school to higher education. As a global language, English plays a crucial role in communication, access to information, and academic development. Among the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—writing is widely regarded as one of the most complex and demanding skills for learners. Writing requires not only linguistic knowledge but also the ability to organize ideas, apply appropriate grammatical structures, and convey meaning clearly and coherently. Many students encounter difficulties in writing because they must transform abstract ideas into structured written forms while simultaneously paying attention to grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. Writing recount texts, in particular, poses a challenge for junior high school students because it requires mastery of past tense forms, appropriate sequencing of events, and cohesive sentence construction. Recount texts are used to retell past experiences or events either to inform or to entertain readers. As noted by previous scholars, recount texts are closely related to students' personal experiences, yet many learners struggle to express these experiences accurately in written English. As a result, errors frequently occur in sentence structure, grammatical usage, and writing mechanics, which affect the clarity and overall quality of students' written texts.

Despite the importance of writing skills in English learning, field observations conducted by the researcher revealed that students at the junior high school level still experience considerable difficulties in writing recount texts. Students of SMP Swasta Al-Ikhlas often produce texts that contain grammatical errors, weak organization, and inappropriate use of writing mechanics. These problems may arise from limited exposure to structured writing instruction, insufficient practice, and interference from students' first language. Error analysis is considered an effective approach to identifying and understanding learners' difficulties in second language writing. According to Divsar and Heydari, error analysis involves identifying errors in learners' language production, determining whether the errors are systematic, and explaining the possible causes behind them. Through systematic analysis, teachers can better understand the patterns of students' errors and design more effective instructional strategies. Therefore, this study focuses on analyzing eighth-grade students' writing recount texts by examining key aspects of writing, including content, organization, grammar, and mechanics. By identifying the types and frequency of errors found in students' writing, this research aims to provide a clearer picture of students' actual writing ability and the challenges they face. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to English language education by offering practical insights for teachers in improving writing instruction and helping students develop stronger recount text writing skills. Furthermore, this research enriches the field of applied linguistics by deepening the understanding of students' written language performance in the context of junior high school education.

Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to analyze students' ability in writing recount texts. Descriptive qualitative research is considered

appropriate for studies that aim to describe and interpret phenomena in depth rather than to test hypotheses statistically. This approach allows researchers to examine language use, patterns of errors, and students' writing performance based on actual written data. By applying this design, the researcher was able to gain a detailed understanding of students' writing ability through close examination of their written texts, focusing on linguistic features and writing components. This method is particularly suitable for analyzing students' writing because it emphasizes description, interpretation, and explanation of observed data rather than numerical comparison.

The research was conducted at a junior high school level during the 2024/2025 academic year. The participants of this study consisted of 21 eighth-grade students selected through purposive sampling. This sampling technique was chosen because the selected class represented students who were actively learning recount text writing and were relevant to the research focus. The data source of this study was students' written recount texts produced as part of classroom learning activities. These written texts served as the primary data for analyzing students' writing ability, particularly in terms of how they constructed recount texts based on their understanding of content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics.

Data were collected through a writing test in which students were asked to write a recount text based on their experiences. The students' written works were assessed using an analytical writing rubric that covered five aspects of writing: content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. To ensure objectivity, the students' texts were evaluated by two raters. The collected data were analyzed qualitatively by identifying and classifying students' strengths and weaknesses in each writing aspect. In addition, simple percentage calculations were used to describe the distribution of students' writing ability levels. The results of the analysis were then interpreted to provide a comprehensive description of students' recount text writing ability and to identify common difficulties encountered by students in writing English recount texts.

Results

This section presents the results of the study concerning eighth-grade students' ability in writing recount texts. The results are derived from students' written works collected through a writing test and analyzed descriptively based on five writing aspects: content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. The findings are presented in the form of descriptive statistics, frequency distributions, and percentage calculations to illustrate students' performance in each writing aspect.

Research Context and Participants

The research was conducted in November 2024 at a private junior high school in Aceh Tenggara, Indonesia. The participants consisted of 21 eighth-grade students who were selected purposively as the research sample. All students were asked to write a recount text based on their personal experiences. The students' written texts were assessed using an analytical writing rubric adapted from established ESL composition assessment criteria. Each writing aspect was scored on a four-point scale ranging from poor (1) to excellent (4).

Overall Students' Writing Scores

Table 1 presents the overall scores obtained by students in each writing aspect.

Table 1
Students' Writing Scores Based on Writing Aspects (N = 21)

Writing Aspect	Total Score	Mean Score
Content	74	3.52
Organization	68	3.24
Vocabulary	67	3.19
Grammar	64	3.05
Mechanics	71	3.38

The data in Table 1 show that students achieved the highest mean score in the content aspect (3.52), followed by mechanics (3.38), organization (3.24), vocabulary (3.19), and grammar (3.05). These scores indicate varying levels of proficiency across the five writing aspects, with content emerging as the strongest aspect and grammar as the weakest.

Results of Writing Recount Text on the Content Aspect

The content aspect assessed students' ability to express main ideas clearly, develop relevant information, and maintain focus on recounting past events. Table 2 presents the distribution of students' scores in the content aspect.

Table 2
Students' Scores in Content Aspect

Score Level	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent (4)	13	70.27%
Good (3)	6	24.32%
Average (2)	2	5.41%
Poor (1)	0	0%
Total	21	100%

Most students demonstrated strong performance in content development. Thirteen students achieved an excellent level, indicating clear and accurate presentation of main ideas. Six students were categorized as good, while only two students were classified as average. No students fell into the poor category for content.

Results of Writing Recount Text on the Organization Aspect

The organization aspect focused on logical sequencing, coherence, and clarity of paragraph structure. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Students' Scores in Organization Aspect

Score Level	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent (4)	8	47.06%
Good (3)	10	44.12%
Average (2)	3	8.82%
Poor (1)	0	0%
Total	21	100%

The data indicate that nearly half of the students achieved an excellent level in organizing their recount texts, while ten students were rated as good. Three students were categorized as average, showing difficulties in maintaining logical sequencing or coherence.

Results of Writing Recount Text on the Vocabulary Aspect

The vocabulary aspect measured students' ability to select appropriate words, use expressions accurately, and avoid misuse of vocabulary. Table 4 summarizes the results.

Table 4
Students' Scores in Vocabulary Aspect

Score Level	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent (4)	9	53.73%
Good (3)	7	31.34%
Average (2)	5	14.93%
Poor (1)	0	0%
Total	21	100%

More than half of the students achieved an excellent level in vocabulary usage. However, five students were categorized as average, indicating limited vocabulary range or inappropriate word choices in some parts of their writing.

Results of Writing Recount Text on the Grammar Aspect

The grammar aspect evaluated students' control of sentence structure, tense usage, and grammatical accuracy. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5
Students' Scores in Grammar Aspect

Score Level	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent (4)	6	37.50%
Good (3)	10	46.88%
Average (2)	5	15.63%

Poor (1)	0	0%
Total	21	100%

The majority of students were rated at the good level for grammar. Six students demonstrated excellent grammatical control, while five students showed average performance, indicating recurring grammatical errors.

Results of Writing Recount Text on the Mechanics Aspect

The mechanics aspect focused on spelling, punctuation, and capitalization accuracy. Table 6 presents the distribution of students' scores.

Table 6
Students' Scores in Mechanics Aspect

Score Level	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent (4)	11	61.97%
Good (3)	7	29.58%
Average (2)	3	8.45%
Poor (1)	0	0%
Total	21	100%

The mechanics aspect showed strong performance overall, with most students achieving excellent or good levels. Only three students were classified as average, indicating minor issues with spelling or punctuation.

Summary of Results

Overall, the results indicate that students demonstrated varying levels of proficiency across the five writing aspects. Content and mechanics emerged as the strongest aspects, while grammar showed comparatively lower performance. The majority of students achieved good to excellent levels in all aspects, although a small number of students consistently fell into the average category across vocabulary and grammar. These results provide a comprehensive descriptive profile of students' recount text writing ability at the eighth-grade level.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that eighth-grade students generally demonstrate a moderate to high level of proficiency in writing recount texts, with variations across the five assessed aspects: content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. The strongest performance appears in the content aspect, followed by mechanics, while grammar shows comparatively weaker results. The high percentage of students achieving excellent and good levels in content indicates that most students are able to understand the communicative purpose of recount texts, namely retelling past events clearly and meaningfully. This suggests that students are

familiar with recount text topics derived from personal experiences, which helps them generate relevant ideas and maintain focus throughout their writing. These findings align with the view that experiential topics reduce cognitive load in writing tasks, allowing students to concentrate more on idea development rather than content generation. However, despite strong content development, some students still struggle to present their ideas coherently, as reflected in the organization scores. While most students reached good or excellent levels, the presence of average-level performance indicates difficulties in sequencing events logically and maintaining paragraph cohesion. This may result from limited practice in structuring texts explicitly or insufficient emphasis on text organization during instruction.

In terms of vocabulary and grammar, the results show a more varied distribution of achievement. Although more than half of the students demonstrated excellent vocabulary use, a notable number remained at the average level, indicating limited lexical range or inappropriate word choice. This suggests that students may rely on familiar vocabulary rather than exploring varied expressions appropriate for recount texts. Similarly, grammar emerged as the weakest aspect overall, with several students exhibiting recurring grammatical errors, particularly in tense consistency and sentence structure. Given that recount texts require consistent use of past tense forms, grammatical inaccuracies can significantly affect clarity and meaning. These findings support previous research indicating that grammatical competence remains a major challenge for EFL learners, especially at the junior high school level. In contrast, students' strong performance in mechanics suggests that spelling, punctuation, and capitalization are relatively well-established skills, possibly due to repetitive exposure through written exercises and teacher feedback. Overall, the findings imply that while students possess adequate conceptual understanding of recount texts, they require more focused instruction on grammatical accuracy, vocabulary expansion, and organizational strategies. Targeted pedagogical interventions, such as explicit grammar instruction, guided writing practice, and vocabulary enrichment activities, may help bridge these gaps and enhance students' overall writing proficiency.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the eighth-grade students of SMP Swasta Al-Ikhlas generally demonstrate a good level of ability in writing recount texts. The analysis across five writing aspects—content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics—shows that students perform strongest in content and mechanics, indicating a solid understanding of recount text purpose and basic writing conventions. However, weaknesses are still evident in grammar and vocabulary usage, particularly in tense consistency and lexical variation, which affect the overall clarity and accuracy of students' writing. These results suggest that while students are capable of expressing ideas and experiences in written form, they require more structured guidance to improve linguistic accuracy and textual coherence. Therefore, it is recommended that English teachers implement focused instructional strategies, such as explicit grammar instruction, vocabulary enrichment, and guided writing practice, to enhance students' recount writing skills. The findings of this research also contribute to the field of English language teaching by providing empirical

insights into common writing difficulties faced by junior high school students in an EFL context.

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