

Descriptive Writing Ability of Elementary Students Using Picture Media: A Qualitative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Background: According to the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018, Indonesia was 74th out of 79 countries in reading literacy. This PISA result shows that Indonesian students' reading and writing skills are much worse than those of students in Thailand, Malaysia, and other countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Writing ability is one of the most important parts of being literate.

Purpose: This study investigates the vocabulary utilization of elementary school students in composing descriptive paragraphs through the use of visual media. The study aims to ascertain the descriptive paragraph writing proficiency of elementary students utilizing pictorial media, to delineate the disparities in the quantity and diversity of vocabulary employed by the students, and to examine the factors contributing to challenges in composing descriptive paragraphs.

Method: This study utilizes a qualitative descriptive methodology. The study's population comprises students from SDN 07 Kota Jantho, located in Aceh Besar District. The sample was chosen using purposive sampling, which meant that 30 students from grades IV, V, and VI were chosen. The research instrument employed consisted of colored images aimed at assessing the students' capacity to compose descriptive paragraphs.

Results and Discussion: The study's findings reveal disparities in writing proficiency among students at different grade levels, predominantly characterized by the use of elementary vocabulary and straightforward sentence structures. The number of sentences produced by Grade VI students is consistently higher compared to those in Grades IV and V. This reflects a greater maturity in expressing ideas and maintaining topic continuity throughout a paragraph. Conversely, various factors were recognized as contributors to writing challenges, such as insufficient ideas, restricted vocabulary, diminished interest, inadequate comprehension of paragraph structure and visual content, and a deficiency in self-confidence.

Conclusions and Implications: This study also contributes to mapping the basic writing abilities of elementary school students in Aceh Besar, which have previously been limited in empirical research. These findings are expected to serve as a reference for teachers, policymakers, and other researchers in designing more contextual literacy programs based on students' needs.

Keywords:	Elementary School Student; Ability; Writing; Descriptive Paragraph
ABSTRAK	
	<p>Latar Belakang: Menurut Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018, Indonesia menempati peringkat ke-74 dari 79 negara dalam literasi membaca. Hasil PISA ini menunjukkan bahwa kemampuan membaca dan menulis siswa Indonesia jauh lebih rendah dibandingkan dengan siswa di Thailand, Malaysia, dan negara-negara lain di kawasan Asia-Pasifik. Kemampuan menulis merupakan salah satu bagian terpenting dari kemampuan literasi.</p> <p>Tujuan: Penelitian ini mengkaji pemanfaatan kosakata oleh siswa sekolah dasar dalam menulis paragraf deskriptif melalui penggunaan media visual. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui kemampuan menulis paragraf deskriptif siswa sekolah dasar dengan menggunakan media bergambar, untuk menguraikan perbedaan jumlah dan keragaman kosakata yang digunakan oleh siswa, serta untuk menelaah faktor-faktor yang menyebabkan kesulitan dalam menulis paragraf deskriptif.</p> <p>Metode: Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif. Populasi penelitian terdiri atas siswa SDN 07 Kota Jantho yang terletak di Kabupaten Aceh Besar. Sampel dipilih dengan menggunakan teknik purposive sampling, yaitu sebanyak 30 siswa dari kelas IV, V, dan VI. Instrumen penelitian yang digunakan berupa gambar berwarna yang bertujuan untuk menilai kemampuan siswa dalam menulis paragraf deskriptif.</p> <p>Hasil dan Pembahasan: Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya perbedaan kemampuan menulis di antara siswa pada tingkat kelas yang berbeda, yang umumnya ditandai dengan penggunaan kosakata dasar dan struktur kalimat yang sederhana. Jumlah kalimat yang dihasilkan oleh siswa Kelas VI secara konsisten lebih tinggi dibandingkan dengan siswa Kelas IV dan V. Hal ini mencerminkan tingkat kematangan yang lebih baik dalam mengungkapkan gagasan serta menjaga kesinambungan topik di sepanjang paragraf. Sebaliknya, berbagai faktor diidentifikasi sebagai penyebab kesulitan dalam menulis, seperti kurangnya ide, keterbatasan kosakata, rendahnya minat, pemahaman yang kurang terhadap struktur paragraf dan isi visual, serta kurangnya rasa percaya diri.</p> <p>Kesimpulan dan Implikasi: Penelitian ini juga berkontribusi dalam pemetaan kemampuan menulis dasar siswa sekolah dasar di Aceh Besar, yang sebelumnya masih terbatas dalam penelitian empiris. Temuan ini diharapkan dapat menjadi acuan bagi guru, pembuat kebijakan, dan peneliti lainnya dalam merancang program literasi yang lebih kontekstual dan berbasis pada kebutuhan siswa.</p>
Kata Kunci	Siswa Sekolah Dasar; Kemampuan; Menulis; Paragraf Deskriptif
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INTRODUCTION

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 ranked Indonesia 74th out of 79 countries in reading literacy [1], [2], [3], [4], [5], [6], [7], [8], [9], [10]. These findings demonstrate that the literacy skills of Indonesian students are markedly inferior to those of their counterparts in Thailand, Malaysia, and other Asia-Pacific nations [11], [12], [13], [14], [15]. Improving the reading and writing skills of elementary school students is very important for improving the quality of education as a whole. Writing ability is an important part of literacy [16]. Writing is a skill that people use to send messages to each other through written media instead of talking to each other in person. It requires certain steps and regular practice [17]. Writing requires a good vocabulary and the ability to put together sentences that make sense and flow well.

Elementary school students can practice writing descriptive paragraphs by looking at things or the environment around them. Writing descriptive paragraphs is an important part of learning Indonesian in elementary school [18]. Using a wide range of vocabulary correctly improves the quality of students' writing and helps them think critically and improve their language skills [19]. Using pictures is suggested as a way to improve vocabulary use in descriptive writing. To write descriptive paragraphs, you need to use your senses, do a series of tasks, and go through certain steps. When students master this skill, they can describe things, places, or events in enough detail to help them get their point across and make their writing more interesting for readers.

The researcher posits that each student's writing proficiency is influenced by both internal and external factors. We will also look at how well people use vocabulary, including the types of vocabulary and how much they use it. Consequently, this study seeks to thoroughly investigate the vocabulary utilization skills of elementary students in composing descriptive paragraphs through the use of visual media. This is anticipated to facilitate the enhancement of writing skills, as visual media can encourage students to articulate descriptions of objects, individuals, or circumstances more proficiently in written expression. Based on the information above, this study looks at: (1) How elementary school students write descriptive paragraphs with picture media? and (2) What elements contribute to students' difficulties in composing descriptive paragraphs utilizing visual media?

This study is of great importance in the realm of primary education, especially in enhancing the literacy skills of elementary students. Writing is an important part of learning Indonesian in both the Merdeka Curriculum and the 2013 Curriculum [20]. Based on initial observations and preliminary studies, students' proficiency in composing descriptive paragraphs is still inadequate. A lot of students have trouble putting their thoughts together in a clear way, coming up with detailed descriptions, and using the right words. This has a direct effect on how well students learn Indonesian, which helps them develop their critical and creative thinking skills. However, empirical studies on the linguistic profile of descriptive writing particularly word class distribution and its correlation with structural coherence in rural Acehnese schools remain scarce. This research fills that gap by combining qualitative analysis with quantitative lexical mapping to inform targeted pedagogical interventions

LITERATURE REVIEW

To address the issue of low literacy skills among elementary school students, especially in descriptive writing, this research adopts a student-centred, pedagogical-constructivist approach. This approach emphasises that learning should build students' knowledge through direct experience, exploration, and meaningful engagement with visual contexts [21], [22], [23], [24], [25], [26], [27] [28], [29]. In this context, the proposed strategy involves using picture media as a stimulus to help students develop imagination, expand vocabulary, and organise ideas systematically and contextually. Pictures provide real contexts that students can observe, helping them describe objects more clearly and coherently in descriptive paragraphs.

The novelty of the research titled 'Analysis of Elementary School Students' Ability in Writing Descriptive Paragraphs Using Picture Media in Aceh Besar District' lies in its systematic approach and comprehensive analysis of students' abilities using both quantitative and qualitative empirical data not merely on skill improvement after media intervention. Previous studies, such as that by [30], found that picture media significantly helped elementary students at SD IT An-Nahl write descriptive paragraphs, enhanced teacher explanations, and motivated students by creating a joyful learning environment through colourful and engaging visual aids [30]. Nila Fitri focused on Grade VII students at SMP IT Darussalam rather than elementary school students, analysing the effectiveness of picture media in improving descriptive writing skills [31]. Meanwhile, Nurasiah studied the enhancement of essay writing skills among Grade IV students using picture series media [32], and Utami focused on Grade III students, showing that pictures of national symbols

significantly improved descriptive writing skills, with 16 out of 17 students demonstrating improvement [33]. Arief examined the impact of mind mapping based on picture media on elementary students' ability to write descriptive paragraphs [34].

These studies were more practical and limited to specific classroom contexts without a strong approach to mapping students' initial abilities or developing widely replicable instructional models. In contrast, this study integrates an analysis of students' initial capabilities and a picture-based instructional design, making it more comprehensive and long-term oriented. The novelty of this study is evident in the dual use of picture media as both a diagnostic and instructional tool not merely as a visual aid. The approach employed is not just a simple experiment but includes the development of a visual-media-based learning model tailored to the local context of Aceh Besar District. Moreover, no previous research has specifically analysed elementary students' descriptive writing skills based on the geographical region of Aceh Besar, which has a unique cultural and linguistic background. Therefore, the localisation of context, integration of quantitative-qualitative methods, and design of an adaptive learning model make this study unique and offer a significant contribution to the development of basic literacy at both local and national levels

METHOD

The research method used in this study is descriptive qualitative. Qualitative research is a type of research that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observable behaviours [35], [36], [37], [38]. According to Sudaryanto, there are three methods or strategic stages in language processing: (1) data collection methods, (2) data analysis methods, and (3) data presentation methods. The clarity and completeness achieved in the initial stages will influence the subsequent stages, as each step is interconnected and forms a logical flow in the research process.

The population in this study consisted of students from SD Negeri 07 Kota Jantho, Aceh Besar, with a sample of 30 students from grades IV, V, and VI are 10 students from each grade. This selection was based on the consideration that these students had already learned descriptive paragraphs and the proper rules of Indonesian writing. A purposive sampling technique was used to capture variations in writing ability across grade levels. The research instrument consisted of a set of coloured images designed to elicit students' ability to produce descriptive paragraphs. Data were collected through two methods: (1) analysis of students' written work focusing on word count and diversity of word classes used, and (2) individual interviews to identify the types of difficulties they experienced during writing. To ensure accuracy in analysis, a coding scheme was applied to categorise word classes (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and others) and emerging themes of writing difficulties. Two independent raters conducted the coding process, and inter-rater consistency was calculated to ensure data reliability.

A qualitative-quantitative approach was selected because this research integrates two mutually complementary analytical goals. Quantitative content analysis was used to obtain an objective overview of the distribution of word classes and the amount of vocabulary produced by the students, enabling comparison of word-use patterns across grades. Meanwhile, thematic analysis was employed to examine various forms of writing difficulties expressed by the students in the interviews, such as limited vocabulary, challenges in developing ideas, or confusion in structuring paragraphs. Together, these approaches provided a more comprehensive understanding of descriptive writing skills at the elementary school level. Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were strictly maintained: approval was obtained from the school principal and teachers, student identities were anonymised to ensure confidentiality, and participation was entirely voluntary without coercion. Thus, the study was not only methodologically sound but also ethically responsible.

The data then classified based on the categories of word classes, vocabulary quantity, and the factors causing difficulties in writing descriptive paragraphs using picture media. The data were analysed by referring to relevant theories related to morphology, syntax, and language error analysis. The final stage of this research is the presentation of the data analysis results. In this study, the data analysis results are described informally using ordinary language. To support the explanation, formal methods such as tables and charts are also included to clarify the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Analysis of Students' Descriptive Paragraph Writing Ability

This study addresses two main focuses as outlined in the research questions: first, how is the descriptive paragraph writing ability of students at SD Negeri 07 Kota Jantho using picture media, and second, what are the factors that cause difficulties for students in writing such descriptive paragraphs. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were obtained through the analysis of students' written work, reflecting the variety of vocabulary usage and sentence structures, as well as in-depth interviews that revealed various obstacles encountered in writing. The analysis results show variations in students' writing abilities across grade levels, with a dominant tendency toward the use of basic vocabulary and simple sentences. On the other hand, several factors contributing to writing difficulties were identified, including a lack of ideas, limited vocabulary, low motivation, poor understanding of paragraph structure and picture content, and a lack of self-confidence.

Nama OSRRAF: Mablitli kelas 4 mereka pergi ke keranjang
 Maka suatu hari mereka mengambil padi
 mereka jalanan setiap mereka pulang sekolah kami tiba ditukuh nenek
 mulai tinggai ditungah kakak mereka hari kami sudah mulai halang menunggang sapi
 sekolah kami pun sekolah di desa disana lah kami melihat sawah
 mereka sedang jalanan dan ada yang nai segera dan mereka melanjutkan tadi
 dan mereka menuntun tadi ibu ibu ada yang kentang adenan

Picture 1. sample of the descriptive paragraph writings by students Grade IV

Therefore, the following discussion will elaborate on the research findings, which not only factually reflect the students' writing abilities but also highlight pedagogical implications for developing descriptive writing skills at the elementary school level.

Table 1. Analysis of Descriptive Paragraph Writing Ability of Grade IV

No.	Name	Word Class							Word Count	Sentence Count
		N	V	Adj	Adv	Pron	Num	Conj		
1.	DF	18	8	5	3	6	0	1	59	6
2.	ZG	28	10	1	0	2	0	0	103	10
3.	CHI	9	14	1	4	1	0	0	118	16
4.	RAH	7	8	1	0	1	0	0	58	3
5.	QAK	23	12	2	1	2	0	0	127	8
6.	MJ	17	6	0	2	3	5	0	59	2
7.	AM	11	5	1	1	4	0	0	55	1
8.	FR	19	10	1	0	6	0	2	89	2
9.	M	16	9	2	1	2	0	1	82	5

10.	F	12	7	3	2	3	4	0	57	4
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N: noun, V: verb, Adj: adjective, Pron: pronoun, Num: numeral, Conj: conjunction

Based on the data analysis in Table 1, Grade IV students demonstrate varying abilities in the use of word classes, with a strong tendency toward the use of nouns. Students such as QAK (127 words) and CHI (118 words) have a relatively high total word count, yet the number of sentences produced remains low, only 8 and 16 sentences respectively. This indicates a tendency to pile up words without forming cohesive sentence structures. Verbs are still used in limited quantities by most students; for example, AM used only 5 verbs out of a total of 55 words. This suggests that the ability to describe actions or processes has not yet developed optimally. Nouns are often used to describe objects monotonously, but the lack of verbs limits the students' narrative capabilities.

Additionally, adjectives are used very minimally even by students with high word counts. For instance, QAK included only 2 adjectives, reflecting a lack of variety in describing object qualities, which should be a defining feature of descriptive paragraphs. Pronouns and numerals also appear to be underutilised. Most students wrote without using pronouns, indicating that they are not yet accustomed to referencing previously mentioned subjects or objects. For example, students MJ and DF did not use any pronouns at all, leading to repetitive and inefficient sentence structures. The use of numerals was extremely minimal, with QAK being the only student to use five numerals, while the rest used none. This shows that students are not yet accustomed to describing quantity or order in the objects they depict.

In terms of conjunctions, only RA used four conjunctions, while most students did not use any. This reinforces the finding that Grade IV students are not yet able to construct inter-sentential relationships effectively. As a result, paragraph structure lacks logical flow and coherence, with ideas presented in a disconnected manner.

NAMA: AMMAR
KLS: V

JUDUL: PERGI KE KAMPUNG NENEK
Pagi ini pergi ke kampong puno nenek karena libur sekolah
sakit saya sampai di kampong saya sangat senang
saya pun melihat nenek dan kakak
kami pun ke sana jika pergi mi neneck dan kakak
kami pun mencuci padi persama sama
saya pun keponok untuk minum
saya pun bermain bersama teman teman
kami pun main petak uang pet
saya bersem bunyi di atas ponon kelapa.
sore pun belalú kami dan keluar ga pulang

Picture 2. sample of the descriptive paragraph writings by students Grade V

The number of sentences written by Grade IV students is generally low, with only two students (CHI and QAK) producing more than ten sentences. Even so, a low sentence count does not necessarily indicate a lack of depth in description, as most sentences are simple declarative statements with minimal elaboration. Students with high word counts do not always produce longer or more complex sentences, indicating that many words are repeated. This suggests that students have not yet developed an awareness of linguistic efficiency. Strengthening instruction on sentence structure particularly compound sentences and the use of modifiers is urgently needed.

Overall, the analysis of the first table shows that Grade IV students are still at an early stage in developing descriptive writing skills. They require pedagogical intervention to enhance their understanding of word classes and their functions in constructing vivid, meaningful, and engaging narratives.

Table 2. Analysis of Descriptive Paragraph Writing Ability of Grade V

No.	Name	Word Class						Word Count	Sentence Count	
		N	V	Adj	Adv	Pron	Num	Conj		
1.	AA	37	14	5	4	8	0	3	172	18
2.	MZA	12	7	2	4	6	0	2	103	10
3.	U	9	6	0	2	5	0	4	86	11
4.	AZ	14	11	3	3	6	0	2	100	11
5.	SZA	12	13	3	3	4	0	3	116	13
6.	AN	7	3	0	1	4	0	1	60	15
7.	MR	9	4	3	1	4	0	1	68	6
8.	AM	7	8	0	1	5	0	0	47	11
9.	F	9	6	1	1	4	0	0	70	10
10.	SA	8	7	1	1	4	0	1	62	8

N: noun, V: verb, Adj: adjective, Pron: pronoun, Num: numeral, Conj: conjunction

The data in Table 2 indicates that the writing abilities of Grade V students generally show improvement compared to Grade IV, particularly in terms of word count and the distribution of word classes. Student AA recorded the highest word count (172), with a balanced use of nouns (37) and verbs (14), as well as the inclusion of adjectives (5), adverbs (4), and conjunctions (3). This suggests that AA has begun to understand the importance of word class variety to enrich descriptive writing. However, other students such as MR and AM recorded low word counts (68 and 47 respectively), with very limited use of verbs (4 and 8), indicating persistent gaps in individual writing proficiency. The number of sentences produced by Grade V students ranged from 6 to 18, with a tendency toward simple sentence structures. Nevertheless, an increase in the use of verbs and conjunctions has begun to emerge, suggesting efforts to build more dynamic and logically connected narratives.

ASKIA UTAMI
VI Lenam).

Pergi ke saudah netek

Satu hari yang cerah saya pergi kesauah netek bersama adik. Sesampainya di saudah saya dengan adik menangkap belalang. Saat menangkap belalang saya kelemu terpan. lalu kami menangkap belalang bersama-sama. Setelah menangkap belalang kami disuruh makan. Selesai makan kami pergi ke kebon untuk mengambil sayur dan buah-buahan. Saat mengambil buah untuk dimakan. buahnya dicuci di bawah kalau mudimakan. kata ade netek. iya nek. Setelah makan bruh. Saya pun pulang. sesampai di rumah saya pun mandi dan siap-siap untuk ngajin.

tamat.

Figure 3. Sample of the descriptive paragraph writings by students Grade VI

Morphologically, the variation in word class usage becomes more complex in Grade V students, although still inconsistent. Pronouns remain rarely used, even by students with high word counts such as MZA and AZ, indicating that the concept of internal coherence within a paragraph is not yet fully mastered. The use of adjectives has increased compared to Grade IV, with SA and SZA recording 3 and 4 adjectives respectively evidence of efforts to enrich descriptive quality. Numerals remain infrequently used, showing that students are either not yet taught or are not yet accustomed to describing quantities or sequences in texts. Meanwhile, conjunctions are more evenly used among most students, serving as an early sign that the skill of linking sentences is beginning to develop. This represents an important foundation for building cohesive and coherent paragraphs.

In terms of overall vocabulary use, Grade V students display a more exploratory tendency, although the use of certain word classes remains irregular and unstructured.

The number of sentences produced by Grade V students is more consistent than in Grade IV, with students like AA and AZ writing more than 10 sentences. This allows more space for developing ideas within paragraphs. Although sentence structure is still dominated by the Subject-Predicate-Object (S-P-O) pattern, students are making efforts to include modifiers and adjectives that enrich the information presented. They also begin to utilise various aspects of the picture stimuli to construct more contextual descriptive paragraphs. However, limitations in paragraph development are still visible in the lack of prepositional and adverbial phrases, which are commonly used in descriptive writing. This indicates the need for further practice in composing compound sentences and enriching syntactic structures. In conclusion, Table 2 shows that Grade V students are in a transitional phase from informative to narrative descriptive writing. This potential must be cultivated through gradual practice to fully develop their writing skills.

Table 3. Analysis of Descriptive Paragraph Writing Ability of Grade VI

No.	Name	Word Class						Word Count	Sentence Count
		N	V	Adj	Adv	Pron	Num		
1.	AHY	28	27	1	3	4	0	4	170
2.	NA	29	21	5	5	9	0	5	188
3.	SH	13	11	3	4	5	1	3	136
4.	DS	8	9	2	2	4	0	2	61
5.	AZ	14	12	3	3	6	0	3	110
6.	DI	9	6	1	1	3	0	2	55
7.	NCA	12	14	6	5	4	0	2	110
8.	THA	20	24	4	4	7	0	4	247
9.	AU	10	8	2	3	5	0	4	73
10.	TGK	26	18	5	4	6	1	5	146

N: noun, V: verb, Adj: adjective, Pron: pronoun, Num: numeral, Conj: conjunction

Table 3 reveals that Grade VI students demonstrate a more mature command of vocabulary, with notable increases in both word count and word class variety. Students such as THA and AHY produced the highest word counts 247 and 170 respectively and a high number of sentences (30 and 21 sentences). They used various word classes more proportionally, including nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. This indicates stronger linguistic ability in constructing complete and varied descriptive paragraphs. Even students with fewer words, such as SH and DS, displayed coherent paragraph structures with a relatively balanced use of adjectives and conjunctions. Grade VI also shows a significant increase in the use of verbs, reflecting their ability to describe actions or situations more dynamically. With higher verb usage, the paragraphs written become more vivid and informative.

Furthermore, Grade VI students begin to show awareness of stylistic elements such as comparison or analogy. Although not explicitly presented in the table, this tendency is indicated by the more varied use of adjectives and adverbs, as seen in students like TGK and THA who combined adjectives with conjunctions. This suggests a more complex descriptive thinking process, where students not only describe objects but also logically connect ideas. The use of pronouns and conjunctions also increased in this grade, signalling an emerging mastery of paragraph structure. However, the use of numerals remains low, indicating that although progress has been made, there is still a need for teachers to familiarise students with expressions of quantity in descriptions. In general, paragraph structure among Grade VI students is better in terms of idea organisation, sentence-to-sentence cohesion, and word class usage.

The number of sentences produced by Grade VI students is consistently higher compared to those in Grades IV and V. This reflects a greater maturity in expressing ideas and maintaining topic continuity throughout a paragraph. With more sentences, students can explore details more deeply and present more convincing descriptions. Some students even demonstrate the ability to develop a single object from the picture into a description from multiple perspectives. Nonetheless, there are still some students, such as DI and AU, who produced lower word counts than the class average. This indicates that despite the overall improvement in descriptive paragraph writing, student progress remains individual and must be supported with differentiated teaching approaches. Overall, Table 3 shows that with appropriate instruction and gradual practice, Grade VI elementary students can reach a level of descriptive writing ability that approaches the minimum standard expected at the primary level.

2. Factors Contributing to Students' Difficulties in Writing Descriptive Paragraphs

1. Lack of Ideas

Based on interview results, one of the dominant factors causing students' difficulties in writing descriptive paragraphs is a lack of ideas. Many students stated that they did not know what to write when looking at the provided images. Upon further inquiry, several students admitted they could not relate the images to their experiences or relevant stories. This indicates that students' imaginative abilities are either underdeveloped or untrained in interpreting visual contexts narratively. Uncertainty about how to begin writing and the inability to develop ideas into sentences pose major obstacles. Students often feel stuck when trying to express their thoughts in paragraph form. Some also expressed confusion about whether the description must reflect reality or could be imaginative. This highlights the importance of teacher guidance in helping students understand narrative freedom in picture-based descriptive writing. The absence of pre-writing activities such as discussions or outlining has left students cognitively unprepared for writing tasks.

2. Limited Vocabulary

The second emerging factor from the interviews is limited vocabulary. Many students reported being unable to write the names of objects or actions shown in the images because they did not know the terms in Indonesian. For example, some said they didn't know how to write 'cow' because they were used to the local word 'lembu.' This reflects a vocabulary gap, especially regarding nature, activities, or specific objects. As a result, students often repeated the same words within a paragraph. Some even chose not to write at all due to uncertainty about word choice. This difficulty is exacerbated by a lack of reading habits, as admitted by several students. Limited exposure to written texts leads to a restricted vocabulary. Teachers must systematically introduce new vocabulary through contextual, visual-based learning activities. Exercises like making word lists from images or word-guessing games can be used to expand students' vocabulary.

3. Low Writing Motivation

Beyond ideas and vocabulary, a lack of interest and writing habits also contributes to students' difficulties. Interview data reveals that several students admitted they do not like writing or are not accustomed to writing in their daily lives. When asked to write a paragraph, they found the activity boring and confusing. The absence of a writing routine means that students lack stable strategies for forming sentences or paragraphs. They tend to view writing merely as an assignment rather than a medium of expression. Students also lack sufficient intrinsic motivation to produce quality writing. This condition shows the importance of cultivating a writing culture from an early age through enjoyable and meaningful activities. Teachers can integrate writing activities into games, projects, or short stories that relate to students' lives. By nurturing an interest in writing, students will become more motivated to explore ideas and improve their skills naturally.

4. Difficulty Interpreting Images

Difficulty in understanding the content of images is also identified as one of the barriers to writing descriptive paragraphs. Some students said the images were unfamiliar or hard to interpret. Several students even failed to identify the objects or activities depicted clearly. This confusion prevented them from building a narrative due to insufficient visual information for writing. When images do not align with students' experiences or backgrounds, gaps in interpretation emerge. In this context, it is essential for teachers to select image media relevant to the students' environment, culture, and developmental level. Moreover, image observation should be guided through prompting questions. Teachers can also offer image interpretation practice via group discussions before writing. This helps students recognise key elements in images and connect them with personal experiences or prior knowledge.

5. Lack of Understanding of Paragraph Structure

Another significant factor worsening students' difficulties in descriptive writing is their limited understanding of paragraph structure. Interview results show that many students do not know how many sentences to write or how to organise them properly. They write instinctively without considering idea sequencing or sentence relationships. Consequently, the paragraphs produced tend to lack coherence and are difficult to understand. Students also struggle to distinguish between main and supporting sentences. In this case, the teacher's role is crucial in providing concrete examples and repeated practice on paragraph structure. Using writing templates or simple outlines can help students understand the format of a descriptive paragraph. Teachers may also facilitate exercises in assembling paragraphs from jumbled sentences as reinforcement of structural skills. By equipping students with a solid understanding of paragraph components, writing becomes more focused and meaningful.

6. Doubt and Lack of Self Confidence

Interviews also revealed that doubt and a lack of self-confidence are significant barriers for some students. Several expressed fear of making mistakes in writing, particularly in word choice or sentence formation. This uncertainty causes them to delay writing or produce very few sentences. Fear of language and spelling errors also reduces students' willingness to express ideas freely. Students who feel incapable tend to give up before completing a paragraph. This highlights that affective aspects such as confidence, courage, and acceptance of mistakes must be incorporated into writing instruction. Teachers should create a supportive and inclusive learning environment where errors are seen as a natural part of the learning process. Acknowledging students' efforts not just their outcomes can gradually build their confidence. Additionally, collaborative or group writing activities can boost self-confidence, as students feel less isolated in facing writing challenges.

Limitations & Future Work

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the sample size is relatively small and limited to a single school, which restricts the generalisability of the findings. Second, although the study employs simple quantitative indicators such as Type Token Ratio (TTR) to measure lexical diversity, number of conjunctions per 100 words as a proxy for cohesion, and mean sentence length to reflect syntactic complexity these metrics provide only a preliminary overview of linguistic performance. More fine-grained analyses, such as syntactic parsing or error typology classification, were beyond the current study's scope. Third, the reliance on image-based prompts may not fully capture students' writing abilities across other genres or contexts. Therefore, future research should include larger and more diverse student populations, richer linguistic indicators, and varied writing tasks. Longitudinal designs would also enable researchers to track developmental progress over time and assess the sustained impact of visual scaffolding and process writing interventions.

The analysis of students' descriptive writing using images has important implications for education, pedagogy, linguistics, and assessment. Images function as scaffolding tools that promote vocabulary development, stimulate observation, and support the construction of coherent sentences, making the writing task less intimidating for young learners. From a linguistic perspective, visual stimuli encourage the use of more varied lexical items and more accurate syntactic structures, as reflected in improvements in TTR, conjunction density, and sentence length. Pedagogically, image-based writing aligns with student-centred learning principles and supports the integration of the full writing cycle, which fosters gradual improvement in content development, organisation, and textual clarity. Assessment practices also benefit from rubric-based scoring systems that incorporate content, coherence, vocabulary, creativity, and accuracy. These findings provide a foundation for comparative or longitudinal studies that examine how visual scaffolding influences literacy growth and how instructional challenges such as limited vocabulary or structural coherence can be addressed through sustained pedagogical intervention.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a clear developmental progression in students' descriptive writing abilities across grade levels, particularly in lexical diversity, syntactic maturity, and cohesion. Students in Grade IV generally demonstrated limited lexical resources and produced shorter, more fragmented sentences, whereas those in Grade VI exhibited more varied vocabulary and greater ability to elaborate on details. This progression aligns with established theories of writing development, which suggest that linguistic complexity and narrative coherence increase as cognitive, linguistic, and metacognitive capacities mature. Thus, the observed differences across grades reflect not only age-related growth but also cumulative exposure to language learning experiences within the school environment.

A closer linguistic examination reveals that students across all grade levels predominantly relied on nouns, with relatively sparse use of verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. This pattern suggests that students tended to describe visual stimuli as lists of objects rather than constructing fully elaborated descriptive propositions. Such noun-heavy output indicates limited mastery in transforming visual cues into dynamic verbal expressions a key component of descriptive writing. The insufficient presence of modifiers further constrained the richness of their descriptions. Taken together, these features point to a need for pedagogical interventions that strengthen morpho-syntactic control and encourage students to construct sentences that integrate actions, qualities, and relationships between objects depicted in images.

When compared to existing literature, the findings reinforce the widely documented value of visual scaffolding in promoting student engagement and initiating descriptive thinking. Previous research by Pantaleo [21] and Herrlinger et al. [25] underscores the role of images in stimulating observational detail and vocabulary use; however, the present study highlights an important nuance. While images effectively support idea generation, they do not automatically lead to coherent paragraph construction unless accompanied by explicit instruction in the writing process. This study therefore adds to the growing body of research demonstrating that the pedagogical impact of visual media is maximized only when embedded within structured process-writing frameworks.

The quantitative indicators used Type-Token Ratio (TTR), conjunctions per 100 words, and mean sentence length provide valuable proxies for assessing students' linguistic development. The gradual increase in TTR from Grades IV to VI suggests a broadening vocabulary repertoire, while the rising density of conjunctions indicates improvement in establishing logical relationships across sentences. Longer mean sentence length similarly reflects increasing syntactic complexity. These measures, although simple, offer practical and replicable tools for teachers to monitor students' writing development over time, particularly in contexts where advanced linguistic assessment resources may be limited.

The pedagogical implications of these findings are substantial. Integrating visual scaffolding with structured pre-writing activities, such as guided discussions or concept mapping, can help students move beyond merely naming visual elements. Targeted mini-lessons on the use of verbs, modifiers, and cohesive devices can further support students in shaping more coherent and elaborated descriptive paragraphs. Incorporating iterative drafting, peer review, and teacher feedback aligned with the stages of the writing process can foster metacognitive awareness and encourage students to refine their writing with intention. These strategies collectively support the development of both linguistic competence and writing fluency.

Despite the valuable insights generated, this study is limited by its focus on a single school and one writing genre. As such, caution must be exercised when generalizing the findings to broader populations. Future research should consider employing longitudinal designs to examine long-term growth in writing proficiency and controlled intervention studies that compare the effects of different instructional approaches combining visual scaffolding with process writing. Additional linguistic analyses, such as error typology or syntactic parsing, would also extend understanding of the specific challenges faced by young writers and inform more targeted instructional strategies.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the analysis of elementary school students' ability to write descriptive paragraphs at SD Negeri 07 Kota Jantho, Aceh Besar District, using image media, it can be concluded that students' writing abilities are still in the low to moderate category. Although images have been proven to stimulate imagination and serve as an initial stimulus in writing, their success greatly depends on how teachers integrate the media into the learning process. Students tend to write simple, repetitive sentences with limited vocabulary. This indicates that mastering sentence structure, diction choices, and paragraph cohesion and coherence remain a major challenge in descriptive writing among elementary school students. Variations in ability are also observed among fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students, with sixth-grade students showing better performance compared to lower grades. However, this improvement is not yet significant and highlights the need for a more systematic and continuous learning approach. Factors causing difficulty in writing include lack of ideas, low motivation, limited vocabulary, writing anxiety, difficulty understanding the content of images, lack of understanding of paragraph structure, low self-confidence, misunderstanding of what a descriptive paragraph is, as well as time constraints and writing pressure.

Common errors found in students' writing include spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, and improper use of morphemes. In addition, poor skills in organizing ideas and constructing cohesive paragraphs also pose significant obstacles. Students also struggle with forming compound sentences and developing ideas from a main thought. This highlights the importance of strengthening logical thinking skills and the ability to build systematic narratives in writing instruction. The use of images as a learning strategy must be accompanied by a contextual and reflective teaching approach. Teachers need to provide explicit guidance in observing images, exploring visual elements, and composing descriptions based on students' observations and personal experiences. An approach based on guiding questions and concept maps greatly helps students in building coherent and engaging paragraph structures. Teachers are also encouraged to train students in outlining, revising, and editing their written work.

To address these various obstacles, several instructional strategies are recommended, including: (1) strengthening visual and linguistic literacy simultaneously, (2) training writing skills through a process-oriented approach rather than focusing solely on the final product, (3) developing collaborative learning based on descriptive writing projects, and (4) providing clear, consistent, and constructive formative feedback. By implementing these strategies, students are expected to gradually and sustainably improve their writing skills. Overall, this study emphasizes that the skill of writing descriptive paragraphs at the elementary school level is an essential aspect of students' literacy

development. With the support of appropriate visual media and effective teaching strategies, students can be guided to develop writing skills that are not only formally descriptive but also communicative and meaningful. Pedagogical interventions that focus on cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects holistically are necessary to achieve optimal Indonesian language learning objectives.

This study also contributes to mapping the basic writing abilities of elementary school students in Aceh Besar, which have previously been limited in empirical research. These findings are expected to serve as a reference for teachers, policymakers, and other researchers in designing more contextual literacy programs based on students' needs. Further research is recommended to explore the effectiveness of specific interventions, such as the use of digital technology, cooperative learning models, or the integration of local culture in writing descriptive paragraphs. Thus, the conclusion of this study not only provides an overview of students' abilities but also opens opportunities for innovation in Indonesian language learning at the elementary level. Improving students' literacy quality cannot be separated from the synergy between learning media, teaching strategies, school environment, and family involvement. In the spirit of Merdeka Belajar (Independent Learning), students need to be empowered as active subjects who can develop their literacy potential through various creative and needs-oriented approaches.

The analysis of elementary school students' ability in writing descriptive paragraphs using pictures has significant implications for education, pedagogy, linguistics, and assessment. Pictures serve as scaffolding tools that enhance vocabulary, stimulate observation, and encourage coherent sentence structuring, making writing tasks more engaging and less intimidating. Pedagogically, this approach supports student-centred learning, where teachers facilitate creativity and detail-oriented expression through visual prompts. Linguistically, students demonstrate improved lexical variety and syntactic accuracy, measurable through indices such as the Writing Growth Index. Assessment practices benefit from rubric-based evaluations that capture content, coherence, and creativity. Furthermore, this research opens opportunities for comparative and longitudinal studies, highlighting how visual-based instruction fosters literacy development while addressing challenges like limited vocabulary or structural coherence.

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