

## An Analysis of Students' Writing Competence through Biography Text: A Case Study at SMKN 3 Tanjungpinang

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### Abstract

The purpose of this research is to analyze the writing competence of vocational high school (SMK) students through the production of biographical texts. Focusing on the eleventh-grade students of the Industrial Automation Engineering program at SMKN 3 Tanjungpinang, this study aims to examine how well students construct biography texts in terms of content, organization, grammar, and mechanics. Writing, as a productive skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), is widely recognized as one of the most complex skills to master, especially within the constraints of vocational education that prioritizes functional communication. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, this study involved 25 student participants who completed a biographical writing task. The analysis was based on Brown's (2007) writing rubric. Findings show that while most students demonstrated adequate competence in content development and grammatical accuracy, they still struggled with organizing ideas coherently and applying appropriate writing mechanics, including punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. The average overall writing score was 80.64, with the highest performance observed in content and the lowest in mechanics. These results emphasize the necessity for more structured and genre-based writing instruction, supported by scaffolding, model texts, and formative feedback. The findings are expected to inform pedagogical practices in vocational education by highlighting areas that require instructional reinforcement and by offering insights for the development of more effective EFL writing strategies in similar educational contexts.

**Keywords:** *Biographical writing; writing competence; vocational education; English as a Foreign Language.*

### 1. Introduction

Writing is a crucial skill that EFL learners must master, and it is often regarded as the most challenging among the four primary language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Its complexity arises not only from the need to control vocabulary and grammar but also from the ability to organize ideas coherently, considering the communicative purpose, intended audience, and text type. In the context of vocational high schools (SMK) in Indonesia, writing plays a dual role: it serves as a tool for linguistic expression and as a means of cultivating critical and reflective thinking (Hyland, 2019). According to Weigle (2002), writing involves more than sentence construction; it is a structured process that requires clarity and precision in conveying meaning to the reader. Furthermore, Nunan (2003) highlights that writing in EFL contexts demands greater effort, as learners must navigate not only the linguistic system but also discourse conventions and cultural expectations. These demands are particularly pronounced in vocational education, where the curriculum is geared toward developing practical and professional communication skills essential for the workplace.

One of the text types taught in English instruction at vocational schools is the biographical text. This genre provides students with opportunities to develop factual writing skills through the construction of narratives about real-life figures in chronological order. Writing a biography requires students to employ the past tense, utilize cohesive devices, and maintain clarity and coherence across sections of the text. However, in practice, many students face difficulties in producing structurally and linguistically accurate biographical texts. These difficulties include limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, and low cohesion and coherence in organizing ideas. Intended to be a study of the conditions of the world throughout and after the dominance of European colonizers and the various effects that emerged in the

contemporary literature (Ashcrot, 2017, p.22). Thus, analyzing students' writing competence through biographical texts can serve as a reflective means to evaluate their achievement of learning objectives.

In the Indonesian English curriculum, the teaching of writing is grounded in a genre-based approach, which emphasizes the understanding and production of various types of texts by their social purposes, schematic structures, and linguistic features. This approach, which draws from Halliday's (1985) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), positions language as a resource for making meaning within specific cultural and situational contexts. Within this framework, students are introduced to a range of text types—both factual and literary—with the goal of equipping them with the ability to communicate effectively across different genres. One of the factual text types emphasized in the junior and senior high school curriculum is the biographical text. As a genre, biography presents factual information about a person's life in a chronological sequence and frequently includes evaluative commentary about the individual's achievements, character, or social contributions (Wijayanti, Emilia, & Gunawan, 2017). The teaching of this text genre is not solely aimed at developing students' narrative competence, but also at fostering critical thinking, historical awareness, and the ability to express information objectively and coherently. Accordingly, instruction in biographical writing focuses on the genre's conventional structures—orientation, sequence of events, and evaluation—as well as its typical linguistic features, such as the use of past tense verbs, temporal conjunctions, and descriptive noun phrases to ensure textual cohesion and clarity (Emilia & Hamied, 2015).

Previous studies have shown that vocational school students still encounter numerous challenges in writing biographical texts. Yunus and Haris (2021) report that most students struggle with constructing the proper text structure, avoiding repetition of information, and selecting appropriate vocabulary and verbs. Common errors include inaccurate grammar usage, limited vocabulary, and weak cohesion and coherence (Emilia & Hamied, 2015; Alwasilah, 2024). The lack of active writing practice and feedback-based instruction is identified as one of the major inhibiting factors. Fitriani (2020) and Putri and Marlina (2020) also highlight that students tend to struggle with logically connecting ideas and composing a communicative and unified piece of writing. These challenges indicate the need for a more systematic, contextual, and integrative approach to writing instruction, especially in vocational schools where academic instruction time is limited due to vocational subject demands. Setiawan and Anggraeni (2022) emphasize that writing skills often receive insufficient attention in the vocational curriculum, thus necessitating pedagogical interventions such as writing process support and the provision of ongoing formative feedback. Strategies such as scaffolding, peer review, and the use of authentic model texts have been proven effective in enhancing students' writing quality.

Although many studies have investigated the writing skills of vocational school students, most of them focus on descriptive and narrative texts. In-depth studies on biographical writing remain relatively scarce, despite the genre's potential to develop students' factual narrative writing skills. Suherman (2019) found that although students could construct the basic structure of a biography, they still encountered difficulties in building sentence-level cohesion and expressing ideas logically and efficiently.

Based on the background elaborated above, this study aims to analyze how the writing competence of students at vocational high schools (SMK) 3 Tanjungpinang is reflected through the production of biographical texts. This research does not only evaluate linguistic aspects such as structure, grammar, vocabulary, organization, and mechanics, but also explores how students develop ideas, organize information, and build cohesion and coherence in their writing. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the findings of this study are expected to provide practical contributions for teachers in designing more effective and contextual writing instruction strategies, as well as theoretical insights for the advancement of writing pedagogy in vocational education contexts.

## 2. Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design involving vocational high school (SMK) students as the research subjects, specifically about their writing abilities. The data collection procedures included data collection, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. As Sandelowski (2000) asserts, qualitative descriptive research aims to provide a comprehensive summary of an event or experience from the perspective of the individuals involved, using their everyday language. Similarly, Polit and Beck (2012) emphasize that qualitative descriptive research is designed to enhance narrative clarity and transparency in the analytical process—an essential component in studies aimed at data-driven decision-making, particularly in explaining conditions related to students' writing competence at vocational high schools (SMK) 3 Tanjungpinang.

The research was conducted on May 15th–16th in the eleventh-grade class of the Industrial Automation Engineering program at vocational high school (SMK) 3 Tanjungpinang, consisting of 25 students. This class was chosen due to the accessibility of the participants and their willingness to be involved in the study. The data were obtained from students' worksheets in the form of a *recount* text, focusing on biographical writing.

The data collection instrument in this study was a worksheet containing questions related to the biography of a public figure. Students were required to answer the questions appropriately and accurately, based on their writing capabilities. The primary objective of this study was to explore and describe the writing competence of vocational students in English. The qualitative descriptive method was used, and data were collected through worksheets distributed to the students. The research sample consisted of eleventh-grade students from the Industrial Automation Engineering department at SMKN 3 Tanjungpinang, representing a range of English proficiency levels. The data collected were then

transcribed and coded to identify key themes, such as grammatical inaccuracies, punctuation issues, and other common linguistic challenges encountered in English writing.

### 3. Findings and Discussion

The research, conducted using student worksheets completed by vocational high school (SMK) students majoring in Industrial Automation Engineering, yielded a variety of results. The data analyzed by the researcher are presented in tabular form accompanied by descriptive narrative explanations. The responses provided by the participants were not influenced by the researcher, ensuring that the data analyzed reflect the students' authentic understanding of writing competence.

The analysis of vocational high schools (SMK) 3 Tanjungpinang students' writing competence in composing biographical texts was based on four main components from the writing assessment rubric developed by Brown (2007), namely: **content**, **organization**, **grammar**, and **mechanics**. A total of 25 student writing samples were analyzed. Each component was assigned a maximum score as follows: 30 points for content, 20 points for organization, 30 points for grammar, and 20 points for mechanics, with an overall maximum score of 100 points.

**Table 1.** Score of Students Writing Skill in Biography Text

| No | Subject | Writing Aspect  |                      |                 |                  | Total |
|----|---------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------|------------------|-------|
|    |         | Content<br>(30) | Organization<br>(20) | Grammar<br>(30) | Mechanic<br>(20) |       |
| 1  | S1      | 30              | 20                   | 24              | 16               | 90    |
| 2  | S2      | 22              | 15                   | 24              | 14               | 75    |
| 3  | S3      | 23              | 17                   | 24              | 10               | 74    |
| 4  | S4      | 18              | 8                    | 24              | 16               | 66    |
| 5  | S5      | 28              | 18                   | 28              | 18               | 92    |
| 6  | S6      | 25              | 18                   | 25              | 12               | 80    |
| 7  | S7      | 30              | 20                   | 28              | 18               | 96    |
| 8  | S8      | 25              | 15                   | 26              | 15               | 81    |
| 9  | S9      | 28              | 16                   | 25              | 12               | 81    |
| 10 | S10     | 20              | 15                   | 18              | 8                | 61    |
| 11 | S11     | 25              | 16                   | 25              | 14               | 75    |
| 12 | S12     | 24              | 20                   | 24              | 16               | 84    |
| 13 | S13     | 30              | 20                   | 24              | 12               | 86    |
| 14 | S14     | 27              | 20                   | 25              | 13               | 90    |
| 15 | S15     | 25              | 18                   | 25              | 10               | 78    |
| 16 | S16     | 30              | 20                   | 25              | 20               | 95    |
| 17 | S17     | 28              | 18                   | 28              | 20               | 94    |
| 18 | S18     | 25              | 13                   | 20              | 16               | 74    |
| 19 | S19     | 28              | 20                   | 28              | 18               | 94    |
| 20 | S20     | 25              | 14                   | 22              | 15               | 76    |
| 21 | S21     | 30              | 20                   | 19              | 20               | 89    |
| 22 | S22     | 27              | 19                   | 28              | 20               | 94    |
| 23 | S23     | 23              | 14                   | 28              | 15               | 80    |
| 24 | S24     | 20              | 15                   | 10              | 10               | 55    |
| 25 | S25     | 28              | 20                   | 28              | 18               | 94    |

In general, students' total scores varied, ranging from 55 to 96. The highest score was achieved by Student S7 (96), while the lowest score was recorded by Student S24 (55). Most students demonstrated strong performance in the **content** and **grammar** aspects; however, **organization** and **mechanics** remained significant areas of weakness for the majority of the participants.

On average, the overall scores of the 25 students were as follows:

**Table 2.** Average Scores of Students’ Writing Competence in Biography Texts

|                       |                     |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Content               | 25.16 / 30 (83.87%) |
| Organization          | 17.08 / 20 (85.4%)  |
| Grammar               | 24.12 / 30 (80.4%)  |
| Mechanics             | 14.28 / 20 (71.4%)  |
| Overall average score | 80.64 / 100         |

This table serves as the primary basis for analyzing students’ strengths and weaknesses in each component of writing skills. These findings will be further discussed in the following section to identify common patterns and the contributing factors that influenced students’ writing performance.

**Table 3.** Content of Biography Text

| Score Category | Score Range | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------|-------------|-----------|------------|
| Excellent      | 27-30       | 6         | 24%        |
| Good           | 22-26       | 8         | 32%        |
| Average        | 17-21       | 6         | 24%        |
| Poor           | 13-16       | 3         | 12%        |
| Very Poor      | ≤12         | 2         | 8%         |
| Total          |             | 25        | 100%       |

Based on the table above, students’ writing skills in terms of **content** generally fall within the *fair* to *good* categories. A total of six students (24%) obtained scores ranging from 27 to 30, which are classified as *very good*, while eight students (32%) scored between 22 and 26, placing them in the *good* category. In addition, six students (24%) fell into the *fair* category (17–21), three students (12%) into the *poor* category (13–16), and two students (8%) into the *very poor* category (≤12). These findings indicate that while the majority of students were able to develop the content of their biographical texts reasonably well, a portion of them still require guidance in expressing information more comprehensively and in a more structured manner.

**Table 4.** Organization of Biography Text

| Score Category | Score Range | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------|-------------|-----------|------------|
| Excellent      | 18-20       | 10        | 40%        |
| Good           | 15-17       | 8         | 32%        |
| Average        | 12-14       | 4         | 16%        |
| Poor           | 09-11       | 2         | 8%         |
| Very Poor      | ≤8          | 1         | 4%         |
| Total          |             | 25        | 100%       |

Based on the table above, it can be observed that the majority of students have demonstrated good text organization skills. Ten students (40%) fell into the *very good* category with scores ranging from 18 to 20, while eight students (32%) were classified as *good* with scores between 15 and 17. However, there were still four students (16%) in the *fair* category, two students (8%) in the *poor* category, and one student (4%) in the *very poor* category. This indicates that although most students are able to organize ideas logically and systematically, some students still require practice in constructing coherent paragraphs and using conjunctions effectively.

**Table 5.** Grammar of Biography Text

| Score Category | Score Range | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------|-------------|-----------|------------|
|----------------|-------------|-----------|------------|

|           |       |    |      |
|-----------|-------|----|------|
| Excellent | 27-30 | 5  | 20%  |
| Good      | 22-26 | 13 | 52%  |
| Average   | 17-21 | 4  | 16%  |
| Poor      | 13-16 | 2  | 8%   |
| Very Poor | ≤12   | 1  | 4%   |
| Total     |       | 25 | 100% |

The grammar aspect shows that more than half of the students (52%) fall into the *good* category with scores ranging from 22 to 26, and five students (20%) are classified as *very good* with scores between 27 and 30. Meanwhile, four students (16%) are in the *fair* category, two students (8%) in the *poor* category, and one student (4%) in the *very poor* category. These findings indicate that the majority of students have a good understanding of basic grammar usage; however, some students still encounter difficulties with tense consistency and sentence structure.

**Table 6.** Mechanic of Biography Text

| Score Category | Score Range | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------|-------------|-----------|------------|
| Excellent      | 18-20       | 8         | 32%        |
| Good           | 15-17       | 7         | 28%        |
| Average        | 12-14       | 5         | 20%        |
| Poor           | 09-11       | 3         | 12%        |
| Very Poor      | ≤8          | 2         | 8%         |
| Total          |             | 25        | 100%       |

In the mechanics aspect, eight students (32%) were classified as *very good*, and seven students (28%) as *good*. Meanwhile, five students (20%) fell into the *fair* category, three students (12%) into the *poor* category, and two students (8%) into the *very poor* category. This indicates that a considerable number of students are still inconsistent in their use of punctuation, capitalization, and spelling, necessitating more focused instruction on the technical aspects of writing.

Based on the analysis of the students' writings at vocational high schools 3 Tanjungpinang in composing biography texts, it can be concluded that their writing competence varies across different aspects. The majority of students demonstrated a fairly good mastery of content and grammar, reflected in their ability to develop factual information about the figures and use appropriate sentence structures. However, weaknesses were still found in organization and mechanics, such as inconsistent paragraph coherence and improper use of punctuation and spelling.

These findings suggest that although students possess a basic understanding of writing biography texts, more intensive and structured teaching strategies are needed, particularly to strengthen discourse coherence and technical accuracy in writing. According to Askurny (2023), understanding pragmatic and textual aspects in translation can significantly improve students' ability to compose coherent and contextually appropriate texts, which is particularly relevant in biographical writing. Therefore, the results of this study are expected to provide valuable considerations for teachers in designing a more contextualized, sustainable, and student-centered writing instruction approach in vocational school settings.

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the study conducted on 25 students of the 11th grade Industrial Automation Engineering program at SMKN 3 Tanjungpinang, it can be concluded that the students' writing competence in composing biography texts shows considerable variation among the respondents. The aspects of content and grammar tend to be better mastered by most students, as reflected in their ability to present factual information about the figures and use relatively accurate sentence structures. However, the aspects of organization and mechanics remain the primary challenges faced by the students, particularly in terms of paragraph coherence, the use of conjunctions, as well as accuracy in punctuation and spelling.

These findings indicate that although students have a reasonably good foundation in writing skills—especially in developing content and using grammar—they still require intensive guidance in organizing ideas logically and attending to the technical aspects of writing. Therefore, a contextual, systematic, and feedback-based writing instruction strategy needs to be consistently implemented in vocational school settings. A genre-based approach, the use of text models, and continuous training in discourse cohesion and coherence are essential steps to comprehensively improve students' writing competence.

Thus, the results of this study are expected to provide practical contributions for teachers in designing more effective writing instruction, as well as serve as a foundation for further research exploring more in-depth challenges and solutions in developing students' writing skills at the vocational education level.

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