Analysis of Narrative Writing Skills Among Junior High School Students in Indonesia

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Writing is a critical skill for English language learners, enabling them to express ideas effectively. This study investigates the narrative writing abilities of second-grade students at SMPN 5 Wonomulyo, Indonesia, focusing on five key aspects: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Employing a mixed-method approach, data were collected through writing tests and teacher interviews. The findings reveal that a majority of students (60%) failed to meet the minimum standard of writing proficiency. Content and vocabulary were identified as the most challenging aspects, with many students struggling to generate coherent ideas and use appropriate language. Interviews with the teacher highlighted contributing factors, including limited vocabulary, lack of practice, and reliance on conventional teaching methods. The study emphasizes the need for innovative, student-centered approaches to enhance narrative writing skills, such as collaborative writing exercises, peer feedback, and digital storytelling tools. Vocabulary enrichment and regular writing practice are also critical for improving performance. This research contributes to the body of knowledge on EFL writing and offers practical recommendations for improving teaching practices.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a fundamental skill in language learning, enabling individuals to express thoughts, ideas, and emotions effectively. Among the four primary language skills, writing is often considered the most challenging for second-language learners due to its complexity in combining cognitive, linguistic, and cultural elements (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), writing proficiency is crucial for academic and professional success, yet it remains a significant hurdle for many students in non-native English-speaking regions (Hyland, 2019; Isma, Hermansyah, et al., 2023). Within this domain, narrative writing serves as an essential genre, fostering creativity, linguistic competence, and the ability to convey coherent stories. However, many students struggle to master this genre, particularly in developing content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics skills critical for effective communication (Isma, Putri, et al., 2024; Isma, Rasmin, et al., 2023; Knapp, 2005).

Numerous studies have explored various aspects of narrative writing in the EFL context, providing a solid foundation for understanding students' challenges and effective teaching strategies. Research such as Yana (2024) has established a positive correlation between students' reading habits and their narrative writing abilities, highlighting the importance of reading in fostering writing skills. Similarly, Nabella and Rini (2023) demonstrated the effectiveness of the Genre-Based Approach (GBA) in enhancing students' comprehension and writing of narrative texts, while Hellystia and Hermawati (2024) emphasized the role of metacognitive strategies and cultural integration in improving narrative writing. These studies provide valuable insights into the interplay between reading, cognition, and instructional techniques in narrative writing.

Despite these advancements, several gaps remain in the literature. First, while existing studies often focus on specific strategies or tools, such as gamification (Manthofani et al., 2024) or flipped learning (Chai & Hamid, 2023), little attention has been paid to understanding the multifaceted challenges students face in narrative writing, particularly in under-resourced or rural educational settings. Moreover, most studies

emphasize high school or university students (Damayanti et al., 2024; Schmitz & Dannecker, 2023), leaving the challenges of younger learners, especially at the junior high school level, underexplored. Additionally, the focus has often been on isolated aspects of narrative writing, such as grammar errors (Laia, 2024) or specific components like organization and language use (Vandermeulen et al., 2024).

However, there is limited research that holistically examines all critical aspects of narrative writing: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics in a single study. This integrated approach is crucial for identifying comprehensive solutions to the challenges faced by learners. This study addresses these gaps by analyzing the narrative writing abilities of junior high school students in a rural Indonesian context. It examines all critical aspects of narrative writing and integrates teacher perspectives to understand instructional challenges and limitations. By focusing on a less-studied demographic and providing a holistic analysis, this research contributes to the broader understanding of narrative writing in EFL contexts and offers practical recommendations for improving teaching and learning outcomes.

This study aims to analyze the narrative writing abilities of second-grade students at SMPN 5 Wonomulyo, focusing on content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. This research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to students' difficulties and identify strategies for improvement. The objectives include assessing students' current writing proficiency, identifying common errors, and exploring the impact of teaching methods on student performance. The findings of this study contribute to the existing body of knowledge by addressing the underexplored challenges faced by EFL learners in rural Indonesian schools. This research not only provides practical recommendations for educators to enhance their teaching practices but also offers theoretical insights into the interplay between instructional strategies and student outcomes in narrative writing.

METHODS

This study employed a mixed-method research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis of students' narrative writing abilities. The mixed-method design allows for methodological triangulation, offering a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The research was conducted at SMPN 5 Wonomulyo, located in Polewali Mandar Regency, Sulawesi Barat Province, Indonesia. The participants were ten second-grade students selected through purposive sampling. The selection criteria included students ranked first to tenth in academic performance within their class, representing a range of abilities. This sampling approach was chosen to ensure diverse perspectives and provide rich data for analysis.

Two primary instruments were used to collect data: (1) Writing Test, students were assigned to write narrative texts, which were evaluated based on five key aspects: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. A scoring rubric adapted from Jacobs (1981) was utilized to ensure consistency and reliability in grading. Scores were categorized into four levels: Excellent to Very Good, Good to Average, Fair to Poor, and Very Poor; (2) Interviews, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the students' English teacher to gain qualitative insights into the challenges students face in narrative writing. The interview questions focused on students' writing difficulties, teaching strategies employed, and the teacher's perceptions of the students' performance. Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and analyzed for thematic patterns.

The data collection process comprised the following steps: (1) Administering the narrative writing test to the participants in a controlled classroom setting; (2) Evaluating the students' writing using the scoring rubric to classify their performance across the five writing aspects; (3) Conducting semi-structured interviews with the teacher, which were audio-recorded for accuracy and subsequently transcribed. The quantitative data from the writing tests were analyzed descriptively to determine the frequency and percentage of students' performance in each scoring category. The qualitative data from the teacher interviews were analyzed thematically to identify recurring challenges and instructional factors affecting students' writing. The transcripts were coded and categorized into themes, such as vocabulary limitations, lack of practice, and teaching strategies.

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings from the writing test, which evaluated students' narrative writing abilities across five key aspects: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. The results

are summarized in tables to highlight performance patterns and are followed by detailed explanations and interpretations.

The writing test revealed that the majority of students struggled to meet the minimum standard of completeness (score ≥ 70). Table 1 summarizes the distribution of students' overall writing scores.

Table 1. Distribution of Students' Writing Scores

Score Range	Category	Frequency	Percentage
70–100	Passed Minimum Standard	4	40%
0–69	Below Minimum Standard	6	60%

As shown in Table 1, only 40% of the students achieved a passing score, indicating a significant proportion (60%) failed to meet the expected standard. This highlights substantial difficulties in narrative writing among the students.

Table 2. Students' Scores for Content

Score Range	Category	Frequency	Percentage
20–18	Excellent to Very Good	2	20%
17–14	Good to Average	0	0%
13–10	Fair to Poor	2	20%
9–7	Very Poor	6	60%

The content aspect evaluates the relevance, coherence, and depth of ideas presented in the narrative text. The majority of students (60%) scored in the "Very Poor" category, indicating difficulty in generating coherent and meaningful ideas. Only 20% of students achieved an "Excellent to Very Good" rating, reflecting the need for instructional strategies that emphasize idea development.

Table 3. Students' Scores for Organization

Score Range	Category	Frequency	Percentage
20–18	Excellent to Very Good	2	20%
17–14	Good to Average	1	10%
13–10	Fair to Poor	2	20%
9–7	Very Poor	5	50%

The organization aspect assesses the logical arrangement of ideas and adherence to narrative structure. Half of the students (50%) performed poorly in organization, struggling to structure their narratives effectively. Only 30% scored "Good to Average" or above, highlighting the need for explicit instruction in narrative structures.

Table 4. Students' Scores for Vocabulary

Score Range	Category	Frequency	Percentage
20–18	Excellent to Very Good	2	20%
17–14	Good to Average	1	10%
13–10	Fair to Poor	1	10%
9–7	Very Poor	6	60%

The vocabulary aspect measures students' ability to use appropriate and varied word choices in their writing. Similar to the content aspect, vocabulary scores reflect significant challenges, with 60% of students categorized as "Very Poor." This indicates a pressing need for vocabulary-building activities.

Table 5. Students' Scores for Language Use

Score Range	Category	Frequency	Percentage
20–18	Excellent to Very Good	2	20%
17–14	Good to Average	2	20%
13–10	Fair to Poor	1	10%
9–7	Very Poor	5	50%

Language use evaluates grammar, syntax, and sentence variety in students' narratives. Half of the students (50%) scored in the "Very Poor" category, struggling with basic grammatical accuracy and sentence construction. Instruction focused on language use is necessary to address these weaknesses.

Table 6. Students' Scores for Mechanics

Score Range	Category	Frequency	Percentage
20–18	Excellent to Very Good	2	20%
17–14	Good to Average	2	20%
13–10	Fair to Poor	2	20%
9–7	Very Poor	4	40%

The mechanics aspect examines spelling, punctuation, and formatting. While 40% of students scored "Very Poor," the remaining 60% achieved better results, suggesting that mechanics, though challenging, may be improved with focused practice.

The findings reveal consistent challenges across all five aspects of writing, with content, vocabulary, and organization being the most problematic areas. Only a small proportion of students demonstrated proficiency. These results highlight the urgent need for innovative teaching methods, such as explicit instruction in narrative structure, vocabulary-building exercises, and targeted feedback on grammar and mechanics. Addressing these issues can significantly improve students' narrative writing skills, enabling them to meet academic standards effectively.

To complement the findings from the writing tests, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the students' English teacher. The interview explored the teacher's perspectives on students' English writing abilities, the teaching strategies employed, the difficulties faced by students, and the methods used to address these challenges. Selected excerpts from the teacher's responses are presented and analyzed below.

The teacher expressed concerns regarding the students' overall English proficiency, particularly in narrative writing:

"Students' English skills are generally poor. Many of them do not enjoy learning English, and for narrative writing specifically, they struggle because they lack vocabulary and rarely read English texts."

This response highlights two significant factors contributing to poor performance: a lack of interest in English and limited exposure to reading and vocabulary development. These issues likely stem from external factors, such as insufficient motivation and lack of access to English materials outside the classroom.

The teacher described the conventional approach used to teach narrative writing:

"I explain the definition and general concept of narrative texts during the first session. Then, I provide examples, ask students to read aloud, discuss the generic structure and language features, translate the text into Indonesian, and conclude the moral message."

While the strategy covers fundamental concepts, it reflects a teacher-centered approach with minimal active student participation. The lack of interactive or engaging activities, such as group discussions or the use of multimedia tools, may limit students' opportunities to practice and internalize narrative writing skills effectively.

The teacher identified several difficulties encountered by students:

"Many students struggle to understand the generic structure and language features of narrative texts. They also have difficulty differentiating narrative texts from other genres. This is because they rarely study or practice writing at home."

This response underscores fundamental gaps in students' understanding of narrative texts, compounded by their limited practice outside the classroom. The lack of a structured learning routine at home and inadequate vocabulary further exacerbates these challenges.

The teacher explained the methods employed to address these difficulties:

"I provide key vocabulary lists, translate the narrative texts into Indonesian with the students, and assign exercises for practice."

While these efforts are practical, they primarily focus on addressing surface-level issues such as vocabulary gaps. More comprehensive interventions, such as incorporating creative writing activities or peer feedback sessions, could foster deeper engagement and skill development.

The interview findings reveal that students' struggles in narrative writing stem from a combination of external factors (e.g., lack of motivation and practice) and internal barriers (e.g., limited vocabulary and poor understanding of narrative structures). Additionally, the teacher's reliance on conventional, teacher-centered methods further limits students' opportunities for active engagement and skill development. To address these challenges, it is recommended that teaching strategies be diversified to include interactive and student-centered approaches, such as collaborative writing exercises, the use of digital storytelling tools, and regular writing workshops. These interventions could enhance both the effectiveness of instruction and students' overall narrative writing proficiency.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to analyze students' narrative writing abilities across five key aspects: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Additionally, the study explored the challenges students face in narrative writing and the instructional strategies employed by their teacher. The results of the writing tests reveal that most students struggled significantly in narrative writing. Content and vocabulary emerged as the most challenging aspects, with 60% of students performing in the "Very Poor" category. Similarly, organization and language use showed substantial weaknesses, with only a small proportion of students achieving scores in the "Good to Average" or higher categories. While mechanics showed slightly better performance, 40% of students still fell below the minimum standard. The interview findings further supported these results, identifying limited vocabulary, insufficient practice, and reliance on conventional teaching strategies as major contributing factors.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research that emphasizes the key challenges students face in narrative writing within the EFL context. Several studies have explored similar issues related to vocabulary limitations, content development, and the use of conventional teaching methods, which align with the struggles observed in this study. For example, the research conducted by Yana (2024) highlighted a significant correlation between students' reading habits and their ability to write narrative texts. The study found that students with better reading habits tended to perform better in narrative writing. Similarly, in this study, limited exposure to English texts and a lack of vocabulary were identified as major factors hindering students' writing proficiency. This suggests that reading plays a crucial role in developing writing skills, which is consistent with Yana's conclusion that reading practices are closely linked to writing success.

In addition, research by Vandermeulen et al. (2024) on the writing processes of students in both L1 and L2 contexts found that effective writing processes are significantly related to higher writing quality, especially in narrative writing tasks. The authors noted that the process of drafting, revising, and reflecting on written content helped students improve their writing performance. However, the students in this study struggled with the organization and structure of their narratives, which could have been improved with more systematic exposure to the writing process, such as through drafting and feedback cycles. The lack of effective writing processes in this study suggests that more interactive and process-oriented approaches are needed to address the deficiencies observed in students' performance.

The study by Damayanti et al. (2024) also complements the findings of this research, particularly in terms of students' understanding of the generic structure of narrative texts. They found that students in Indonesia had difficulty understanding the structure of narrative texts, which mirrors the challenges faced by students in this study, who demonstrated poor organization in their narratives. Similarly, Schmitz and Dannecker (2023) found that university students used cognitive and metacognitive strategies more effectively when reading narrative texts, leading to better comprehension. This suggests that integrating metacognitive strategies in writing instruction could help students improve both their understanding of narrative structures and their writing abilities.

Furthermore, studies underscore the effectiveness of incorporating technology and innovative teaching methods, such as multimodal texts, flipped learning, and digital tools into EFL classrooms (Chai & Hamid, 2023; Isma, Lestari, et al., 2024; Novita et al., 2024). These methods have been shown to enhance student engagement and motivation, which in turn improves writing skills. In contrast, this study revealed that traditional, teacher-centered approaches were still prevalent in the classroom, leading to limited student engagement and a lack of opportunities for interactive practice. This comparison emphasizes the need for a shift towards more dynamic and student-centered instructional strategies in narrative writing education. Overall, while this study confirms the challenges identified in previous research, it also highlights the need for more holistic and innovative approaches to teaching narrative writing. By combining elements from studies on

reading habits, metacognitive strategies, and technology integration, this research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how narrative writing instruction can be improved in EFL contexts, particularly for junior high school students.

The results underscore the need for pedagogical innovations to improve students' narrative writing abilities. Teachers should adopt more interactive and student-centered approaches, such as collaborative writing exercises, the use of digital storytelling tools, and peer feedback sessions. Incorporating multimedia and technology into writing instruction could make the learning process more engaging and effective. Moreover, vocabulary-building activities, such as word games or context-based learning, should be prioritized to address lexical deficiencies. For curriculum developers, these findings highlight the importance of integrating writing-focused activities into English language teaching, especially at the junior high school level. Providing teachers with training in innovative instructional strategies could further enhance the effectiveness of writing instruction. While this study provides valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research should involve larger and more diverse samples to validate these results. Second, the reliance on interviews with only one teacher may not fully capture the instructional challenges faced across different contexts. Including multiple educators' perspectives would provide a more comprehensive understanding. Finally, the study primarily focused on the writing product rather than the process. Future studies should explore how students develop their narratives through drafting, revising, and editing stages.

CONCLUSIONS

This study analyzed the narrative writing abilities of second-grade students at SMPN 5 Wonomulyo, focusing on five key aspects: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. The findings revealed significant challenges across all aspects, with content and vocabulary emerging as the most problematic areas. A majority of students scored below the minimum standard, reflecting difficulties in generating ideas, organizing narratives, and employing appropriate language and mechanics. These struggles were attributed to limited vocabulary, inadequate understanding of narrative structures, and the lack of writing practice both inside and outside the classroom. The teacher interviews further supported these findings, highlighting the impact of conventional teaching methods and low student motivation on writing performance. The teacher-centered approach, characterized by minimal interaction and reliance on traditional practices, failed to engage students effectively or provide sufficient opportunities for skill development. Additionally, students' limited exposure to English texts and their lack of familiarity with writing processes exacerbated their difficulties. These findings underscore the urgent need for innovative, student-centered teaching strategies to enhance narrative writing proficiency. Techniques such as collaborative writing, peer feedback, and the integration of technology, including digital storytelling tools, can foster greater student engagement and improve outcomes. Addressing vocabulary deficiencies through context-based learning and regular practice is also crucial for long-term success. While this study provides valuable insights, its limitations, including the small sample size and focus on a single teacher's perspective, suggest avenues for future research. Expanding the scope to include diverse contexts and examining the writing process in detail could yield more comprehensive findings. Overall, this research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on EFL writing and offers actionable recommendations for improving narrative writing instruction in similar contexts.

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