

Exploring the Difficulties in Writing Skills among Students at Vocational High School No. 1 Sukasada

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Abstract

This study explores the writing challenges faced by grade 11 hospitality students at SMKN 1. Sukasada, Bali. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data was collected through a questionnaire from 13 students, which featured both closed and open-ended questions. The findings revealed significant obstacles such as inadequate practice in writing, preference for theoretical learning over practical application, and heavy reliance on translation tools. Students had difficulties with grammar, mechanical errors and limited vocabulary, which affected their proficiency in English communication. This study underscores the importance of integrating practical writing exercises with theoretical instruction to improve language skills and reduce reliance on translation aids. It advocates educational strategies that emphasize regular writing practice and balanced assessment to better prepare students for success in the hospitality industry.

Key word: English, Hospitality Students, Writing Skills.

INTRODUCTION

Awaliah & Rahmawati (2024) shows that language is essential in daily life as a tool to express thoughts, emotions, and intentions in every part of life, on language skill there is several skill and have different concerns based on the human situation. Among many languages, English is widely taught from primary to higher education due to its global importance (Wardana et al., 2025). One part of the language skill that really often to be used was writing skill, this skill widely recognized as one of the essential skills in language education (Wayan et al., 2023). It plays a vital role in enabling students to express ideas clearly, organize thoughts logically, and communicate effectively in both academic and professional contexts. In vocational education, particularly in Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan (SMK), the development of writing skills is no less important. Although the primary focus of SMK lies in equipping students with technical and practical expertise, the ability to write accurately and effectively remains a fundamental component of career readiness. This is especially true for fields like hospitality, where clear documentation, professional communication, and service quality depend heavily on language proficiency, including writing.

Hospitality industry, described as one of the largest and most dynamic global sectors (Pizam & Shani, 2009), has experienced substantial growth in Bali, driven by its status as a world-renowned tourist destination. In response to the increasing demand for skilled and communicative professionals, vocational schools such as SMK N 1 Sukasada offer programs like Hotel Accommodation, aiming to prepare students for various roles in hospitality services. However, despite these efforts, many students

still face significant challenges in developing their English writing skills, which are essential not only for job performance but also for broader professional development.

Writing is one of the language skills in which one can express one's ideas in written form. (Artini et al., 2020). According to Brown (2022) and Smith & Johnson (2023), students in vocational schools often struggle with writing due to the curriculum's stronger emphasis on practical skill acquisition over language literacy. According to Melalolin et al (2020), language skills have four components, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. This will have an impact on students' language skills and This imbalance can result in a limited mastery of academic writing conventions, especially in English, which remains a core language in the hospitality sector. Supporting this, Garcia et al. (2021) and Lee & Wang (2024) emphasized that vocational learners are frequently disadvantaged by inadequate instructional support, reduced exposure to written English, and a general lack of writing-focused pedagogy in vocational curriculum. In addition, according to Maharani (2025) said if careers in the global hospitality sector require not only technical service capabilities but also good communication skills in English.

These patterns were also observed at SMK N 1 Sukasada, where preliminary data collection revealed that many students continue to experience difficulties such as an inability to construct correct sentences, use vocabulary appropriately, and apply grammatical rules. This aligns with the findings of Alfiah Humairoh (2021), who pointed out that linguistic barriers, particularly related to grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure, significantly hinder students' ability to produce coherent written texts. In addition, Ratnaningsih (2019) highlighted that mechanical errors such as improper punctuation, capitalization, and spelling – also contribute to poor writing outcomes, reducing the clarity and readability of student work.

Another major contributing factor is the lack of writing practice. As noted by Purwaningsih et al. (2022), insufficient opportunities for writing in both academic and vocational settings may result in a lack of confidence, fluency, and overall proficiency. This is particularly relevant in environments where the dominant form of assessment is practical or oral, further marginalizing the importance of writing. The same issue was reflected in responses from students at SMK N 1 Sukasada, who indicated that written tasks were rarely emphasized, with a stronger preference given to speaking and hands-on examinations.

Julio Saputra et al. (2020) emphasized that writing is both a physical and cognitive activity – it requires not only the mechanical act of writing but also the mental engagement in structuring, analyzing, and conveying ideas. Therefore, a comprehensive writing skill development program should integrate both cognitive strategies and contextualized writing tasks, especially in vocational schools where writing must be adapted to specific occupational contexts such as report writing, guest communication, or email correspondence in the hospitality field.

While previous studies have explored general writing difficulties among high school or university students, there is still a limited body of research focusing specifically on vocational high schools, particularly within the Indonesian context. As Adijaya et al. (2023) and Purba et al. (2024) note, SMKs have become a crucial part of Indonesia's educational system, tasked with producing job-ready graduates. However,

the integration of communication skills – especially writing – into technical training remains underdeveloped.

METHOD

This research utilizes a qualitative descriptive design to explore the difficulties encountered by hospitality students in developing their writing skills at Vocational High School No. 1 Sukasada. The study focuses on 11th-grade students enrolled in the hospitality program. Data were gathered through a survey in the form of a questionnaire distributed to 13 students. The questionnaire consisted of both closed and open-ended questions tailored to investigate specific aspects related to writing skills. Closed-ended questions were designed to assess students' perceived proficiency in writing and the frequency of their writing practice in class. Open-ended questions aimed to delve into the specific challenges students face when learning writing skills and to identify factors contributing to these difficulties. The collected data underwent descriptive analysis, involving systematic steps: regular data capture to ensure thorough recording of each student's responses, categorization of data based on emerging themes related to writing skill challenges, summarization of data to elucidate key findings regarding factors influencing writing difficulties, and interpretation of summarized data to gain deeper insights into the underlying reasons behind these challenges.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Student English Knowledge

No	Question	1 (very low proficiency)	2 (low proficiency)	3 (moderately proficient)	4 (Proficient)	5 (highly proficient)
1	On scale 1-5 how good your understanding in English	1 Student	5 Student	5 Student	2 Student	0 Student

Based on the results of the questionnaire, most students rated their understanding of English at a low to moderate level, with details of 5 students feeling less understanding (score 2), 5 students moderately understanding (score 3), while only 2 students felt quite proficient (score 4), and no one rated themselves as very proficient (score 5).

Table 2. Student Writing Skill

No	Question	1 (very low proficiency)	2 (low proficiency)	3 (moderately proficient)	4 (proficient)	5 (highly proficient)
2	On scale 1-5, how often you practising your writing skill in your class	1 Student	6 Student	4 Student	2 Student	1 Student

In answering the question regarding how often they practiced writing skills in class, most students (6 people) stated that they did it with low frequency (score 2), followed by 4 students who felt quite often (score 3), 2 students who felt often (score 4), and only 1 student who felt very often (score 5). Meanwhile, 1 student stated that they very rarely practiced writing skills (score 1).

Student Response

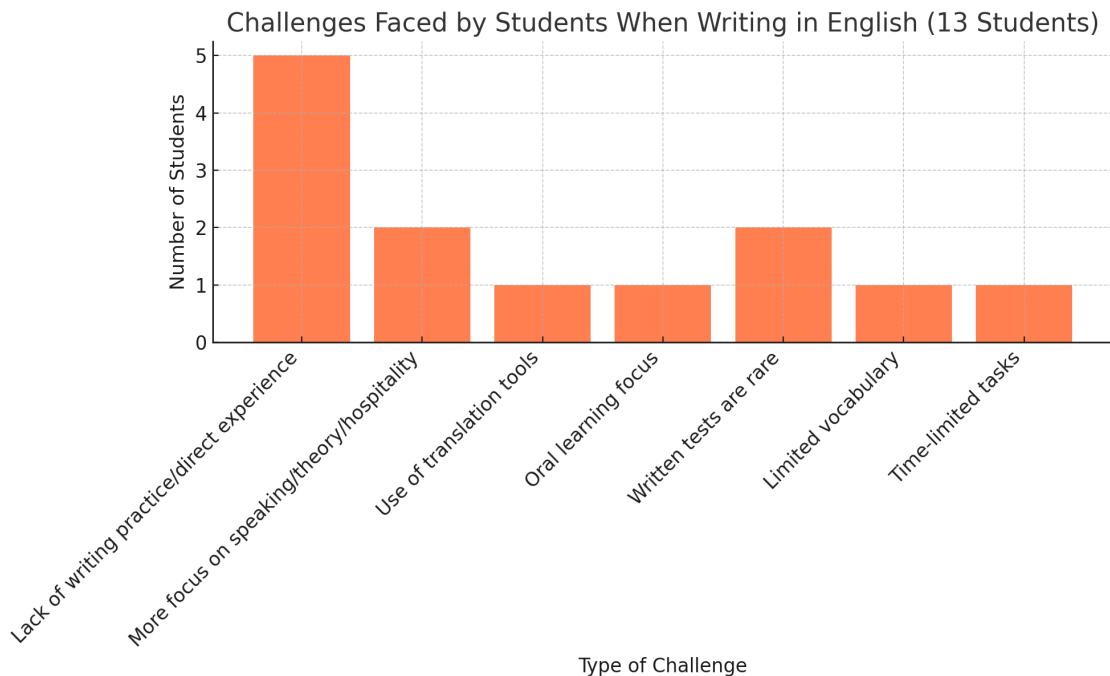


Figure 1. Challenges Faced by Students When Writing in English

Out of a total of 13 students surveyed, the biggest challenge they face in writing English is the lack of writing practice or hands-on experience, as expressed by 5 students. Other common challenges include a greater focus on speaking, theory, and hospitality skills (2 students), as well as the infrequency of written exams (2 students). Meanwhile, some other challenges such as the use of translation tools, the focus on

oral learning, limited vocabulary, and time-constrained assignments were only mentioned by 1 student each.

Discussion

Several factors influencing the performance difficulties faced by hospitality students emerge from the questionnaire responses. Firstly, students consistently highlight the lack of direct practice in various aspects of their learning experience. This issue is particularly evident in writing skills, as noted by Student 3 and others. Despite the importance of writing in hospitality professions, there appears to be insufficient emphasis on practical writing exercises within the curriculum (Student 6, Student 9, Student 13). This deficiency limits students' ability to develop and apply their writing skills effectively when dealing with real-world scenarios such as guest communications and formal documentation.

Moreover, the curriculum often leans heavily towards theoretical instruction rather than practical application (Student 2, Student 11). This imbalance results in students feeling less prepared to handle practical challenges encountered in hospitality settings, such as guest complaints or conflict resolution. While theoretical knowledge is crucial, the practical application of this knowledge through hands-on experience is essential for fostering competence and confidence among students.

Another significant issue highlighted by the students is the over-reliance on translation tools during assignments and oral communication practice (Student 4, Student 5). This dependency can hinder students' ability to communicate fluently and accurately in English, which is crucial for effective guest interactions and overall satisfaction (Thakur & Bhardwaj, 2023). Translation tools often fail to capture the nuance and context of language, leading to potential misunderstandings and reduced problem-solving abilities among students.

Furthermore, the limited frequency of written tests (Student 7) and preference for practical exams (Student 8) indicate a broader need for a balanced assessment approach that includes regular writing practice and evaluation. Written tests provide essential opportunities for students to demonstrate their comprehension and application of theoretical knowledge in written form, which is vital for developing their writing proficiency. Addressing these challenges requires a curriculum redesign that prioritizes experiential learning and practical writing exercises. By integrating more opportunities for direct practice, reducing reliance on translation tools, and balancing theoretical instruction with practical application, educational institutions can better prepare hospitality students to excel in both written and oral communication skills essential for their future careers. This is in line with Armawan (2024), who said The use of appropriate teaching materials is very important in learning English for special purposes (ESP).

the factor of Lack of Practice may also affect, Students may not have sufficient opportunities to practice writing, which can lead to a lack of confidence and fluency in their writing skills (Purwaningsih et al., 2022). Research by Smith and Johnson (2022) corroborates these findings, emphasizing that practical application and hands-on experience significantly enhance students' ability to apply theoretical knowledge

effectively. They argue that while theoretical frameworks provide a foundation, practical exercises are crucial for bridging the gap between academic learning and real-world application in hospitality education. According to Smith and Johnson (2022), "The integration of practical writing exercises in hospitality education not only enhances students' writing proficiency but also prepares them to handle complex communication tasks in professional settings

CONCLUSION

In summary, the survey responses highlight significant hurdles for hospitality students in developing their writing abilities. These challenges include limited opportunities for direct writing practice, an imbalance between theoretical learning and practical application, and an excessive reliance on translation tools during assignments and communication exercises. The data underscores the crucial role of integrating practical experience alongside theoretical knowledge in the curriculum. While theory provides a foundational understanding, practical application through experiential learning is essential for students to navigate real-world challenges in hospitality settings effectively. This includes confidently managing guest interactions, resolving conflicts, and delivering high-quality service. Additionally, the survey findings emphasize the importance of enhancing language proficiency through real-world interactions rather than relying solely on translation tools. Over-dependence on such tools can hinder students' ability to communicate fluently and accurately in English, which is vital for guest satisfaction and professional success in hospitality.

To address these issues, educational institutions should prioritize more opportunities for direct writing practice and adopt a balanced approach to assessment that includes regular written evaluations alongside practical exams. This approach aims to foster robust writing skills and better prepare students for the demands of the hospitality industry. In conclusion, by emphasizing practical writing exercises, enhancing language proficiency through real-world interactions, and ensuring a balanced approach to assessment, educational programs can effectively equip hospitality students with the necessary skills to succeed in their future careers.

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