

Grammatical Proficiency in Descriptive Writing: An Analysis of Tourism Vocational School Students

Purwakaluh Sri Tantra Kharisma Dewi¹, Kadek Sintya Dewi², Gede Mahendrayana³

^{1,2,3} Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha, Indonesia

Email: purwakaluh@undiksha.ac.id¹, sintyadewi@undiksha.ac.id²,
mahendrayana@undiksha.ac.id³

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the grammatical proficiency of vocational tourism school students in descriptive writing and identify the most common types of grammatical errors. Adopting a mixed-methods approach with an exploratory sequential design, the research involved 20 final-year tourism students from a vocational school in Bali. Data were collected through a descriptive writing task evaluated using a grammar assessment rubric, and semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather qualitative insights. Quantitative analysis revealed an average grammar proficiency score of 70.2 out of 100, with dominant errors found in the use of articles (26.7%), adjectives and adverbs (21.7%), and tenses (18.3%). Qualitative findings from interviews indicated challenges stemmed from confusion in applying articles, difficulties in choosing and placing descriptive vocabulary, the influence of Indonesian language structures, lack of specific descriptive vocabulary for tourism, and limited practice in creative writing. The study highlights the need for targeted interventions in grammar instruction, particularly for aspects crucial to descriptive writing, to better prepare students for the demands of the global tourism industry.

Keywords: *Descriptive Writing, Error Analysis, Grammatical Proficiency, Tourism Vocational School.*

INTRODUCTION

Amid rapid globalization in the tourism industry, English language proficiency has become a crucial competency for workers, especially for vocational tourism school graduates who will be dealing directly with international tourists. One essential English language skill in this context is descriptive writing, which enables individuals to describe objects, places, or experiences in detail and vividly. Captivating descriptions of tourist destinations, accommodations, or local experiences are key to attracting the attention and interest of tourists and can even influence their decision to visit. Hyland (2016), in his book *English for Academic Purposes: An Advanced Resource Book*, emphasizes that descriptive writing not only serves to convey information but also to build an emotional connection with the reader, which is particularly important in the context of tourism.

In the world of vocational education, mastery of grammar (grammatical proficiency) is the foundation for producing effective and communicative writing. Proper grammar not only clarifies the meaning of the writing but also enhances the credibility of the writer and the quality of communication (Mahamid, *et.al.*, 2024). This aligns with the perspective of Bitchener and Knoch (2016) in *Teaching and Responding to Written Errors in Second Language Writing*, who state that grammatical accuracy is crucial for clarity and the reception of the message. Inability to apply correct grammar can lead to ambiguity and reduce the appeal of the information conveyed, which has a negative impact on message

delivery, especially in descriptive writing that must describe an object in detail and in an engaging manner.

Despite its high urgency, many vocational tourism students still struggle with proper grammar usage when writing descriptively. Research by Alharbi (2019), published in the *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, shows that students often get stuck using simple sentence structures and have difficulty choosing appropriate vocabulary. This indicates the need for deeper and improved grammatical skills to support students' writing abilities so they can convey more complex and nuanced descriptions, in line with the demands of the tourism industry.

This study aims to analyze the grammatical proficiency of vocational tourism school students in descriptive writing and identify the most common types of grammatical errors. The methodology used in this study includes quantitative analysis of students' writing results and qualitative interviews to gain deeper insights into the challenges they face.

By understanding students' weaknesses and strengths, the English language learning process can be directed to address these shortcomings through more effective and contextual teaching methods tailored to the concrete needs of the tourism industry. Improvements in grammar and descriptive writing skills are expected to help students produce engaging, informative, and professional written work, thereby supporting their career development and advancing the tourism industry. This research is expected to make a significant contribution to curriculum development and teaching practices in vocational tourism schools, ensuring students are better prepared to face challenges in the workplace. This is in line with Mahendrayana's (2016) research, which shows that contextual and structured reading strategies such as PORPE can significantly improve student engagement and learning dynamics—factors that also support grammar development for writing purposes.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach with an exploratory sequential design. The qualitative stage was conducted first to identify and categorize the types of grammatical errors found in students' descriptive writing. The results of this qualitative stage then became the basis for quantitative analysis to measure the frequency of occurrence of each type of error. This design allows for a comprehensive understanding of students' grammatical abilities in descriptive writing, both in terms of the types of errors and their frequency of occurrence.

Participants

The participants in this study were final-year students (grade XI) from the tourism program at a vocational school in Bali. The selection of final-year students assumed that they had received adequate English language instruction and were at the stage of preparing to enter the workforce. The total number of participants was 20 students.

Research Instruments

Data was collected using three main instruments:

1. Descriptive Writing Task: Participants were asked to write a descriptive text (e.g., describing a local tourist destination or tourism experience) of 150-200 words in 60 minutes. The theme given was related to tourist attractions.

2. Grammar Assessment Rubric: An analytical rubric was used to evaluate the accuracy of students' grammar. These rubric covered aspects such as tense usage, articles, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, and sentence structure.
3. Semi-Structured Interview Guidelines: Interviews are conducted with selected students to gain insights into their perceptions, challenges, and strategies in writing descriptive texts and using grammar.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process was divided into two stages:

1. Quantitative Data Collection (Descriptive Writing): After obtaining permission from the school and informed consent from the students, a descriptive writing assignment was given. The students were given 60 minutes to write, after which the papers were collected.
2. Qualitative Data Collection (Interviews): Several participants, selected based on variations in their writing ability from the initial stage, are interviewed individually. The interviews are recorded (with the participants' permission) and transcribed.

Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data is analyzed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques:

1. Quantitative Analysis:
 - a. Error Analysis: Each descriptive writing sample was examined to identify and categorize grammatical errors based on a predetermined taxonomy (e.g., tense errors, articles, prepositions).
 - b. Frequency Counting: The frequency of occurrence of each type of error was calculated and presented in the form of frequency tables and percentages to identify the most dominant errors.
 - c. Descriptive Statistics: Descriptive statistics such as mean, median, and standard deviation are used to describe students' overall grammar proficiency based on rubric scores.
2. Qualitative Analysis:
 - a. Transcription and Thematic Coding: Interview recordings are transcribed and analyzed using thematic coding to identify patterns, themes, and categories related to students' challenges in grammar and descriptive writing.
 - b. Data Triangulation: Quantitative findings (dominant error types) will be validated and enriched with qualitative insights from interviews to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the reasons behind errors and students' perspectives.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This section presents findings from quantitative and qualitative analyses of the grammatical abilities of vocational tourism students in writing descriptive texts about tourist attractions.

Overall Grammatical Ability in Descriptive Writing

Based on rubric assessments of 20 descriptive writings by students, the average grammar proficiency score was 70.2 out of 100, with a standard deviation of 7.8. This score

indicates that, in general, students have sufficient grammar proficiency, but still need improvement to achieve higher accuracy. Student scores ranged from 58 to 85, indicating differences in grammar proficiency among participants.

The Most Common Types of Grammar Errors

An analysis of errors in 20 descriptive writings about tourist attractions identified five dominant types of grammar errors, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage of the Most Common Types of Grammatical Errors

| Type of Grammatical Error | Total Frequency (from 20 writings) | Percentage of Total Errors (%) |
|---|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Use of Articles (a, an, the) | 80 | 26.7 |
| Use of Adjectives and Adverbs (placement/form) | 65 | 21.7 |
| Use of Tenses (especially simple present and present continuous in descriptions) | 55 | 18.3 |
| Subject-Verb Agreement | 45 | 15.0 |
| Use of Prepositions (place and direction) | 38 | 12.7 |
| Others (e.g., punctuation, capitalization) | 17 | 5.6 |
| Total | 300 | 100.0 |

From Table 1, the use of articles (a, an, the) is the most common grammatical error made by students, accounting for 26.7% of total errors. This is followed using adjectives and adverbs (incorrect placement or form), which accounts for 21.7%. Errors in the use of tenses (especially the simple present for general descriptions and the present continuous for ongoing activities), subject-verb agreement, and prepositions are also quite significant in descriptive writing about tourist attractions.

Qualitative Insights from Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with five selected students revealed several key insights into their challenges in grammar and descriptive writing about tourist attractions:

1. **Difficulty Applying Articles:** Students often expressed confusion in deciding when and where to use a, an, or the, especially since there is no similar concept in Indonesian. One student (S-2) said, "The hardest part is a or the. They feel the same, so I often forget or make mistakes."
2. **Choosing and Placing Adjectives/Adverbs:** When describing tourist attractions, students acknowledged difficulties in selecting the appropriate adjectives and adverbs to convey the nuances of beauty or characteristics of a place. Additionally, the placement of these words within sentences is often incorrect. "I know many adjectives, but sometimes I don't know where to place them to make the sentence sound good," explained S-4.
3. **Transition from Indonesian to English:** Some students mentioned that the sentence structure and thought patterns of Indonesian often carry over when writing in English, particularly affecting word order and tense choices that don't always have direct equivalents. "In Indonesian, you can directly mention the object, but in English, you have to think about which tense to use," explained S-1.

4. Lack of Specific Descriptive Vocabulary: Although they have a general vocabulary, students feel they lack specific descriptive vocabulary for tourist attractions (e.g., to describe texture, atmosphere, or architectural features). This sometimes leads them to use repetitive or overly general adjectives. S-5 remarked, "It's hard to find other words besides 'beautiful' or 'nice' to describe a beach."
5. Limited Practice in Creative Writing: Students feel that the writing exercises they receive often focus more on basic grammar structure than on encouraging creative and engaging descriptive writing. "We spend more time doing grammar exercises than writing stories or lengthy descriptions," said S-3.

Discussion

The results of this study clearly identify critical areas in the grammatical abilities of vocational tourism students when writing descriptive texts about tourist attractions. The moderate average score for grammatical ability indicates that the foundation is there, but accuracy and richness of expression still require further attention.

The dominance of errors in the use of articles is a finding consistent with the characteristics of English language learners whose native languages do not have an explicit article system, such as Indonesian. The absence of this concept in the students' native language directly affects their ability to use *a* accurately and consistently, *an*, and *the* in descriptive writing. This is reinforced by the students' acknowledgment in interviews (S-2) of their confusion.

Significant errors in the use of adjectives and adverbs reflect challenges in producing vivid and engaging descriptions. In the context of tourism, the ability to describe a place vividly is crucial. These errors may stem from limitations in descriptive vocabulary (as mentioned by S-5) or a lack of deep understanding of the function and placement of these modifiers in sentences (S-4). Given that the purpose of descriptive writing is to "paint" a picture in the reader's mind, accuracy in the use of adjectives and adverbs is crucial. This is in line with the research by Ratminingsih et al. (2023), which shows that structured sentence construction tasks, such as ordering words and translating sentences using a thematic digital dictionary, significantly improve students' grammatical awareness and sentence construction skills. Although this research was conducted at the elementary education level, this approach provides insights that can be applied in the context of vocational education, where descriptive writing and vocabulary mastery are essential.

Although tense errors are not the most dominant, their frequency remains substantial. These findings are consistent with the research conducted by Suwastini and Yukti (2017), who identified similar grammatical errors—such as incorrect use of articles, verb tenses, and subject-verb agreement—in the writing of vocational high school students in Singaraja. Their research emphasizes that these persistent errors are common among learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) at the vocational level, highlighting the need for targeted teaching strategies. In descriptive writing about tourist attractions, the use of the simple present tense for general facts and permanent characteristics, as well as the present continuous tense for ongoing activities, is vital. The confusion mentioned by the student (S-1) in transitioning tenses from Indonesian indicates the need for further emphasis on the function of tenses in narrative and descriptive contexts.

Errors in subject-verb agreement and prepositions also confirm that basic grammatical accuracy still needs to be strengthened. Like articles, the use of prepositions is often idiomatic and requires exposure and repeated practice. The influence of the mother tongue on word order and word choice is also a contributing factor to various types of grammatical errors. This is consistent with the findings of Budasi et al. (2021), who found that both interlingual and intralingual interferences significantly contributed to the grammatical errors of tourism students in English writing. Their study reinforces the idea that first language transfer and confusion about English grammar rules are persistent challenges in EFL contexts. Similar findings were reported by Ramendra et al. (2021), who analyzed 97 student essays and identified common grammatical problems, including verb tense, subject-verb agreement, incorrect preposition use, and passive sentence use. They concluded that these recurring errors indicate deficiencies not only in grammatical competence but also in the pedagogical strategies used to develop writing accuracy.

Further qualitative findings highlight that a lack of creative writing practice and a focus on rigid grammar exercises (S-3) can hinder students' development in producing engaging and accurate descriptive writing. This observation is consistent with the research by Dewi and Trisna (2021), which highlights that self-assessment practices—both task-related and non-task-related—can enhance students' metacognitive awareness and writing performance by encouraging self-reflection and strategic learning. Although their research involved younger students, the implications remain relevant for vocational students, particularly in developing grammatical awareness and self-revision skills during descriptive writing tasks. Furthermore, Prihastuti et al. (2020) demonstrated that the POWER strategy, which incorporates structured prewriting, drafting, editing, and revising stages, significantly improved students' writing performance, particularly in terms of grammar, sentence structure, and coherence. Their findings suggest that guided writing strategies can empower students to self-correct and improve their grammatical accuracy, a crucial aspect of descriptive writing. Similarly, Dewi et al. (2020) found that the integration of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) using Quizizz significantly improved students' grammar proficiency in higher education settings, with a large effect size. This highlights the role of engaging and interactive digital tools in strengthening grammar skills, especially in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms where traditional methods may be less engaging or effective. Students' awareness of the limitations of their descriptive vocabulary (S-5) also indicates that the curriculum may need to place greater emphasis on developing vocabulary specific to the tourism industry.

Overall, although tourism vocational students demonstrate basic proficiency in grammar, accuracy in aspects crucial to descriptive writing, such as articles, adjectives/adverbs, and tenses, remains a significant challenge. These difficulties are exacerbated by the influence of their native language, limited descriptive vocabulary, and lack of opportunities for structured and creative writing practice with relevant feedback.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that vocational tourism students have sufficient grammar skills, but still face significant challenges in writing descriptive descriptions of tourist attractions. The most common errors were found in the use of articles, adjectives/adverbs, and tenses. These challenges are exacerbated by the influence of the mother tongue, limited vocabulary specific to tourism, and a lack of opportunities for creative writing practice with relevant feedback. Therefore, it is recommended that the English language curriculum and teaching practices in vocational tourism schools focus more on strengthening conceptual understanding of grammar relevant to descriptive writing (particularly articles, modifier placement, and tense functions), developing a rich descriptive vocabulary, and increasing opportunities for structured creative writing practice with specific feedback. In this way, students will be better prepared to produce engaging, informative, and professional writing that supports their careers in the global tourism industry.

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