





## Teaching writing to junior high school students: A focus on challenges and solutions

Hilma Amalia, <sup>a 1</sup> , Fuad Abdullah, <sup>b</sup> , Asri Siti Fatimah <sup>c</sup> 

<sup>a</sup> Siliwangi University, Tasikmalaya, Indonesia

<sup>b</sup> Siliwangi University, Tasikmalaya, Indonesia

<sup>c</sup> Siliwangi University, Tasikmalaya, Indonesia

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### Abstract

Writing has been considered as a highly demanding skill and a complex recursive process involving multifaceted knowledge (e.g. grammar, genre, vocabulary and metacognitive competencies). Hence, it has been documented in miscellaneous studies in the past few decades. However, the issue of challenges and solutions to teaching English writing to junior high school students remains under-researched. Therefore, this study addressed this issue, notably in Indonesian EFL context. Three English teachers from a junior high school in Tasikmalaya, West Java, Indonesia were recruited as the participants. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed with Thematic Analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). On the one hand, the findings reported that there were seven challenges encountered by teachers when teaching English writing, namely (1) students' poor English grammatical competence, (2) students' incapability of developing ideas for English writing, (3) students' inadequate English vocabulary knowledge, (4) students' demotivation to learn English writing, (5) insufficient time management to teach English writing, (6) limited sources of English writing materials and (7) limited facilities to teach English writing. On the other hand, teachers promoted several solutions to cope with such challenges, namely (1) explicit teaching English vocabulary, (2) collaborative English writing activities, and (3) exercises of English writing. Pedagogically speaking, this study offers practical contributions for the TESOL practitioners to teach English writing effectively to junior high school students, particularly in the Indonesian EFL landscape.

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**Keywords:** Challenges and Solutions of Teaching English Writing; Junior High School Students; Teaching English Writing.

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### 1. Introduction

Writing is one of the predominant language skills in teaching English to ESL and EFL students in all educational levels, notably junior high school students. This skill is very crucial for the students as one of the communication tools (Dombey, 2013; Nassi & Nasser, 2018; Salma, 2019) and cannot be separated from the process of language learning allowing students to express their ideas, thoughts and

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [fuad.abdullah182@gmail.com](mailto:fuad.abdullah182@gmail.com)

feelings in the written form. Hammadi and Sidek (2015) noted that writing in education is a way how students communicate with peers and instructors professionally and engage in learning activities. Writing can help students to develop their social skill and promote their critical thinking. It encourages students to think critically in the process of giving argument and judgment. Therefore, writing is pivotal to be taught to students.

However, writing has been considered as the complicated skill to be taught to the students. Zheng in Sohli and Eginli (2020) argued that acquiring writing skill in a second language is considered to be more challenging than the other language skills. Writing consists of cognitive strategies and background knowledge of the target culture encouraging teacher to teach many components to the students. Writing also includes several processes requiring the writer to produce a comprehensible, clear, and informative written expression (Yuce and Atac, 2019). This skill involves the process of discovering ideas on the text not only by putting the words on the paper but also by selecting and organizing the ideas by considering several components. Jacob in Reird (1993) reported that writing encompasses content, organization, vocabulary, language use (grammar) and mechanism. Widiawati and Cahyono (2006) assert that teaching writing can support to reinforce grammar, reading, and vocabulary to use for communicative purposes. Therefore, the implementation of teaching writing to junior high school students in EFL context remains challenging.

Studies about writing have been well-investigated almost in a few decades. Dueraman (2012) argues that teachers in one of the Southern colleges of Technology in Thailand encountered difficulties when teaching writing related to the teachers' inadequate writing skills, insufficient English language use, limited writing resources, and absence of feedback from peers. In addition, Adas and Bakir (2013) verbalized that teaching writing has fostered language skills for second and third year students at conventional universities in Palestine through blended learning integrated with traditional methods. Moreover, Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2014) portrayed that in Omani school and university context, the students encountered problems when writing in English. As an example, they faced problems while deploying lexical and content aspects of writing. The next research was conducted by Badi (2015) showing that the main factor of teaching writing difficulties related to students' lack of experiences, and their prior knowledge. Another research is Almbark (2016) discovering that the teachers dealt with challenges in developing teaching materials for English writing and various approaches employed to shape teaching English writing in terms of grammatical, sociolinguistic strategic and discourse competences. Further, Ibrahim, Yunus, & Khairi (2017) have examined students' obstacles when learning academic writing in terms of structure, content, and language. In a similar vein, Nassi & Nasser, (2018) scrutinized when teaching writing, the teachers have challenges related to differences of linguistic and cultural backgrounds among the students, teachers and the teaching context. The last research was conducted by Karki (2017) indicating that the main challenges in teaching writing was viewed from the aspect of large classes, low proficient learners, pressures of course completion, deficient writing practices, and insufficient resources (ICT facilities in the context of classrooms).

There have been burgeoning studies focusing on teaching and learning writing in EFL and ESL contexts. Nevertheless, a few studies emphasized on exploring the challenges while teaching writing in the university level. Moreover, there have not been empirical investigations accentuating on challenges undergone by English language teachers in teaching writing to junior high school students. Even, a very scarce investigation on the way how the teachers overcome their challenges during teaching English writing. Therefore, this study aims at examining the teachers' challenges when teaching writing and how they overcome such challenges to junior high school students.

## 1.1. Literature review

### 1.1.1. *Teaching Writing in EFL Contexts: A Brief Overview*

Writing is a process of communicating with others in which a writer sends and expresses the ideas and also information through written forms. Hidayati (2018) notes that writing is a communication tool in written form. Additionally, in teaching writing there is English competence including learners' grammatical competence, vocabulary mastery, and how to organize a good paragraph of English (Brown, 2004, p.233 as cited in Hidayati, 2018).

Similarly, teachers should provide the guidance for students when they write ideas and information. In effective teaching writing, the teacher needs several things, such as an organization to develop and build ideas, arguments and information (Ahlsén & Lundh, 2007). Moreover, the teachers should know and pay attention to rhetorical patterns in writing English as a foreign language to help facilitate the teaching writing process to students in the classroom (Nassi & Nasser, 2018).

Hyland (2003) states, as a basic language structure in teaching writing there are four stage-processes, namely:

- a. Familiarization: the learners are taught certain grammar and vocabulary usually through a text.
- b. Controlled writing: the learners manipulate fixed pattern from substitution tables that have been made.
- c. Guided writing: the learners imitate model texts.
- d. Free writing: the learners use patterns they have developed to write an essay, letter, and others.

In teaching writing, the teachers need to complete themselves with knowledge and skills of teaching writing because most of the teachers found that writing is a complex skill to be taught (Almubark, 2016). In the foreign language classroom, teaching writing involves linguistics knowledge, vocabulary choices, syntactic patterns, and cohesive devices that comprise the essential building blocks of texts (Hyland, 2003).

In Indonesia as EFL contexts, English is a foreign language that is only taught in schools as subjects, in secondary education students are only given the exercises to make some sentences, then make paragraphs to manipulate the words grammatically (Widiati & Cahyono, 2006). Moreover, they noted that writing in Indonesia is taught at various levels in educational institutions. Meanwhile, teaching writing applied in Indonesia nowadays is the teacher being the center attention of students in the classroom, which is called teacher-centered, teachers become more active, and students are less to develop their ideas in writing skills (Ariyanti, 2016).

Liaghat and Biria (2018) showed that in EFL context writing can be studied in English language course institutions to demand students for learning English. They also stated several approaches to support the learning process of writing English in the classroom, such as teacher-student cooperation, feedback, collaboration, and mediation. In addition, teachers need to get access to resources available such as printed materials, electronic sources, peers, English teachers, or English native speakers (Dueraman, 2012).

### 1.1.2. *EFL Teachers Challenges in Teaching Writing*

In EFL classroom, teachers faced challenges related to lack of the use of technology in the classroom, classroom management in the large class, and different learning styles of students (Ali & Ramana, 2018). On the other hand, another challenge of teaching writing in EFL context is feeling unconfident, doubt and use traditional methods. For instance, the teacher uses a single method to teach writing skills (Nassi

& Nasser, 2018). Moreover, the teachers faced difficulties in developing English writing related to students lack of grammar and vocabulary knowledge, motivation, the topic in the text book is not interesting, mother tongue interference among students is a disruptive factor in teaching writing (Almubark, 2016).

In addition, the teachers faced challenges related to have a big class who made the learning process not effective, the time for teaching writing is less which makes students difficult to understand the materials that have explained (Ariyanti, 2016; Andriani & Abdullah, 2017). Adas and Bakir (2013) state that there are causes of writing problems such as English language learners who have limited vocabulary and less creativity.

Rovikasari, Suparno & Supriyadi (2019) noted that as an EFL teacher, teaching writing is very challenging assignment. For instance, lack of students' motivation, vocabulary, language use, organization, and give feedback as a reflection for students' writing assignment related to different students' experiences when they write the assignment. Moreover, Hidayati (2018) found that internally, the teachers faced difficulties related to vocabulary mastery, grammar knowledge, students' motivation, and reading habits. On the other side, externally the teachers faced challenges such as the large classroom form, physical discomfort, intimidating atmosphere, and unbalance attention and feedback.

### *1.1.3. Possible Solutions for Teaching Writing Challenges in EFL Contexts*

There are two factors to identify the problems in teaching writing, that are internal and external factors. In internal factors, to overcome challenges when teaching writing the teachers can try to instruct their students to use the internet for learning English and make more creative exercises. Externally, parents should support their children to use English at home, buy some English books, magazines and newspapers to make their children learn English regularly (Muhammad, 2018; Abdullah & Lulita, 2018).

According to Adas and Bakir (2013) blended learning method can be one of the solutions to teach writing, they noted that blended learning is a flexible approach providing online English courses and it can support to improve students' writing skill to keep learning with their teacher and classmates outside of the classroom. Moreover, Adas and Bakir (2013) reported that using various activities such as students may get online sessions for example students were asked to upload their written materials online in a well-organized way.

Rovikasari, Suparno, and Supriyadi (2019) verbalize the solutions for the indicator of writing related to vocabulary the teachers can provide the collection of vocabulary and meanings, ask students to translate words in a text drilling vocabulary and meanings. They also reported the solution for language use such as the teachers can give an explanation of tenses related to a text, give the feedback for students' writing assignment and for students who have lack motivation, the teachers can give discussion and feedback and appreciate honest students (avoiding plagiarism). In addition, the collaborative strategy among students may help enhance teaching writing, intensive writing exercises to identify students' weaknesses, using devices learning in the classroom and teachers need to be trained consistently in teaching writing (Almubark, 2016).

## *1.2. Research questions*

In particular, two questions are addressed in this study:

1. What challenges do the English teachers encounter when teaching writing to junior high school students?
2. How do the English teachers overcome their challenges during teaching writing?

## **2. Method**

Grounded in descriptive case study, the present study aims at depicting detailed and contextualized picture of a particular phenomenon; it is used to describe a phenomenon and contexts that occur in real life (Yin, 2018). This research design was selected because this study described and focused on the phenomenon of the challenges faced by English teachers and the solutions in order to cope with the challenges when teaching writing to junior high school students.

### *2.1. Sample / Participants*

In this research, the participants were three English teachers in one of junior high schools in Tasikmalaya Indonesia. They were Indonesian EFL teachers teaching in seventh to ninth grades. They were recruited since they agreed to participate in this research. They were selected from each level of class and they have long experiences in teaching English writing. Their ages ranged from 48 to 59 years old with ranged of teaching experiences from 21 to 33 years. In general, they communicate in local language (i.e. Sundanese), national language (i.e. Indonesian), and foreign language (i.e. English). Based on gender, they were categorized into males (N = 2) and a female (N = 1).

### *2.2. Data collection procedures*

The data collection of this study used semi-structured interview. It was carried out through voice recording used a cell phone to investigate the challenges and the solutions of English teachers in teaching writing. Practically, the interview was addressed to three participants (N = two males and one female). Further, the interview guidance was designed by several numbers of topics for posing questions. The topics were related to the challenges encountered by the teachers and the solutions to resolve their challenges during teaching writing to junior high school students. In fact, interviewing is a tool for professional development in which language teachers engage in research examining classroom realities drawn from teacher stories” (Widodo, 2014, p.102). Semi-structure interview is used to explore participants' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about a particular topic (Dejonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

### *2.3. Data analysis*

The data were analyzed through Thematic Analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). They contended that “Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p. 6). The steps are familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching the themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

This research aims at deciphering the teachers' challenges and solutions during teaching English writing to junior high school students. The findings revealed two main themes, namely the challenges of teaching English writing to Junior high school students and their solutions. More specifically, the first theme is specified into several sub-themes, namely students' poor English grammatical competence, students' incapability of developing ideas for English writing, students' inadequate English vocabulary knowledge, students' demotivation to learn English writing, insufficient time management to teach English writing, Limited sources of English writing materials and limited facilities to teach English writing. The second theme encompasses explicit teaching English vocabulary, collaborative English writing activities, and exercises of English writing.

### 3.1. The Challenges of Teaching English Writing to Junior High School Students

#### 3.1.1. Students' poor English grammatical competence

Based on the interview results, the researcher identified that teachers faced assorted challenges when teaching writing to junior high school students. One of them was generated from their English grammatical competence, as indicated by one of the participants (participant 2) as follows:

#### **Excerpt 1**

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P<sub>2</sub> “One of the challenges of teaching writing is due to how the way they write. Commonly, they applied spoken language to written in English. For instance, when I said “the word division” of a sentence, for example, “I will go to school by motorcycle” and I requested them to write it, they encountered obstacles to write. This may be caused by their **difficulties to understand the sentence structure** in English. Moreover, the participant argues that the students have **difficulties in grammatical competences**. They were difficulties in understanding the structure to write their ideas in written form. Then, the participant said that the **most difficulties in teaching writing were teaching the structure** such as they were difficulties to change the tenses when writing. **In English, there are past tense, present tense, future, present continuous tense (study, studies, studied, studying),** students encounter difficulties to apply the tenses.”

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(Interview transcript on February 7<sup>th</sup> 2020, Participant 2, translated by the author)

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Excerpt 1 designated that the students' deficient grammatical competence was portrayed when they were employing the word ‘*study*’. To begin with, they seemed perplexed to differentiate the deployment of such a word (study) in various contexts and periods, such as simple past tense (e.g. he studied), simple present tense (e.g. he studies), present continuous tense (e.g. he is *studying*) or simple future tense (e.g. he will study). Another evidence illustrated that they were unable to articulate their ideas into written forms. This was affected by their poor conceptual and practical knowledge of English sentence structures. As a result, they confused when they were assigned writing tasks. Copland, Garton, and Burns (2013) maintain that teachers commonly encounter a number of challenges while teaching writing, such as grammar, sentence structures, students' boredom and their classroom disruptive behaviors (e.g. inattentive responses to the teacher's instructions). For these reasons, guiding students to comprehend and apply English grammar during classroom writing activities remains pivotal to mitigate the impacts of their poor English grammatical competence on their writing performance.

#### 3.1.2. Students' incapability of developing ideas for English writing

Another finding highlighted that students were incapable of developing their ideas for English writing. As an illustration, P1 assumed that their confusion to shape sentence structures contributed significantly to their writing performances and products. In practice, they could not write what the teachers instructed, such as writing the sentence ‘I went to the zoo yesterday’. The worse, they were incompetent to continue the subsequent sentences representing their ideas. In the same way, P2 argued that they were also unable to identify the main ideas of the assigned texts. This affected to their comprehension and logical thinking on how a text is comprehended and produced. The most salient feature of their confusion were symbolized by their reluctance to read the given texts as a model for them to write and the ignorance of accomplishing the writing tasks assigned by the teachers. Moreover, P 3 reported that they could not communicate their ideas into their writing effectively. Aligned with these phenomena, Adas and Bakir (2013) postulate that the teachers possessed various problems during teaching writing, such as students' brainstorming, ideas cultivation and creativity.

**Excerpt 2**

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- P<sub>1</sub> “Students **could not develop their ideas** for writing. Besides, their confusion on English sentence structure became one of the most influential factors inhibiting them to write for example “I went to Bandung last week, “*Saya pergi ke kebun binatang kemarin* (I went to the zoo yesterday)” after they wrote those sentences, they were confused to write the other sentences in English.”
- P<sub>2</sub> “Students are **incompetent or difficult to determine the main idea** in each paragraph in the text. They find it **difficult to develop ideas** when they write the text and sentences it makes them look **confused**.”
- P<sub>3</sub> “Moreover, in our culture, it is **hard to deliver ideas through writing**, and it becomes harder when we use English. Therefore, **students always find it difficult** when they are asked to do the writing task. For example, when they were asked to make a sentence, **they seem confused and difficult to do it**. Moreover, when they were asked to write their experiences or to write their past activities in English, they found it even harder. Even when they were asked to write in a simple form of language, they still find **some difficulties**. They are **confused** so they become lazy to do the writing task.”

(Interview transcript, February 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020, Participant 1, 2 and 3 translated by the author)

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Additionally, Copland, Garton, and Burns (2013) stipulate that when the students were required to write stories or to compose sentences, many of them cannot express themselves in their writing. A lot of students were less creative in writing English stories, such as inability to perform writing tasks. Against this background, facilitating students to activate their schemata and focusing on writing fluency remains demanding (Widodo, 2008).

### 3.1.3. Students' inadequate English vocabulary knowledge

The students' inadequate English vocabulary knowledge has become a central issue affecting students' writing activities. For instance, they were not able to understand the word '*pergi*' in English (going) and exert it in distinctive tenses, such as 'go' (simple present tense) and 'went' (simple past tense). Assuredly, vocabulary plays a prominent role to support students to produce coherent writing. Ali & Ramana (2018) add that vocabulary pervades in the four language skills, including writing.

**Excerpt 3**

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- P<sub>1</sub> “The first challenge is vocabulary. In this school, the students are varied in terms of vocabulary mastery. Students' **difficulties in learning vocabulary** and their **inconsistency in understanding the vocabulary make teaching writing challenge**. For example, the students found it difficult to understand that the past and present form of the word '*pergi*' (going) in English is different.”
- P<sub>2</sub> “When I asked the students to write their daily activities, which tells the time they wake up, the time they go to school, and others. They are willing to do it. The challenge is in their vocabulary. They **do not know how to write some words in English**. For example, **they do not know the words “bangun” (waking up) and “mandi” (taking a bath) in English**.”
- P<sub>3</sub> “The process of writing implementation is also difficult, such as when the students asked to make a sentence like 'I go to school by bicycle'. They are confused because they do not know such word '**pergi (going)**' and '**sepeda (bicycle)**' in English. Moreover, the students here are rarely exposed to English vocabulary.”

(Interview transcript, February 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020, Participant 1, 2 and 3 translated by the author)

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Another evidence has proven that they were lazy to understand the meaning of English vocabulary and its applications in a sentence or a text. Additionally, they did not comprehend the main ideas within a text since they lacked vocabulary knowledge. Even, they did not know the meaning of each word. For instance, they did not know what *pergi* (going), *sepeda* (bicycle), *bangun* (waking up), *mandi* (taking a bath) are in English. As a result, this inhibits them to produce English sentences, paragraphs or texts effectively. Nakagawa and Leung (2020) reported that the majority of teaching writing challenges faced by teachers, notably in ESL and EFL landscapes was students' limited English vocabulary. Equally, Rovikasari, Suparno, and Supriyadi (2019) assert that in teaching writing, a lot of teachers had problems related to students' vocabulary. For example, students were not able to put the appropriate verb, noun, and noun phrase. Another challenge is students' laziness in interpreting the English vocabulary. This occurs due to they have not gained sufficient language exposures to the target language (English) compared to those utilizing English as a native language (ENL) (Tandiana, Abdullah & Komara, 2018; de Magalhães, Cotterall, & Mideros, 2019). Given these facts, teachers should pay more attention to guide and facilitate their students in understanding English vocabulary and its applications to encourage them to write through various practices (e.g. familiarizing them with common English words through attractive instructional media).

#### 3.1.4. Students' demotivation to Learn English writing

Motivation is one of the influential factors that students should have in learning English, notably writing. In this case, students possessing good motivation desired to accomplish English writing assignments. On the contrary, they showing low motivation tended to be lazy to do it. Based on the interview results, teachers encountered challenges how to motivate them to write. P 1 acknowledged that students' demotivation took place due to their diverse levels of English proficiency (e.g. reading comprehension and writing fluency). Psychologically speaking, heterogeneous personalities of students required teachers to provide divergent treatments to motivate them.

#### Excerpt 4

P<sub>1</sub> "Indeed, in this junior high school, **most students lack motivation in writing**. For example, when they were asked to do a writing task, not all of them do it. Sometimes, **they also seem lazy to do it**. The challenge is in how to improve and maintain students' motivation, which is varied, also in the variability of students' comprehension. This is indeed a heterogeneous class, and it needs an enrichment program."

P<sub>2</sub> "Students' learning style in writing is also different so that for them who have high motivation, they tend to pay attention, but for them who **have low motivation, they tend to not pay attention**. Nowadays. There are mostly reading tasks, such as whether the students comprehend the text or not, so there is no special task for writing. There is just information regarding the characteristics of each text. For example, the characteristics of a recount, descriptive text, narrative text, procedure text."

P<sub>3</sub> "Sometimes there are tasks where the students are asked to re-write the main idea of the text. It truly helps students to write in English. However, in one class, only one or two students who can do the task while others feel so difficult to do it. I find it difficult to teach writing under that situation when the students struggle, **and they are also lazy to write**. Then, when I ask them to ask me questions, no one wants to ask"

(Interview transcript, February 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Participant 1, 2 and 3 translated by the author)

Likewise, their demotivation did not only affect their engagement to perform writing activities but also their classroom participation in general. As an example, P2 verbalized that demotivated students tended to ignore teachers' instructions, such as conducting reading comprehension and analyzing generic



structures and lexicogrammatical features of the texts (e.g. procedure, recount, descriptive and narrative texts). Consequently, their understanding on writing teaching materials provided by the teachers remains static and it automatically affects their writing performances. Miftah (2016) claims that demotivated students inclined to be passive and puzzled when being instructed by the teachers. Further, this situation can lead them to fail or avoid writing activities (Yu et al., 2019). In addition, P 3 noted that only a small number of students who were able to perform writing tasks. Other students seemed disengaged to take part in classroom writing practices. As an example, they kept silent and passive when the teacher posed a question. Dealing with this, teaching writing, notably in EFL setting does not only involve content-based writing materials and their mechanics but also affective aspect, such as learning motivation.

### 3.1.5. Insufficient time management to teach English writing

The classic challenge frequently faced by the teachers during teaching writing is insufficient time management. As a matter of fact, P1 admitted that he did not have adequate time to teach writing in the classroom. He could not elaborate comprehensively teaching materials both in substantial and mechanical components of English writing. This affected the students' opportunity to learn writing conceptually and practically. Graham, Harris and Beard (Graham, Harris, & Beard, 2018) assume that in writing there are a lot of basic aspects related to time for goal setting, planning, monitoring, evaluating, and revising. Furthermore, the teachers also require the time for checking sentence construction skills, handwriting, and spelling. Therefore, it needs a long time to teach writing in the classroom.

#### Excerpt 5

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- P<sub>1</sub> “Based on the current curriculum, students are only focused on learning the themes discovered on that day. Teachers sometimes **do not have sufficient time** to teach writing, the students only have a brief opportunity to comprehend the materials.”
- P<sub>2</sub> “Especially, the time to teach writing is **limited**, even though the writing is a lot of stages such as first, students were to practice for writing words into sentences, from the sentences into paragraphs.”
- P<sub>3</sub> “However, sometimes I am challenged by the **limitation of the time**. Due to the time constraints for teaching writing, writing activities sometimes become homework.”

(Interview transcript, February 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> 2020, Participant 1, 2, and 3 translated by the author)

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Similarly, P2 and P3 were unable to introduce the entire stages of writing process to their students specifically. They could only provide them a general portrayal of how to write a sentence, a paragraph or a text in English, such as creating a cohesive sentence, a meaningful paragraph or a coherent text. Technically, students were directly instructed to discover a writing topic and design a writing outline to be extended further. Additionally, if the time of learning activities was over, they would be assigned a writing task as a continuity of their unfinished classroom writing activities. Aryanti (2016) contends that time also became a big challenge for the teachers in teaching writing because to enhance students' writing, they should perform several complex steps of writing such as brainstorming, prewriting, drafting, and editing. These made time to teach and accomplish writing assignments was hampered.

Meanwhile, the teachers only had a brief opportunity to elaborate the materials of writing. Also, most of the students could not finish their writing tasks in the classroom and took it as the homework. Moreover, Leki (2001) states that one of the challenges encountered by teachers in teaching writing is correcting text assignments and giving feedback to many students who could not complete their classroom writing activities due to limited time. Consequently, this situation only allows teachers to

explain teaching materials briefly. Further, time for students to practice writing and to develop their ideas is not sufficient (Tandiana, Abdullah & Komara, 2017)

### 3.1.5. Limited sources of English writing materials

Limited sources of English writing materials have become another central issue related to the teachers' challenges of teaching writing. To begin with, P1 perceived that he encountered any problems to discover various writing materials relevant to his students' learning needs. Unfortunately, he did not provide further information about what specific problems of discovering writing materials. He only explicated that the problems were caused by students' insufficient creativity to locate proper and motivating writing materials for his students.

#### Excerpt 6

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P<sub>1</sub> “Deciding teaching materials **is challenging because it requires teachers' creativity** to attract and to motivate students in learning English.”

P<sub>2</sub> “It is **difficult to explain the materials**. For example, in explaining each paragraph of the text, and then asked the students about the main idea of each paragraph, such as the first or the second paragraph. Sometimes, they do not have any idea about the text.”

(Interview transcript, February 7<sup>th</sup> 2020 Participant 1 and 2 translated by the author)

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Another viewpoint was expressed by P2 admitting that she could not facilitate her students to learn English writing due to scarce writing materials. She was incapable of accessing required writing materials and providing them to her students. Referring to the abovementioned excerpt, she argued that she was not able to elucidate the main ideas of each paragraph in a text, the whole message of the text and vocabulary meanings. These paucities emerge not only because of limited access to teaching materials but also a dependent personality of the teachers to the printed materials (e.g. books) endorsed by the Ministry of Education and Culture (hereafter, MONEC).

Leki (2001) reported that the objectives of teaching writing were difficult to achieve because the **lack of materials accessing the target language** in students' environments, such as teaching materials that came from the central government had to be adjusted to the students' situation. For example, make copies of student texts for peers to read, this material may not always be appropriate to be used. Moreover, Almubark (2016) stated that the topics in the textbooks for writing skills which are **not interesting and persuasive enough** become the other challenges for the teachers to teach writing in the classroom. Therefore, the finding above portrayed as a challenge for the teachers. They should find interesting materials from other sources to increase students' motivation in learning English writing in the classroom.

### 3.1.7. Limited Facilities to Teach English Writing

Another obstacle commonly encountered by teachers in practicing to teach writing was limited facilities. They admitted that instructional media remain crucial to assist them to teach writing. These include LCD projectors, computers, and dictionaries. In fact, they frequently have major challenges to access and utilize them.

#### Excerpt 7

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P<sub>1</sub> “The students **do not bring a dictionary**, and their parents do not pay attention to it. Unfortunately, the availability of dictionaries provided by the school is also **limited**. Furthermore, mobile phones are banned in this school so that it is difficult for students to find out examples of sentences and text, also material which is not provided in the textbook, for their writing task, from the internet.”

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- P<sub>2</sub> “ **The projectors are also limited** and sometimes there is a power outage. Only several classes provide projectors.”
- P<sub>3</sub> “One of the challenges related to the facility is when the **projectors provided in the classrooms do not work anymore**. Another challenge is found in the computer lab. There, **the computers are often in trouble accessing the internet** so that students are not able to find information from the internet such as the examples of particular tasks. Furthermore, in this school, the students are not allowed to use a mobile phone. They, of course, are not willing to take risks from bringing their mobile phone to school. Therefore, **it is difficult when I asked the students to find some sources** to learn writing or to find an example of writing English text from the internet.”

(Interview transcript, February 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> 2020, Participant 1, 2 and 3, translated by the author)

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As indicated by the abovementioned excerpts, P1 maintained that students did not bring their own dictionaries to the class so that they could not consult the unknown meanings of English words. This challenge turned greater due to parents’ ignorance on such a problem. Although teachers had pinpointed that the dictionaries available in the school remain restricted, they still did not obey the teachers’ instructions to bring them. The worst, students could not utilize mobiles in the classroom because of the school regulations. Given these facts, teachers should be able to organize the employment of limited dictionaries by turns to ensure that each student has the same access to them while learning activities in the classroom.

Similarly, P2 complained about scarce LCD projectors as a supportive teaching facility in the classroom. Further, students remarked that only a few classes were equipped by LCD projectors. Other classes merely applied whiteboards and board markers to facilitate them in delivering teaching materials (e.g. writing teaching materials). In addition to limited amounts of LCD projectors as instructional media, power outage became another inescapable challenge to teach writing.

Graham and Hebert (2011) contended that " writing about a text should facilitate comprehending it, as it provides students with a tool for visibly and permanently recording, connecting, analyzing, personalizing, and manipulating key ideas in the text" (p.712). Therefore the lack of facilities in school became a challenge in teaching writing because the teachers would be difficult to explain materials by using technology in the modern era and the students were also bored with learning by using the traditional method. Ali and Ramana (2018) found that the teacher faced challenges in teaching writing, one of which related to the lack of the use of technology in the classroom. Therefore, the teachers only taught by using a traditional method such as explaining and writing the materials on the whiteboard.

In this modern era, this condition made the teachers difficult to assist students to improve their ability in English writing. For instance, students were difficult to find out the materials which are not available in the textbook, and the teachers were difficult to explore materials such as displayed pictures book or video due to the limited projectors in the classroom.

### *3.2. Teachers’ Solutions to Overcome The Challenges in Teaching Writing to Junior High School Students*

#### *3.2.1. Explicit Teaching English Vocabulary*

One of the solutions performed by teachers to cope with prior challenges of teaching English writing is explicit teaching English vocabulary. This method was implemented to tackle the students’ problems on insufficient English vocabulary. Definitely, vocabulary is one of the key components for learning

language skills, including writing. Thus, equipping students with adequate vocabulary knowledge supports them to produce a cohesive and coherent writing.

Technically, P2 initiatively taught her students explicitly though the existing English language curriculum issued by MONEC does not specifically stipulate it. More specifically, she instructed students to memorize English vocabulary in terms of their forms and meanings. She guided students to select Indonesian vocabulary first and translate it into the target language (English). Then, they should memorize it repeatedly to enrich their English vocabulary.

### Excerpt 8

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P<sub>2</sub> "For the solution, sometimes I teach autodidactic to make the students understand. I **asked them to memorize vocabulary**, for example, they use Bahasa Indonesia at first and then they translated into English in written form. For instance, the sentence 'Saya sedang belajar' is translated into 'I am studying', using a present continuous form."

P<sub>3</sub> "Related to vocabulary, for example, the students were **given a text**. Then, they were asked to read a fairy tale and **collected also to memorize the vocabulary from it**, two to five words per day with their meanings."

(Interview transcript, Participant 2 and 3, translated by the author)

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As an example, P2 exemplified an Indonesian sentence 'Saya sedang belajar'. Once she had mentioned it, she translated such a sentence into English 'I am studying.' Even, she deductively verbalized that such a sentence belongs to Present Continuous Tense. The same fact was posed by P3 where he required his students to read a given text (a fairy tale). He did not only direct students to read the text but also collect and memorize English vocabulary from such a text (e.g. memorizing two to five words per day with their meanings). These aimed at enriching the students' English vocabulary so that they could produce English texts effortlessly.

Rovikasari, Suparno, and Supriyadi (2019) stated that the solutions to overcome the writing issue related to vocabulary. The teachers can provide the collection of vocabulary and meanings, ask students to translate the words in a text, drill vocabulary, and meanings. Gu and Johnson (1996) as cited Goundar (2015) argued that there were some strategies for learning English vocabulary, one of them was memorizing vocabulary. This strategy was classified into two categories namely rehearsal and encoding. The example of rehearsal strategies was word lists and repetition. While, for the example of encoding strategies includes included an association, visual, auditory, imagery, semantics, and contextual coding and word structure including word analysis.

Therefore, collecting and memorizing vocabulary were the solutions for teaching writing to junior high school students. The teachers can help students improve their vocabulary knowledge and to develop the ideas when they have a writing assignment. However, these activities do not guarantee them to deploy English vocabulary contextually in the written discourse.

#### 3.2.2. Collaborative English writing activities

Collaborative English writing activities can be an alternative solution for the teachers to resolve their teaching English writing challenges. These activities encouraged students to generate, organize and articulate their ideas systematically. Practically speaking, P1 classified students into a number of groups. This classification was based on diverse students' levels of comprehension, namely low and high levels. Then, he integrated them to several groups. The integration aimed at supporting each other, such as giving feedback and sharing ideas.

**Excerpt 9**

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- P<sub>1</sub> “The solution is such **divided the students into some groups**. First, we analyzed them based on their comprehension of writing materials, and then **we mix them in the groups** so that a group consists of students with a high and low level of comprehension. In this heterogeneous group, they can help each other to do the task such as they **can give feedback to each other**”
- P<sub>2</sub> “For the division of the groups, the students are categorized into lazy and diligent students. Then, they are **divided into several groups** consisting of those two categories in each group. The two categories are mixed in one group so that the lazy students can be motivated to do the task, and those who are diligent can also help the lazy students to do the task **to be creative**”
- P<sub>3</sub> “Well, for the groups the students are usually and always **divided based on their motivation in learning English** or based on their quality of English writing. They are **divided into several mixed-level motivation groups**. Students with a high level of motivation in learning English are expected to help them who has a low level of motivation”

(Interview transcript, February 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> 2020, Participant 1, 2 and 3, translated by the author)

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Referring to the abovementioned excerpts, P<sub>2</sub> added that collaborative English writing activities were intended to motivate them in accomplishing classroom tasks and performances. Subsequently, these activities functioned to stimulate students’ creativity in the classroom, especially when learning English writing. Likewise, P<sub>3</sub> contended that collaborative English writing activities enabled students to complement each other. Storch (2005) postulates that collaborative writing is better conducted in the form of writing task fulfilment, complexity, and grammatical accuracy. It helps students expand their ideas and allow them to provide feedback with each other. Further, Biria and Jafari (2013) report that collaborative writing exercises enhance the overall quality of the student writing, such as an improvement in students writing skills, where the students could write a text by using more clauses and be more creative.

Therefore, collaborative English writing activities by considering aspects of motivation and students’ understanding of learning English writing can be the solution to deal with difficulties in teaching English writing. Furthermore, the students can explore their ideas in written form in a group so that they can motivate each other and can also share their understanding of English writing assignments.

### 3.2.3. Exercises of English writing

Exercises of English writing can be an alternative solution to enhance students’ writing skills. By doing so, teachers enable students not only to invigorate their writing skills but also to practice in constructing sentences and learning contextualized tenses as stipulated by P<sub>1</sub> and P<sub>2</sub> subsequently:

**Excerpt 10**

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- P<sub>1</sub> “They are **trained to make sentences** by using grammar that they have learned before and to motivate the students in learning writing.”
- P<sub>2</sub> “When we teach present continuous tense, we can relate it to the context, for example, ‘what are you doing?’ or ask the students in Bahasa Indonesia first, like ‘sedang apa kamu sekarang?’ They probably respond ‘Belajar Bahasa Inggris’ Then, we asked the students to translate it into English. Therefore, the English **practice could be based on the current situation.**”
- P<sub>3</sub> “Related to the grammar, it is based on the teaching-learning context. For example, we give an example of present tense materials from daily activity. Then, they are asked to **practice making sentences.**”
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(Interview transcript, Participant 1, 2 and 3, translated by the author)

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Giving exercises to students was one of the solutions to overcome the challenges in teaching writing to junior high school students. The teachers gave the exercises to train their grammatical competences and motivate them to produce sentences. For example, teachers facilitated students' writing activities through picture storybooks. More practically, they matched the pictures with the sentences, filled in incomplete sentences and designed more creative teaching materials for writing. Muhammad (2018) contends that to resolve teaching writing challenges, the teachers can attempt to ask their students to use the internet and make more creative exercises for them to learn English writing. In other words, giving English writing exercises assists the teachers to solve their teaching writing challenges. In this case, they can give writing exercises after explaining the teaching materials in the classroom. With this in mind, students were trained to foster their writing skills regularly, such as practicing to make sentences based on the given tenses. In the present continuous tense, for instance, the teachers can request students to make sentences based on what they were doing at that time.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The study aimed at depicting the challenges and solutions in teaching English writing to junior high school students. Based on the findings, there are seventh challenges faced by the teachers and three solutions to cope with such challenges during teaching writing to junior high school students. On the one side, those challenges encompass (1) students' poor English grammatical competence, (2) students' incapability of developing ideas for English writing, (3) students' inadequate English vocabulary knowledge, (4) students' demotivation to learn English writing, (5) insufficient time management to teach English writing, (6) limited sources of English writing materials, and (7) limited facilities to teach English writing. On the other side, the solutions to cope with those challenges cover (1) explicit teaching English vocabulary, (2) collaborative English writing activities and (3) exercises of English writing. Therefore, by knowing the challenges encountered by the teachers in teaching writing and the solutions to overcome the challenges during teaching writing to junior high school students, it is recommended to improve teachers' performances in teaching writing, such as the teachers are able in identifying, preparing for improvement and evaluating for teaching and learning English writing process. However, the solutions to overcome such challenges can make the learning process in the classroom more effectively.

The limitations of this study were on single data collection technique (semi-structured interview), focusing on in-service teachers' perspective, describing the challenges and solutions in teaching English writing. First, this study was only focused on challenges and solutions during teaching English writing to junior high school students. For further research, it should be covered the Teacher Professional Development (TPD) to obtain more representative to describe the teachers' development in teaching writing to junior high school students. Next, this study only employed a single data collection technique, namely interview. The next study should deploy triangulated data collection techniques, such as document analysis, questionnaires administration and observation to gain more confirmable data. In another limitation, this study only focused on in-service teachers' scope. For further research, it should expand the scope such as to pre-service teachers and students. Lastly, this study simply described the challenges and solutions in teaching writing to junior high school students. Future studies, applying a critical analytical framework should be an option.

## 5. Ethics Committee Approval

The author(s) confirm(s) that the study does not need ethics committee approval according to the research integrity rules in their country (Date of Confirmation: 21.01.2021).

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## Ortaokul Öğrencilerine Yazma Öğretimi:Zorluklara ve Çözümlere Odaklanma

### Öz

Yazma, oldukça zorlu bir beceri ve çok yönlü bilgiyi (ör. Dilbilgisi, tür, kelime bilgisi ve üstbilişsel yetkinlikler) içeren karmaşık bir yinelemeli süreç olarak kabul edilmiştir. Bu nedenle, son birkaç on yılda çeşitli çalışmalarda belgelenmiştir. Bununla birlikte, ortaokul öğrencilerine İngilizce yazmayı öğretmenin zorlukları ve çözümleri konusu yeterince araştırılmamıştır. Bu nedenle, bu çalışma, özellikle Endonezya EFL bağlamında bu sorunu ele aldı. Endonezya, Batı Java, Tasikmalaya'daki bir ortaokuldan üç İngilizce öğretmeni katılımcılar olarak işe alındı. Veriler yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmış ve Tematik Analiz (TA) ile analiz edilmiştir (Braun ve Clarke, 2006). Bir yandan, bulgular öğretmenlerin İngilizce yazmayı öğretirken karşılaştıkları yedi zorluk olduğunu, yani (1) öğrencilerin zayıf İngilizce gramer yeterliliği, (2) öğrencilerin İngilizce yazma için fikir geliştirme yetersizliği, (3) öğrencilerin Yetersiz İngilizce kelime bilgisi, (4) öğrencilerin İngilizce yazmayı öğrenmek için isteksizliği, (5) İngilizce yazmayı öğretmek için yetersiz zaman yönetimi, (6) sınırlı İngilizce yazma materyali kaynakları ve (7) İngilizce yazmayı öğretmek için sınırlı olanaklar. Öte yandan, öğretmenler bu tür zorlukların üstesinden gelmek için (1) açık İngilizce kelime öğretimi, (2) işbirliğine dayalı İngilizce yazma etkinlikleri ve (3) İngilizce yazma alıştırmaları gibi çeşitli çözümleri desteklediler. Pedagojik açıdan bakıldığında, bu çalışma TESOL uygulayıcılarına özellikle Endonezya EFL ortamında ortaokul öğrencilerine etkili bir şekilde İngilizce yazmayı öğretmek için pratik katkılar sunmaktadır.

*Anahtar sözcükler:* İngilizce Yazma Öğretiminin Zorlukları ve Çözümleri; Ortaokul Öğrencileri; İngilizce Yazma Öğretimi.

### AUTHOR BIODATA

Hilma Amalia, English Education Department, Siliwangi University, Indonesia

Fuad Abdullah, English Education Department, Siliwangi University, Indonesia

Asri Siti Fatimah, English Education Department, Siliwangi University, Indonesia