



Teacher's Strategies in Teaching Writing descriptive text at Senior High School

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2025-06-25 Revised: 2026-10-14 Accepted: 2026-10-15 Keywords: Descriptive Text, Teaching Strategies, Writing Instruction, Scientific Approach DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v12i1.7291 Corresponding Author: Fita Pramulya fitapramulya83@gmail.com Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, FKIP Universitas Tadulako	<i>This qualitative descriptive study examines the strategies employed by an English teacher to teach descriptive text writing to tenth-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Sindue and the challenges encountered during instruction. Data were drawn from three classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with the teacher. Guided by Haynes and Zacarian's (2010) framework, the analysis identified seven strategies: modifying instructional input, using visuals, activating prior knowledge, emphasizing key concepts, adapting vocabulary instruction, promoting cooperative learning, and modifying assessment. These practices were broadly consistent with the scientific approach associated with the 2013 Curriculum. Nevertheless, students' limited vocabulary constrained their ability to express ideas in English, while unequal participation reduced the potential benefits of group work. The findings illustrate how linguistic, visual, and collaborative scaffolding can be combined in EFL writing lessons. Because the study involved one teacher and did not directly measure changes in students' writing performance, its contribution is a contextual account of instructional practices rather than evidence of causal effectiveness. Implications include contextual vocabulary support, clearer roles in group activities, and ongoing formative feedback.</i>

1. Introduction

Writing is a demanding productive skill because learners must transform ideas into understandable sentences, arrange information logically, and make choices about vocabulary and grammatical structures. In contrast to oral communication, a written text remains available for readers to examine, making clarity, organization, and accuracy particularly important. Harmer (2004) argues that writing instruction should address both the process of composing and the quality of the final product. For English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, this process often requires additional support because opportunities to use English beyond the classroom are limited. A student may recognize words in a reading passage but still find it difficult to select appropriate expressions when describing a person, place, or object independently.

Descriptive text is an important genre in senior high school English instruction. Its communicative purpose is to help readers imagine the characteristics of a particular subject, while its common organization consists of identification followed by description. Learners need to select relevant details, use suitable adjectives and noun phrases, and generally maintain consistent grammatical patterns, including the simple present tense. The genre may appear accessible because students can begin with familiar topics, yet producing a coherent paragraph requires more than listing disconnected features. Students must move from noticing details to prioritizing information, establishing relationships among sentences, and revising language so that a reader can form a clear mental picture.

In the Indonesian context, the 2013 Curriculum promotes active participation through a scientific approach commonly represented by observing, questioning, experimenting, associating, and communicating. These stages provide a useful pedagogical sequence for descriptive writing: students can observe a visual stimulus, ask questions about its features, try out relevant vocabulary, connect ideas in a draft, and communicate a completed description. Nevertheless, curriculum expectations cannot be translated into classroom practice automatically. Teachers have to adjust language input and task demands to learners' levels, classroom interaction patterns, and the time available for writing and feedback.

The preliminary observation reported in the present study indicated that several tenth-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Sindue experienced difficulties expressing ideas in English, selecting vocabulary, and constructing grammatically appropriate sentences. Some relied on word-for-word translation from Bahasa Indonesia, whereas the teacher's account indicated limited understanding of descriptive text structure and motivation for writing. These concerns are consistent with the linguistic and instructional difficulties described by Westwood (2008). Related research in IDEAS also provides a useful point of comparison: Masruddin and Nasriandi (2022) identified lexical and syntactical errors in students' descriptive writing, including inappropriate word choices and difficulties with grammatical forms. Their findings help explain why vocabulary and sentence-level support remain necessary even when students understand the topic of a writing task.

Previous IDEAS studies suggest several ways of responding to these problems. Tarigan et al. (2021) investigated picture-based instruction for descriptive writing and reported improvements in students' writing skills. Dapa Taka (2023) examined guided questions as a means of helping Indonesian EFL students develop descriptive texts. Meanwhile, Furwana and Syam (2019) studied an estafet or relay-writing strategy in a senior high school in Palopo, showing that writing tasks can be structured to support participation. Such studies provide evidence about particular techniques, but they do not fully explain how one teacher combines different forms of scaffolding during ordinary lessons or how practical challenges emerge as those techniques interact.

Teaching strategies are therefore understood here as context-sensitive instructional decisions rather than isolated classroom activities. Haynes and Zacarian (2010) offer seven complementary forms of support for English learners: modifying input, using visuals, activating prior knowledge, emphasizing key concepts, adjusting vocabulary instruction, promoting cooperative learning, and modifying assessment.

This framework is relevant to descriptive writing because it connects the language needed for a task with opportunities to notice, practice, negotiate, and improve meaning. It also makes it possible to examine teaching systematically without assuming that every

strategy will have the same effect for every learner.

Although writing pedagogy has been widely discussed, a closer account of the relationship between these seven strategies and the scientific approach in an Indonesian public senior high school can contribute to the literature. This study addresses two questions: (1) What strategies does the English teacher employ when teaching descriptive text writing to tenth-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Sindue? and (2) What challenges arise when these strategies are implemented? Rather than measuring learning gains experimentally, the study aims to describe the teacher's observed practices, interpret their instructional purposes, and identify implications that can inform more responsive EFL writing lessons.

2. Method

This research employed a qualitative descriptive design to investigate teaching as it occurred in a natural classroom setting. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the focus was on instructional actions, classroom interaction, and the teacher's explanations of the choices made during descriptive writing lessons, rather than on testing a treatment effect (Creswell, 2014). The analytical unit was the teacher's practice across the observed lessons. Students' responses were considered as classroom evidence about how activities unfolded, not as a basis for calculating improvements in writing proficiency.

The study was conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Sindue and involved one English teacher teaching descriptive text writing to tenth-grade learners under the 2013 Curriculum. The site and participant were selected purposively, considering access to the classroom and the teacher's willingness to participate. This bounded context allowed close attention to the sequence of explanations, activities, and feedback. The original study does not specify the number of learners, their proficiency distribution, or the duration of each lesson; consequently, those characteristics are not assumed in the present account.

Two sources of data were used. First, classroom observations covered three teaching sessions and focused on the instructional support provided, learning materials employed, interaction during individual or group work, and visible student responses. Second, semi-structured interviews with the teacher were used to understand the reasons for choosing particular strategies and the challenges perceived during implementation. Observation offered a view of enacted instruction, while the interview provided the teacher's interpretation of that practice. The analysis draws on these two sources without presenting verbatim quotations or numerical frequencies that were not retained in the source report.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). During data condensation, information relevant to writing instruction and classroom challenges was selected and organized. During data display, instances of support were grouped using the seven categories proposed by Haynes and Zacarian (2010); recurring difficulties were identified as additional themes. Conclusions were then developed by comparing the reported observations with the teacher's interview account. This cross-source comparison supported interpretive consistency, although it did not amount to an independent assessment of student writing outcomes.

The research accounted for ethical principles through informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity of participants. The following findings distinguish practices actually reported in the study from pedagogical recommendations developed in the discussion. Because the evidence consists of three observations and teacher interviews at a single school, interpretations are presented as context-specific, and claims of causal effectiveness or broad generalizability are avoided.

3. Results

3.1. Scaffolding instructional input and visualizing the writing task

The observations and interview indicated that the teacher modified instructional input by simplifying explanations, repeating important points, and supplementing verbal directions with gestures. This support made classroom instructions more accessible when learners encountered unfamiliar expressions or complex writing requirements. The strategy did not remove the central task of producing English sentences; instead, it adjusted how the task was introduced so that learners had a clearer starting point. In descriptive writing, comprehensible directions are particularly relevant because students need to understand both what to describe and how the final paragraph is expected to be organized.

Visual support formed a related strategy. Pictures and videos were used to present identifiable people, objects, or places and to give learners concrete details to describe. These resources provided a common reference point for classroom questioning and vocabulary development. Rather than expecting students to generate content from an abstract instruction alone, the teacher could direct their attention to visible characteristics and connect those characteristics with English expressions. The reported use of visual materials is compatible with the scientific approach's observing stage, in which students first attend to a subject before constructing language about it.

3.2. Linking prior knowledge, genre features, and vocabulary

The teacher also related writing tasks to students' existing knowledge by inviting descriptions of familiar subjects, including their school and hometown. This practice reduced the conceptual burden of writing because learners already possessed information about the chosen topic. Familiarity, however, did not necessarily eliminate linguistic difficulty: students still needed to transform ideas expressed comfortably in their first language into English. Activating prior knowledge therefore worked most clearly when combined with other forms of support, especially vocabulary preparation and explanations of sentence patterns.

A fourth strategy involved emphasizing the essential features of descriptive texts. The teacher drew attention to text organization and sentence structure, helping students distinguish the identification of a subject from a description of its characteristics. Highlighting these core concepts could prevent learners from treating the task as an unrestricted collection of sentences. It also provided a basis for deciding which details belonged together and how descriptions might be sequenced. In this sense, genre explanation functioned as a bridge between recognizing a descriptive text and producing one.

Vocabulary instruction was adapted through the introduction of useful words before writing, the development of vocabulary banks, and encouragement to reuse appropriate expressions in students' own texts. Such preparation addressed a problem consistently

identified in the teacher's account: learners had ideas but lacked the English words needed to articulate them. Vocabulary banks offered immediate linguistic resources, while contextual practice created opportunities to connect word meaning to the subject being described. The combined use of images, familiar themes, and selected vocabulary illustrates that these strategies were not independent techniques but mutually reinforcing supports for a single writing task.

3.3. Cooperative learning and formative assessment

Cooperative learning was implemented through group writing tasks, collaborative brainstorming, and peer editing. Students were given opportunities to propose descriptive details, negotiate wording, and review text with classmates rather than working exclusively through teacher explanation. The activities offered a social context in which learners could obtain ideas and language support from peers. At the same time, the observations revealed an important qualification: not every student participated equally. Some learners contributed actively, whereas others remained comparatively passive, limiting the extent to which group activity translated into individual engagement.

The seventh strategy was modification of assessment. The teacher used rubrics, oral feedback, and formative checks during the writing process rather than relying only on a completed text as evidence of learning. These practices allowed attention to be directed to features such as organization and language use while students were still developing their writing. The study does not provide the rubrics themselves or samples of successive drafts, so it cannot establish the extent of improvement attributable to feedback. It does show, however, that assessment was treated as part of instruction and that the teacher had opportunities to respond to difficulties while the task was underway.

3.4. Challenges encountered during implementation

Two recurring challenges emerged from the reported evidence. The first was limited vocabulary, which affected students' ability to express observations or familiar ideas in English and at times led them to rely on Bahasa Indonesia. This difficulty placed additional demands on the teacher's explanations, vocabulary preparation, and feedback. The second was unequal participation in collaborative activities, where a relatively small number of students tended to dominate the contribution of ideas or wording. These challenges indicate that the presence of supportive strategies does not guarantee uniform access to their benefits; their usefulness depends on how learners take part in each activity.

Taken together, the findings show a pattern of interconnected instructional choices. Input modification and visuals supported initial comprehension; prior knowledge and genre explanation helped students plan relevant content; vocabulary activities supported expression; collaboration created opportunities for exchanging ideas; and formative assessment provided feedback during composing. The teacher's implementation was broadly consistent with the scientific approach, but the observation-based evidence supports a descriptive account of instructional practice rather than a claim that the strategies independently increased writing test scores.

4. Discussion

The findings suggest that teaching descriptive writing can be understood as a sequence of supported decisions that move learners from recognizing a subject to producing an intelligible text. In the present classroom, scaffolding operated at several levels: the language of teacher explanations, the availability of visual and lexical resources,

the accessibility of topics, and opportunities for social feedback. This layered support is consistent with Haynes and Zacarian's (2010) framework and with Hyland's (2002) emphasis on writing as a process that involves planning, drafting, and revision. Its main instructional value lies in reducing avoidable obstacles while preserving the cognitive work that students must undertake as writers.

The use of pictures and videos deserves attention because descriptive writing depends upon noticing and selecting relevant details. Tarigan et al. (2021), writing in IDEAS, reported positive results from picture-based writing instruction. The present study complements that intervention-oriented research by showing how visuals were incorporated alongside oral explanations, vocabulary work, and attention to text structure. A visual stimulus should therefore not be treated as a complete method by itself; its pedagogical contribution depends on the questions posed, the language supplied, and the opportunities students receive to transform observations into coherent descriptions.

Attention to familiar topics and guided language also helps explain the potential value of adapting instruction to students' actual needs. Dapa Taka (2023) found that guided questions could support Indonesian EFL learners' descriptive writing, while Kembaren and Patmala (2022) reported that brainstorming encouraged learners to generate ideas for descriptive texts. Although the teacher in Sindue did not report using those studies' specific procedures, the observed activation of prior knowledge and collaborative brainstorming served a comparable preparatory purpose. The distinction matters: similarity of instructional purpose does not mean that identical techniques or equivalent learning outcomes were observed.

Vocabulary limitations were a central constraint even when students were asked to describe familiar experiences. Masruddin and Nasriandi (2022) documented lexical and syntactical errors in descriptive texts, suggesting that difficulty may persist at the point where knowledge of content must be expressed through appropriate language. The present findings imply that vocabulary teaching should connect individual words with useful phrases and sentence patterns rather than stop at translation or memorization. For example, a word bank can be arranged around categories such as appearance, location, and function, then used as a resource when learners plan and revise descriptions. This is proposed as an instructional implication, not presented as an additional activity observed in the study.

Collaboration provided another opportunity for support but also exposed participation differences. Madehang (2015) discussed peer contribution and feedback as important features of collaborative descriptive writing, while Furwana and Syam (2019) showed the value of structuring participation through relay writing. More recently, Rahmi et al. (2025) reported that cooperative jigsaw activities could foster interaction but also created difficulties in managing passive learners and group dynamics. These studies provide a close comparison with the Sindue classroom, where students did not contribute equally. Their combined implication is that assigning a group task alone is insufficient: clear individual responsibilities, opportunities to contribute in turns, and teacher monitoring may be needed to distribute participation more fairly.

The reported use of rubrics and oral feedback also highlights the importance of assessment during composing. A rubric can make expectations for identification, descriptive detail, organization, vocabulary, and grammatical control more explicit. Oral comments during drafting can help students identify a manageable next step, while peer editing can prompt attention to how readers interpret a text. Because the current study

did not analyze successive student drafts or score distributions, the findings cannot establish whether these feedback practices improved performance. A useful extension would examine annotated drafts or compare student texts produced at successive stages while documenting the specific feedback learners received.

An additional contribution of the study is its interpretation of the scientific approach as a flexible instructional sequence rather than a checklist. Observing was visible in the use of pictures and videos; questioning could be supported through teacher prompts; experimenting was associated with trying vocabulary and sentence constructions; associating appeared in organizing information into text; and communicating was linked to collaborative writing and feedback. The available report does not record each curriculum stage as a separately timed activity. The relationship should therefore be interpreted as pedagogical alignment rather than proof that all five stages were implemented formally or with equal emphasis.

Several limitations qualify these interpretations. The research involved one teacher and three observed sessions at one school, with data derived from observation and teacher interview. The published account does not include student writing samples, detailed observation extracts, quantitative assessment results, or a direct comparison with another classroom. As a result, the findings illuminate the range of strategies and the difficulties of implementing them, but they do not demonstrate causal gains or the prevalence of the same practices across schools. Future research could combine sustained observation with document analysis, student interviews, and assessment of draft development to better connect teachers' instructional decisions with learners' written products.

5. Conclusion

This study identified seven interconnected strategies used by an English teacher to support tenth-grade students in writing descriptive texts at SMA Negeri 1 Sindue: modifying input, using visuals, activating prior knowledge, emphasizing key concepts, adapting vocabulary instruction, organizing cooperative learning, and modifying assessment. The strategies broadly corresponded to the scientific approach associated with the 2013 Curriculum. Their value was most evident in the ways they made the task more comprehensible, provided linguistic resources, and created opportunities for students to work with ideas and receive feedback during writing.

Nevertheless, limited vocabulary and unequal participation remained important challenges. These findings suggest that teachers should provide explicit, contextual vocabulary support, make text organization visible, and structure group work so that individual contributions can be monitored. Formative assessment should be integrated with drafting and revision rather than reserved for the finished product. Since the study was descriptive and involved a small, bounded setting, the conclusions concern observed instructional practices and their pedagogical implications, not measured improvements in writing achievement. Further studies should examine student texts and longer sequences of classroom activity to assess how these strategies contribute to writing development over time.

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