

An Analysis of Linguistic and Affective Factors in Students' Difficulties in Writing English Narrative Texts

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INFORMASI ARTIKEL	ABSTRAK
<p>Article History: Received: 14 January 2026 Revised: 23 January 2026 Accepted: 26 January 2026 Published: 29 January 2026</p> <p>Kata Kunci: Kesulitan Menulis. Teks Naratif. EFL.</p>	<p>Penelitian ini mengkaji kesulitan yang dihadapi oleh siswa kelas XII SMA Negeri 2 Pematangsiantar dalam menulis teks naratif berbahasa Inggris dan mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang berkontribusi terhadap kesulitan tersebut. Dengan menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif deskriptif, penelitian ini melibatkan 36 siswa yang dipilih melalui pengambilan sampel bertujuan. Data dikumpulkan melalui tugas menulis naratif dan kuesioner yang diberikan melalui Google Form. Siswa diminta untuk menghasilkan teks naratif berbahasa Inggris sekitar 200–250 kata, yang dianalisis berdasarkan tata bahasa, kosakata, struktur kalimat, organisasi teks, dan pengembangan ide. Kuesioner digunakan untuk mengeksplorasi persepsi siswa tentang masalah menulis mereka dan strategi yang mereka gunakan untuk mengatasinya. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa siswa mengalami kesulitan besar dalam ketepatan tata bahasa, penggunaan kosakata yang terbatas, konstruksi kalimat, dan pengorganisasian ide sesuai dengan struktur generik teks naratif. Selain tantangan linguistik ini, faktor afektif seperti motivasi rendah, kurangnya kepercayaan diri, dan takut membuat kesalahan ditemukan secara signifikan menghambat kinerja menulis siswa. Studi ini berkontribusi pada pedagogi penulisan EFL dengan memberikan bukti empiris tentang interaksi antara faktor linguistik dan afektif dalam penulisan naratif di tingkat sekolah menengah atas dan menawarkan implikasi pedagogis untuk menerapkan pengajaran tata bahasa yang terstruktur, pengayaan kosakata yang terarah, dan aktivitas menulis yang membangun kepercayaan diri untuk meningkatkan keterampilan menulis naratif siswa.</p>
<p>Keywords: Writing Difficulties. Narrative Teks. EFL.</p>	<p>ABSTRACT</p> <p>This study examines the difficulties encountered by grade XII students of SMA Negeri 2 Pematangsiantar in writing English narrative texts and identifies the factors contributing to these difficulties. Employing a descriptive qualitative research design, the study involved 36 students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through a narrative writing task and a questionnaire administered via Google Form. Students were required to produce an English narrative text of approximately 200–250 words, which was analyzed based on grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, text organization, and idea development. The questionnaire was used to explore students' perceptions of their writing problems and the strategies they employ to cope with them. The findings indicate that students experienced major difficulties in grammatical accuracy, limited vocabulary use, sentence construction, and organizing ideas according to the generic structure of narrative texts. In addition to these linguistic challenges, affective factors such as low motivation, lack of self-confidence, and fear of making mistakes were found to significantly hinder students' writing performance. This study contributes to EFL writing pedagogy by providing empirical evidence on the interaction between linguistic and affective factors in narrative writing at the senior high school level and offers pedagogical implications for implementing scaffolded grammar instruction, guided vocabulary enrichment, and confidence-building writing activities to enhance students' narrative writing skills.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">This is an open access article under the CC-BY-SA license.</p> <div style="text-align: right;">  </div>

How to Cite?

Napitupulu, Y. E., & Napitupulu, S. (2026). An Analysis of Linguistic and Affective Factors in Students' Difficulties in Writing English Narrative Texts . Education and Learning Journal, 7(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.33096/eljour.v7i1.1560>

1. Introduction

English functions as a key medium of communication in global academic, professional, and technological domains. In the context of globalization and rapid digital advancement, proficiency in English enables learners to access international knowledge, exchange ideas across cultures, and participate in global discourse. Scholars have consistently highlighted English as a lingua franca that bridges linguistic and cultural diversity, particularly in educational and professional settings (Jenkins, 2021; Seidlhofer, 2023). In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language and occupies a strategic role within the national education system. Through the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka*, English learning is expected not only to enhance students' communicative competence but also to foster critical thinking and adaptability in response to global challenges.

English language instruction encompasses four fundamental skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these, writing is often regarded as the most demanding skill to acquire. Writing requires learners to simultaneously apply grammatical knowledge, lexical resources, and cognitive strategies while managing affective aspects such as confidence and motivation. Writing is not simply the production of correct sentences; rather, it involves developing ideas, organizing information coherently, and conveying meaning effectively to an intended audience (Hyland, 2021). In addition, writing reflects complex cognitive activity, as learners must engage in planning, drafting, and revising throughout the writing process (Lee & Schallert, 2022). Consequently, students' writing performance is an important indicator of both language proficiency and higher-order thinking.

At the senior high school level, narrative text constitutes one of the core genres taught in English writing instruction. Narrative writing enables students to recount events, construct stories, and express moral or social values through a structured sequence. This genre plays a significant role in developing students' creativity, imagination, and discourse competence, while also reinforcing control over grammar and vocabulary (Widodo, Rahayu, & Suryani, 2022). Moreover, narrative texts require students to organize ideas according to a conventional structure consisting of orientation, complication, and resolution, which demands logical sequencing and coherence to produce a meaningful written text (Nugroho & Anwar, 2023).

Previous studies have documented various difficulties encountered by EFL learners in writing narrative texts. Commonly reported problems include grammatical inaccuracies, limited vocabulary, inappropriate sentence construction, and weak organization of ideas (Putri & Siregar, 2021; Hasanah & Pratama, 2022). Other research has highlighted affective factors, such as low motivation, writing anxiety, and a lack of self-confidence, which negatively affect students' writing performance (Rahmawati, 2023). Despite these findings, many studies examine linguistic difficulties and psychological factors separately. As a result, limited attention has been given to how these factors interact and jointly contribute to students' writing challenges, particularly in the context of narrative writing at the senior high school level.

Furthermore, previous research has largely relied on analyzing students' written products, with less emphasis on learners' perspectives on their own writing difficulties and the strategies they employ to overcome them. This indicates a need for more comprehensive research that integrates textual analysis with students' perceptions to deepen understanding of writing problems in EFL contexts. The present study addresses this gap by investigating both linguistic and affective factors influencing students' narrative writing.

The context of SMA Negeri 2 Pematangsiantar is academically significant due to its diverse student population and varying levels of English proficiency. As one of the senior high schools implementing the deep learning curriculum, this context provides a representative setting for examining the challenges faced by Indonesian EFL learners in developing writing skills. By analyzing students' narrative texts alongside questionnaire data, this study aims to contribute empirical evidence on the interaction between linguistic limitations and affective factors in EFL writing. The findings are expected to provide insights on inform more targeted, context-sensitive, and pedagogically sound approaches to teaching narrative writing at the senior high school level.

However, in practice, writing narrative texts remains a major challenge for many EFL students in Indonesia. Several recent studies indicate that students continue to experience difficulties in writing, particularly in terms of grammatical accuracy, vocabulary mastery, sentence construction, and text organization. Fareed, Ashraf, and Bilal (2022) report that limited grammar knowledge and a narrow vocabulary significantly hinder students' ability to express ideas clearly in written English. In addition, Suryani et al. (2024) found that many students struggle to apply appropriate tense forms, especially the past tense, which is dominant in narrative writing. These linguistic problems often result in unclear meanings and poorly structured narratives.

In addition to linguistic difficulties, affective factors also contribute significantly to students' writing problems. Recent research shows that low motivation, lack of self-confidence, and fear of making mistakes negatively influence students' writing performance. Rahmawati and Lestari (2023) explain that students who lack confidence tend to avoid writing tasks or produce very short texts because they fear making grammatical errors. Similarly, Putri et al. (2024) highlight that writing anxiety can limit students' willingness to experiment with new vocabulary or sentence structures, which ultimately affects the quality of their writing. Moreover, insufficient writing practice and limited teacher feedback also contribute to students' slow progress in developing writing skills.

These findings suggest that although writing instruction has been formally implemented in schools, the results have not been optimal. Most previous studies have focused on general writing difficulties or isolated linguistic errors, while limited research has specifically examined students' difficulties in writing English narrative texts at the senior high school level within a local context. Meanwhile, narrative writing remains an essential component of the English curriculum, as it not only assesses language competence but also trains students to develop creativity, empathy, and moral awareness through storytelling. Therefore, a deeper investigation into students' difficulties and the factors causing them is necessary to help teachers design more effective writing instruction with grade XII students at SMA Negeri 2 Pematangsiantar, many students struggled in develop story ideas, use appropriate verb forms, particularly past tense, and connectprate verb forms, particularly past tense verbs, and connecting sentences into coherent paragraphs. Several students also reported limited vocabulary mastery and confusion when expressing ideas in written English. These conditions indicate a gap between the writing competencies expected by the curriculum and students' actual writing abilities in the classroom. If these difficulties are not addressed effectively, the objectives of writing instruction will not be fully achieved.

Therefore, this study aims to identify and analyze the difficulties experienced by grade XII students at SMA Negeri 2 Pematangsiantar in writing English narrative texts, as well as the factors contributing to these difficulties. The results of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for English teachers in developing more effective, creative, and student-centered strategies to improve students' narrative writing skills and overall writing competence.

2. Method

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative research design to explore the difficulties students encounter in writing English narrative texts. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables

an in-depth examination of students' written texts and their perceptions within authentic classroom contexts. Qualitative research is particularly well-suited to investigating language learning difficulties, as it provides rich, contextually grounded insights into learners' linguistic performance and affective experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2021; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2023).

The participants of this study were 36 students of class XII at SMA Negeri 2 Pematangsiantar. Total sampling was used to include all students in the class and obtain comprehensive, representative data on students' narrative writing difficulties in the classroom.

Data were collected through two instruments: a narrative writing task and an open-ended questionnaire. In the writing task, students were asked to write an English narrative text based on a given topic. The students' texts were analyzed qualitatively using an analytical writing rubric adapted from narrative writing criteria, focusing on grammatical accuracy, vocabulary, sentence structure, tense, text organization, and idea development. The purpose of this analysis was not merely to classify errors, but to interpret patterns of difficulties reflected in students' written discourse. To enhance the credibility of the analysis, the students' texts were systematically reviewed using consistent analytical criteria.

The questionnaire was administered to explore students' perceptions of their writing difficulties, particularly related to non-linguistic factors such as motivation, self-confidence, writing anxiety, and learning experiences. Open-ended questions were used to allow students to express their views freely and provide detailed explanations. The use of multiple data sources was intended to strengthen data validity through methodological triangulation (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2022).

Data analysis followed the qualitative content analysis procedures proposed by Miles et al. (2023), involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The students' narrative texts were examined to identify recurring patterns of linguistic difficulties and interpreted in relation to narrative text conventions. Questionnaire responses were coded and categorized into thematic groups representing affective factors influencing students' writing performance. An audit trail was maintained throughout the analysis process to ensure transparency and analytical rigor.

3. Result and Discussion

Result

Based on the analysis of students' narrative writing tasks and questionnaire responses, this study found that grade XII students of SMA Negeri 2 Pematangsiantar experienced various difficulties in writing English narrative texts. These difficulties can be categorized into linguistic difficulties, problems in sentence and text organization, psychological factors, and students' coping strategies. The findings indicate that linguistic difficulties were the most dominant, followed by problems in text organization and affective factors.

3.1 Linguistic Difficulties

Linguistic difficulties emerged as the most prominent problem in students' narrative writing. The majority of students encountered serious challenges in grammatical accuracy, particularly in the use of past tense verbs, subject-verb agreement, and basic sentence construction. Many students failed to consistently use past-tense forms, which are essential in narrative texts.

For example, one student wrote:

“One day, the princess went to the forest and met a prince.”
(Student Text)

In this sentence, the student used present-tense verbs instead of the required past-tense forms (*went, met*), indicating limited mastery of tense usage. Similar errors appeared repeatedly across students' texts, suggesting that tense misuse was a dominant grammatical problem.

In addition to tense errors, students also struggled with vocabulary selection. Many students relied on repetitive, limited vocabulary or directly translated expressions from Indonesian into English, resulting in unnatural sentence construction. For instance, one student wrote:

"She felt very happy sekali when she saw her mother."
(Student Text)

This example reflects both vocabulary limitation and negative transfer from the first language. The frequent repetition of simple words such as *happy, good, and sad* across texts further demonstrates students' restricted lexical range. Overall, grammatical errors, particularly tense misuse, were more dominant than vocabulary problems, although both significantly affected the clarity of students' writing.

3.2 Difficulties in Sentence Structure and Text Organization

Beyond linguistic issues, many students experienced difficulties in organizing sentences and developing coherent narrative texts. Several narratives did not follow the conventional structure of orientation, complication, and resolution. Some texts lacked a clear introduction of characters or setting, while others ended abruptly without a proper resolution.

One student wrote:

"The boy lived in a village. He is angry with his friend. The story is finished."
(Student Text)

This excerpt shows weak sentence structure and poor narrative development. The ideas are disconnected, and the narrative sequence is incomplete. Such problems indicate that students had difficulty organizing ideas logically and linking events cohesively. Compared to grammatical problems, organizational issues appeared slightly less frequently but still significantly affected the overall quality of the narrative texts.

3.3 Psychological Factors Affecting Writing Performance

The questionnaire results revealed that affective factors also contributed to students' writing difficulties. Many students reported low self-confidence and fear of making mistakes when writing in English. These feelings often led students to hesitate, write very short texts, or avoid more complex sentence structures.

One student stated:

"I am afraid my grammar is wrong, so I write short stories only."
(Questionnaire Response)

This response indicates that psychological barriers limited students' willingness to fully express their ideas. Although affective factors did not appear as frequently as linguistic errors in the written texts, they played a crucial role in shaping students' writing behavior and performance.

3.4 Strategies Used by Students to Overcome Difficulties

Despite these challenges, some students attempted to cope with their writing difficulties by employing certain strategies. Common strategies included translating Indonesian sentences into English using digital dictionaries or translation apps, and imitating sample texts provided by the

teacher. However, these strategies often led to literal translations and grammatical inaccuracies, rather than improved writing quality.

For example, several students produced sentences that closely mirrored Indonesian sentence patterns, indicating overreliance on translation tools. While these strategies helped students complete the writing task, they did not effectively address underlying linguistic and organizational problems.

Overall, the findings indicate that students' difficulties in writing English narrative texts were primarily linguistic, particularly grammatical errors related to tense usage. These were followed by limitations in vocabulary and difficulties with sentence and text organization. Affective factors, such as a lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes, further exacerbated these challenges. Therefore, the results suggest that students require intensive guidance not only in grammar and vocabulary development but also in building confidence and understanding narrative text structure.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that grade XII students at SMA Negeri 2 Pematangsiantar continue to experience persistent difficulties in writing English narrative texts, despite the implementation of curriculum reforms that emphasize student-centered and competency-based learning. These difficulties involve both linguistic limitations and affective constraints, indicating that writing challenges in EFL contexts cannot be addressed solely through curricular changes without corresponding pedagogical adjustments.

From a linguistic perspective, tense usage, particularly past tense verb forms, emerged as the most dominant difficulty. This persistence suggests that grammatical knowledge taught in classrooms may remain largely declarative rather than procedural. In other words, although students may be familiar with grammatical rules, they struggle to apply them accurately in extended writing tasks. This finding supports Hyland's (2021) argument that grammar instruction detached from meaningful writing practice often fails to transfer into actual writing performance. Therefore, the continued occurrence of tense-related errors reflects a gap between grammar instruction and its functional application in narrative discourse.

Vocabulary limitations also remained a significant barrier to effective narrative writing. Students' reliance on repetitive and basic lexical items indicates insufficient exposure to varied vocabulary within meaningful contexts. Although curriculum guidelines encourage communicative competence, vocabulary development may not be systematically integrated into writing instruction. This finding reinforces Nugroho and Anwar's (2023) claim that vocabulary instruction should be embedded within genre-specific writing tasks rather than taught in isolation.

In terms of text organization, students' difficulty in constructing narratives according to the generic structure suggests limited mastery of genre conventions. This problem persists despite the inclusion of genre-based instruction in the curriculum, possibly because genre features are often introduced explicitly but not practiced intensively through guided writing stages. As Rahayu and Widodo (2024) note, students require repeated exposure to model texts and explicit scaffolding to internalize genre structure. Without sufficient guided practice, students may understand the components of narrative texts theoretically but fail to apply them cohesively in their own writing.

Beyond linguistic challenges, affective factors such as low confidence and fear of making mistakes significantly influenced students' writing performance. These affective barriers may be exacerbated by an instructional focus on accuracy over process, where students perceive errors as failure rather than as part of learning. Rahmawati and Lestari (2023) emphasize that such negative emotional responses can limit students' willingness to experiment with language, resulting in shorter and less complex written texts. This suggests that affective readiness plays a crucial role in determining students' engagement and risk-taking in writing.

The interaction between linguistic difficulties and affective factors highlights the need for pedagogical approaches that address both aspects simultaneously. From a genre-based perspective, teachers are encouraged to implement explicit instruction on narrative structure through modeling, joint construction, and independent writing stages. This approach allows students to gradually internalize genre conventions while receiving sufficient support. Additionally, integrating grammar and vocabulary instruction within narrative contexts can help students see language forms as resources for meaning-making rather than isolated rules.

Furthermore, the findings support the application of a process-based writing approach. Process writing emphasizes planning, drafting, revising, and feedback, which can reduce students' anxiety and improve writing quality over time. By allowing students to revise their work and receive constructive feedback, teachers can foster a supportive learning environment that enhances confidence and motivation. This approach aligns with the current curriculum's goals, which prioritize meaningful learning experiences and learner autonomy.

Overall, this study suggests that students' persistent difficulties in narrative writing are not merely the result of individual limitations but also reflect the need for more pedagogically aligned implementation of curriculum principles. Addressing these challenges requires instructional practices that integrate linguistic support, genre awareness, and affective scaffolding to improve students' narrative writing competence.

4. Conclusion and Suggestion

This study investigated the difficulties encountered by twelfth-grade students of SMA Negeri 2 Pematangsiantar in writing English narrative texts, as well as the factors contributing to these difficulties. The findings demonstrate that students' writing problems can be categorized into linguistic and non-linguistic domains, which interact and collectively influence writing performance.

From a linguistic perspective, students experienced persistent difficulties in applying appropriate past tense forms, selecting suitable vocabulary, constructing grammatically accurate sentences, and organizing ideas according to the generic structure of narrative texts. These weaknesses resulted in narratives that lacked coherence, clarity, and structural completeness. The frequent occurrence of tense inconsistency and limited lexical variation indicates that students' grammatical and vocabulary knowledge has not yet been fully internalized or effectively applied in extended writing tasks.

Beyond linguistic challenges, affective factors such as low self-confidence and limited motivation were found to significantly affect students' narrative writing. Many students hesitated to express ideas due to fear of making grammatical errors, leading them to rely on simple sentence patterns and familiar vocabulary. This interaction between limited language mastery and negative emotional responses suggests that writing difficulties are not solely technical in nature but are also shaped by students' psychological readiness to write in a foreign language.

Based on these conclusions, several pedagogically oriented suggestions are proposed. English teachers are encouraged to integrate grammar instruction, particularly past tense usage, directly into narrative writing activities rather than teaching it in isolation. For instance, teachers can employ guided rewriting tasks in which students revise narrative drafts by focusing specifically on verb tense accuracy. To strengthen students' understanding of narrative structure, the use of model texts followed by joint text construction and scaffolded independent writing is recommended. Vocabulary development may be enhanced through context-based strategies such as lexical notebooks linked to narrative themes, peer discussion of word choices, and collaborative storytelling tasks.

Furthermore, teachers should adopt process-based writing instruction that emphasizes planning, drafting, revising, and feedback. Providing formative feedback that prioritizes meaning and organization before grammatical accuracy can help reduce students' writing anxiety and gradually build confidence. Creating a supportive classroom atmosphere in which errors are treated as part of the learning process is essential for encouraging students to experiment with more complex language forms.

For students, regular, structured writing practice is crucial for improving narrative writing competence. Students are advised to engage in extensive reading of narrative texts to enrich vocabulary, internalize narrative conventions, and develop greater sensitivity to language use in context. Maintaining writing journals or portfolios may also help students monitor their progress and reflect on recurring difficulties.

Finally, future researchers are recommended to explore students' writing difficulties across different genres or educational contexts, and to involve larger participant groups to obtain more comprehensive findings. Investigating the effectiveness of specific instructional interventions, such as genre-based or process-oriented approaches, may also contribute valuable insights to EFL writing pedagogy.

Thank You Note

The author expresses praise and gratitude to God Almighty for His grace and blessings, enabling the successful completion of this research and the writing of this article. The author acknowledges that the completion of this article would not have been possible without the support, assistance, and guidance of various parties.

The author extends his deepest gratitude to his supervisor, who patiently provided guidance, advice, and motivation throughout the writing process. Their guidance and input were invaluable in helping him complete this research in an academic and systematic manner.

The author also expresses his sincere gratitude to his beloved parents, who have provided constant prayers, moral support, affection, and unwavering encouragement. Their support has been a major source of strength for him as in faced various challenges during the preparation of this research.

In addition, the author extends sincere gratitude to SMA Negeri 2 Pematangsiantar, especially the students of class XII-2, for their cooperation, participation, and willingness to be involved in this research. Their contributions were essential in obtaining meaningful data for this study.

Furthermore, he would like to express his gratitude to himself for his perseverance, patience, and commitment to see this research through to completion. Every process, difficulty, and learning experience has been a valuable experience in his academic journey.

Finally, the author hopes that this article can provide benefits and contributions to the development of science, especially in the field of education and English language learning.

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