

## Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Mastery as Determinants of Junior High School Students' Descriptive Writing Performance

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### Abstract

*This study investigates the influence of reading comprehension and vocabulary mastery on the descriptive writing skills of junior high school students in East Jakarta. A quantitative research design was employed, with data collected from 70 eighth-grade students at two public schools. Three standardized instruments were administered to measure students' reading comprehension, vocabulary mastery, and descriptive writing performance. The data were analyzed using multiple regression to determine the extent to which the independent variables predicted students' writing abilities. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between reading comprehension, vocabulary mastery, and descriptive writing skills. Among the predictors, vocabulary mastery showed a stronger effect than reading comprehension, indicating its central role in shaping students' ability to produce coherent and vivid descriptive texts. The study emphasizes integrating reading comprehension strategies with explicit vocabulary instruction. Educational implications include curriculum development and teaching practices that promote reading engagement and lexical enrichment.*

**Keywords:** Reading comprehension; vocabulary mastery; descriptive writing skills; junior high school; quantitative study

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji pengaruh pemahaman membaca dan penguasaan kosakata terhadap keterampilan menulis deskriptif siswa SMP di Jakarta Timur. Desain penelitian kuantitatif digunakan dengan melibatkan 70 siswa kelas VIII dari dua sekolah negeri. Tiga instrumen standar digunakan untuk mengukur pemahaman membaca, penguasaan kosakata, dan performa menulis deskriptif siswa. Data dianalisis melalui regresi berganda guna mengetahui sejauh mana variabel independen memprediksi kemampuan menulis siswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya hubungan positif yang signifikan antara pemahaman membaca, penguasaan kosakata, dan keterampilan menulis deskriptif. Di antara prediktor tersebut, penguasaan kosakata memberikan pengaruh lebih kuat dibandingkan pemahaman membaca, yang menegaskan peran penting kosakata dalam membentuk kemampuan siswa menghasilkan teks deskriptif yang koheren dan hidup. Studi ini menekankan integrasi strategi pemahaman membaca dengan pengajaran kosakata secara eksplisit. Implikasi pendidikan meliputi pengembangan kurikulum dan praktik pengajaran yang mendorong keterlibatan membaca serta penguasaan kosakata siswa.

**Kata kunci:** Pemahaman membaca; penguasaan kosakata; keterampilan menulis deskriptif sekolah menengah pertama; penelitian kuantitatif

## INTRODUCTION

Writing is widely recognized as one of the most complex and essential skills in language learning, serving both communicative and academic purposes. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), writing competence becomes a decisive factor in students' academic success, as it requires them to integrate multiple linguistic, cognitive, and organizational skills. Among various genres of writing, descriptive writing holds a distinctive role because it demands that students portray objects, people, places, or events in ways that are vivid, structured, and meaningful. Effective descriptive writing not only enriches students' expressive abilities but also supports their capacity to engage critically with language and ideas (Nguyen & Rahman, 2023; Patel et al., 2024). In Indonesian junior high schools, however, many students struggle to produce descriptive texts that are coherent and engaging. Their challenges often arise from insufficient vocabulary knowledge and weak reading comprehension, which limit their ability to articulate ideas clearly and accurately.

Existing literature underscores the interdependence of reading comprehension, vocabulary mastery, and writing proficiency. Research suggests that students with strong reading comprehension skills are better able to recognize organizational patterns, narrative structures, and stylistic features in texts, which they can then transfer into their own writing (Grabe & Stoller, 2019; Graham & Harris, 2019). Similarly, vocabulary mastery provides the lexical resources necessary for students to select precise words, convey nuanced meanings, and maintain stylistic variety in descriptive texts (Nation, 2019; Lee & Kim, 2021). Yet, while these two competencies are individually acknowledged as significant contributors to writing development, fewer studies have examined their combined impact on students' descriptive writing performance, particularly within the Indonesian EFL context. This gap in the literature creates the need for more empirical studies that assess how reading comprehension and vocabulary mastery jointly predict students' ability to construct vivid and coherent descriptive writing.

The present study seeks to address this gap by investigating the effects of reading comprehension and vocabulary mastery on the descriptive writing skills of junior high school students in East Jakarta. Employing a quantitative design, the study examines both the individual and joint contributions of these two predictors to students' writing performance. Specifically, it aims to answer three research questions: (1) To what extent do reading comprehension and vocabulary mastery jointly influence students' descriptive writing skills? (2) How does reading comprehension alone affect students' writing performance? (3) How does vocabulary mastery alone affect students' writing competence? The significance of this study lies in its dual contribution: theoretically, it enriches the understanding of how reading and vocabulary interact to shape writing proficiency; practically, it offers insights for teachers, curriculum designers, and policymakers to integrate reading comprehension strategies and vocabulary instruction into literacy programs. The scope of this study is limited to eighth-grade students at two public junior high schools in East Jakarta, and while its generalizability may be

constrained, its findings provide valuable evidence for improving EFL writing instruction in similar contexts.

## METHOD

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the extent to which reading comprehension and vocabulary mastery affect students' descriptive writing skills. The design was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to determine both the individual and combined predictive contributions of the independent variables toward the dependent variable. Correlational and regression analyses were conducted to establish the statistical significance of the observed relationships.

### Participants

The participants were 70 eighth-grade students enrolled in two state junior high schools in East Jakarta, Indonesia. The schools were chosen purposively to represent typical urban public schools with diverse student populations. Participants' ages ranged from 13 to 14 years, with a relatively balanced proportion of male and female students. Inclusion criteria required students to be formally registered in the eighth grade during the academic year and to attend school regularly, while those with prolonged absences were excluded. The sample size met the minimum requirement for regression analysis, as recommended by Sudjana (1989) and Hadi (1986), ensuring sufficient statistical power for the study.

### Instruments

Three instruments were used to collect data:

1. Reading Comprehension Test consisted of 30 multiple-choice items that measured indicators such as main idea identification, inference, vocabulary in context, author's purpose, figurative language, and text interpretation.
2. Vocabulary Mastery Test also consisted of 30 multiple-choice items designed to assess students' knowledge of synonyms, antonyms, word meanings, word usage in context, and word categories.
3. Descriptive Writing Test required students to compose a descriptive text. Their writing was evaluated using a rubric that assessed content, organization, vocabulary use, grammar and sentence structure, as well as mechanics including spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

All instruments were validated through expert review and piloting. Validity tests confirmed that each item was statistically significant, while reliability tests using Cronbach's Alpha yielded coefficients above 0.6, indicating internal consistency.

### Procedures

Data collection was conducted in classroom settings over a two-week period. In the first session, students completed the reading comprehension and vocabulary mastery tests under standardized conditions. In the second session, students were

asked to produce a descriptive text within a set time limit. The researcher provided uniform instructions and monitored the process together with classroom teachers to ensure consistency and prevent bias.

#### Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS version 22.0 for Windows. Descriptive statistics (mean, median, standard deviation, and frequency distribution) were used to summarize students' performance. Before hypothesis testing, assumption tests including normality, homogeneity, linearity, and multicollinearity were conducted to confirm the suitability of regression analysis. Inferential statistics involved Pearson correlation to examine relationships between variables and multiple regression analysis to determine the predictive contributions of reading comprehension and vocabulary mastery toward descriptive writing skills.

#### Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were carefully observed. Approval was obtained from the school administration prior to data collection. Students and their guardians were informed about the purpose of the study, and consent was secured. Participation was voluntary, and students were assured that their responses would remain confidential and would not affect their academic grades. All collected data were used exclusively for research purposes, and no conflicts of interest were reported.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Overall Findings

The analysis of the data revealed significant effects of both reading comprehension and vocabulary mastery on students' descriptive writing skills. The multiple regression results indicated that the combined contribution of the two independent variables explained 80.3% of the variance in descriptive writing performance, with an F-value of 136.445 and a significance level of 0.000. This demonstrates that students with stronger reading comprehension and richer vocabulary resources are more capable of producing coherent, detailed, and vivid descriptive texts. Among the predictors, vocabulary mastery showed the strongest standardized coefficient ( $\beta = 0.584$ ), while reading comprehension also contributed positively ( $\beta = 0.284$ ). These findings suggest that while both skills are important, vocabulary mastery plays a more dominant role in shaping students' descriptive writing ability.

#### The Effect of Reading Comprehension

The findings confirmed that reading comprehension significantly contributes to students' descriptive writing performance, as evidenced by a t-value of 5.710 with a significance level below 0.05. Students with stronger comprehension skills were able to organize ideas more effectively and produce texts that demonstrated coherence and clarity. Reading comprehension not only helps learners understand how descriptive structures are developed but also supports broader linguistic development, including vocabulary growth, sentence formation, and stylistic variation. Exposure to diverse texts further provides students with models of



descriptive techniques that they can adapt in their own writing, enabling them to construct paragraphs that are both logically organized and linguistically accurate. Equally important, vocabulary mastery played a central role in shaping the quality of students' writing. A rich and contextually appropriate vocabulary allowed learners to create vivid imagery, convey precise meanings, and maintain stylistic engagement. As Nation (2020) and Webb and Nation (2022) emphasize, vocabulary development is incremental and requires systematic instruction reinforced by meaningful practice. Taken together, reading comprehension and vocabulary mastery operate synergistically: comprehension provides models of textual organization, while vocabulary supplies the lexical tools to realize those models in writing. When nurtured simultaneously, these competencies enable students to produce descriptive texts that are coherent, detailed, and expressive, thereby strengthening overall literacy and communicative proficiency.

Table 1 The Recapitulation Result for Linear Regression Coefficient Significance Test of The Effects of Reading Comprehension (X1) and Vocabulary mastery (X2) towards Student Descriptive Writing Skills (Y)

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	8.062	1.324		6.087	.000
X1	.284	.050	.310	5.710	.000
X2	.584	.038	.831	15.312	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Y

Table 1 displays the results of the partial (individual) effect tests, showing that both reading comprehension and vocabulary mastery have a statistically significant partial effect towards student descriptive writing skills, with p-values of 0.000 and 0.000, respectively both below the 0.05 threshold. The unstandardized coefficients (regression coefficients) are used to construct the regression equation and to determine the direction of effect. A positive coefficient indicates that as the value of the X variable increases, the value of the Y variable (student descriptive writing skills) also increases.

It can stated that there is a significant effect Reading Comprehension towards Student Descriptive Writing Skills. This is evidenced by the acquisition of Sig 0,000 < 0,05 and th= 5,710.

#### The Effect of Vocabulary Mastery

Vocabulary mastery emerged as the strongest predictor of descriptive writing skills, with a t-value of 15.312 ( $p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that the ability to select precise and contextually appropriate words enables students to produce writing that is vivid, accurate, and stylistically rich. Nation (2020) emphasizes that vocabulary knowledge underpins all aspects of language performance, including writing, by providing lexical resources that allow for clarity and expressiveness. Likewise, Webb and Nation (2022) note that repeated exposure to words in varied contexts strengthens both receptive and productive vocabulary, which translates into



improved writing outcomes. The findings of this study are consistent with those of Miller and Ginsburg (2020), who found that vocabulary development significantly improved middle school students' writing abilities, particularly in descriptive tasks. From table 1 it stated that there is a significant effect Vocabulary Mastery towards Student Descriptive Writing Skills. This is evidenced by the acquisition of Sig  $0,000 < 0,05$  and  $t_{th}=15.312$ .

#### Joint Contribution of Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Mastery

The findings of this study demonstrate that reading comprehension and vocabulary mastery jointly exert a significant influence on students' descriptive writing skills. The statistical analysis revealed a strong correlation ( $r = 0.803$ ) and a coefficient of determination of 80.3%, with the F-test confirming the significance of the model ( $F = 136.445, p < 0.05$ ). These results indicate that both variables are critical in shaping students' ability to produce coherent, vivid, and meaningful descriptive texts. Reading comprehension provides learners with the capacity to interpret texts, identify main ideas, and analyze structures, while vocabulary mastery equips them with the lexical resources needed to articulate ideas precisely. Together, these competencies form the foundation for effective writing development in junior high school students.

The interdependence between comprehension and vocabulary suggests that they operate in a complementary manner, reinforcing one another in the process of literacy acquisition. As highlighted by Grabe and Stoller (2019), comprehension relies heavily on lexical knowledge, while vocabulary growth is accelerated through exposure to authentic reading experiences. In descriptive writing, this synergy enables students not only to understand textual input but also to craft language that communicates sensory details effectively. Therefore, pedagogical approaches that integrate explicit vocabulary instruction with active reading strategies are likely to yield greater improvements in students' descriptive writing performance, reinforcing the need for holistic literacy instruction in EFL contexts.

Table 2 The Recapitulation Result of Multiple Correlation Test of The Effects of Reading Comprehension (X1) and Vocabulary mastery (X2) towards Student Descriptive Writing Skills (Y)

**Model Summary<sup>b</sup>**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.896 <sup>a</sup>	.803	.797	1.097

a. Predictors: (Constant), X2, X1

b. Dependent Variable: Y

Table 2 shows an R Square value of 0.803, indicating that 80.3% of the variation in student descriptive writing skills is explained by reading comprehension and vocabulary mastery. The remaining 19.7% is affected by other factors, such as students' ability to answer multiple-choice questions related to types of text.



Table 3 The Recapitulation Result for Regression Coefficient Significance Test of The Effects of Reading Comprehension (X1) and Vocabulary mastery (X2) towards Student Descriptive Writing Skills (Y)

**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	328.446	2	164.223	136.445	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	80.640	67	1.204		
	Total	409.086	69			

a. Dependent Variable: Y

b. Predictors: (Constant), X2, X1

Table 3 presents the ANOVA results, interpreting the F-test to determine whether the combined effects of X1 (Reading Comprehension) and X2 (Vocabulary Mastery) are statistically significant. With an F value of 136.445 and a significance value (p) of 0.000, which is less than 0.05, the model is considered a good fit. This result confirms that there is a significant joint effect of reading comprehension and vocabulary mastery towards student descriptive writing skills.

Referring to Table 3, it can be concluded that reading comprehension and vocabulary mastery have a significant combined effect towards student descriptive writing skills. This is supported by the significance value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05, and an F value of 136.445.

The multiple regression equation is represented as:  $Y = 8.062 + 0.284X1 + 0,584 X2$

In this equation, 8.062 is the constant, while 0.284 and 0.584 are the regression coefficients for reading comprehension (X1) and vocabulary mastery (X2), respectively. This means that if both reading comprehension and vocabulary mastery are not considered, student descriptive writing skills would be at a baseline of 8.062. For each 1-point increase in reading comprehension, student descriptive writing skills improves by 0.284, and for each 1-point increase in vocabulary mastery, student descriptive writing skills improves by 0.584. From table 2, it can also be explained that jointly the reading comprehension and vocabulary mastery variable contributed 80.3% to the student descriptive writing skills variable.

#### Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings are in line with previous studies. Chen and Huang (2020) demonstrated that reading comprehension and vocabulary growth are mutually reinforcing, both contributing significantly to writing performance. Similarly, Lai and Chien (2020) found that explicit vocabulary instruction improved not only vocabulary knowledge but also students' reading comprehension and writing quality. In the Indonesian context, studies by Basri (2020) and Fitriani et al. (2019) also reported that targeted literacy instruction improved students' ability to write descriptive texts more effectively. The present study strengthens this body of evidence by showing quantitatively that the combined effect of reading

comprehension and vocabulary mastery accounts for a substantial proportion of the variance in writing skills.

#### Implications and Limitations

The implications of these findings are twofold. Theoretically, they confirm the interdependence of reading, vocabulary, and writing in second language acquisition, supporting integrated models of literacy instruction. Practically, they suggest that teachers should design instructional activities that simultaneously foster reading engagement and vocabulary growth, such as reading authentic texts followed by writing tasks requiring the application of newly acquired vocabulary. However, the study has limitations, including its relatively small sample size and restriction to two schools in East Jakarta, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could expand the scope to include more diverse student populations and explore additional variables such as grammar mastery, motivation, or learning styles.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the influence of reading comprehension and vocabulary mastery on the descriptive writing skills of junior high school students in East Jakarta. The findings demonstrated that both variables significantly contributed to students' writing performance, with vocabulary mastery exerting a stronger effect than reading comprehension. Together, these skills accounted for more than eighty percent of the variance in writing outcomes, underscoring their central role in shaping students' ability to produce coherent, vivid, and stylistically effective descriptive texts.

The results highlight the importance of integrated literacy instruction that simultaneously strengthens reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge as a foundation for improving writing competence. This study contributes to the growing body of research by providing empirical evidence from the Indonesian context, showing that reading and vocabulary are not isolated skills but mutually reinforcing in supporting descriptive writing development.

Despite its contributions, the study is limited by its relatively small sample size and focus on two schools, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future research should include larger and more diverse populations and explore additional factors, such as grammar mastery, motivation, or digital literacy, that may also influence students' writing performance.

In conclusion, the study affirms that fostering both reading comprehension and vocabulary mastery is a pedagogical necessity for improving students' descriptive writing skills and overall language proficiency.

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