

**STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN WRITING DEFINITION PARAGRAPH  
AT THE THIRD SEMESTER STUDENTS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM OF STKIP NIAS SELATAN**

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**Abstract**

Writing is one of the main issues encounter by college students who learn English as foreign language. The third semester students of STKIP Nias Selatan encounter this problem. The students were unable to deliver their ideas into structural paragraph particularly when they were asked to write a definition paragraph. This study aims to reveal how are the difficulties faced by the students and what factors caused them. The research was designed in qualitative research design. The researcher collected the data from the students' papers and interview session. Initially, the researcher collected the students' paper and then analyzed them. Furthermore, the researcher conducted an interview to acquire what factors caused the difficulties. Based on the data analysis, the researcher found that the students encountered difficulties in writing definition paragraph. They found difficulties in the five aspects of writing. The factors that caused difficulties were: the ignorance of a well-organized paragraph, unconsciousness of non existence of a part of paragraph definition, not good at grammar, lack of vocabulary, unawareness of indentation usage, unawareness of the use of proper spelling, self ignorance of proper capitalization, and the inconducive environment and less time. Therefore, it is recommended to English lecturer to more emphasize in teaching grammar, vocabulary, the rules of writing definition paragraph in particular so that the students would be able to overcome the difficulties in producing a definition paragraph further, as well as for other genres of writing in general.

**Key words:** *Writing, definition paragraph, difficulty*

**Abstrak**

*Menulis merupakan salah satu persoalan utama yang dihadapi oleh mahasiswa yang mempelajari bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing. Mahasiswa semester tiga di STKIP Nias Selatan juga menghadapi persoalan ini. Mahasiswa tidak dapat menyampaikan gagasan mereka menjadi paragraph yang terstruktur, khususnya ketika mereka diminta untuk menulis paragraf definisi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkapkan bagaimana kesulitan yang dihadapi oleh mahasiswa tersebut dan apa saja faktor yang menyebabkan kesulitannya. Penelitian ini didesain menggunakan penelitian kualitatif. Peneliti mengumpulkan data dari hasil kerja siswa dan sesi*

wawancara. Awalnya, peneliti mengumpulkan hasil kerja siswa dan kemudian menganalisisnya. Selanjutnya, peneliti melakukan wawancara untuk memperoleh faktor yang menyebabkan kesulitan-kesulitannya. Berdasarkan hasil analisis tersebut, peneliti menemukan bahwa mahasiswa menghadapi kesulitan dalam penulisan paragraf definisi. Mereka menemukan kesulitan pada lima aspek menulis. Faktor-faktor yang menyebabkan kesulitan tersebut adalah: ketidaktahuan akan paragraf yang terorganisir dengan baik, ketidaksadaran akan ketiadaan bagian paragraf definisi, tidak menguasai tata bahasa, kekurangan kosakata, ketidaksadaran akan penggunaan indensi, ketidaksadaran akan penggunaan ejaan yang benar, ketidakpedulian akan kapital yang tepat, serta lingkungan yang kurang mendukung dan kurangnya waktu. Untuk itu, disarankan agar pengajaran akan lebih ditekankan pada tata bahasa, kosakata, dan aturan-aturan pada penulisan paragraf definisi pada khususnya sehingga mahasiswa akan mampu mengatasi kesulitan-kesulitan dalam penulisan paragraf definisi di masa yang akan datang sebagaimana dengan jenis tulisan lain pada umumnya.

*Kata kunci: Menulis; paragraf definisi; kesulitan*

## **Introduction**

Writing is simply about expressing ideas, opinions, thought, feeling, etc. on a piece of paper by using pen. It is an activity of transferring knowledge to others into written symbols or statement. In this era, most people use electronic tools such as computer to express their thought or ideas. Therefore, the way modern people do writing is by typing. Nonetheless, there are some skills needed to have a good written product. Brown (2015: 427) states, "Written products are often the result of thinking, drafting, and revising procedures that require specialized skills, skills not every speaker develop naturally". This is very clear that in writing there are some skills needed by writer to produce a good writing. They are vocabulary, grammar, language use, organization, spelling, mechanics, etc.

A process should be undergone to write something. Process is the steps of

doing something systematically or structurally. Therefore, there are some steps of writing process. Oshima and Hogue (2007: 15) states, "The process of writing has roughly four steps. In the first step, you create ideas. In the second step, you organize the ideas. In the third step, you write a rough draft. In the final step, you polish your rough draft by editing it and making revisions".

Third semester students of English Language Study Program of STKIP Nias Selatan learn writing subject. In their writing subject, the students learn definition paragraph with all the rules of writing definition paragraph and some examples of it includes its organization and sentence structure.

A preliminary study was done by collecting the third semester students' paper. There were 40 students who participated during this preliminary study

that consisting of 7 males and 33 females. Based on the preliminary study done by the researcher on students' writings of definition paragraph, there were found some mistakes made by the students in writing definition paragraph. Most of the students could not write a proper definition paragraph. From their own writing of definition paragraph there were found that the students got difficulties in determining topic sentence, supporting sentences, and concluding sentence of definition paragraph.

From the students' writing, writing or determining the topic sentence was incorrect. It did not display any definition of a certain term. It was also the same with supporting sentence written by the student was incorrect. It did not display any additional information or sentence of subject defined. In clear, the student's writing of definition paragraph as displayed above did not show any correct construction of definition paragraph.

Furthermore, based on the instruction given by the lecturer of that course stated on the paper to write a definition paragraph, there was found that most of the students wrote only the definition of what paragraph is. Indeed that was incorrect. This problem showed students' difficulties in writing definition paragraph as well.

The fact as explained above shows that the third semester students got the difficulty in writing definition paragraph. Therefore, the researcher was interested in

researching and revealing what difficulties faced by the third semester students, and even the factors that cause the difficulties. The researcher conducted a research entitles "**Students' Difficulties in Writing Definition Paragraph at the Third Semester of English Language Education Study Program of STKIP Nias Selatan**". The objectives of this research are:

1. To reveal the difficulties in writing definition paragraph faced by the third semester students of English Language Study Program of STKIP Nias Selatan.
2. To describe the causes of the difficulties in writing definition paragraph faced by the third semester students of English Language Study Program of STKIP Nias Selatan.

There were some related studies done about students' difficulties in writing. The first research was done Alisa et al (2019) The result of their study was there was significant problem in writing English. The findings revealed that the most significant problems are because of the students' lack of vocabulary mastery, problem in language use, problem in sentence construction grammatically, and problem in spelling. Another research result by Sura Muttalak Nasser (2022) proposed and classified the difficulties faced by the students into four aspect, they are grammar, punctuation, spelling and handwriting mistake. Some students made grammatical mistakes. In addition, the students were not aware of the importance

of using proper capitalization and punctuation marks. Furthermore, a study also conducted by Kristy Dwi Pratiwi (2016) As the result, the researcher found that the difficulties faced by the students related to linguistic difficulty (language use and vocabulary aspects) as the most difficult aspect compared to cognitive difficulty (organization and mechanic aspect) and physiology difficulty (content aspect).

The studies researched by previous researchers as stated above was about students' difficulties in writing. The difficulties they found were about the students' difficulties in English in general. However, the researcher in this study is going to reveal the difficulties in writing definition paragraph at the third semester students of English Language Education Study Program of STKIP Nias Selatan and the factors caused them. This research is more specified on difficulties in writing definition paragraph.

### Research Method

This research is designed in qualitative research design. A design in research is used to plan all things needed and how to proceed. All the settings must be natural and real to reveal the objectiveness of object or phenomenon researched. The object or phenomenon then is explained as what it is comprehensively to be understood. Beuving and Vries (2015:19) state "Broadly speaking, qualitative research in social science aims to

describe, interpret, and explain social reality through the medium of language (as opposed to quantitative research, which aims to do so through the medium of mathematics)".

This research is going to reveal the difficulties of writing definition paragraph experienced by third semester students of English Language Study Program of STKIP Nias Selatan. To reveal this phenomenon, the researcher plans design of the research and all things needed.

Some techniques were used in analyzing the data as elaborated below:

#### 1. Documentation

After the data had been collected, the researcher analyzed them by using technique of data analysis of Miles and Huberman (2014:9), as elaborated below:

##### a. Data condensation

After collecting the data, the researcher then selected and coded the mistakes made by the students in writing definition paragraph that definitely referring to the theory used. The students' papers then were evaluated through analytic scoring.

##### b. Data Display

In this section, the data were organized and displayed into readable and understandable table, as can be seen below:

##### c. Drawing Conclusion and Verification

In this last section, the researcher concluded and verified the result by noting the difficulties encounter by the students based on the data displayed.

## 2. Interview

After the result of the data analysis organized, an interview session then conducted by the researcher. The researcher initially interview five college students to acquire the factors that caused the difficulties in writing definition paragraph. The result of that interview was that the students conveyed similar responds of the questions delivered by the researcher. Based on this result, the data needed considered sufficient and the researcher ended the interview session. The data that had been collected in interview session were then transcribed into written form. Furthermore, the researcher classified the causes of difficulties experienced by the third semester students in writing the definition paragraph. In the end, the researcher verified the entire data, the finding and drew conclusion based on the finding of the research.

### Research Finding and Discussion

After collecting the data, the researcher found the result and organized them based on the five aspect of writing.

**Table 4.1**  
**The Result of Students' Worksheet**  
**Analysis at the Third Semester**  
**Students of English Language**  
**Education Study Program**  
**of STKIP Nias Selatan**

No.	Students' Difficulties	Causes of Students' Difficulties
1.	Providing supporting details/evidence;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Inability to express ideas;</li> <li>▪ Ignorance of a well-organized definition paragraph</li> </ul>
2.	Constructing concluding sentence;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unawareness of the existence of concluding sentence in paragraph</li> </ul>
3.	Stating cohesive and coherent idea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Inability to express idea properly;</li> <li>▪ Not good at grammar</li> </ul>
4.	Using singular/plural form;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Not good at grammar</li> </ul>
5.	Using appositives and adjective clause;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Not good at grammar</li> </ul>
6.	Formatting a good paragraph;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ignorance of proper organization of definition paragraph</li> </ul>
7.	Using indentation;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unaware of proper use of indentation</li> </ul>
8.	Word spelling;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of vocabulary</li> </ul>

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9.	Using proper capitalization;	▪ Ignorance of proper use of capitalization
10.	Using proper punctuation;	▪ Ignorance of proper mechanic in writing
11.	Using academic vocabulary	▪ Lack of vocabulary

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Source: Designed by Researcher (2021)

Based on the analysis, the researcher found that most of the students perform mistakes on basic part of good definition paragraph. The initial mistake found was that some students could not define the topic sentence properly. Secondly, some of the paragraph lack of supporting details, which, in fact, would help the readers to understand what is being defined. Then, some of the students did not provide a proper concluding sentence of the paragraph. Even some of the paragraph consisted of sentences that unrelated to the idea that is being defined. Furthermore, there were also some mistakes found on the sentence structure. Some of the sentences written by the students were intelligible. Besides, there were some mistakes due to the improper mechanic of writing. The last mistake found in the students' paper is the improper use of vocabulary. All the mistakes found in the students' paper

indicate the students' inability in producing well written definition paragraph.

After the data analyzed, the researcher selected the respondents to be interviewed to know their own difficulties in writing definition paragraph. The respondents were the representatives from the whole subjects. Based on paragraph conducted, some students confessed that their inability to write a good paragraph due to their inability to develop their idea into organized paragraph that is consisted of topic sentence, supporting sentence, and concluding sentence. This reason closely related to the lack of vocabulary mastered by the students. In addition, they also admitted that they were not good at grammar. This caused them to construct unintelligible sentence. The last issue they encountered was the use of improper writing mechanic. Their ignorance of the important use of proper mechanic has let them to maintain their wrong habit. Indeed, the responds stated by the students remarked the causes of their inability to produce a good definition paragraph.

The researcher in this research focused on finding students' difficulties and the causes of difficulties in writing definition paragraph experienced by the third semester students of English Language Education Study Program of STKIP Nias Selatan. The researcher was interested in researching this problem because the students still had the difficulty in writing in general, and in writing definition paragraph in particular. The

expectation of course is that this problem could be solved further.

The research finding showed that the third semester students had problem in writing definition paragraph. They found some difficulties in organizing their ideas in definition paragraph, developing them into coherent and cohesive sentences, in mastering grammar that of course related to constructing the sentences structurally and correctly, dealing with proper mechanics, and in using style and quality of expression. These difficulties were caused by unconsciousness of non-existence paragraph components, no grammar mastery, lack of vocabularies, unawareness of indentation usage, unawareness of the use of proper spelling, and self-ignorance of the using proper capitalization.

The third semester students of English Language Education Study Program of STKIP Nias Selatan as college students are expected to be able to produce well-written language. By learning what writing is and many genres of writing or the theories of writing are, they can produce a good writing product from their own academic writing. It is expected that in their academic writing at least will show what something is telling or explaining it correctly, as defined by Anker (2010: 205) that it is writing that tells or explains what a term or concept means. Moreover, they also are able to organize their ideas structurally in a paragraph, organize their sentences coherently and cohesively in a paragraph, use their own competence in

grammar, mechanics, style and quality of expression to deliver their ideas in a good paragraph.

The fact based on research result is the third semester students had some difficulties in writing definition paragraph. It is based on data analysis done by the researcher and proved by the students' papers of writing definition paragraph. The students' writing of definition paragraph showed the students encountered difficulty in dealing with proper paragraph organization. Mostly from the students' papers of writing definition paragraph, there was no concluding sentence made. Furthermore, they were difficult to construct the sentences grammatically, coherently, and cohesively; not notice the mechanics, punctuation, spelling, and style and quality expression. The most terrible one as the basis of English skills was they lacked of vocabulary that could have helped the students to produce a good definition paragraph.

There was the same thing happened obtained from the latest related research by Alisa et al (2019) about students' difficulties in writing EFL. The research result showed the significant problem faced by the students in writing English. It was because of the students' lack of vocabulary mastery, problem in language use, problem in sentence construction grammatically, and problem in spelling. Thus, it can be said that these things are the main points that cause the difficulties.

The research findings as elaborated above about difficulties faced by the third semester students of English Language Education Study Program of STKIP Nias Selatan implied that there must be much concern about these difficulties in writing definition paragraph, and the factors caused them. The lecturer who teaches writing subject is suggested to give much concern about the causes of those difficulties, so that the students may solve their own problem, and improve their writing of definition paragraph, and in writing in general.

### Conclusion and Suggestion

With the mistakes done by the students, it was urgent to undertake a study in order to reveal how the difficulties and what their causes are. The result is the students perform mistake on the five aspects of writing. Some of the factors that cause the difficulties are due to lack of mastery and/or unawareness of writing aspects. Moreover, there was also tendency to ignore some of the aspects needed to produce a well-written task. Besides, a conducive environment was one of the factors causes the students was unable to produce a good writing. Reflecting on these facts, we can see that the skill needed to write a good definition paragraph need to be mastered include the five aspects of writing. Since becoming competent in writing could help the students tackling bad atmosphere. Furthermore, based on the finding of this research, the researcher suggests:

1. English Lecturers need to emphasize the teaching of the basic competencies of English to the students in order that they would not face difficulty in doing their academic writing, such as: vocabulary, grammar, and writing in particular.
2. Students should not only depend on the lecturer for what is taught. The students must be more creative and active in browsing references to develop the basic knowledge taught by the lecturers. In addition, the students are also expected to make reading become one of their daily habits. By doing so, it would help the students to gain more insights on how to produce a good writing.
3. Next researcher to conduct further related researches so that the students can master all competencies of English skills and the result of the research can be as reference to minimize difficulty in English skills.

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