

**EMPLOYING PICTURE DESCRIPTION TO ASSESS STUDENTS' DESCRIPTIVE  
PARAGRAPH WRITING**

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**ABSTRACT**

Writing is considered as an important skill in learning process which is needed to be mastered by the students. However, in teaching learning process at schools or universities, the assessment of writing skill is not becoming the focus of learning process and the assessment is administered inappropriately. In this present study, the researcher undertook the study which dealt with assessing descriptive paragraph writing ability of the students through picture description by employing an ex post facto as the research design. The present study was intended to answer the research problem dealing with the extent of the students' achievement of descriptive paragraph writing ability which is assessed through picture description. The samples under the study were 40 students determined by means of random sampling technique with lottery system. The data were collected through administering picture description as the research instrument. The obtained data were analyzed by using norm-reference measure of five standard values. The results of the data analysis showed that there were 67.50% samples of the study were successful in writing descriptive paragraph, while there were 32.50% samples were unsuccessful in writing descriptive paragraph which was assessed by administering picture description test.

**KEYWORDS:** *assessing, descriptive paragraph, writing ability, picture description.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Teaching and learning process consists of two main important and inseparable activities, namely: teaching and assessment. Both teaching and assessment cannot be separated because they are integral parts of teaching and learning practices. Assessment can be used as a point of reference to improve the quality of teaching and learning (Mantra and Maba, 2018). Historically, assessment was more directed to measure the students' learning achievement to provide them numerical score, however

recently assessment has been considered to be the essential factor to boost the students' achievement (Maba and Mantra, 2018). It is a stepping stone towards the maximum level of the students' achievement. In short, it can be said that without knowing the students' existing ability, then it would be hard to move forward to the highest level of ability.

Consequently, teachers are urged to properly carry out assessment to gain a clear picture of their students' ability (Mantra, 2017). In English language teaching, teachers are put into the obliged position to assess the four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. This is comprehensibly understandable because the skill based curriculum put more emphasis in ensuring the students to have a good mastery in communication. It has become a consensus among the linguists and language educators that the ability to master the four language skills is the prime factor to support the ability in communicating appropriately both in academic and social contexts. Therefore, the assessment of the four language skills should continually and predominantly conducted by the teacher in English language teaching (Brown, 2004; Mantra and Maba, 2018).

Theoretically a good assessment of language skills certainly encourage slow learner to speed up their ability (Brown, 20104; Maba and Mantra, 2017). As a result, every teacher has to design and conduct the language skills assessment practices up to the highest standard to attain the purpose of the assessment. Therefore, it becomes a real challenge then for the teachers to design the appropriate assessment. There are number of rigid guideline to comply to create a valid and reliable assessment. Moreover, effective assessment should also reflect the students' authentic ability and the assessment content should really in conjunction with the learning syllabus currently used in teaching (Mantra, 2017). In addition, the assessment should also give a reflection of the extent of the students' positive attitude towards learning and the ability to create something as a result of their understanding.

One of the language skills that directly may show the students' creativity is writing (Mantra, 2017). Moreover, Oshima and Hogue (2007:15) state that writing is never a one-step action; it is an ongoing creative act. The process of writing has roughly four steps. In the first step is called prewriting, prewriting is a way to get

ideas. In this step, the students choose a topic and collect ideas to explain to the topic. In the second step is organizing, the students organize the ideas into a sample outline. In the third step is writing, students write a rough draft using their outline as guidance. In the final step is called polishing, in this step, students polish what they have written.

Assessment is really needed to be conducted to know students' ability in writing. Brown (2004:218) states that assessment of writing is not a simple task for the students to do. It needs hard thinking to produce ideas, words, sentences, paragraphs, and composition. On the other hand, the students are afraid in facing writing test because writing has many purposes, and it pushes the students' mind to find out the ideas. Oshima and Hogue (2007:196) state that there are five indicators to measure students' writing ability such as, format, punctuation and mechanics, content, organization, grammar and sentence structure.

Brown (2004:3) states that a test is an instrument to measure a person's ability, knowledge or performance in given domain. Thus, in the teaching and learning process, the teacher should have a test which is really able to measure the students' ability. Based on the observation, the English teacher of junior high school of this study used a very common test to assess descriptive paragraph writing. The students were simply given a topic and then the teachers asked the students to compose a descriptive paragraph about the topic.

This kind of test was not reliable to measure students' descriptive paragraph writing ability because it does not clearly show the generic structures of the paragraph to be used as a guidelines in writing the paragraph. Moreover, the students were difficult to imagine what they have to write since the test was not constructed clearly. The students generally asked to start write the paragraph because the teacher did not give any detail information about the topic. It made the students felt hard to do their writing. Additionally, the teacher also did not use scoring rubric to assess the paragraph that have been made by the students. It made the students did not know the strengths and weaknesses of their writing ability whether they did the test as well or not. Therefore, this kind of test made the students become unmotivated to write.

In this present study, the researcher intended to employ different form of writing assessment from the test that is commonly used by the English teacher to

assess the students' ability in writing descriptive paragraph. The researcher introduced a better test item that could be used to assess students' descriptive paragraph writing ability. The test was picture description. Picture description is very attractive for junior high school students because it gives clues to the students in writing a good descriptive paragraph. In this test, the researcher provided six pictures then the students chose one picture to be described by using their own words. The test allows students imagine the object easily and then write it in form of descriptive paragraph. In addition, the researcher also constructed a relevant scoring rubric to minimize subjectivity in marking the students' writing in order to provide fairness and objectivity in scoring and grading students' writing ability.

As a result, considering to the facts above, the researcher was interested in assessing descriptive paragraph writing ability of the eighth grade students of junior high school in academic year 2017/2018 through Picture Description. The results of this study were expected to contribute information feedback, which could be used in planning more effective way of assessing the students' writing skill.

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

The present study has dealt with assessing descriptive paragraph writing ability of the eighth grade students of a junior high school in Bali through picture description task. The present study used an ex post facto research design with descriptive analysis. The population of this present study was the eighth grade students of the total students were 445 students. Thus, with a certain academic consideration, data was collected from the smaller group of the population which was called as sample. The researchers used random sampling technique. In this present study, by means of random sampling technique with lottery system, the researcher took 40 students randomly which were regarded as the samples.

Research instrument is a significant factor in carrying out the research because it is important to get the data. The instrument of the present study was in the form of picture description test. The preparation and construction of valid and reliable research instrument is an important step of any scientific study. The data were collected by writing descriptive paragraph through picture description as the research instrument.

Moreover, students were given six pictures then they had to choose one of them to compose their writing in six to twelve sentences which consisted of the generic structure (identification, description, and conclusion) in thirty minutes. After the samples finished their test, the researcher scored the sample's paragraph writing by using scoring rubric that was adapted from Oshima and Hogue (2007:196).

In order to answer the research question under the study, the obtained data should be analyzed. The main purpose of the present study was to figure out the achievement of descriptive paragraph writing ability of the eighth grade students which was assessed through picture description. In this study, the process of data analysis was discussed in the following parts: (1) the scores were arranged from the highest to lowest, (2) finding out the mean scores, (3) the next step is to find out the standard deviation (SD), (4) The obtained research findings, data were analyzed by using norm-reference measure of five standard values.

### **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

The final data were analyzed by using norm-reference measures of five standard values, showing excellent, good, sufficient, insufficient and poor achievement of speaking ability. The first thing that should be figured out was the average score or the mean score (M) and the standard deviation (SD) of the raw score. After the mean and the standard deviation of the samples under the study had been respectively computed, now the converted standard scores using norm-reference measures of five standard values that showed excellent, good, sufficient, insufficient, and poor achievement were analyzed critically and systematically.

The results of the data analysis were analyzed by using norm-reference of five standard values clearly pointed out that 5.00% of samples under study got excellent achievement of descriptive paragraph writing; 30.00% of samples, good achievement; 32.50% of samples, sufficient achievement; 25.00% of samples, insufficient achievement; and 7.50% of samples, poor achievement. Based on percentage calculation, the findings of the present study which was collected by using picture description task clearly pointed out that there were 67.50% samples under study that

were successful in writing descriptive paragraph. Meanwhile, the other 32.50% samples under study failed in writing descriptive paragraph.

The result of the present study showed that in term of format, some of the samples had been able to put the title in the correct order, and indented the first sentence. They also gave margin on both sides so that their paragraphs were tidy enough. However, the other samples in the present study did not indent their first sentence which was as identity to start a paragraph. Furthermore, there were some of the samples did not give margin and used correction too much, so that make their works untidy.

In term of punctuation and mechanics, all of the samples under study put a period at the end of every sentence in their paragraph. The samples of the present study were able to use capital letters and commas in their descriptive paragraph correctly. However, in writing descriptive paragraph, a few samples of the study wrote misspelling words. In addition, the researcher also found some samples were not able to place lowercase letters and commas correctly.

Furthermore, most of the contents of the students' paragraph were good enough. Most of the samples of the present study could write a paragraph which was fit the assignment. In this present study, the students had done their paragraph according to the instructions that had been written above the pictures. However, some of the samples did not write a coherent paragraph in which there was no transition signal in each sentence from the paragraph which related the first sentence to the next sentences. Moreover, they commonly used simple sentence in conducting their paragraph.

In organization, some of the samples of the study were able to write a paragraph with a clear identification. Moreover, they were able to write a paragraph with clear description that could picture the object that they were being described. However, a few samples had problem in writing a conclusion. They forgot to end their paragraph with concluding sentence. In term of grammar and sentence structure, it was found that some samples could write a descriptive paragraph with a good grammar. However, some samples often forgot to put suffix-s or -es behind the noun when the

noun was plural. In addition, some samples of the study were still confused when they should use "is" and "are" in referring to singular and plural noun.

### **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

In reference to the discussion of the findings, it can be concluded that picture description task is significantly useful to measure the descriptive paragraph writing ability of the junior high school. The findings indicated that crystal clear facts related to the existing ability of the students in descriptive paragraph could be established. Therefore in respect to the findings, then some suggestion can be forwarded that teachers should carefully consider the usability of picture description task to assess students' writing ability. Researchers are suggested to critically plan further study to uncover the benefits of picture description for further futuristic practices in language assessment as well its dissonant principles to its real practices in English language classroom.

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