

## **REALIA IN EFL CLASSROOM: PROMOTING DESCRIPTIVE WRITING PROFICIENCY OF EIGHTH-GRADERS**

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### **Abstract**

*Advancing students' writing skill as one of the benchmarks for the quality of literacy requires practical learning innovation. One of the models offered in this study was realia in English as a foreign language class. This research was conducted to determine if realia as a learning medium was effective to improve the students' descriptive writing ability. Quantitative was the design of this research in the form of a pre-experiment. The sample of this study consists of 19 students, 9 for male students, and 10 for female students. They were class eight at SMPIALA'roof, Loceret, Nganjuk. The study was for three weeks and conducting five meetings. Two meetings are for collecting the data on the pre-test and post-test, and three meetings are to provide treatment to the students using realia as a learning medium in a descriptive writing class. The assessment criteria carried out include content, style, and mechanics. The data analysis indicated that the students' descriptive text writing achievement improved significantly. Therefore, it could be concluded that teaching realia writing helped develop the students' descriptive writing skills.*

**Keywords:** *Realia, Descriptive Text, Writing.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Writing and reading become the main essential benchmarks for children during their growth and development. However, the condition of literacy in Indonesia, especially interest in writing in children is still low. The survey results in 2015 launched by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) showed that the Indonesian students' writing skills have slightly improved and are still ranked 60<sup>th</sup> out of 72 countries.

In a speech entitled "Building a Smart Generation of Indonesia Through Writing Habits" held in Central Jakarta, Nurman Siagian in Ramadhini said that based on research conducted by the Education Ministry in 2016. It was stated that 73% of Indonesian children were still categorized as lacking in writing competence. The low writing culture is also influenced by the rapid development of gadgets so that children

are lazy to write by hand. Still, it is also caused by the weakness of children to express ideas or argue and understand what they have learned.

Writing is a way of visualizing thoughts in certain symbols that others can understand. According to Lado (1964), Writing is a partial representation of the expression unit. In academic activities, students are expected to define keywords and phrases to show their teachers that they understand the related terms clearly. When vital words cannot be understood clearly, the reader may misunderstand the text. Therefore, not only focusing on speaking skills but writing in the target language also needs to be mastered by students. Linse (2005) stated, "Writing is a productive skill because the focus is on producing information. But when they write, they have more time to think about what they want to write. This is why their sentence must be true". Supported by Oshima and Hogue (1997), "Writing is a progressive activity. This means that when students first write something, they have already thought about what they are going to say and how they are going to say it".

Success in writing cannot be separated from a teacher. Teachers as professionals must have the ability to apply various theories or media in learning and choose and apply a practical learning method approach. The success of the teaching and learning in the class is determined by the willingness and ability of students to write. Writing classes are a particular challenge for students and teachers because they need to creatively develop linguistic competence and communicative skills (Hidayati, 2018). Therefore, writing skills are fundamental to be developed by both students and teachers in language classes.

In this case, the researcher who is also a teacher wants to try to use *realia* as a medium in carrying out learning activities in writing descriptive texts for eighth-grade students. Soames (2010) said, "In TEFL classes, the word *realia* means using real things found in everyday life as a tool for teaching English. Using *realia* can help to learn English to be memorable by creating connections between objects and the words or phrases they represent." Here the researcher will use *realia* as a descriptive text

learning media. The researcher believes that *realia* as a learning medium will improve the ability to write descriptive texts for eighth-graders at SMPI Al A'roof Loceret Nganjuk.

Research on *realia* has been raised in several previous studies. For example, Rosdiana (2017) focused on the context of descriptive writing for grade 7 students found that *realia* used as a learning medium could improve students' writing skills. This learning media was very suitable for improving students' writing description skills. It was evidenced by the increase in student scores as seen in students' post-test scores, which were better than their pre-test scores.

In line with Rosdiana (2017), several other studies use *realia* as a learning medium in writing descriptions. Among them were Qudsiyah (2020), Astuti (2020), Bidatolok (2020), Sumarsih (2021), and Dely (2021). While Medissa (2018) uses *realia* as a learning medium in the context of writing procedures for grade 7 students, and Hana (2020) in the context of writing in general, which was combined with students' physical responses for grade 8. There are several similarities from the several studies above, including being applied in descriptive writing for students of junior high school, and some of the differences are applied in the procedural text writing class, and some are combined with students' physical responses and writing classes in general for higher-level students, namely high school and college. The description above shows that research on *realia* is critical to be continued in writing class. In this case, the author will focus this research in the context of a descriptive writing class for 8<sup>th</sup> graders.

### ***Realia***

In language teaching, *realia* is a tangible object around the class as a medium or equipment to be discussed or written down used in the learning process (Richards and Platt (1992). *Realia* is a term used in educational science to refer to particular real-life objects. In education, *realia* is an object from real life that is used in learning in language classes.

Why is *realia* so helpful in teaching?. Saomes (2010) said, “By presenting information through a variety of media, *realia* helps to make English input as comprehensive as possible and to build associative bridges between the classroom and the world”. *Realia* in the class can use natural objects are around the class as aids to teach descriptive writing. *Realia* helps the students memorize English subjects because it connects directly to the words or phrases they represent.

Young learners are the perfect age to learn a language. It is because they use most visible part to learn. According to Emine (2015), to make learning much easier to remember and fun, students must see or feel directly the objects used in real life. Belward (1987) said the same thing, that the *realia* used should be authentic materials from certain cultures.

*Realia* will be a fun medium in teaching descriptive writing. It can help the students know some vocabulary about colors, shapes, and sizes by looking at the objects described directly. Still, a teacher needs to consider how many new words will be in the material. If students see the material in actual, they may need to study because they will find a lot of unfamiliar vocabulary. Chiarantiono (2015) stated “*realia* concretizes vocabulary and language and places them in a frame of reference. For example, to illustrate and teach vocabulary for objects, animals, fruits, etc. Teachers can use real objects, dolls, bags, pencils, or fruits. It is a very useful tool in making something abstract concrete”.

### **Descriptive Paragraph Writing**

Writing must be learned and mastered by the students. Harmer (2004) stated, “Writing is one of the four skills that students must master. It has formed part of the syllabus in teaching English”. “Writing is taught after listening, speaking, and reading” (Oshima & Hogue, 1999). It can be understood that writing is an essential aspect in teaching and learning English because it can combine with three more aspects of English. Students not only need to speak, listen and read, but they also need to learn to write.

“Writing in the true sense, which is a reflection of the reading process to get an idea to be written” (Murphy, 2005). Nunan (2003) corroborates this statement, who said, “Writing is a thought process to get ideas, express them, and arrange them into statements and write paragraphs. In addition, writing is a whole-brain activity, which uses the right side of the brain (emotions) and the left side of the brain (logic); although the right and left sides of the brain are used in writing, the right side of the brain has a great position because it is the place, which comes to the idea, and new emotions”, and this is in line with what Raimes said, "Writing is the skill of expressing ideas, feelings, and thoughts that are arranged in words, sentences, and paragraphs using the eyes, brain, and hands". Formulating and organizing ideas in the right words to be conveyed and communicated to readers in written works.

Discussing writing skills cannot be separated from understanding text elements, such as descriptive text. In this case, a descriptive paragraph is a paragraph that mostly describes a person, place, or event particularly. Jolly (1984) explained, “There are five types of descriptive writing paragraphs, namely describing a process, describing an event, describing a personality, describing a place, and describing an object”. In general, there are three parts of descriptive text; the first is the social function to describe certain people, places, or things. Then the general structure is divided into two, namely identification to identify the phenomenon to be described and description to describe parts, qualities, and characteristics. The last is a significant lexico-grammatical feature, namely focusing on certain participants, using the simple present tense. Another source, Pardiyo (2007) argued that there are three descriptive parts, namely the first communicative purpose, which describes an object (human and non-human). The second is the rhetorical structure which is divided into two parts, namely 1) identification, which is a statement consisting of one topic to be described, and 2) description, which consists of a detailed description of the object identified in the identification, and 3) grammatical patterns, which need to be

understood. In the descriptive paragraph, declarative sentences are used, and the present form is used.

## METHODOLOGY

It is quantitative research using the experimental design that applied a one-group pre-test and post-test (Sugiyono, 2016). The population in this study were eighth-grade students of SMPI Al A'roof, Loceret, Nganjuk. The researcher used one class as the sample in this study, with 19 students, consisting of nine boys and ten girls.

The instrument used in this research was an essay test conducted in pre-test and post-test were carried out each for 90 minutes by describing an object in the environment around the class. This researcher had five meetings for this study. The first meeting was a pre-test conducted to determine the students' abilities in descriptive writing before applying *realia*. The next three meetings provided treatment or taught students to write descriptive texts using *realia*. The last was a post-test conducted to determine whether students' abilities had increased in descriptive writing after being treated using *realia*.

The assessment rubric used for assessing student work in writing descriptive texts was to consider several factors as shown in table 1.

*Table.1. Descriptive Writing Assessment Rubric*

ASSESSMENT	SCORE
<b>CONTENT 55</b>	
The accuracy of the information based on the topic	20
The relevancy of the supporting details to the main idea	20
Organization of the idea	15
<b>STYLE 25</b>	
Grammar use	15
Diction	10

**MECHANIC 20**

Use of the capital letter	10
Punctuation	10
<b>TOTAL SCORE</b>	<b>100</b>

(Heaton, 1998)

The data results obtained from the pre-test and post-test were then processed by using the SPSS application to determine the average of the pre-test and the post-test value. Finally, the average pre-test and post-test scores that have been obtained were calculated to determine the difference. Further information sought from the results of data processing with SPSS is the t-value which will be compared with the t-table with the significant level of 0,05 to determine whether the results are significant or not. If t-value > t-table so the result is significant and if t-value < t-table, the result is not significant.

**RESULT/FINDINGS**

This study was conducted to determine whether *realia* is effective on students' descriptive writing skills. Researchers conducted research in the eighth grade of SMPI Al A'roof, Loceret, Nganjuk for three weeks with five meetings. The researcher used one class as the sample in this study, with 19 students, consisting of 9 boys and ten girls. The results of data collection can be seen in table 2.

*Table 2. The Improvement of students' score*

<b>Aspect of Writing</b>	<b>Mean Score of Pre-test</b>	<b>Mean Score of Post-test</b>	<b>The Improvement</b>
Content	46.736	48.263	1.526
Style	16.526	19.263	2.736
Mechanic	12.842	15.684	2.842
<b>Total</b>	<b>76.105</b>	<b>83.210</b>	<b>7.105</b>

Table 2 describes the scores of the three writing aspects taken from pre-test and post-test. The content value has increased from 46,736 to 48,263, the style has increased from 16,526 to 19,263, and the mechanic has increased from 12,842 to 15,684. From all aspects, it increased by 7,105 from 76,105 to 83,210. The data above show that *realia* effectively improved all aspects of students' descriptive writing.

Table 3. The Analysis of Hypothesis

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Interval of the					
				Std. Err or Mean	Lower				Upper
Pair 1	Sebelum Perlakuan Sesudah Perlakuan	-7,10526	3,36476	,77193	-8,72703	-5,48350	-9,205	18	,000

Table.3 shows the t-value is 9.205 which means that the data was significantly based on the t-table (2.130) t-value in table.3 was higher than the t-table (9.205 > 2.130) at the significant level of 0.05. It suggests that H1 was accepted if *realia* was effective in improving students' writing descriptive text skills and rejected if *realia* was not effective in improving students' descriptive writing skills. So it could be concluded that the hypothesis of this study was accepted.

## DISCUSSION

The initial activity in this study was to do a pre-test on the students. This stage was carried out to determine the condition of pre-writing, writing drafts, and the results of students' writing before being given treatment. This process was in line with Kartono, et al (2009: 90) who said, "Writing is seen as a series of flexible activities. The series of activities in question included pre-writing, drafting, revision, editing,



and publication or discussion”. Here the researcher found that students were still confused about what they should write because they had difficulty finding ideas to write about. Then it was found that they had difficulty expressing ideas and organizing words and sentences to become good descriptive paragraphs. In addition, they also have difficulty choosing and using the appropriate vocabulary in their writing. Another fact shows that they always find it challenging to use grammar to be applied in sentences arranged into paragraphs.

After doing a pre-test, the researchers treated the students by applying *realia* as a learning medium. This treatment was carried out in three meetings by providing material relevant to students' abilities. Finocchiaro (1973) said, “To be successful in writing, the material must be relevant to students' interests, needs, capacities, and ages until they can make a composition with their point of view or even without making mistakes in their writing”. The researcher tried to apply the theory stated by Finocchiaro by teaching students with relevant material in this treatment so that students could relate to real objects directly and help students to find and develop their ideas; the researcher used *realia* as a medium. Objects in the classroom and its surroundings could be called *realia* as a medium in this research. By using *realia*, the researcher explained the concept of descriptive material and how to build a good descriptive paragraph. The researcher instructs the students to draw up an outline and build it into a paragraph by using real objects around them as a medium. Then they submitted it to the researcher to be evaluated and given feedback.

The researcher found changes in students' behavior in the class, they became more focused, enthusiastic, and motivated after using *realia* as a medium, and learning became more lively and fun. According to Arsyad (2011), “a good learning medium is anything that can be used to convey messages or information in the teaching and learning process so that it can stimulate students' attention and interest in learning”. Students who were more focused, enthusiastic, and motivated in learning were easier to find ideas for writing, especially when they were faced with real

objects, which was very helpful for students because the objects were not abstract. From here, they began to develop ideas that they would write with more focus on the objects they faced directly, and they easily found the right vocabulary to be assembled in descriptive writing.

The researcher conducted a post-test at the last meeting and analyzed it. It was done to see the extent to which the increase in student achievement in writing descriptive texts after being given treatment using *realia*. The researcher found an improvement in every aspect of writing (see table 2). These results were better than before. However, there were still some weaknesses in the results of students' writing on the post-test. For example, students still often forget to write the article "a" in front of nouns to express singular nouns and add the letter "s" at the end of nouns to express plural properties. In addition, some students still made mistakes in writing verbs for the 3rd person singular such as "He and She", where they still used verbs without the addition of the letter "s" behind it. This was where students needed feedback so that they could find out their mistakes and correct them. "Providing effective written feedback is one of the most important tasks for English writing teachers" (Hyland, 1998). So with good feedback, it would help students to be able to produce better writing.

The researcher saw that several other factors influence why students' achievement in writing descriptive texts increased. These factors included that students were given treatment in the morning at 07.00 to 08.30 because, in the morning, students were still in a fresh condition where the level of concentration was still high. According to J. Biggers (1980), studying in the morning is more effective than studying at other times. It is because students are still in a new condition, and brain memory is still empty, so they can absorb the material being taught optimally. On the other hand, the class arrangement also affected the students' achievement. Here, the researcher set the students to sit in a semi-circular position to see what the teacher explains perfectly without being hindered by friends sitting in front of them.

*Realia* or real objects were very easy to obtain in learning. Teachers and students could get it in the classroom or outside the classroom or even students or teachers themselves who could be a medium in carrying out the descriptive writing learning process. It proved that the learning media used in the classroom did not have to be expensive but could help students understand the material being taught better. According to Azhar Arsyad (2011), “The main function of learning media is as a teaching aid that also influences the climate, conditions, and learning environment that is organized and created by the teacher”. Thus, the teacher must be creative and observant to find the right learning media and easy to get around the classroom. Most importantly, the media used can have a positive effect on learning.

Overall, this study succeeded in proving that *realia* was adequate to be used as a medium in learning to write. This result was in line with similar previous studies. Rokhmawaty (2010) studied *realia* as a medium in improving students' speaking skills in procedural texts in MTs. Mathalibul Huda Mlonggo Jepara. He found that using *realia* in teaching speaking can improve students' speaking skills. Mulyani (2015), who researched *realia* to improve students' speaking skills at SMPN Salatiga also found that *realia* could improve students' speaking skills. Kurnia (2016), who has researched *realia* in teaching vocabulary, also claims an increase in students' vocabulary mastery regarding objects in the class, parts of the human body, and fruits after being taught using *realia*. This study and several previous studies showed that *realia* was very good to be applied in learning because it had been proven successful in improving writing, speaking, and vocabulary mastery.

There were several limitations to this study. Although *realia* was effective in improving the writing achievement of 8<sup>th</sup> graders, it was not necessarily effective for 9th graders where they are concentrating on taking exams. Then this learning is effective because it was carried out offline, which means that teachers and students can interact directly. However, different results may be obtained when this learning is carried out online. Teachers and students cannot interact effectively because there will

be technical problems such as poor signal, limited data packets, and other technical problems. The success of the application of *realia* as a learning medium was also inseparable from the timing of the implementation of learning carried out in the morning where learning in the morning is more effective than studying at other times (Biggers, 1980). On the other hand, the learning time carried out in the afternoon or evening will not guarantee the success of the application of *realia* as a learning medium as the physical and mental conditions of students have decreased. The absorption of the material being taught cannot be maximized.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings above, it can be inferred that *realia* was effective in improving students' writing descriptive text skills. It was because students can come into direct contact with the object being studied. It can be seen that all aspects of students' writing improved significantly. *Therefore, Realia* can be applied in teaching writing descriptive texts and other types of texts and other skills in English such as speaking, reading, and vocabulary. It means that *realia* is one of the effective media to use as a medium in learning English widely. So, the researcher recommends that *realia* be considered a learning medium to be applied in English classes, and this can also be a reference for future research.

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