
**GENDER DIFFERENCES IN WRITING ABILITY: A STUDY ON
DESCRIPTIVE TEXTS AMONG NINTH-GRADE STUDENTS****Zola^{1*}, Zulfariati², Risza Dwiputri³**¹Universitas Mahaputra Muhammad Yamin
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Email : risza.dwiputri@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to examine gender-based differences in English descriptive writing performance among ninth-grade students at SMPN 1 Kubung during the 2024/2025 academic year. Employing a descriptive quantitative research design, the study involved a purposive sample of 16 students, comprising 8 male and 8 female participants randomly selected from Class IX.1. Data were collected through a writing assessment in which students composed descriptive texts based on one of ten visual prompts. Writing samples were evaluated independently by three trained scorers using standardized criteria, including topic selection and themes, description structure and character development, self-expression and emotional depth, length, and language use and style. The results indicated that male students achieved a marginally higher mean score (58.86) compared to female students (55.96). While both groups demonstrated strength in aligning their writing with the selected topics, they exhibited similar challenges in producing sufficiently detailed and elaborated texts. These findings highlight the nuanced influence of gender on writing proficiency and underscore the need for instructional approaches that are sensitive to gender-related differences in skill development. The study contributes valuable insights for educators and researchers seeking to design targeted interventions to improve descriptive writing competence among secondary school learners.

Keywords: Gender differences, descriptive writing, writing assessment, English language learning, secondary education

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a fundamental component of language acquisition and plays a pivotal role in learners' academic development and capacity for self-expression. According to Troyka (2017), writing serves as a medium through which individuals communicate ideas to an audience with specific purposes in mind. Linse (2019) further contends that writing encompasses both a process—characterized by planning, drafting, and revising—and a product shaped by sustained practice and skill refinement.

Among the factors influencing writing proficiency, gender has emerged as a critical variable attracting increasing scholarly interest. Prior research has attributed gender-related differences in writing performance to a combination of biological, cognitive, social, and cultural influences (Cameron, 2013; Suprpto et al., 2018). For example, Adams et al. (2015) report that female students often demonstrate heightened engagement and creativity in composing written texts, possibly reflecting broader socialization patterns that encourage expressive communication. In contrast, other studies have suggested that male students may excel in aspects such as logical organization, task orientation, and conciseness (Noviza, 2023). These divergent findings point to a complex interplay of factors, including self-efficacy beliefs, instructional practices, and gendered expectations, that shape how students develop and apply their writing skills. Despite this body of work, relatively few studies have systematically examined how such differences manifest in specific genres, such as descriptive texts, which require the ability to convey vivid detail and clear structure.

This gap is especially salient in the Indonesian educational context, where descriptive writing constitutes a key component of the English curriculum. However, evidence regarding how gender influences descriptive writing performance among Indonesian secondary students remains limited and inconclusive. SMPN 1 Kubung, a public junior secondary school in West Sumatra, represents an important setting for this inquiry. Preliminary observations and internal assessments at the school have revealed inconsistencies in students' writing outcomes that appear to correlate with gender, underscoring the need for a more rigorous examination.

Accordingly, this study aims to investigate gender differences in descriptive writing ability among ninth-grade students at SMPN 1 Kubung. By identifying the specific dimensions of descriptive writing where male and female students may differ, this research seeks to address an important gap in the literature and inform the development of pedagogical approaches that are responsive to gender-related variations in writing competence.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive quantitative design to explore gender differences in students' writing ability, specifically in composing descriptive texts. This design was chosen because it allows for systematic observation, description, and quantification of phenomena as they occur naturally, without manipulating any variables. According to Creswell (2018), descriptive quantitative research is well suited for investigating group differences using

numerical data to generate statistically analyzable results. In this study, the design enabled the collection of measurable data on student writing performance and the identification of patterns associated with gender. While no causal relationships were examined, the approach facilitated a structured analysis of the current state of students' writing abilities across gender lines.

Participants and Sampling

The study was conducted at SMPN 1 Kubung during the 2024/2025 academic year. The population consisted of all ninth-grade students enrolled at the school. Using cluster random sampling, Class IX.1 was selected as the study sample. To ensure balanced representation, a purposive subsample of 16 students—8 male and 8 female—was drawn from the class using simple random sampling. Class IX.2 was designated as a tryout class for piloting the research instrument.

Although the sample size was limited due to practical constraints, this study is intended as a preliminary investigation to provide insights into potential gender-based writing differences and inform the design of larger-scale studies in the future. Thus, while findings are not generalizable to all populations, they serve as a valuable exploratory foundation.

Instrumentation

The primary instrument was a descriptive writing task, in which students were instructed to select one of ten visual prompts and compose a descriptive text based on it. The prompts depicted familiar objects, scenes, and everyday experiences to stimulate descriptive expression. Students were given 35 minutes to complete the task under standardized classroom conditions.

A scoring rubric was developed to assess five core aspects of writing:

- 1) Content and Topic Relevance
- 2) Organization and Structure
- 3) Detail and Expression
- 4) Language Use and Grammar
- 5) Text Length and Completeness

Each criterion was rated on a 4-point scale (1 = Beginning, 4 = Proficient). The rubric was adapted from second language writing assessment guidelines (Brown, 2015) and further refined based on feedback from two experienced English language educators. These experts

reviewed the rubric for clarity, alignment with instructional goals, and cultural appropriateness, enhancing its content validity.

Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established through expert judgment and the pilot testing process in Class IX.2. Following the pilot, minor revisions were made to the prompt phrasing and rubric descriptors for clarity. Construct validity was assessed using item-level analysis in SPSS 22. As shown in Table 1, the validity coefficients (Pearson correlation values) for each writing component across male and female groups exceeded the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.30 (Sugiyono, 2020), confirming that the rubric reliably measured the intended constructs.

Table 1: Result of Validity of Instrument by Using of SPSS

Gender	Component	Pearson Correlation Total Score	Coefficient Level	Description
Female	C	,360	0,3	Valid
	O	,777	0,3	Valid
	G	,700	0,3	Valid
	V	,777	0,3	Valid
	M	,639	0,3	Valid
Male	C	,950	0,3	Valid
	O	,861	0,3	Valid
	G	,880	0,3	Valid
	V	,968	0,3	Valid
	M	,919	0,3	Valid
Female	C	,870	0,3	Valid
	O	,756	0,3	Valid
	G	,922	0,3	Valid
	V	,882	0,3	Valid
	M	,878	0,3	Valid
Male	C	,945	0,3	Valid
	O	,876	0,3	Valid
	G	,852	0,3	Valid
	V	,884	0,3	Valid
	M	,889	0,3	Valid
Female	C	,882	0,3	Valid
	O	,570	0,3	Valid
	G	,770	0,3	Valid
	V	,922	0,3	Valid
	M	,934	0,3	Valid
Male	C	,823	0,3	Valid
	O	,795	0,3	Valid
	G	,784	0,3	Valid
	V	,887	0,3	Valid
	M	,772	0,3	Valid

Scoring and Inter-Rater Reliability

Three raters independently scored the student writing samples: an English teacher, an English lecturer, and the primary researcher. Prior to formal scoring, a calibration session was held to ensure consistent application of the rubric criteria. Each rater assessed all 16 scripts individually.

To assess inter-rater reliability, the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) was computed using SPSS. The resulting ICC value was 0.87, indicating a high level of agreement among raters (Landis & Koch, 1977). This strong consistency supports the reliability and objectivity of the scoring process.

Instrument Reliability and Scoring Procedures

In addition to content validity, internal consistency reliability of the scoring rubric was assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha, calculated with SPSS version 22. According to Sugiyono (2017), a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of ≥ 0.60 indicates acceptable reliability. The tryout phase included evaluations from three independent raters—an English teacher, an English lecturer, and the researcher—each of whom scored the same set of writing samples separately for both male and female students.

Table 2 summarizes the reliability indices for each scorer by gender. All Cronbach Alpha values ranged between 0.722 and 0.935, indicating that the scoring rubric demonstrated strong internal consistency across raters.

Table 2: Reliability Coefficients of the Scoring Rubric by Rater and Gender

Rater	Gender	No. of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha	Threshold	Interpretation
Teacher	Female	5	0.722	≥ 0.60	Reliable
Teacher	Male	5	0.935	≥ 0.60	Reliable
Lecturer	Female	5	0.908	≥ 0.60	Reliable
Lecturer	Male	5	0.930	≥ 0.60	Reliable
Researcher	Female	5	0.863	≥ 0.60	Reliable
Researcher	Male	5	0.869	≥ 0.60	Reliable

These results confirm that the instrument used in this study provided consistent and dependable measures of students' writing performance across both gender group

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process followed a structured protocol to ensure standardization and fairness. Prior to administering the writing test, the researcher obtained formal permission from the school's student affairs office. The test was delivered in a paper-based format,

including written instructions and a visual prompt. Each student selected one image from a set of ten and was instructed to write a descriptive paragraph based on the chosen image.

Before the test began, students received a brief explanation of the task, including the objectives of descriptive writing and how to interpret the prompts. This short orientation aimed to ensure task clarity while avoiding content coaching. The writing session was conducted within a 35-minute classroom period, as allocated by the English teacher. After completion, all responses were collected, anonymized, and submitted for evaluation.

Data Analysis Procedures

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize students' performance across all rubric dimensions, including means and standard deviations by gender group. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine whether mean scores differed significantly between male and female students. All analyses were performed using SPSS version 22.

Following data collection, the student compositions were independently evaluated by the three trained raters using the validated rubric. Each criterion was scored on a scale from 1 (Beginning) to 4 (Proficient). The total score for each student was computed using a weighted formula adapted from Brown (in Betri, 2019), which assigns different weights to each dimension of writing:

Final Score Formula:

Female/Male :

$$Score = \frac{3C + 2O + 2G + 1.5V + 1.5M}{40} \times 100$$

Where:

C = Topic selection and relevance

O = Organization and structure

G = Language use and style

V = Description structure and character development

M = Text length and completeness

This formula reflects the relative emphasis placed on various aspects of writing quality, aligning with pedagogical standards for descriptive texts. Mean scores were calculated

separately for male and female students, and an independent samples t-test was used to determine whether the gender-based differences in writing performance were statistically significant.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Overview of Scoring and Evaluation

After the successful pilot of the instrument on July 15, 2024, in Class IX.2, the validated writing test was administered to the sample class (Class IX.1) on July 22, 2024. The test was scored independently by three raters: an English teacher, an English lecturer, and the researcher. Each rater evaluated student performance across five criteria:

- C: Topic selection and themes
- O: Self-expression and emotional depth
- G: Language use and style
- V: Description structure and character development
- M: Length

Each student was scored on a scale of 1 to 4 for each criterion, with total scores converted into final percentages using the weighted formula established in the methodology. The results of the test to the sample class from the three scorers can be seen in the followings tables 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. Students' performance by writing criteria base on teacher's assessment as the first scorer shown in Tables 3 & 4:

Table 3: Result of Female Students' Test Scores by the Teacher (1st Scorer)

No	Students	Score per Criteria					Total Score
		C	O	G	V	M	
1.	Student 1	3	3	3	3	2	70
2.	Student 2	3	2	2	2	2	55
3.	Student 3	2	2	3	1	1	45
4.	Student 4	3	3	3	3	2	70
5.	Student 5	3	3	3	3	2	70
6.	Student 6	3	2	3	3	2	65
7.	Student 7	3	3	3	3	2	70
8.	Student 8	3	3	3	3	2	70
TOTAL SCORE		23	21	23	21	15	515

Table 4: Result of Male Students' Test Scores by the Teacher (1st Scorer)

No	Students	Score per Criteria					Total Score
		C	O	G	V	M	
1.	Student 1	3	3	2	3	2	65
2.	Student 2	3	2	2	2	2	55
3.	Student 3	4	3	3	3	3	80

4.	Student 4	3	3	3	2	2	65
5.	Student 5	3	2	3	3	1	60
6.	Student 6	3	3	3	3	1	65
7.	Student 7	3	2	3	3	1	60
8.	Student 8	3	2	3	3	2	65
TOTAL SCORE		25	20	22	22	14	515

The teacher's evaluation revealed that both male and female students achieved identical total scores of 515. In both groups, the highest mean criterion score was recorded for Topic Selection and Themes (C), with females scoring 23 and males scoring 25. This indicates that students across genders demonstrated strong alignment between chosen topics and the content of their texts. Conversely, Text Length (M) received the lowest scores (females: 15; males: 14), suggesting a shared difficulty in elaborating ideas into sufficiently developed paragraphs. Although the overall totals were equal, the highest individual score was obtained by a male student (80), exceeding the female highest score (70), hinting at slightly greater top-end performance among male students.

Students' performance by writing criteria base on lecturer's assessment as the second scorer shown in Tables 5 & 6:

Table 5: Result of Female Students' Test Scores by the Lecturer (2nd Scorer)

No	Students	Score per Criteria					Total Score
		C	O	G	V	M	
1.	Student 1	3	2	2	2	2	55
2.	Student 2	3	1	1	1	1	35
3.	Student 3	2	1	1	1	1	30
4.	Student 4	3	2	2	2	2	55
5.	Student 5	3	2	2	2	1	50
6.	Student 6	3	1	1	1	1	35
7.	Student 7	3	2	2	1	1	45
8.	Student 8	2	1	2	2	1	40
TOTAL SCORE		22	12	13	12	10	345

Table 6: Result of Male Students' Test Scores by the Lecturer (2nd Scorer)

No	Students	Score per Criteria					Total Score
		C	O	G	V	M	
1.	Student 1	3	2	2	2	1	50
2.	Student 2	2	1	2	1	1	35
3.	Student 3	3	3	3	3	3	75
4.	Student 4	2	2	2	2	2	50
5.	Student 5	2	2	2	2	2	50
6.	Student 6	3	2	1	1	1	40
7.	Student 7	2	2	2	2	1	45
8.	Student 8	3	1	2	2	1	45
TOTAL SCORE		20	15	16	15	12	390

According to the lecturer's evaluation, male students obtained a higher total score (390) than female students (345). In both groups, Topic Selection and Themes (C) again emerged as the strongest area (females: 22; males: 20), while Text Length (M) remained the weakest (females: 10; males: 12). These results confirm the trend observed in the teacher's scoring, indicating that regardless of gender, students are generally able to select relevant topics but struggle with extending their writing into longer, more developed texts. Notably, the gap between male and female totals in the lecturer's scores was larger than in the teacher's assessment, reinforcing the advantage of male students in this evaluation.

Students' performance by writing criteria base on researcher's assessment as the third scorer shown in Tables 7 & 8:

Table 7: Result of Female Students' Test Scores by the Researcher (3rd Scorer)

No	Students	Score per Criteria					Total Score
		C	O	G	V	M	
1.	Student 1	4	2	3	2	2	65
2.	Student 2	2	2	2	1	1	40
3.	Student 3	2	1	1	1	1	30
4.	Student 4	3	2	2	2	2	55
5.	Student 5	3	3	2	2	2	60
6.	Student 6	3	2	2	2	1	50
7.	Student 7	3	2	2	2	1	50
8.	Student 8	3	2	2	2	2	55
TOTAL SCORE		23	16	16	14	12	405

Table 8: Result of Male Students' Test Scores by the Researcher (3rd Scorer)

No	Students	Score per Criteria					Total Score
		C	O	G	V	M	
1.	Student 1	3	3	2	2	2	60
2.	Student 2	3	2	2	1	1	45
3.	Student 3	4	3	3	3	3	80
4.	Student 4	3	2	2	2	2	50
5.	Student 5	3	2	2	2	1	45
6.	Student 6	3	2	1	1	1	40
7.	Student 7	3	2	2	2	1	45
8.	Student 8	2	2	3	2	2	55
TOTAL SCORE		24	18	17	15	13	420

The researcher's assessment also reflected higher overall scores for male students (420) compared to female students (405). Consistent with prior evaluations, Topic Selection and Themes (C) was the highest-rated criterion for both genders (females: 23; males: 24), while Text Length (M) scored the lowest (females: 12; males: 13). The persistence of this pattern across all three raters suggests that the ability to choose and stay on topic is a shared strength, whereas expanding content remains a universal weakness. Additionally, male students

showed slightly higher minimum and maximum scores than female students in this assessment, further supporting the observation of a modest male advantage in descriptive writing performance.

The following chart (Figure 1) summarizes average scores of the whole scorers by criterion for each gender.

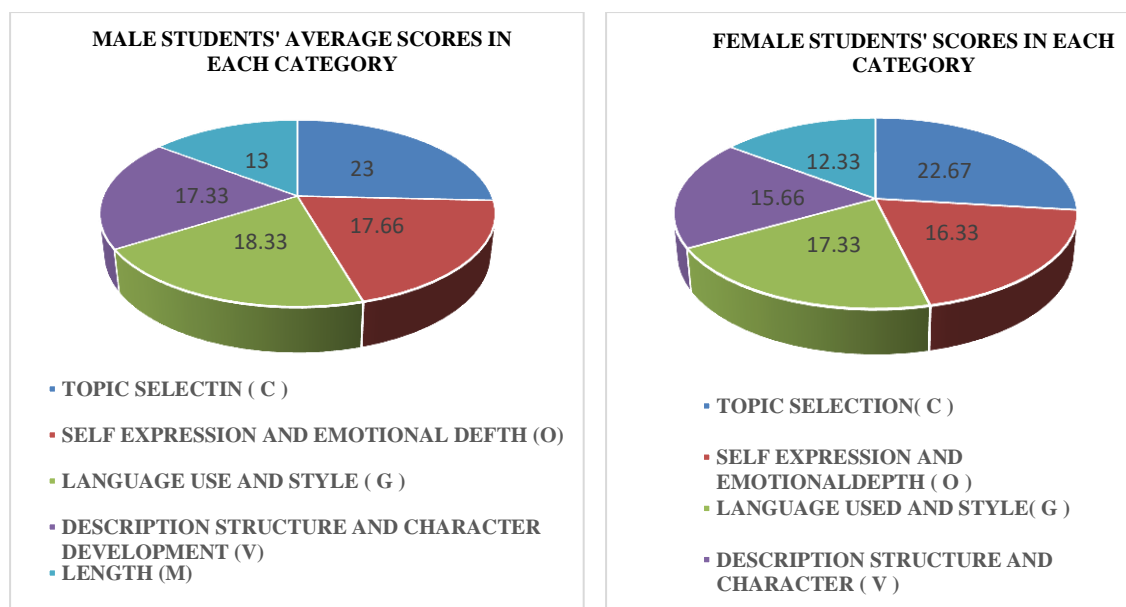


Figure 1: Summary of Average Scores by Criterion for Each Gender

Descriptive Statistics by Rater

Table 9 presents the mean scores of male and female students as evaluated by each rater.

Table 9: Mean Scores of Male and Female Students (n = 8 per group)

Scorer	Female	Male
Teacher	66.3	67.5
Lecturer	47.3	51.3
Researcher	54.3	57.8
Average	55.96	58.86

Across all scorers, male students consistently achieved higher mean scores than female students, with an overall mean difference of approximately 2.9 points. Although the difference is modest, it is consistent across raters, suggesting a trend of male students slightly outperforming females in this sample. Both genders excelled in topic selection and themes, showcasing consistency in aligning their content with chosen topics. However, both struggled with text length, often failing to produce detailed or sufficiently developed paragraphs.

Performance by Writing Criteria

Across all three scorers, both male and female students demonstrated strength in topic selection and themes (C)—with male students often slightly ahead. However, text length (M) consistently received the lowest scores for both groups, indicating a shared challenge in producing sufficiently developed texts.

This pattern was consistent across raters:

- Highest-scoring criterion: Topic selection and themes (C)
- Lowest-scoring criterion: Length (M)

The following chart (Figure 2) summarizes the students' strength in topic selection (C) and text length (M).

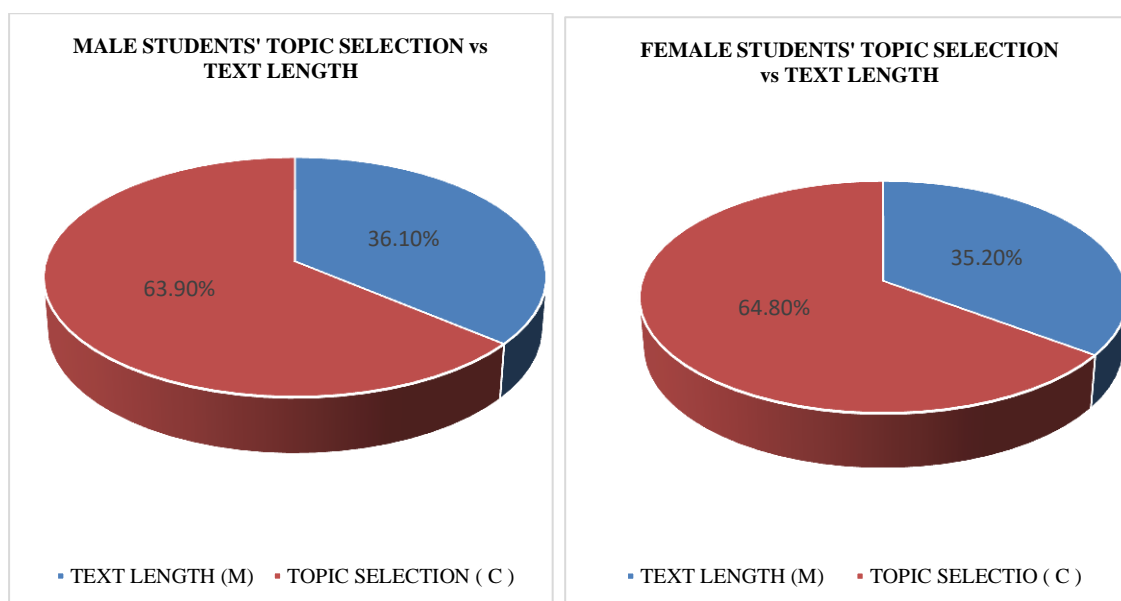


Figure 2: Chart Showing the Students' Strength in Topic Selection (C) and Text Length (M).

Inferential Analysis

To determine whether the observed differences between male and female students were statistically significant, an independent samples t-test was conducted using the overall mean scores from each rater.

Table 10. Results of Independent Samples t-Test (Female vs. Male Mean Scores)

Statistic	t-value	df	p-value
Mean Score Diff.	-2.77	14	0.014*

(*p < .05)

The t-test indicates that the difference in writing performance between male and female students is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This provides empirical support for the conclusion that male students, in this context, outperformed their female peers in descriptive writing.

Summary of Key Findings

- 1) Male students outperformed female students in overall descriptive writing ability, as evidenced by higher mean scores across all three raters.
- 2) Both groups scored highest in topic selection and lowest in text length, suggesting shared strengths and weaknesses.
- 3) The independent samples t-test confirmed that the gender difference in writing scores is statistically significant ($p < .05$), though the practical difference remains modest.
- 4) These findings support the need for targeted instruction on writing elaboration and sentence development—particularly for both genders—and suggest that male students in this cohort may benefit from cognitive or instructional advantages in structured descriptive tasks.

Discussion

This study investigated gender-based differences in descriptive writing performance among ninth-grade students at SMPN 1 Kubung. The results, based on evaluations from three independent scorers, revealed that while both male and female students demonstrated strengths in topic selection and thematic consistency, male students outperformed female students in overall writing performance, as indicated by higher mean scores across all raters.

These findings provide insight into how gender may influence specific dimensions of writing ability. The fact that both male and female students scored highest in topic selection and lowest in text length suggests a shared competence in content generation but a common weakness in elaborating and extending ideas into fully developed paragraphs. This is consistent with research by Pajares and Valiante (2001), which emphasizes the role of self-efficacy and task familiarity in shaping writing outcomes. Limited paragraph development, as seen in both groups, may reflect insufficient practice with syntactic complexity and idea expansion—key elements in successful descriptive writing.

Importantly, the findings indicate that male students achieved marginally higher overall scores, particularly in the areas of content structure and language use. This outcome contrasts with a substantial body of research suggesting that female students typically outperform their

male counterparts in writing tasks. For instance, Darningwati (2019) reported superior writing achievement among female students in the context of narrative text production. However, the transferability of those findings to descriptive writing is limited, as this genre entails distinct cognitive demands and rhetorical conventions. Moreover, the present study employed a balanced sample of male and female participants, whereas Darningwati's sample was heavily skewed toward female students, which may have introduced bias into the results. The observed differences in performance could be linked to cognitive factors, such as task planning and spatial organization, as well as sociocultural influences shaping students' writing styles (Suprpto et al., 2018). These findings underscore the importance of implementing gender-responsive instructional strategies, particularly those aimed at strengthening text elaboration, coherence, and the ability to sustain descriptive detail.

These findings reveal that male students outperformed female students in descriptive writing tasks, as evaluated across five key criteria: topic selection, organization, language use, development, and text length. The average scores from three independent raters consistently showed higher mean scores for male students (58.86) compared to female students (55.96), a difference that was confirmed to be statistically significant through independent samples t-testing ($p = 0.014$).

These results contribute to the ongoing scholarly discourse on gender differences in writing performance. Previous studies have presented conflicting conclusions—some highlighting female students' advantages in creativity and expressive writing (Adams et al., 2015), while others, such as Noviza (2023), have found male students to excel in organization and clarity. The current study supports the latter, particularly in the context of descriptive writing, which requires logical structure and detail-oriented elaboration.

One consistent pattern in this study was both genders' strength in topic selection and their relative weakness in developing text length. This suggests that while students could identify relevant content and maintain focus on a theme, they struggled to elaborate and expand their ideas—a skill integral to descriptive writing. These findings underscore the importance of integrating writing strategies into classroom instruction that focus not only on idea generation but also on elaboration and syntactic development.

Notably, although male students achieved slightly higher scores across all raters, the performance gap was modest. This suggests that while gender-based tendencies may influence writing outcomes, they are not deterministic. Factors such as writing confidence, exposure to structured writing tasks, and teacher feedback likely play critical roles.

A limitation of this study is its relatively small sample size (n=16), which, while balanced by gender, restricts the generalizability of findings. Additionally, only one genre of writing—descriptive text—was assessed. Broader studies involving multiple writing genres and larger, more diverse samples would help validate and expand upon these findings.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study concludes that ninth-grade students at SMPN 1 Kubung performed well in generating relevant topics and aligning their ideas with descriptive writing prompts, but both male and female students showed weaknesses in elaboration and paragraph development. Notably, male students achieved higher overall scores than female students, with statistically significant differences, suggesting that gender-related performance in writing may vary depending on the genre. These findings imply that teachers should adopt gender-responsive strategies that provide balanced feedback and focus on strengthening students' ability to elaborate ideas, organize paragraphs, and use descriptive language effectively. Students are encouraged to engage in consistent writing practice, peer review, and collaborative tasks to improve coherence, fluency, and confidence. For future research, it is recommended to explore gender differences across other genres and to investigate targeted interventions, supported by qualitative data, to gain deeper insight into the factors shaping students' writing performance.

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