

Weaknesses and Solutions of Students in Writing Descriptive Text

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Abstract

This research focused on the students' writing descriptive text and strategies in teaching writing descriptive text. The objective of this research was to find out the weaknesses of students' descriptive writing text and the strategies used in overcoming weaknesses of students' descriptive writing text. The researcher employed quantitative method with the quasi-experimental design and descriptive qualitative method. The research was conducted to the eleventh-grade students of MAN 1 Bone. The data were collected by using writing test. The writing test was given twice for both group A and group B to investigate the students' weaknesses in writing descriptive text. The data was tabulated and calculated by using SPSS 22 program. Moreover, the interview was given to the both group and group B also to find out students' weaknesses in writing descriptive text. The result showed that the students score in writing descriptive text of both group in pretest was categorized as good classification. Moreover, t-test calculation result of pretest and posttest by using SPSS 22 shows a significant difference in group A and group B. Meanwhile the weaknesses faced by the students in writing descriptive text were limited information about the topic or the subject, limited supporting details, weak in using the appropriate tenses, verb and auxiliary past form weaknesses, incorrect used of to infinitive verb form, inappropriate pronoun, difficult in using preposition, weak of the use the appropriate words, weak of word order, incorrect spelling, punctuation and capitalization in incorrect place. While the strategies used in teaching writing descriptive text to overcome the students weaknesses were brainstorming and listing strategy, free writing strategy, and collaborative strategy, contextual teaching and learning strategy and communicative teaching and learning strategy.

Keywords: Students' Writing Weaknesses, Writing Descriptive Text, Teaching Strategies

A. Introduction

Writing is a skill which can help the writer to deliver information from mind into a piece of paper and as process of utilizing symbols to deliver thoughts and ideas into a readable form. In writing it needs to understand about the rule of grammar and the component of good writing but also should notice about the pronouns and the punctuation marks.

Since junior high school to university level, the students have been taught about kinds of text, particularly descriptive text. The main purpose of descriptive text is to describe something into detail. In writing a descriptive text, students have to describe a particular thing such as a person, an animal, or a plant and others specifically, in terms of shape, color, smell, taste, quantity and so on.

In writing there are many weaknesses have by the students, it is significant problem that affect students in learning English, such as they are lack of vocabulary and the lack of capability in applying the English grammar and also about the mechanical problems the students have problems such as; composing indefinite paragraph, complex sentences problems, and making grammatical slips and also according to the student, they still need more improvement because they still made a lot of mistakes in writing descriptive text, they are still confused in identifying the schematic structure of descriptive text. (Wigati 2014, Siahaan 2013).

Based on the researcher prior observation, it was found that according to one of teacher and students of MAN I 1 Bone, based on interview that had been held at 20th March 2018, as the prior observation, they stated that, there are some problems faced by the students, in writing subject. The students are lack of vocabulary, therefore they always find problems in choosing correct words in writing, they cannot be organized the paragraph well, and they have problem in using the good structure in writing.

Based on the problems mentioned above, it necessary to find the solutions to solve the problems. In this reasearch, it was used some strategies in teaching writing to overcome the students' problems in writing descriptive text. It is very important in increasing students' writing ability. Therefore, the students will get better achievement in writing task. According to Gocer (2010), teaching strategy is implementing the methods with the techniques and tactics. Furthermore, teaching strategies related to solve the students' difficulties in writing text. Therefore, it can be said, teaching strategies is way of choosing the methods and technique of teacing in achieving the objectives of the learning. Therefore, the researcher is interested to investigate the weaknesses' and the solutions of students' descriptive in writing text.

B. Concept of Writing

Widdowson (1978) stated that writing is the act of creating correct sentences and communicating them through the visual medium on paper. Troyka (1996) stated that writing is a process of transmitting a message to a reader for a purpose. The purposes of writing are to voice own self, to deliver information for reader, to convince reader, and to create a literary work.

According to Jacobs (1981), there are five components of writing, they are;

- a) Content; it contains clear information to readers have unity coherence and continuity.
- b) Organization; it concerns with the specific order of the ideas or the message in the text.

- c) Vocabulary; it deals with choosing the appropriate words that will help the readers easy to understand the text.
- d) Language use; grammar can help the students to improve the use of formal language.
- e) Mechanic; it deals with capital letter to distinguish between particular and proper adjective, etc

Brown (1994) explained that writing framed in three stages;

- a) Prewriting; it encourages the generating ideas.
- b) Drafting; draft on the paragraph with ideas from prewriting states the main ideas, include several sentences that support the main idea (McCrimmon, Trimmer, & Sommers 1984),
- c) Revising; series of design to re-examine and re-evaluate the choices that have created a piece of writing.

C. Concept of Descriptive Text

1) Definition of Descriptive Text

According to Oshima and Hogue (2006), description is writing about how something or someone looks and uses space order. Dorothy E Zemach (2005) also states that descriptive paragraph explains how someone or something looks or feels.

Wardiman, et. al. (2008) specified the generic structure of descriptive text into two parts, 1) Introduction is the part of the introductory paragraph of the character; and 2) *Description* is the part of the paragraph that describes the character. This indicates that a descriptive text has two elements, an element to identify phenomenon (*identification*) and another one (*description*) to portray parts, qualities, or characteristics.

a) Problems in Writing English

- (1) Grammatical problems; Kharma (1987) states that students have subject verb agreements, pronoun references and connectors problems.
- (2) Sentence structure problems; Kharma (1987) states that those students who have the problem of writing good sentences structures are unable to produce longer sentences requiring subordination and coordination.
- (3) Word choice problems; According to Reid (1983), when the writer practices the choice of vocabulary that would reflect a concern for the reader and the purpose of writing, the composition written by the student would become sensible to his/her reader.
- (4) Punctuation problems; According to Byrne (1988: 16), the fact that punctuation has never been standard to the extent as spelling, makes it is problematic.
- (5) Capitalization problems; The rules of capitalization are not universal and classifying nouns as proper and common noun is difficult for students" (Gowere et al., 1995)
- (6) Spelling problem; the English spelling system which has become inconsistent is complex for students (Gowere et al, 1995).
- (7) Content problem; According to Leki (1991) content problem could be because of the traditional methods teachers use to teach writing for spelling, punctuation, and mastering grammar.
- (8) Organization problem; Raimes (1983) states that the other problem of organization in student' writing is the difficulty of differentiating a topic and supporting ideas or generalizations and specific details.

D. Hypotheses

There are two hypotheses in this research, they are:

H0 : The students have no weaknesses in writing descriptive text

H1 : The students have weaknesses in writing descriptive text and strategies overcome by using the strategies.

E. Research Method

The research applied quantitative research with quasi-experimental design, where it consisted of two groups of students, group A and group B. The population is the students of XIth class of MAN 1 Bone in the academic year 2018/2019 and the subject of the study is the students of XI Mia Ci and XI Mia 1 which consist of 32 students. The instruments used in collecting the were writing test and interview. The writing test was analyzed to find the weaknesses of students descriptive text and in analyzing the data of interview, the researcher used qualitative data analysis based on Miles & Huberman's theory (1994) which consist of three stages namely data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification.

F. Findings and Discussion

1. Weaknesses of Students' descriptive writing text

The first way of determining the students' weaknesses in writing descriptive text is by writing test which was conducted in two sections pretest and posttest.

a) By Writing Test

The students' score in writing descriptive text in pretest was categorized as good classification proved by the mean score of both group was 68,69 for Group A, and 65,78 for Group B. While the students' ability in writing descriptive text based on the score of posttest of Group A was 81,25 which categorized as excellent classification and Group B was 78,22 with good classification.

Based on the writing test it was found the weaknesses encountered by the students in writing descriptive text in each writing component of group A and group B based on the writing test result in pretest and posttest by asking the students to write a descriptive text by choosing a theme from three themes provied by researcher, they are; "my house, my bestfriend and my bedroom".

1) Pretest of Group A

Based on the pretest and posttest result of group A and B, the analysis and the examples of students' writing weaknesses are summerized in the following points;

- 1) Content weaknesses; in group A were found about 7 in pretest, examples; "**My house is big. In my house I have my father, my mother and my two brothers. I live on Pisang Baru street, number II**", the paragraph describes that the house is big, with whom she lives and the address of her house, it means that there are only three informations about the topic. While in posttest, it was found 5 content weaknesses, example; "**I have a beautiful house. My house is large. I live in Sungai Cerekang number 31. I live together with my family**", in the second paragraph it is written "**in front of my house there are many flowers. I feel comfortable to stay there because it is easy to stay**". The both pragraphs only consist of no more three informations. Meanwhile in group B, there were totally 13 content weaknesses in pretest, example; "**I have many friend in my environment, either in my house or my school. But I have some Best friend. My best friend. is**

they who very good". It was only mentioned the best friend in around house and school who has good characteristics, but the student does not explore the description about the subject's characteristics in to detail, the student has limit discussion about the topic. and 6 weaknesses in posttest, example; "I have a house. The house is my place to rest and gather with family", in the paragraph it is only mentioned about a house as a place to rest and gather with family. In writing descriptive text, the students of both groups had limited information about the topic, thus the content of the text in each paragpah did not explore more.

- 2) Schematic structure of descriptive text weaknesses, in group A, there were totally 26 schematic structure of descriptive text weaknesses in pretest and posttest. Meanwhile in group B, there were 32 weaknesses in pretest and 31 weaknesses in posttest; example; "I have a friend. Her name is Nurul Ardiyah Sari. I call her Diyah. She is cute girl, fat, short and her skin is white. Ardiyah is very kind with me and always there every time. I am very thank got get her. Every daya I always with her go to school. Her sometimes irksome but I can't angry with her. If her angry. I sometimes buy for food to her." In second paragraph "Now, I seldom meet with her because I'm dont school i her school. If she leave I sometimes chat with her and another tell our own dailty. I am very miss with her. May be she also miss with me. I hope always meet with her." In the first paragraph, the student described about the characteristics of her best friend, and also in second paragraph, it was described about the condition of their current friendship. Based on the text, it can be seen that in both paragraph describes about the specific thing of the topic, there is no sentences describe generally as identification of the topic, the paragraph is about the description of the topic. Both groups had weaknesses in distinguishing the schematic structure of descriptive text, thus, the text was produced have incomplete structure.
- 3) Supporting details weaknesses; there were 2 weaknesses in pretest and 2 weaknesses in posttest of group A, while in group B there were 10 weaknesses in pretest and 3 weaknesses ound in posttest, example; "My bedroom is good, but I always sleep in family room. And in family room thare is a TV I always watching tv. My mother always cooking in the kitchen." It was not mentioned in the paragraph the details about the bedroom and reasons caused the room was good or additional description about the family room and the kitchen. Thus, it can be stated that, the text is has limited supporting ideas about the description of the topic. In the students descriptive text, the students frequently wrote the text without supporting details; the topic described with no additional reasons about the prior statements.
- 4) Pronoun weaknesses were found in students' writing test of group A totally 25 weaknesses in pretest and 3 misatkes in posttest, while in group B, there were 24 incorrect pronoun used in pretest and 15 pronoun weaknesses found in posttest, example; "I have a best friend. She name is Titah". It should be used "her". "I always ask about lesson to he every day", there is an incorrect objective pronoun used in the sentence. It should be used "him". By the example it can be said that most of students have weaknesses in using the pronoun in the sentence.
- 5) Sentence structure weaknesses were found in group A about 39 weaknesses in pretest and 30 weaknesses in posttest, while in group B, there were 32 mistakes in pretest and 11 weaknesses in posttest;; "My house is simple. Live in Galung, Talungeng Village or Jl. A. Malla". The sentences should be written into compound sentences "my house is simple that/which lives in Galung...". "My house

is yellow and orange”, “*there is a living room, four bedrooms, a bathroom...*”, it should be used “are”. “*my house not too big*”, the sentence need “is”. The students’ text of both group made frequently mistakes in constructing the sentence grammarly, some of the students’ sentence needs to write into complex sentence and also some of them used incorrect auxiliary verb.

- 6) Subject verb agreement weaknesses there were found 54 weaknesses of group A in pretest and 47 weaknesses in posttest. Meanwhile in group B were found 30 weaknesses in pretest and 11 weaknesses in posttest, example; “*she don’t like angry*”, it should be used “does”, “*because I’m don’t school in her school*”, it should only use “do not”. In the example can be seen that, the students used incorrect auxiliary verb in their sentence.
- 7) Verb form weaknesses, in group A were found about 17 weaknesses in pretset and 12 weaknesses found in posttest. Meanwhile in group B, there were totally 25 weaknesses in pretest and 30 weaknesses found in posttest, example; “*he attended the eleventh grade in madrasah aliah one*”, it should be used “attend” and added “s”. “*He lived on A. Malla street*”, it should be used “live” and added “s”. “*she always got me something, example her breakfast*”, it should be used “get”.
- 8) Preposition weaknesses, in group A there were found about 21 mistakes in pretest and 27 mistakes in posttest. Meanwhile in group B, there were found 30 mistakes in using preposition and 17 mistakes in posttest, example; “*I have a lot friends in my school*”, “*in the middle my house 2 levels*”. The both sentences need preposition “of”.
- 9) Word order weaknesses in group A, there were 12 weaknesses in pretest and 11 weaknesses in posttest, while in group B, there were 10 weaknesses found in pretest and 12 weaknesses found in posttest, examples; “*Dinda have body tall*”, “*she is student young in class*”, “*she is student small in class*”, “*Lia have body short*”, “*she have body big*”, those words should be “tall body”, “young student”, “small student”, “short body” and “big body”.
- 10) To infinitive verb form weaknesses there were 2 mistakes made by the students in posttest of group A, example; “*I am very happy when I to stay in my house*”, it should be “I stay”. Unappropriate quantifier was only 1 mistake in posttest of group A, example; “*Much transportation pass in front of my house*”, it should be used “many”.
- 11) Number of noun weaknesses were found in posttest of group A, example; “*I have many bestfriend*”, “*but all room is yellow*”, “*In front of my house, there are many flower*”, the underlined word of those sentences should be added “s”.
- 12) Incorrect quantifiers were found in group A in posttest, example; “*Much transportation pass in front of my house*”, it should be “*Many transportations pass in front of my house*”.
- 13) Vocabulary weaknesses were found 30 in pretest and 7 in posttest on group A. Meanwhile in group B, there were 42 weaknesses in pretest and 17 word choice weaknesses in posttest, example; “*she is very good*”, the best word used in the sentence is “kind”. “*I mate with her at Junior High, we mate in the class room....*” the correct word is “meet”, “*I want to description my best friends*”, the word should be “describe”.
- 14) Spelling weaknesses in group A were found 13 in pretest and 9 in posttest, while in group B, there were 42 in pretest and 17 weaknesses in posttest, example; “*I have sameone best friend*” the word should be “someone”. “*they have tin body except*

me” the underlined word should be “thin”. “They have beutiful face”, the word should be “beautiful”. “she always halp me”, the word should be “help”.

- 15) Punctuation weaknesses, there were found 47 weaknesses in pretest and 12 weaknesses in posttest of group A, while in group B, there were 43 weaknesses in pretest and 24 weaknesses in posttest, example; “I have many friend. But I have one best friend”, “the second bedroom is small. And small living room”, “they always teach me when I don’t know about lesson. And I always play handpone with them”. The fourth example is “her father is our teacher in the school. And she is very annoying. And the last but not least...”, in the sentences should not be put full stop before “but” and “and”. and the the first letter should be written in lowercase.
- 16) Capitalization weaknesses in group A were found 34 mistakes in pretest and 24 weaknesses in posttest. Meanwhile in group B, there were 26 weaknesses in pretest and 22 weaknesses in posttest, example; “He is my neighbor and We go to the mosque together”, “I am very love them, They are my best friend in school”, “They” after comma. The third example is “Next is titah”.

b) By Interviewing

Below will be shown the interview result related to the students’ weaknesses in writing descriptive text;

(1) Extract 1 (Limited vocabulary)

- Ss : Kadang terdapat istilah-istilah yang susah dibedakan, kayak langsing, ramping, tinggi kurus, begitu kak
["sometimes, there are some terms difficult to differentiate, such as slim, slender, tiny, like that"]
- Rr : Begitu?
["like that?"]
- Ss : Kerempeng, susah dibedakan
["thin" it is difficult to be differentiated]
- Rr : ohhh, lebih ke istilah bahasa yang spesifik yah, ada lagi?
["ohh, is it about the specific vocabulary, any more?"]
- Ss : Pemilihan katanya mam
["it is about word choice mam"]

The extract 1 above shows that the student was difficult to differentiate some words that have similar meaning from Indonesia to English and the next statement the student revealed it related with word choice in writing. It means that the students had limited vocabulary related with word choice.

(2) Extract 2 (Grammar/tenses weaknesses)

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- Rr : Ok, karena kekurangan vocabulary, kalau misalkan kesulitannya Fiona selain vocabulary, apa lagi?
["Ok, because you are lack of vocabulary, if for example your other weaknesses besides vocabulary, what else?"]
- Ss : tata kalimatnya susah di susun
["grammar is difficult to arrange"]
- Rr : ok, apalagi?

[*“ok, what else?”*]

Ss : susah disusun kata-katanya mam

[*“difficult to arrange the words mam”*]

The extract 2 above shows that after the researcher asked more other weaknesses in writing descriptive text, the students mentioned that grammar was difficult to arrange, then the researcher asked more about other weaknesses, and the student repeated her prior statement that it was difficult to arrange the words, it means that she had weakness in arranging the words combining the grammar.

(3) Extract 3 (Conjunction, preposition and article weaknesses)

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Rr : spellingnya, apalagi?

[*“spelling, what else?”*]

Ss : Kata-kata penghubungnya kak, kayak, pakai at, in

[*“conjunction words Ms, like, use at, in”*]

Rr : Conjunction atau prepositionnya?

[*“conjunction or preposition?”*]

Ss : Sama kayak depannya pakai the atau a, begitu

[*“also like; in front of the text use “the” or “a”, like that”*]

The extract 3 above shows that the student mentioned the other weakness that she faced in writing descriptive text was the use of conjunction, and also she mentioned the use of “at and in”, and the student mentioned in last conversation that it was also difficult to use article in front of the text, she had confused to use “a” or “the” which appropriate with the word or sentence.

(4) Extract 4 (Find and determine ideas)

Rr : apa kesulitannya?

[*“what are your weaknesses?”*]

Ss : biasanya toh mam, susah eee, susah menentukan topic

[*“sometimes mam, I am difficult eee, difficult to determine the topic”*]

Rr : iya

[*“yes”*]

Ss : bingung menentukan topic, biasa ada kalimat yang dag di tau artinya, terjemahannya kalau dalam bahasa inggris

[*“I am confused to determine the topic, usually, there is text that I do not know the meaning, the translation when in English”*]

The extract 4 above shows that the student firstly the student said that she had many weaknesses then she continued said after the researcher asked the kinds of weaknesses, she said that sometimes she was difficult to determine the idea and next the student mentioned that she was confused to determine the topic, it means that in writing the student sometimes confused to determine the topic and she difficult to determine the ideas related to the topic.

(5) Extract 5 (Structure of descriptive text confusion)

Rr : di dalam menulis descriptive text apa ada kekurangan atau masalah?

[*“in writing descriptive text, do you have any weaknesses or problem?”*]

Ss : ada masalah

[*“I have problem”*]

Rr : apa?

[*“what is that?”*]

Ss : terkadang saya susah membedakan antara identifikasi dengan deskriptif

[*“sometimes I am difficult to differentiate the identification and the description”*]

The extract 5 above shows that after the student mentioned that she had problem in writing descriptive text, then the researcher asked again about problem and the student stated in writing descriptive text, she was sometimes difficult to differentiate the identification and description which both were the structure of descriptive text.

(6) Extract 6 (Types of text confusion)

Rr : Bagaimana menurut kamu tentang kemampuan menulis kamu dalam bahasa Inggris?

[*“... What is your opinion about your writing ability?”*]

Ss : menurut saya, kemampuan saya dalam menulis masih kurang, dikarenakan saya belum bisa menentukan jenis-jenis text apa, jenis kata yang dapat dimasukkan kedalam text tersebut dan grammar atau tata bahasa saya masih kurang

[*“in my mind, my ability in writing descriptive text is low, because I still can not determine the kinds of text, kinds of words that can be included in the text and my grammar or tenses is still low”*]

The extract 6 above shows that the student mentioned that he had low ability in writing English text, it was because some of weaknesses such as vocabulary and grammar, but the student mentioned first that he was difficult to determine the types of the text. The student statement reflected that by the weaknesses to determine the kinds of text, it means that the student also difficult to match with the grammar, vocabulary, and also the most important was the student difficult to construct a English text, specially descriptive text.

(7) Extract 7 (Spelling)

Rr : di dalam menulis descriptive text, ada kesulitan?

[*“in writing descriptive text, do you have weaknesses?”*]

Ss : iye kak

[*“yes Ms”*]

Rr : apa?

[*“what?”*]

Ss : kadang dag ku tau i tulisannya

[*“sometimes, I do not know the spelling of the words”*]

The extract 7 above shows that after the student said that she had difficulty in writing descriptive text, then the researcher asked to mention the difficulty, the student said that sometime she did not the spelling of the word.

2. Strategies in Teaching Writing Descriptive Text

In group A, the researcher applied several strategies in each stage of writing. In prewriting activity, the researcher applied brainstorming and listing strategies. It was applied by asking the student about some questions related with topic, example “My house”, such as; where do you live, what kinds of house that you have, what colour of your house, how many rooms in your house, what properties that you have in your house, what colour of the dining room, etc”. The strategies was applied to stimulate the

students thinking about the topic, then the ideas was listed into points. The strategies was as the way to solve the students weaknesses in finding the ideas and to help the students develop the content.

In drafting process, the researcher applied free writing strategy; the researcher asked the students to arrange the sentences that they get from brainstorming and listing by making descriptive text. This strategies used to help the students elaborate the ideas and to give the students space to expand the material of the text, it was related to solve the students' content and ideas weaknesses.

In revising activity, the students were asked to correct their friends' descriptive writing text into pairs and groups. In this section was made the students corrected the mistakes and shortcomings of their writing and their friends freely. Thus, this session allows the students to correct their friends' writing more, starting from the information delivered in text, main ideas and supporting details to the semicolon and the spelling of the words. In this stage, the researcher applied cooperative/collaborative strategy This strategy was applied in solving the students language use, vocabulary and mechanics weaknesses.

While in group B, in prewriting activity, the researcher applied contextual teaching and learning strategy, the students were asked to imagine anything about the topic. The students were allowed to write down ideas that they got. This strategy were applied to help the students weaknesses in developing the content, it help the students to find more ideas about the topic. After the students found the ideas, they started to write descriptive text in drafting process, they were asked to collaborate the ideas that they got in prewriting activity, they should write text at least 2 paragraph. In drafting process, the researcher applied communicative teaching and learning, the students were allowed to question to the reseacher related to the words that they did not know the meaning or about they were confused in constructing the text.

In revising process, after the students completing drafting process, the students were shared review form, then the students were asked to make a pair group, and they were asked to exchange their papers each other. The researcher asked the student to correct their friends' text and write down their correction into the review form. After the students correcting their friend paper, the students asked to return their friends' paper, the students was asked to rewrite the text based on their friends' correction, and last, after they were finishing rewriting process, the students were asked to collect their papers.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

a. Conclusion

This study is an attempt to identify the weaknesses of students in writing descriptive test and also to give solution of the weaknesses in several treatments.

Based on the writing test and supporting data from interview, it was found that there are several weaknesses encountered by the students in writing descriptive text of group A and group B. The weaknesses were dominated in language use component. Most of students in both groups made mistakes in constructing the sentence grammarly. Then second frequently mistakes made were in using correct preposition. However, the students still had weaknesses in content by having limited information in the text, using unappropriate vocabulary and still a lot of mistakes in mechanics component.

As the solution in overcoming the students' weaknesses in writing descriptive text, it was applied some strategies used in teaching writing descriptive text are; in group A they were; brainstorming and listing strategy, free writing strategy, and collaborative strategy. In group B, the strategies applied were; contextual teaching and learning strategy and communicative teaching and learning strategy.

b. Suggestions

The result of this research is regarding with the students' weaknesses in writing descriptive text. The researcher strongly suggests that in writing English text, students are really abstracted in developing the text. Thus, master a lot of vocabulary well can help in writing easily. Especially for the teacher in teaching writing, it is necessary to increase the students' vocabulary in learning process, inasmuch as by helping the students to know the new words, it can enrich the students' vocabulary which will make the students' writing process easier.

The weaknesses of this research is limited in applying the teaching strategies effected the students writing descriptive weaknesses is not overcome well, thus for the further researcher can apply the other strategies and have renewal of the applied strategies so the students' weaknesses can be solved well.

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