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THE DIFFICULTIES AND STRATEGIES OF EFL STUDENTS IN IMPROVING THEIR ENGLISH SKILLS

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Abstract
This paper aims to explain the difficulties of EFL students in learning English, the difficulties in writing skills, and the strategies used to improve their writing skills. The participants were 20 students of SMPK. St. Isidorus, Lewolema sub-district, East Flores, Nusa Tenggara Timur. A qualitative method was employed in this research using the interview as a data collection technique. The findings showed that the difficulties of EFL Students in learning English where they cannot (1) translate the English words, (2) read an English text, (3) write an English sentence, (4) pronounce, and (5) memorize the English sentence. Students have difficulties in writing such as lack of vocabulary, cannot write the word in English correctly, and translate the sentence in English. The strategies chosen by the students to improve their writing include learning how to translate the word, memorize the vocabulary, and learn to write the correct English sentence.

Keywords: difficulties, EFL students, English language, strategies, writing

Introduction
English has been popular for each subject of human beings. The English language is used as an international tool for communication with other people around the world. English has been dominated in many various fields such as education, business, technology, research, tourism, medicine, and others. English language is spoken all over the world and attained as a global language (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021). English has become one of the requirements for recruiting a new employee in some foreign companies and having an international relationship with other countries. No matter what country a person goes to, they should communicate using the English language and it will help them to receive information. Each person has a unique way to learn the language. People can communicate verbally and in writing in their daily lives (Miranda & Wahyudin, 2023). Starting to learn the language, some of them already determine the level that will be effective for them (Zubaydullaevna et al., 2023).

In learning the English language, we learn about listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The four skills of language will be improved to communicate effectively in English (Kashinathan, 2021). English as a foreign language, and each student has the challenge to master the language itself. Some of the students find it

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easy to adopt the new language, but some of the others need more attention to motivate themselves to learn. English students still face challenges in spoken or written English (Ratnasari, 2020). All these skills are very important, but learning writing is a crucial skill that must be learned by the students (Yaumil et al., 2020). Especially, for writing skills, many students find difficulties when they try to write a sentence in English. Writing in English seems to be the most difficult skill among the other skills. This case does not happen only for EFL students but it also becomes a challenge for native speakers of English to produce good and well-structured writing (Sundrarajun, 2020). Language learners' luck of literacy and have different experiences of literacy (Alharbi, 2021). Each student has several ways to deal with writing challenges (Riadil et al., 2023).

In Writing skills, some activities involve several things to be mastered namely lexical and grammatical knowledge, coherence, cohesion, and mechanics. When we learn about writing skills, we learn how to think about ideas as well as the logical organization of ideas. Writing is one of the composing processes as a result of employing strategies (Listyani, 2018). In writing skills, all students are expected to develop a technical point of view toward writing and can increase their awareness of their responsibilities. The main factor that affects a writing skill is the writing strategy itself (Asmari, 2013). Writing is the productive skill that seems the most challenging, even for native speakers of a language since it includes coherence, grammar structures, and appropriate mechanics (Mouri, 2020). So, when we learn about writing, we should manage our writing strategies to get the idea of creating a sentence. Because English is a foreign language, many students still lack knowledge in developing and arranging their ideas and content to write.

Those problems become the factors that make the students are often faulted in improving their writing skills. Students might not be exposed to the writing process correctly or at all in some cases. Besides that, the students also do not know how to express their ideas when they are writing. The situation, annoys the students to come up with their brilliant thoughts, and most of them will end up abandoning those ideas which makes the writing dull and uninteresting for readers. Due to poor writing skills, the students‟ motivation and confidence were then hampered. This has then caused many to struggle to put ideas on paper every time they were told to write in the target language (Pek et al., 2019).

Related to writing skills, the students should also think about how to create what they thought and can make good writing. Writing always presents a huge barrier since students have difficulty producing good writing, This is why the students often still produce poor writing and have difficulty expressing their ideas through writing. Grammatically correct text and the application of knowledge to particular contexts and purposes are essential in writing. A genre focus can be a framework to help students improve their writing in particular communicative events (Purba, 2020). Good grammatical also has an important role in producing good writing. The students should master how to arrange the word to become a sentence. Writing is an essential language skill that is vital to academic success (Asmari, 2013), so it is important to teach the students how to produce good writing, and how to collaborate their ideas in writing. Developing the student's writing competence, and producing a good structure of writing are the goal of writing itself. Through writing, the students can create their ideas, organize, and write (Ceylan, 2019).

In writing, all students are expected to be more active during the learning process. The students should be active in arousing interest and curiosity, questioning, reflection, problem-solving, explanations of concepts, etc. are carried out with students for their active learning. Their prior knowledge is triggered and their mind is activated to ensure learning (Mehmet, 2018). The teacher should build the student's awareness in writing and also guide them to transfer their idea. The difficulties of students in learning a language may be related to the number of words, the structure, the characteristics of the language, and the level of students' readiness for the language. When the students learn the new word, they should make an association with the action. The students can forget the words but they will never forget the action (Mansoor et al., 2023).

The level of student's experience in learning the language can be directly proportional to their difficulties while learning the language itself. Besides that, the differences in student's character also affect the level of students in mastering the language (Tanir, 2020). Each student has a different problem in learning a language. Mostly, the students in internet-restricted areas find it difficult to find their partner to practice the English language and find their friends to correct their mistakes in writing an English sentence. Because English is still something new for them, they need other people to push them to know the language better. Based on the explanation above, the researcher considers to following research questions:

1. Why do EFL students have difficulties in learning the English language?
2. Why do EFL students have difficulties in improving their writing skills?
3. What are the strategies used by the EFL Students to improve their writing skills?

Method

Research design

To describe the result of the difficulties and strategies of EFL students in learning the English language and improving their writing skills, the researcher used the qualitative method. The data was collected through the interview and questionnaires to find out student's opinions. The researcher prepared some questions and asked the students about their difficulties in mastering the English language. The research aimed to know what kinds of students have difficulties in learning the English language, what their difficulties are in improving their writing skills, and what their strategies are to improve them. After collecting the data, the researcher concluded the result of the research itself.

Setting and participants



Figure 1. Map of East Flores, Nusa Tenggara Timur (the research location)

The participants of this research were 20 students of junior high school. They were second-grade students at SMP St. Isidorus, Lewotala, Flores Timur, and Nusa Tenggara Timur in the 2020/2021 academic year. From 20 students, the researcher found out their difficulties in learning the English language, their difficulties in writing the English language, and their strategies to solve their writing problems.

Data collection method

The researcher used the interview as the data collection technique, some questions were provided by the researcher. After collecting the data, the researcher divided the data based on the student's answers. There were some questions used by the researcher for the interview:

Table 1. List of interview questions

No	Questions
1	Apa kesulitan anda dalam belajar bahasa Inggris? *What are your difficulties in Learning English Language?*
2	Apa kesulitan anda dalam menulis sebuah cerita dalam bahasa Inggris? Jelaskanlah! *What are your difficulties in writing an English text? Explain it!*
3	Kesulitan apa yang paling mendasar sehingga anda tidak dapat menulis sebuah cerita dalam bahasa Inggris? *What is your big problem in writing an English text?*
4	Untuk mengatasi kesulitan anda menulis cerita dalam bahasa Inggris, apa cara atau strategi yang anda lakukan? *For solving your problem in writing an English text, what are your strategies?*

Data analysis

For analyzing the data, the researcher took some steps to analyze data from the participants. The first step was to transcribe the data interview into written documents. In transcribing, the researcher transcribed the data recording based on the student's answers to the questions given. The next step was coding the data, in this part, the researcher constructed the unstructured sentence into the right one. The next step was categorizing, in this step, the researcher classified the data that had a similar meaning and explanation. The last step was the conclusion, after categorizing the data (interview and questionnaire), the researcher made the conclusion based on the data result.

Findings and Discussion

Three points emerged from the analysis of the current data set, (1) the difficulties of EFL Students in Learning the English Language;(2) The difficulties of EFL Students in Writing an English text; and (3) Students' strategies in Improving their writing.

The difficulties of EFL students in learning the English language

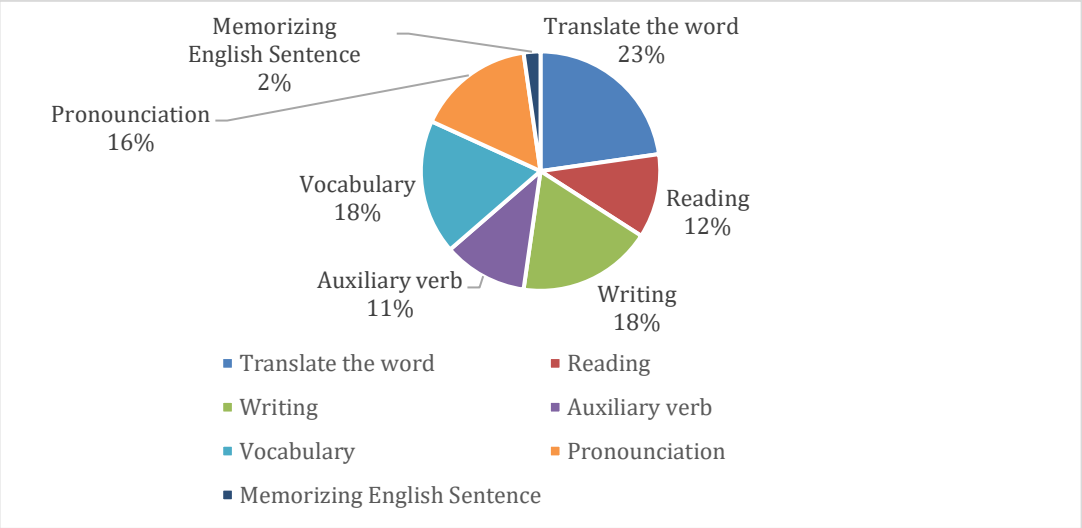


Figure 2. Student's Difficulties in Learning English

Translate the English word

Translating the English word becomes a higher problem for the students in learning English. It has 23 % of 20 students in a class. Most students complain that they have difficulties in translating English words to Indonesian or Indonesian to English.

> *"Kesulitan yang saya alami dalam belajar bahasa Inggris adalah belum bisa menerjemahkan kata dengan baik*" (***My difficulty in learning the English language is can not translate the words correctly)***
> ***"****kesulitan saya dalam belajar bahasa Inggris adalah dalam Menerjemahkan/memahami bahasa inggris.* ***(My difficulties in learning English language are in translating and understanding the English language).***

There are many strategies for translating the English word, but each student should realize how to improve themselves in learning before they go to the next level.

Writing in English

In learning the English language, there are still students who have difficulty in writing. Of 20 students, there is 18 % of students say that while learning English, they are difficult to write.

> *"Saya kesulitan dalam menulis kata-kata dalam bahasa inggris****"(My difficulty is in writing a word in English Language)***
> *"Kesulitan dalam belajar bahasa inggris terdapat dalam penulisan kata dan pengucapan kata****"(My difficulty in learning English language are in writing and pronouncing the words)***

Mostly writing became the common problem that often happens to the EFL students. The students realize that writing in English has become a problem that makes them unconfident in learning English.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary also became a problem for the students while learning the English language. There 18 % of 20 students mentioned that they have a problem related to the vocabulary.

> *"Saya tidak mengerti arti kata bahasa inggris"* ***(I do not understand the English words)***
> ***"****Tidak tau dalam menghafal kosakata"****(Can not know how to memorize the vocabulary)***
> *"Kalau dari saya kesulitan yang saya alami adalah penghafalan kosakata"****(My difficulty in memorizing the vocabulary)***

Having enough knowledge of vocabulary can help students in learning the English language. But, it still becomes a problem for the students. Some of them have no dictionary and do not have much time to memorize the vocabulary at home.

Pronunciation

Of 20 students, there is 16 % of students point out that they still have difficulty pronouncing the English word. They do not know how to pronounce the words correctly.

> "*Saya susah mengucapkan kalimat bahasa inggris*" **(I am difficult in pronounce the sentence in English language)**
> *"saya tidak mengerti dalam mengucapkan kalimat bahasa inggris****. (I do not understand in pronouncing an English sentences).***

As we know English is a foreign language for Indonesian students. Having many various dialects of language also becomes a problem for students to pronounce the English language correctly. Lack of confidence and practice in speaking the English language, the students have difficulty pronouncing the correct words.

Reading an English text

There 12 % of students have difficulty in reading an English text. The lack of practice in reading becomes a problem for students in improving their English.

> *"kesulitan saya selama belajar bahasa Inggris adalah bahwa saya tidak tau cara baca dalam bahasa inggris".* ***(My difficult in learning English language is I do not know how to read in English).***

The utterance above, clearly shows us that most students have difficulty reading an English text. Having a limit of books and reading practice, makes the students confused about how to read an English text correctly.

Determine the auxiliary Verb

There 11 % of students have difficulty knowing about the auxiliary verb.

"*Kesulitan yang sering saya alami adalah dalam menentukan kata kerja bantu bentuk present dalam sebuah kalimat".* ***(My difficult is to determine the auxiliary verb in a present form in a sentence).***

Having good grammar also became the foundation for the students while learning the English language. The students realized that determining the auxiliary verb in a sentence still became their problem.

Memorizing the English sentence

There 2 % of students have difficulty in memorizing the English sentence. One of the student statements:

> ***"****Menurut saya, kesulitan dalam belajar bahasa Inggris adalah dalam menghafal kalimat".* ***(For me, my difficult in learning English is in memorizing the English sentences).***

Most students find it difficult to memorize English sentences, such as how to know which kind of simple present, simple past tense, or simple future tense. They can not guess the sentence correctly.

1. The Difficulties of EFL Students in Writing an English Text

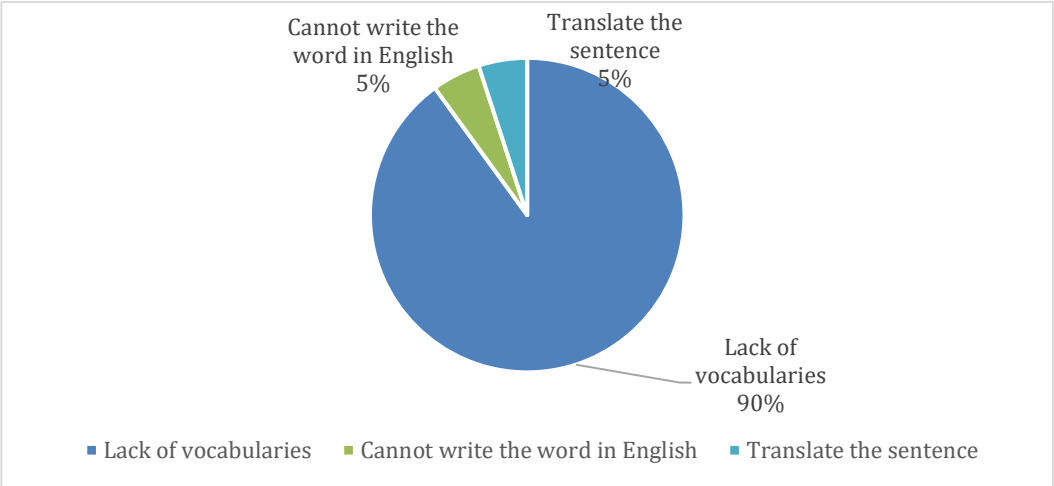


Figure 3. Student's difficulties in writing

Lack of vocabularies

Of 20 students, there are 82 % of students mentioned that vocabulary becomes their problem in writing English.

> *"Saya susah menyebutkan kosakata bahasa inggris****". (I am difficult in pronounce the English vocabularies)***
> *"Saya kurang tau kalimat atau kosakata bahasa inggris"****(I do not know the English sentences or vocabularies)***
> *"Saya belum menghafal beberapa kalimat atau kata dalam bahasa inggris".*
> ***(I have not memorize the sentence or words in English yet)***

Student competence in memorizing the vocabulary is still low. They do have not much time to learn the vocabulary at home. Having no dictionary still became their problem itself.

Translate the sentence

There is 5 % of 20 students mention that during writing in English, they have difficulty translating the sentence in English.

> *Ketiksa saya menulis dalam bahasa indonesia dan terjemahkan dalam bahasa inggris.* ***(When I write in Indonesian Language and translate in English language).***
> *Saya kesulitan saat membuat kalimat-kalimat dan menyatuhkan menjadi sebuah teks* ***(I am difficult in making a setences and writing it)***

Most students often have the same problems during writing in English. When writing in English, they usually write the sentence in the Indonesian language and then translate it into English.

Write the word in English

There 5% of 20 students still have problems writing English words correctly. Even though they know the vocabulary itself, they still make mistakes in writing the word correctly.

> *"Saya tidak bisa menulis kata bahasa inggris dengan benar"****(I can not write the English word correctly).***

2. Student's strategies for improving their writing skill

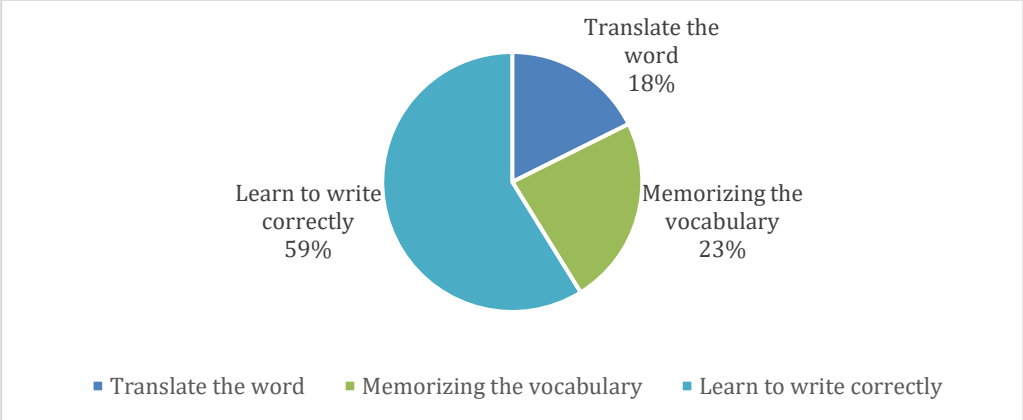


Figure 3. Student's strategies in writing skill

Based on the data, some strategies used by students in improving their writing skill such as:

Learn to write the correct English sentence

There is 59% of 20 students point out that learning to write the correct English sentence can help them improve their writing skills.

> *"Belajar menulis kosakata dengan lengkap"* ***(Learn to write the vocabulary completely)***
> *"Menulis cerita yang pendek sesuai dengan kata-kata yang saya tau atau kalimat yang saya tau".* ***(Write a short story with the words or sentences that I know)***

More writing practice can make the students have good writing in English. Having enough knowledge of vocabulary can help the students to write and build their ideas.

Memorizing the vocabulary

There is 23% of 20 students say that having enough vocabulary knowledge can help students in writing English.

> *"Belajar kembali yang diajarkan dan mengerti kosakata"* ***(Reviewing what have been learned and understand the vocabularies)***
> *"Menghafal kosakata dalam bahasa inggris".* ***(Memorizing the English vocabularies)***

Students need to learn more about vocabulary. When they have good knowledge, English will become easy to learn.

Translate the words

There is 18 % of 20 students confirm that learning to translate words can help them improve their skills in writing English.

> **"***Menterjemahkan kosakata****"(Translating the English vocabulary)***
> Translating the word by word can help students in learning the new word and find the meaning of each word.

Discussion

Learning the English language will be necessary if, teachers and students can remove all barriers to communication. The teacher should design a concept in learning (Yashchuk et al., 2020). Students, still have a problem in mastering the language. Learning a language can done well if the learners are enjoy the class, and interested in challenging themselves (Khasawneh, 2023). As we know in learning the English language, four skills of language should be learned by the students, they are listening skills, speaking skills, reading skills, and writing skills. During learning the English language, most students have some problems in translating the English words, cannot read an English text, cannot write the correct sentence, cannot pronounce the English words, and others.

Based on the problems mentioned above, show us that many students still fail to find their way in learning the English language. When the students find it difficult to translate the words, it can be mentioned that they still have not vocabulary enough. Their vocabulary knowledge is still limited. If they have no more time to open a dictionary or learn to translate the English text, this problem cannot be solved by themselves. In reading an English text, the students need to practice. The teacher should guide them to read an English text. When the students have no time to practice their reading, they do not know how to read in English, or how to

understand the meaning of the text itself. When they say that they have difficulty reading an English text, it also shows us that they are still not confident with themselves. Lack of practice in reading, the students do not know how to write a correct English sentence. Most students mention that they often make mistakes in writing the correct English sentence.

English still becomes the biggest problem for students when they do not know how to learn the English language by themselves. When the students cannot pronounce the English words correctly, it shows that they are still rarely practicing the listening skill. The students are still afraid to speak using English because they do not how to pronounce the English word correctly. These problems almost happen to all the students that the researcher interviewed. When focusing on writing skills, most of the students still have problems improving their writing skills. The problems such as lack of vocabulary, inability to write the correct word in English, and inability to translate the sentence into English. Writing becomes very difficult for them because they do have not much vocabulary knowledge. When writing a text, most students still write in the Indonesian language first, and then they translate it into the English language. Writing is the most challenging skill for the learners. Students need extra activity in writing a text (Alghamdy, 2023). Although we say that it is their learning process, it is not easy for them. When translating the word into English, the vocabulary still makes them fault in writing. Vocabulary becomes the dominant problem for all the students in learning and writing the English language. When asked about their strategies for improving their writing skill, the students mentioned that they should practice more how to translating the word, memorize the vocabulary, and practice writing the correct English sentence. In memorizing the word, some students can enjoy learning the language through English songs (Isnaini & Aminatun, 2021).

As students, they should study hard, and each of them has a struggle in learning. But when learning English, they should be confident, and be brave to express their idea (Purnawati, 2021). There are many strategies for improving English skills but it depends on how the students choose and apply those strategies in their learning process. In educational programs, the teacher should focus on how to engage the students to have a meaningful task (Tamimi et al., 2020). Related to the student's problem in learning the English language, the process of learning should solve the problem. Students and teachers should work together to find out the information during the learning process (Zannan, 2023).

Conclusion

English is a foreign language, each student has their struggles to learn the language itself. The students are still influenced by their mother tongue. Many difficulties happen to the students when improving their English skills. As students, they should realize that English is very important to learn for their future or career later. The teacher should push the students to learn and practice their English every day. When learning without practice, their English skills cannot be improved. The student should review what they have learned from their teacher after class. Four skills of English (Listening, speaking, reading, writing) have an important role in learning English. Lack of reading, lack of listening, lack of speaking, and lack of writing, the students will have difficulty in learning English. The students should improve themselves with English every time. The students should have their

dictionary, through the dictionary, the students can read and memorize the English words. Each student has different strategies for learning, and the teacher should know how to guide their students when they are still teaching them. The teacher and students should cooperate in learning. The students should be brave to consult their English problems with their teacher and the teacher also can guide their students to find their solution in learning. Nowadays, English is still a problem, the students find it difficult to find their friends in practice, and their class is still dominant with the theory and lack of practice. When we learn a foreign language, we should learn to practice how to speak, how to read, and how to write in English. Living in internet-restricted areas, the students have a challenge to push themselves to learn English individually. Therefore, the teacher also has the responsibility of guiding their students to learn English. Mostly they are scared to pronounce English, and it makes their reading skills poor. So, the teacher and students should cooperate in learning the language.

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