

# THE ORGANIZATIONAL AND GRAMMATICAL PROFICIENCIES IN WRITING A NARRATIVE ESSAY OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** This study is aimed at examining students' organizational and grammatical proficiencies in writing a narrative essay between two different grades of senior high school students of SMAN 3 Malang. Using Simplified ESL Composition Profile for Organizational Features and Simplified ESL Composition Profile for Grammatical Features, the results show that there is no significant difference in the organizational and grammatical proficiencies in writing a narrative essay between students of grade X and grade XI students for the following reasons. First, the organizational proficiency of the students of grade X was *high-to-low*, while that of the students of second grade X was *low*. Second, the grammatical proficiency of the students of grade X and of grade XI was *low*.

**Key words:** narrative essay, organizational proficiency, grammatical proficiency.

The teaching of English should cover the teaching of the four language skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and the three language components, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Unfortunately, the teaching of writing is often neglected in the teaching of English in senior high schools in Indonesia. The implementation of the 2004 English Curriculum which is based on genre approach is a breakthrough in the teaching of writing. A number of genres are introduced to senior high school students.

According to the 2004 Curriculum (Depdiknas, 2004), there are fourteen genres that should be taught to the senior high school students during the three

years of education. For grade X students, genres that should be taught are Narrative, Procedure, Spoof/Recount, Report, and News Item. For grade XI students genres that should be taught are Descriptive, Narrative, Anecdote, Exposition (Analytical), and Exposition (Hortatory). For grade XII students the genres that should be taught are Narrative, Explanation, Discussion, Commentary, and Review. It is obvious that the most common genre taught to senior high school students is narrative.

Since narrative is taught to all grades, in order to measure the students' proficiency in writing, the present study used narrative as the standard measurement of students' writing proficiency. A narrative is simply defined as a story (Solorzano, 2001:27; Bullon *et al*,

2000:965). More specifically, a narrative is a story that typically tells about "problematic events", which later are resolved in certain ways (Depdiknas, 2003). The purposes of narratives are "to amuse, entertain and to deal with actual or vicarious experience in different ways" (Depdiknas, 2003). According to Derewianka (1990:40), the purposes of narratives are "to entertain, to teach or inform, to embody the writer's reflections on experience, and to nourish and extend the reader's imagination".

The generic structure of a narrative is only orientation, complication, resolution (1990:40), and reorientation (Depdiknas, 2003). Derewianka (1990:40) explained that the term *orientation* refers to the introduction part of a narrative where the writer set the background of the story. In the orientation, the writer introduces the characters of the story, gives information about the setting in terms of time and place and creates a particular *atmosphere* to make the readers interested in the story. Derewianka (1990:42) also added that the term *complication* refers to the problem that arises in the story and the term *resolution* refers to the way the problem or the complication is resolved. *Re-orientation*, which is optional in a narrative, refers to the closure of the story (Depdiknas, 2003).

Some studies on narrative were conducted by Cahyono (1997), Jusuf (2004), Kamimura (1996), and Söter (1988). Söter (1988) investigated simple narratives written by Vietnamese, Arabic-speaking Lebanese, and native English-speaking students. "Storygraph" was employed to analyze the development of the plot and the typical feature of the narratives. The analysis showed that the

narratives written by native English-speaking students were different from narratives written by non-native English-speaking students in various respects in terms of the development of the plot and the typical feature of the narratives.

Kamimura (1996) examined the interrelationships between composing in Japanese, as a first language, and in English, as a foreign language. The subjects of the study, college students, were asked to write two narratives, one in Japanese and the other in English, based on two series of picture. The students' compositions were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The analysis showed that there was positive correlation between students' Japanese and English writing behaviour. Students who tended to write "higher-rated compositions" in Japanese tended to do so in English, while students who tended to write "lower-rated compositions" in Japanese also tended to do so in English. The analysis also showed that students' English proficiency influenced the correlation between composing in Japanese and in English. Students with high English proficiency were able to write narratives as efficiently as in Japanese, but students with low English proficiency failed to write as good as in Japanese.

Cahyono (1997) investigated the application of genre approach in the teaching of writing narrative. The procedures applied in the application of the approach are explained as follows. First, the feature of narrative was revealed to the students. Then, students were given a model paragraph to make the students more familiar with the feature of a problem solution narrative. Finally, the students were asked to write their own short story based on the model frame provided. Later, it was found out that the application of genre approach is helpful in improving students' writing.

Jusuf (2004) conducted a study to investigate the effectiveness of outlining in the teaching of narration. The subjects of the study were students of SLTP Negeri I

Limboto Kabupaten Gorontalo. The result of the study showed that students' ability in writing narratives is improved after the outlining strategy is applied in the teaching and learning process.

The review of previous studies suggests that narratives written by non-native English speaking-students are different from narratives written by native English-speaking students. The review of previous studies also suggests that narratives written by non-native English-speaking students can be improved, particularly by the application of genre approach in the teaching of writing.

The present study was designed to investigate the organizational and grammatical proficiencies in writing a narrative essay of senior high school students as well as to find out the significant difference between students of different grades in the proficiencies. It was expected that the outcomes of the present study proved that the application of genre approach can improve senior high school students' proficiency in writing a narrative. More particularly, it was expected that students of the higher grade are more proficient in writing a narrative essay than students of the lower grade.

The research questions of the present study are stated as follows: (1) How are the organizational and grammatical proficiencies in writing a narrative essay of grade X students and of grade XI students?; (2) Is there any significant difference between the organizational proficiency in writing a narrative essay of grade X students and that of grade XI students?; (3) Is there any significant difference between the grammatical proficiency in writing a narrative essay of the first grade students and that of the second grade students?

The research hypothesis of the present study is that there is a significant

difference in the organizational and grammatical proficiencies in writing a narrative essay between students of grade X and those of grade XI.

## **METHOD**

The target population of the present study was the X and XI grade students of senior high schools in Malang in the academic year of 2005/2006. The accessible population of the present study was the X and XI grade students of regular classes in SMAN 3 Malang in the academic year of 2005/2006. The sample was 76 students, consisting of 38 grade X students and 38 grade XI students.

The data were students' scores on the organization and scores on the grammar of narrative essays. The data were collected in two steps: first, a writing test was conducted in SMAN 3 Malang and, second, the narratives essays written by the students were scored by employed raters.

The actual data collection took place in June 2006. Prior to the actual data collection, a tryout test was conducted in a class of grade X students. The purpose of conducting the tryout test was to check the clarity of the writing prompt for the students in terms of the wording of the instruction, the wording of the outline and to find out the appropriate time allotment for students in writing the narrative essay. From the try out test, it was found out that some words used in the writing prompt needed to be substituted and the theme of the story needed to be broadened. Furthermore, the option of the main character needed to be made more various and the time allotment needed to be changed from 75 minutes into 90 minutes.

In the actual data collection, the number of students who joined the writing test was 74, so 74 essays were collected. The essays were scored by three raters, two main raters and an additional rater in case of scoring discrepancies. Both main raters had graduated from the English Department of State

University of Malang, while the additional rater was the researcher herself. The three raters worked independently using the Simplified ESL Composition Profile for Organizational Feature and Simplified ESL Composition Profile for Grammatical Feature, which are adapted from Hartfiel's ESL Composition Profile (1985), as the scoring guides (see Appendix 1 and 2).

Prior to the scoring process, the main raters were trained by the researcher to use the two Simplified ESL Composition Profiles in order that the raters have the same perception of what to judge and how to judge it. The drafts used in the training session were narrative essays obtained from the try out test. Rater 1 and Rater 2 were asked to score four narrative essays in terms of the organization and the grammar of the essays. Scores given by Rater 1 and Rater 2 were compared with the researcher's scores of the same essays. Different scores were discussed in order that the three raters arrived at an agreement about the scoring criteria.

The inter-rater reliability for scoring the organization of the essays was 0.23, while the inter-rater reliability for scoring the grammar of the essays was 0.26. Although the inter-rater reliability for scoring the organization of the essays and the inter-rater reliability for scoring the grammar of the essays was low, both inter-rater reliabilities were significant at the 5 percent level which means that the scores yielded by the main raters were positively correlated.

The final scores used in the data analysis were the average scores of the scores given by raters employed (see Appendix 3). The descriptive statistics applied in this study were the mean of the scores, while the inferential statistics applied were Mann-Whitney *U*-test and *z*-test. Comparison of means was used in this study in order to determine the

difference in organizational and grammatical proficiencies in writing a narrative essay between two groups of students. Mann-Whitney *U*-test and *z*-test with the significance level of 0.05 were employed to see whether the means of the two groups were significantly different.

## RESULTS

To answer the first research question, the means of students' scores on organization and grammar were interpreted based on a four-level proficiency scale. Table 1 presents the scale of proficiency level in writing a narrative essay.

**Table 1. Scale of Proficiency Level in Writing a Narrative Essay**

Level of Proficiency	Score
Very High	4
High	3
Low	2
Very Low	1

(Adapted from the Simplified ESL Composition Profile for Organizational and Grammatical Feature)

Based on the scale, the organizational proficiency in writing a narrative essay of grade X students was *high-to-low* since the mean on organization was 2.50, while the organizational proficiency in writing a narrative essay of grade XI students was *low* since the mean on organization was 2.32. The grammatical proficiency in writing a narrative essay of grade X students was *low* because the mean on grammar was 2.24 and the grammatical proficiency in writing a narrative essay of grade XI students was also *low* because the mean of grade X students' on grammar was 2.29. Table 2 shows the comparison of means of the final scores as the result of the computation.

**Tabel 2. A Comparison of Organizational and Grammatical Proficiencies in Writing a Narrative Essay of Grade X and Grade XI Students**

Group	N	Mean	
		Scores on Organization	Scores on Grammar
First Grade Students	37	2.50	2.24
Second Grade Students	37	2.32	2.29

To answer the second and the third research questions, the null hypothesis was tested. It was tested by applying Mann-Whitney *U*-test and *z*-test using SPSS 10.0 for Windows. After Mann-Whitney *U*-test was applied, it was figured out that the calculated value of *z* for student' scores on organization was -1.26 and the asymptotic significance was 0.21. It was also known that the calculated value of *z* for students' scores on grammar was -.37 and the asymptotic significance was 0.71. Table 3 shows the result of computation of students' scores on organization and the grammar of the essays by means of Mann-Whitney *U*-test.

**Table 3. The Result of Mann-Whitney U-Test Application**

	Scores on Organization	Scores on Grammar
Mann-Whitney U	570.00	651.50
WilcoxonW	1273.00	1354.50
Z	-1.26	-.37
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.21	.71

Based on the result of the computation, the null hypothesis, stated that there is no significant difference in the organizational and grammatical proficiencies in writing a narrative essay between grade X and grade XI students, was accepted and the research hypothesis was rejected. The null hypothesis was accepted because of the following reasons. First, the calculated value of *z* for scores on organization, 1.26, was smaller than the critical value of *z*, 1.96, and the significance level of the study, 0.05, was smaller than the asymptotic significance, 0.21. Second, the calculated value of *z* for scores on grammar, 0.37, was smaller than the critical value of *z*, 1.96, and the significance level of the study, 0.05, was smaller than the asymptotic significance, 0.71. The acceptance of the null hypothesis indicates that the organizational proficiency of the first and the second grade students were not significantly different and that the grammatical proficiency of students of grade X and XI were not significantly different either.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study complete and support the findings of some previous related studies because from this study it is found out that Indonesian senior high school students as non-native English-speaking students have *high-to-low* to *low* English organizational and grammatical proficiencies in writing a narrative essay.

In particular, the findings of the present study complete the findings of Söter's (1988) study because the findings of the present study give one possible reason of what Söter found in her study. Söter, based on her investigation on narratives written by native and non-native English-speaking students, figured out that narratives written by non-native English-speaking students were different from those written by native English-speaking students. One possible reason for such difference is due to the different level of proficiency in writing

narratives between native and non-native English-speaking students.

The findings of the present study also support Kamimura's (1996) findings since Kamimura's findings proved that the level of proficiency of students had significant influence on the composition produced by the students. Students with high English proficiency were able to write narratives in English well, whereas students with low English proficiency failed to do so.

The findings of the present study are also in line with Alwasilah's (2004) findings. In his study, Alwasilah (2004) found out that senior high school students perceived writing as the most difficult skill to acquire among the four language skills. Therefore, it is reasonable that senior high school students have *high-to-low* to *low* organizational and grammatical proficiencies in writing a narrative essay as what is found from the present study since the students do not acquire the writing skill well. Hapsari (1993), as cited in Cahyono (1997:4), mentioned four problems that students encountered in writing. Among the four problems, the two problems are theory to write and grammar. Hapsari explained that the limited knowledge of how to write prevents students from organizing their ideas coherently and cohesively, while the lack mastery of grammar causes students to produce grammatical mistakes, such as using inappropriate tenses and creating wrong sentence construction.

Since the present study was conducted under the application of genre approach in the instructional process, the findings of the present study suggest that the application of genre approach does not improve students' narrative writing proficiency as what was found in Cahyono's (1997) study. However, it is still arguable that the application of genre

approach improves students' writing proficiency since the teaching of English to senior high school students which is based on genre approach has only been implemented for less than two years in Indonesia, so the application of genre approach is not maximum yet. Many teachers do not have sufficient theoretical and practical knowledge about genres. Another thing that makes the application of genre approach is not maximum is that the number of genres taught in senior high schools is considerably big. Moreover, the teaching of English in senior high schools does not focus only on writing skill, but also on other skills.

Finally, the findings of the present study enable us to know the proficiency in writing a narrative essay of senior high school students, although the narrative essay-writing test was conducted at school. Kroll (1990), based on her study, stated that the way a writing test is conducted to measure students' proficiency does not have much influence to the result of the study. Kroll found out in her study that there was no significant difference between essays written at home and at school. Students whose compositions were badly written at school also had compositions which were badly written at home.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

From the findings, it can be concluded that there was no significant difference in the organizational and grammatical proficiencies between the first and second grade students for the following reasons. First, the level of the organizational proficiency of the first grade students and that of the second grade students was not significantly different. Second, the level of the grammatical proficiency of the first grade students and that of the second grade students was the same.

Based on the discussion of the findings, in order to improve English writing proficiency of senior high school students, it was suggested that teachers use genre and process

approaches integratedly. It was also suggested that teachers be motivators as well as facilitators for students to write in English and that students should practice writing in English as often as possible.

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## Appendix 1

### Simplified ESL Composition Profile for Organizational Feature

<b>Organization</b>	4	<b>EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD:</b> Fluent expression • ideas clearly stated/ supported • succinct • well-organized • logical sequencing • cohesive
	3	<b>GOOD TO AVERAGE:</b> Somewhat choppy • loosely organized but main ideas stand out • limited support • logical but incomplete sequencing
	2	<b>FAIR TO POOR:</b> Non-fluent • ideas confused or disconnected • lacks logical sequencing and development
	1	<b>VERY POOR:</b> Does not communicate • no organization • OR not enough to evaluate

Source: Adapted from Learning ESL Composition (Hartfiel *et al*, 1985)

### Descriptors and Criteria of the Simplified ESL Composition Profile for Organizational Feature

DESCRIPTOR	CRITERIA
Fluent expression	Do the ideas flow, building on one another? What point of view is used? Is it consistently used?
Ideas Clearly stated/supported	Is the point of the essay clearly stated? Is the point of orientation, the point of complication, the resolution, and re-orientation support the point of the essay (fiction) in general?
Succinct	Are all ideas directed concisely to the central focus of the paper, without digressions?
Well-organized	Is the overall relationship of ideas within and between paragraphs clearly indicated? Are there the orientation, complication, resolution and re-orientation in the essay?
Logical sequencing	Is this development indicated by appropriate transitional markers? Are the points logically developed, using a particular time order such as chronological order or flashback?
Cohesive	Is this development indicated by appropriate transitional markers? Does each paragraph reflect a single purpose? Do the paragraphs form a unified essay?

Source: Adapted from Learning ESL Composition (Hartfiel *et al*, 1985)



## Appendix 2

### Simplified ESL Composition Profile For Grammatical Feature

Language Use	4	<b>EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD:</b> Effective complex constructions • few errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns
	3	<b>GOOD TO AVERAGE:</b> Effective but simple constructions • minor problems in complex constructions • several errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns <i>but meaning seldom obscured</i>
	2	<b>FAIR TO POOR:</b> Major problems in simple/complex constructions • frequent errors of negation, agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns • <i>meaning confused or obscured</i>
	1	<b>VERY POOR:</b> Virtually no mastery of sentence construction rules • dominated by errors • does not communicate • OR not enough to evaluate

Source: Adapted from Learning ESL Composition (Hartfiel *et al*, 1985)

### Descriptors and Criteria of the Simplified ESL Composition Profile for Grammatical Feature

DESCRIPTOR	CRITERIA
Effective complex constructions	Are sentences well-formed and complete, with appropriate complements? Are single-word modifiers appropriate to function? Are they properly formed, placed, and sequenced? Are phrases and clauses appropriate to function? complete? Properly placed? Are introductory It and There used correctly to begin sentences and clauses? Are main and subordinate ideas carefully distinguished? Are coordinate and subordinate elements linked to other elements with appropriate conjunctions, adverbials, relative pronouns, or punctuation? Are sentence types and length varied? Are elements parallel? Are techniques of substitution, repetition, and deletion used effectively?
Agreement	Is there basic agreement between sentence elements: auxiliary and verb? subject and verb? Pronoun and antecedent? Adjective and noun? Nouns and quantifiers?
Tense	Are verb tenses correct? Properly sequenced? Do modals convey intended meaning? time?
Number	Do nouns, pronouns, and verbs convey intended quality?

Word order/function	Is normal word order followed except for special emphasis? Is each word, phrase, and clause suited to its intended function?
Articles	Are a, <i>an</i> , and <i>the</i> used correctly?
Pronouns	Do pronouns reflect appropriate person? gender? Number? function? Referent?

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## Appendix 3

**Students' Scores on Organization of Narrative Essays**  
**(Mean Scores of Rater 1, 2, and Rater 3)**

No.	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	No.	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	No.	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	No.	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>
1	3.5	2	11	2	3.5	21	3.5	2.7	31	2.5	2
2	2	2.5	12	1	2.3	22	4	3.5	32	2	2.5
3	3	3.5	13	2	2	23	3	1.5	33	1.5	2
4	2.5	1.5	14	2.5	2.5	24	2	2.5	34	2.5	2
5	1.5	2	15	3	2.7	25	2.7	2.5	35	2.5	2
6	3	2	16	3.3	4	26	1.5	1.7	36	2.5	1
7	2.5	1.5	17	2	3	27	2.5	3.5	37	1	1.5
8	3.5	1.7	18	2.5	2	28	4	2.5			
9	3.3	1.5	19	2.7	2	29	2	2.7			
10	2.5	1.7	20	2	2.5	30	2.5	3.3			

**Students' Scores on Grammar of Narrative Essays**  
**(Mean Scores of Rater 1, 2, and Rater 3)**

No.	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	No.	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	No.	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	No.	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>
1	2.5	1.5	11	2	3.5	21	2.5	2.5	31	2.5	2
2	1.5	2.5	12	2.5	2.5	22	3	3.5	32	2	2.5
3	2.5	2.5	13	3	2	23	1.5	1.5	33	1.5	1.5
4	2	2.5	14	1.5	2	24	2	2	34	2.5	3
5	1.5	3	15	2	3	25	2.5	2	35	2.5	1.5
6	2.5	3	16	3.5	3	26	2.5	2.5	36	1.5	2
7	1.5	1	17	2.5	1.5	27	1.5	2.5	37	1.5	1.5
8	3.5	3	18	3	2	28	3	2			
9	2.5	1.5	19	2	2	29	2	2			
10	2	2.5	20	2	2.5	30	2.5	3.5			