

VOCABULARY AND GRAMMAR MASTERY AS PREDICTORS OF WRITING ABILITY AMONG INDONESIAN EFL JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article history: Received: August 5, 2026 Revised: August 15, 2026 Accepted: August 29, 2026 Published: August 31, 2026 Keywords: Descriptive Writing, EFL Students., Grammar Mastery, Vocabulary Mastery, Writing Ability	Vocabulary and grammar are fundamental resources for effective writing, yet their relationships with descriptive writing among Indonesian EFL learners remain underexplored. This study investigated the individual and joint relationships of vocabulary and grammar mastery with seventh-grade students' descriptive writing ability. Using a quantitative correlational design, the study involved 64 students from SMP Negeri 1 Kayuagung, selected through cluster random sampling. Data were collected using vocabulary and grammar tests and a descriptive writing assessment, then analyzed through Pearson correlation and multiple regression. The findings revealed very strong positive relationships between vocabulary and writing ($r = .953$, $p < .001$) and grammar and writing ($r = .961$, $p < .001$). Together, vocabulary and grammar explained 95.5% of the variance in writing performance ($R^2 = .955$), with grammar showing a stronger relative contribution ($\beta = .545$) than vocabulary ($\beta = .453$). The study contributes context-specific evidence supporting integrated vocabulary-grammar instruction to strengthen descriptive writing in Indonesian EFL classrooms. <i>This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA license.</i> 
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INTRODUCTION

Writing is an important part of learning English because it allows students to communicate ideas, information, and experiences in written form. Writing involves more than producing grammatically correct sentences; students also need to develop ideas, select appropriate language, and organize their message so that readers can understand it (Hyland, 2022). For EFL learners, particularly junior high school students who are still developing their English proficiency, managing these aspects at the same time can make writing challenging.

Vocabulary is one of the language components that supports students in writing. Knowing a word involves several aspects, including its form, meaning, grammatical function, and appropriate use (Nation, 2022). In writing, students need sufficient vocabulary to express what they want to say and develop their ideas clearly. When their vocabulary is limited, they may have difficulty choosing appropriate words, adding details, or avoiding unnecessary repetition. In contrast, better vocabulary knowledge gives students more language resources for expressing their ideas. Previous studies have also reported significant relationships between vocabulary mastery and students' writing performance (Nugraheni et al., 2024; Purnomo et al., 2023; Puspitasari et al., 2024).

Grammar is also closely related to writing. While vocabulary provides the words students need, grammar helps them arrange those words into meaningful sentences. Students need grammatical knowledge to construct sentences that can be understood by readers. In descriptive writing, for example, students commonly need appropriate sentence patterns and grammatical forms to describe people, animals, places, or objects. Previous research has also found a significant relationship between grammar mastery and descriptive writing ability (Pradana et al., 2023).

Vocabulary and grammar therefore have different but related functions in the writing process. Knowing many words alone may not be sufficient when students cannot organize them into appropriate sentences. Similarly, understanding grammatical rules may not help students communicate their ideas effectively when they do not have enough vocabulary. Both components are therefore relevant when examining students' writing ability.

Descriptive text is one type of writing learned by junior high school students. Through descriptive writing, students learn to describe a particular person, place, animal, or object by presenting its characteristics clearly. This type of writing requires students to select suitable vocabulary and use appropriate grammatical structures to communicate details effectively. Research involving Indonesian junior high school students has shown that vocabulary knowledge is significantly related to the ability to write descriptive texts (Purnomo et al., 2023).

Previous studies provide useful evidence about the relationship between language knowledge and writing. Puspitasari et al. (2024), for example, found that vocabulary mastery contributed significantly to the writing ability of eighth-grade EFL students. Nugraheni et al. (2024) also reported a significant relationship between vocabulary mastery and writing skills among ninth-grade junior high school students. In relation to grammar, Pradana et al. (2023) found a significant relationship between grammar mastery and descriptive writing. These studies support the importance of vocabulary and grammar in writing, although they were conducted with different groups of students and did not necessarily examine the same combination of variables and educational context.

The present study therefore extends previous research by examining vocabulary mastery, grammar mastery, and writing ability among seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Kayuagung. Rather than claiming that these relationships have not been studied before, this study provides evidence from a different group of EFL learners and examines the two linguistic predictors both individually and jointly in relation to descriptive writing. It also compares their relative contribution through multiple regression analysis.

Accordingly, this study addresses three questions: (1) Is there a significant relationship between vocabulary mastery and students' writing ability? (2) Is there a significant relationship between grammar mastery and students' writing ability? and (3) Do vocabulary mastery and grammar mastery jointly make a significant contribution to students' writing ability? The findings are expected to provide additional evidence about the role of vocabulary and grammar in EFL writing and offer practical information for English teachers in developing writing activities for junior high school students.

METHOD

This study used a quantitative correlational design to examine the relationships among vocabulary mastery, grammar mastery, and writing ability. This design was appropriate because the study focused on the relationships among the variables without giving any experimental treatment to the participants.

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The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Kayuagung, South Sumatra, Indonesia, in the 2025/2026 academic year. The population consisted of 256 seventh-grade students from eight classes, with 32 students in each class. Cluster random sampling was used to select the sample. Two classes were randomly selected, resulting in a total sample of 64 students.

Three instruments were used to collect the data: a vocabulary mastery test, a grammar mastery test, and a descriptive writing test. The vocabulary test consisted of 30 multiple-choice items covering meaning, use, and form in descriptive contexts. The grammar test also consisted of 30 multiple-choice items focusing on the simple present tense, subject-verb agreement, and sentence structure in descriptive contexts. Both tests were designed for seventh-grade students and were aligned with the English curriculum used at the school.

For the writing test, the students were asked to write a descriptive paragraph of approximately 80–100 words based on a given picture and guided sentences. The students' writing was assessed using an analytic scoring rubric consisting of five components: Vocabulary Use, Grammar Accuracy, Sentence Completion and Structure, Descriptive Content, and Mechanics. Each component was scored from 0 to 20, resulting in a maximum score of 100.

Before data collection, the three research instruments were reviewed by two experts in English Language Education. The validation process focused on the relevance of the content, the alignment of the instruments with the research indicators, the clarity of the instructions, and their suitability for seventh-grade students. Revisions were made based on the validators' feedback before the instruments were administered. The writing test was scored independently by two raters using the same analytic scoring rubric. The inter-rater analysis showed a very high level of agreement between the two raters ($r = .993$, $p < .001$).

The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize students' scores in vocabulary mastery, grammar mastery, and writing ability. Before hypothesis testing, assumption testing was conducted to determine whether the data were appropriate for parametric analysis. Pearson

Product-Moment correlation was then used to examine the relationship between vocabulary mastery and writing ability and the relationship between grammar mastery and writing ability. Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the joint predictive contribution of vocabulary mastery and grammar mastery to writing ability. The level of statistical significance was set at .05.

RESULTS

Before hypothesis testing, the assumptions required for the statistical analyses were examined. The data were considered appropriate for parametric analysis, and the scatter plots indicated positive linear relationships between each predictor and writing ability. The multicollinearity analysis showed a tolerance value of .157 and a VIF of 6.384 for both vocabulary and grammar mastery. Although the VIF values were relatively high, they remained below the threshold used in this study, indicating no serious multicollinearity problem. Therefore, both predictors were retained in the multiple regression analysis.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to provide an overview of students' vocabulary mastery, grammar mastery, and writing ability. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Research Variables

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Vocabulary Mastery	64	21.36	2.242	18	25
Grammar Mastery	64	21.25	1.960	18	25
Writing Ability	64	78.13	5.935	68	87

As shown in Table 1, the mean score of vocabulary mastery was 21.36 (SD = 2.242), while the mean score of grammar mastery was 21.25 (SD = 1.960). The students obtained a mean writing score of 78.13 (SD = 5.935). The relatively small standard deviations indicate that the students' scores were not widely dispersed within each variable.

2 Correlation between Vocabulary Mastery and Writing Ability

Pearson Product-Moment correlation was used to examine the relationship between vocabulary mastery and writing ability. The result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlation between Vocabulary Mastery and Writing Ability

Variables	r	p
Vocabulary Mastery - Writing Ability	0.953	< .001

The analysis showed a very strong positive relationship between vocabulary mastery and writing ability ($r = .953$, $p < .001$). Therefore, the relationship was statistically significant. Students with higher vocabulary scores tended to obtain higher writing scores.

3 Correlation between Grammar Mastery and Writing Ability

The relationship between grammar mastery and writing ability was also examined using Pearson correlation.

Table 3. Correlation between Grammar Mastery and Writing Ability

Variables	r	p
Grammar Mastery - Writing Ability	.961	< .001

The result showed a very strong positive relationship between grammar mastery and writing ability ($r = .961$, $p < .001$). This relationship was statistically significant, indicating that students with higher grammar mastery tended to perform better in descriptive writing.

4 Joint Prediction of Vocabulary and Grammar Mastery on Writing Ability

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine how vocabulary mastery and grammar mastery jointly predicted students' writing ability.

Table 4. Multiple Regression Model

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	p
.977	.955	.954	648.524	< .001

The regression model was statistically significant, $F = 648.524$, $p < .001$. The multiple correlation coefficient was .977, while the coefficient of determination was .955. This means that vocabulary mastery and grammar mastery together accounted for 95.5% of the variance in writing scores within the sample. The remaining 4.5% was not explained by the two predictors included in the model.

The high R^2 value should be interpreted within the context of this study rather than as evidence of a causal relationship. The analysis shows that vocabulary and grammar scores were strongly associated with writing scores among the students in this sample.

Relative Contribution of Vocabulary and Grammar Mastery

The regression coefficients were examined to determine the contribution of each predictor to students' writing ability. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Regression Coefficients

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Vocabulary Mastery	1.199	.181	.453	6.607	< .001
Grammar Mastery	1.649	.208	.545	7.944	< .001

Both vocabulary mastery and grammar mastery significantly predicted students' writing ability. Vocabulary mastery had a standardized coefficient of $\beta = .453$ ($t = 6.607$, $p < .001$), while grammar mastery had a standardized coefficient of $\beta = .545$ ($t = 7.944$, $p < .001$). The higher standardized coefficient for grammar mastery indicates that grammar made a somewhat stronger relative contribution to writing ability than vocabulary in this sample. However, both predictors were important components of the regression model.

DISCUSSION

Vocabulary Mastery and Writing Ability

The first finding showed a very strong positive relationship between vocabulary mastery and writing ability ($r = .953$, $p < .001$). This means that students who obtained higher vocabulary scores also tended to achieve higher scores in descriptive writing. Vocabulary appears to be closely related to students' ability to express and develop their ideas in written form.

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This finding is understandable because students need sufficient vocabulary to describe people, places, animals, or objects clearly. When students know more words, they have more choices to express characteristics, actions, and details. In contrast, limited vocabulary may make students repeat the same words or leave their ideas underdeveloped because they cannot find suitable expressions. Thus, vocabulary knowledge can support not only word choice but also the development of content in descriptive writing.

The result is in line with Firdaus and Wulansari (2022), who found a positive relationship between students' vocabulary mastery and writing ability. A similar result was reported by Purnomo et al. (2023), whose study of eighth-grade students found that vocabulary mastery was significantly related to their ability to write descriptive texts.

More recent evidence from Puspitasari et al. (2024) also showed that vocabulary mastery contributed significantly to the writing ability of eighth-grade EFL students. Although the strength of the relationships reported in those studies was not identical to the present result, they generally support the view that vocabulary knowledge is closely connected with writing performance.

The particularly high correlation found in the present study should nevertheless be interpreted within its specific context. The participants came from the same grade level and school and completed the same type of writing task. Therefore, the result describes a strong association within this particular sample and should not automatically be generalized to all EFL learners.

Grammar Mastery and Writing Ability

The second finding revealed a very strong positive relationship between grammar mastery and writing ability ($r = .961$, $p < .001$). Students with higher grammar scores tended to perform better in descriptive writing. Among the two predictor variables, grammar also showed a somewhat stronger standardized contribution ($\beta = .545$) than vocabulary ($\beta = .453$).

Grammar helps students arrange words into sentences that communicate their intended meaning. In descriptive writing, students need to connect subjects and

verbs appropriately, use suitable sentence patterns, and maintain grammatical accuracy while developing descriptions. A student may know the words needed to describe an object or person, but the message can still be unclear when those words are not organized into understandable sentences. This may help explain why grammar was strongly associated with writing performance in this study.

The present result supports studies that have reported a meaningful connection between grammar knowledge and writing performance. For example, research on EFL learners has shown that grammatical knowledge can play an important role in students' ability to produce written texts. Haryadi et al. (2021) also reported that vocabulary and grammar mastery were related to students' descriptive writing performance at the junior high school level.

However, not all previous studies have produced the same result. Fahuzul et al. (2022), for example, reported no significant correlation between grammar mastery and writing ability among the eighth-grade students in their study. This difference is important because it suggests that the relationship between grammar and writing may vary across groups of learners. Differences in participants, instruments, writing tasks, learning conditions, and students' level of English may contribute to different findings. Therefore, the strong relationship found in the present study should be understood within the context in which the data were collected.

Combined Contribution of Vocabulary and Grammar Mastery

The multiple regression analysis showed that vocabulary mastery and grammar mastery jointly had a very strong relationship with writing ability ($R = .977$). The model accounted for 95.5% of the variance in students' writing scores ($R^2 = .955$). Both predictors were statistically significant, with grammar showing a somewhat higher standardized coefficient than vocabulary.

This finding suggests that vocabulary and grammar work together in students' writing. Vocabulary provides the words needed to communicate ideas, while grammar helps students arrange those words into meaningful sentences. Having vocabulary without sufficient grammatical control may make it difficult for students to express their ideas clearly. In the same way, knowing grammatical rules may not be

enough when students do not have the vocabulary needed to develop their descriptions. For this reason, the two language components should be considered together rather than as completely separate aspects of writing.

The finding is consistent with Haryadi et al. (2021), who examined vocabulary and grammar mastery in relation to descriptive writing among junior high school students and found that both language components were relevant to students' writing performance. The present study adds evidence from a different educational setting and focuses on seventh-grade learners.

However, the R^2 value of .955 is unusually high and needs careful interpretation. It does not mean that vocabulary and grammar cause 95.5% of students' writing ability. The study used a correlational design, so the results show statistical relationships rather than cause-and-effect relationships. In addition, the participants were relatively homogeneous because they were from the same school and grade level and completed the same descriptive writing task. The vocabulary, grammar, and writing measures may also have assessed related areas of language knowledge. These conditions may have contributed to the strong relationships found among the variables.

From a teaching perspective, the findings suggest that vocabulary and grammar can be integrated into writing activities. Teachers may introduce useful vocabulary together with relevant grammatical patterns before asking students to write. Students can then apply both components in short descriptive paragraphs and receive feedback on word choice, sentence construction, content, and mechanics. In this way, vocabulary and grammar are learned as resources for communicating ideas rather than only as separate language exercises.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationships among vocabulary mastery, grammar mastery, and writing ability among seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Kayuagung. The findings showed that vocabulary mastery had a significant positive relationship with writing ability. Grammar mastery was also significantly and positively related to writing ability. When examined together, vocabulary and

grammar mastery were strong predictors of students' writing scores. Grammar showed a somewhat stronger relative contribution than vocabulary, although both predictors were statistically significant.

These findings indicate that vocabulary and grammar are closely connected with students' ability to write descriptive texts. Vocabulary helps students express and develop their ideas, while grammar helps them organize those ideas into clear and meaningful sentences. Therefore, writing instruction may be more effective when vocabulary and grammar are practiced together within meaningful writing activities rather than taught only as separate language exercises.

The findings should be interpreted within the context of this study. The participants were limited to 64 seventh-grade students from one public junior high school, and the study focused only on descriptive writing. In addition, the correlational design does not establish cause-and-effect relationships. The high proportion of explained variance in the regression model should therefore not be interpreted as evidence that vocabulary and grammar alone determine students' writing ability. Future studies may involve students from different schools and grade levels, examine other types of writing, and include additional factors that may be related to writing performance.

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