



An Analysis of Students' Difficulties in Writing Recount Texts through Picture Series Media among Tenth-Grade Students at MPI Silo Bonto Private Islamic Senior High School in the 2025/2026 Academic Year

Khairun Nisa Panjaitan* & Susi Masniari Nasution

Universitas Asahan, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Writing recount texts requires students to integrate grammatical accuracy, appropriate vocabulary, chronological organization, and coherent idea development, which remain challenging for many English as a Foreign Language learners. This study investigated the difficulties experienced by tenth-grade students at MPI Silo Bonto Private Islamic Senior High School in writing recount texts through picture series media during the 2025/2026 academic year. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, the study involved 27 students and collected data through writing tasks, classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis. Students wrote recount texts based on picture series, and the data were analyzed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's procedures of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings identified grammar as the dominant difficulty (61.5%), particularly in using the simple past tense and constructing sentences, followed by vocabulary (19.2%), organization (11.5%), and idea development (7.6%). Although picture series facilitated idea generation and chronological organization, some students still struggled to produce clear and cohesive texts. The study concludes that students' difficulties primarily stemmed from linguistic and cognitive factors, indicating the need for more focused instructional support in grammar, vocabulary, organization, and idea development.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted 16 05 2026
Revised 28 09 2026
Accepted 30 09 2026
Published 02 10 2026

KEYWORDS

Grammar; picture series; recount texts; vocabulary; writing difficulties.

*CORRESPONDANCE AUTHOR

 nisapjt213@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30743/bahastra.v11i1.13554>

INTRODUCTION

Writing constitutes an essential language skill that students need to master in learning English. It enables students to communicate their ideas, opinions, feelings, and experiences effectively in written form (Jamshed et al., 2025). Chico (2022) explains that writing is a complex skill because it requires learners to integrate grammatical knowledge, vocabulary, sentence structure, and the organization of ideas. Students must coordinate these linguistic and cognitive components to produce clear, coherent, and meaningful written texts. The complexity of this process often creates substantial difficulties for students when they write in English.

Recount text represents one of the text types taught at the senior high school level and requires students to retell past experiences or events in chronological order. Anderson and Colpaert (2006) explain that recount texts aim to inform or entertain readers by presenting events that occurred in the past. To produce an effective recount text, students need to apply the appropriate generic structure and linguistic features, particularly the simple past tense. Previous studies have shown that EFL learners commonly encounter difficulties involving grammar, vocabulary, idea organization, and the development of coherent paragraphs when producing English texts, including recount texts (Jamshed et al., 2024; Salim, 2023). These difficulties indicate that writing recount texts requires students not only to understand linguistic conventions but also to organize past events into a coherent and meaningful sequence.

Preliminary observations at MPI Silo Bonto Private Islamic Senior High School revealed that many tenth-grade students experienced difficulties in writing recount texts. Students frequently made grammatical errors, particularly when applying the simple past tense to describe past events. Limited vocabulary also restricted their ability to select appropriate words and communicate their experiences effectively. Students encountered further difficulties in organizing ideas and developing them into coherent paragraphs. These problems frequently resulted in written texts that lacked clarity, coherence, and grammatical accuracy.

To facilitate students' idea generation, the researcher incorporated picture series media into the writing activities. Liddicoat (2008) suggests that picture series can stimulate students' imagination, facilitate idea development, and assist them in organizing events chronologically. By observing a sequence of pictures, students can identify relationships among events and establish an appropriate chronological order before transforming those events into written recount texts. Despite this instructional support, some students continued to experience difficulties in expressing their ideas clearly, selecting appropriate vocabulary, and applying grammatical rules accurately. This condition indicates that the availability of visual support does not necessarily eliminate the linguistic and organizational difficulties students encounter during the writing process.

Previous research has identified grammar, vocabulary, and idea organization as recurring difficulties in English writing (Jamshed et al., 2024; Salim, 2023), while picture series can provide visual support for generating and sequencing ideas (Liddicoat, 2008). Nevertheless, the difficulties that students continue to experience when producing recount texts with the assistance of picture series require further examination within specific classroom contexts. Analyzing these difficulties can reveal which aspects of recount writing remain challenging even when students receive visual support for developing and sequencing events. Such an analysis is particularly relevant to the context of tenth-grade students at MPI Silo Bonto Private Islamic Senior High School, where preliminary observations identified persistent grammatical, lexical, and organizational difficulties. This contextual focus provides the basis for examining students' recount-writing difficulties through picture series media during the 2025/2026 academic year.

This study therefore aims to analyze the types of difficulties experienced by tenth-grade students at MPI Silo Bonto Private Islamic Senior High School when writing recount texts through picture series media. The analysis focuses on difficulties involving grammar, vocabulary, organization, and idea development during the writing process. By identifying these difficulties, the study seeks to provide a clearer understanding of the challenges students encounter when transforming visually sequenced events into coherent recount texts. The findings can provide English teachers with empirical information for designing more responsive instructional strategies and writing activities. They can also help students recognize the aspects of recount writing that require further development and practice.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to examine students' difficulties in writing recount texts through picture series media. Descriptive qualitative research enables researchers to describe and interpret a phenomenon based on participants' experiences and empirical data collected within a natural setting. The researcher selected this design to obtain a detailed understanding of the difficulties students encountered during the recount-writing process. The study focused on identifying and describing these difficulties without introducing experimental treatment or manipulating the instructional conditions (Moses & Mohamad, 2019). This design therefore provided an appropriate framework for examining students' writing difficulties as they naturally emerged during classroom activities.

The researcher conducted the study at MPI Silo Bonto Private Islamic Senior High School during the 2025/2026 academic year. Data collection took place in the second semester when tenth-grade students were studying English writing, particularly recount texts. The study involved 27 tenth-grade students who had previously learned the characteristics and structure of recount texts. The researcher selected these participants because they had studied recount texts and actively participated in English writing activities using picture series media. Their participation provided relevant data for examining the difficulties that emerged when students transformed visually sequenced events into written recount texts.

The researcher employed four instruments to collect the data: writing tasks, observation sheets, interview guidelines, and documentation. For the writing task, the researcher provided students with picture series and instructed them to compose recount texts based on the sequence of events represented in the pictures. The researcher used observation sheets to record students' behavior and participation throughout the writing process, while interviews provided additional information concerning the difficulties students experienced when producing recount texts. Documentation consisted primarily of students' written work and served as supporting evidence for identifying recurring writing difficulties. The combination of these instruments enabled the researcher to examine students' difficulties through multiple sources of qualitative evidence.

The researcher collected the data through a systematic sequence of procedures. First, the researcher provided students with picture series and instructed them to write recount texts based on the events represented in the visual sequence. During the writing activity, the researcher observed students' participation and behavior and subsequently collected their completed texts for further analysis. The researcher then examined students' written work to identify recurring difficulties related to their recount-text production. Finally, the researcher conducted interviews with selected students to obtain additional information and support the findings derived from the writing tasks and classroom observations.

The researcher analyzed the collected data using the qualitative data analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which comprises data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During data reduction, the researcher selected, focused, and organized information relevant to students' difficulties in writing recount texts. In the data-display stage, the researcher presented the findings through systematic descriptions and tables to facilitate interpretation and identify recurring patterns across the data. During conclusion drawing and verification, the researcher interpreted the identified patterns and formulated conclusions regarding the difficulties students experienced in writing recount texts. The researcher verified these conclusions by comparing evidence obtained from students' writing tasks, interviews, and classroom observations to ensure that the interpretations remained consistent with the collected data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings were derived from students' writing tasks, classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis. The researcher instructed the students to compose recount texts based on a picture series provided as visual support for the writing activity. The picture series presented a sequence of events that students could interpret and transform into written recounts. Through this activity, the researcher examined how students constructed recount texts and identified the difficulties that emerged during the writing process.



Figure 1. Picture Series Used as a Visual Prompt for Recount Text Writing

The analysis focused on four major areas of difficulty: grammar, vocabulary, organization, and idea development. The analysis of students' written work revealed that most students continued to experience difficulties in producing recount texts effectively. Common problems included the incorrect use of the simple past tense, limited vocabulary, inappropriate word choice, inaccurate sentence construction, weak organization of events and ideas, and difficulties in developing coherent paragraphs. These difficulties affected students' ability to communicate past events accurately and systematically through written language. Table 4.1.1 presents the distribution of the difficulties identified in students' recount texts.

Table 1. Students' Difficulties in Writing Recount Texts

No.	Types of Difficulties	Number of Students	Total Errors	Percentage	Description
1	Grammar	27	80	61.5%	Students had difficulties in using the simple past tense and constructing sentences.

No.	Types of Difficulties	Number of Students	Total Errors	Percentage	Description
2	Vocabulary	24	25	19.2%	Students demonstrated limited vocabulary and inappropriate word choice.
4	Organization	19	15	11.5%	Students had difficulties organizing events and ideas.
5	Idea Development	13	10	7.6%	Students found it difficult to develop ideas clearly.
Total		127 Students	130	100%	

The percentage in the table above was calculated by using the following formula:

F

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

N

Where:

P = Percentage

F = Frequency of errors

N = Total number of errors

Table 1 shows that grammatical difficulties constituted the largest proportion of the errors identified in students' recount texts, accounting for 80 errors (61.5%). Vocabulary difficulties accounted for 25 errors (19.2%), while organizational difficulties represented 15 errors (11.5%). Difficulties in idea development accounted for the remaining 10 errors (7.6%). The distribution indicates that grammatical difficulties were considerably more frequent than the other categories identified in students' writing.

Grammar Difficulties

Grammar emerged as the most prominent difficulty in students' recount writing. Students frequently made errors in applying the simple past tense, which constitutes an important linguistic feature of recount texts because these texts typically retell events that occurred in the past. Several students continued to use present-tense verb forms when the context required past-tense forms. Students also encountered difficulties in constructing grammatically accurate sentences and maintaining appropriate subject-verb agreement. These recurring patterns demonstrate that students had difficulty applying their grammatical knowledge consistently when transforming past events into written narratives.

The following example illustrates a grammatical error identified in a student's writing task:

"In the last week, I and my family ready for went to the beach to swam and have fun."

The sentence contains several grammatical problems involving subject construction, verb forms, and infinitive structures. The expression "I and my family" requires the more appropriate construction "my family and I." The phrase "ready for went" should be revised to "were ready to go," while "to swam" requires the base form "to swim." These errors demonstrate difficulty in selecting verb forms according to grammatical context. They also illustrate students' challenges in constructing complete and grammatically accurate sentences when recounting past experiences.

Another grammatical problem appears in the following excerpt from a student's written work:

"We are swam, eat together, and played the sand."

This sentence demonstrates inconsistent tense selection and inaccurate verb construction. The phrase "are swam" should be written as "swam," while "eat" should take the past-tense form "ate," and "played the sand" should be expressed as "played in the sand." The combination of present and past forms within the same sequence indicates

that students had difficulty maintaining tense consistency when recounting past events. Across the analyzed data, grammatical difficulties accounted for 61.5% of the total errors, making grammar the most frequently identified category of difficulty in students' recount writing.

Vocabulary Difficulties

Limited vocabulary mastery constituted another difficulty identified in students' recount writing. Students frequently relied on repetitive expressions and selected inappropriate words, which reduced the clarity and precision of their written ideas. These lexical limitations affected their ability to communicate past experiences effectively and construct meaningful sentences. The writing data revealed several instances in which inappropriate vocabulary and word combinations obscured the intended meaning. The following excerpt illustrates a vocabulary-related difficulty identified in a student's writing:

"Experience fan this not will unforgertable."

The sentence demonstrates inappropriate vocabulary selection, inaccurate word forms, and problematic word arrangement, which make the intended meaning difficult to understand. A more appropriate construction would be "This experience was fun and unforgettable." The student appears to have intended to describe the experience positively but lacked the lexical resources required to express the idea accurately. This example demonstrates how limited vocabulary mastery can affect both the comprehensibility and accuracy of students' recount writing.

Another vocabulary-related difficulty appears in the following phrase:

"with heart to glad."

The phrase does not represent a conventional or grammatically appropriate expression in English. A more appropriate expression would be "with happy hearts." The original construction indicates difficulty in selecting and combining English words to communicate the intended meaning naturally. This problem suggests that students' vocabulary difficulties involved not only limited word knowledge but also uncertainty about appropriate lexical combinations and expressions.

Interview findings provided further evidence of students' vocabulary difficulties. Several students reported that they frequently forgot English words and relied on dictionary translation while completing their writing activities. Such reliance indicates that students had difficulty retrieving appropriate vocabulary independently when transforming their ideas into English sentences. Across the analyzed writing data, vocabulary difficulties accounted for 19.2% of the total errors. This proportion positioned vocabulary as the second most frequently identified category of difficulty after grammar.

Organization Difficulties

Students also experienced difficulties in organizing ideas and arranging events chronologically within their recount texts. Some students presented events without clear sequencing, which made the progression of their recounts difficult to follow. Several students also struggled to apply the generic structure of recount texts appropriately, particularly the orientation, events, and reorientation components. These organizational problems weakened the logical relationships among events and affected the overall coherence of students' written texts. The following excerpt illustrates an organizational difficulty identified in a student's writing:

"After that evening then arrive we clear up belongings and enter to the car for return home."

The excerpt demonstrates weak organization because the sequence of events remains unclear and the ideas lack logical connections. The student appears to describe several consecutive actions, yet the sentence does not establish a sufficiently coherent chronological relationship among them. Problems with sentence construction further obscure the intended sequence and make the event progression difficult to interpret. This example demonstrates that organizational difficulties can interact with grammatical problems and collectively reduce textual coherence.

Another example of organizational difficulty appears in the following excerpt:

"Finally to the evening, we all return home together. My experience is fun and unforgettable."

The excerpt shows a weak transition between the final event and the student's concluding evaluation of the experience. Although the student attempted to signal the conclusion through "Finally," the chronological expression and connection between the two sentences remain inadequately developed. This pattern suggests that the student understood the need to conclude the recount but experienced difficulty constructing an appropriate transition into the reorientation. The example therefore illustrates students' challenges in maintaining chronological sequencing and establishing coherent relationships among different components of a recount text.

Classroom observations reinforced the organizational difficulties identified in students' written work. Students frequently hesitated when transforming individual ideas into connected paragraphs, particularly when determining how one event should lead to the next. Although picture series provided visual cues that facilitated idea generation and event sequencing, some students continued to struggle with establishing logical and coherent connections among events. Organizational difficulties accounted for 11.5% of the total errors identified in the writing data. These findings indicate that visual sequencing alone did not fully address students' difficulties in constructing coherent recount texts.

Idea Development Difficulties

Students also experienced difficulties in developing their ideas into complete and meaningful statements. Several students produced very short sentences with insufficient explanation, resulting in incomplete content and unclear descriptions of events. These difficulties suggest that students could sometimes identify an event from the picture series but could not elaborate on it adequately in written form. Limited idea development consequently reduced the informativeness and comprehensibility of their recount texts. The following excerpt illustrates this difficulty:

"Look crocodile finally i went."

The excerpt presents an incomplete and unclear idea because the student did not sufficiently explain the event being recounted. Although individual words suggest that the student intended to describe seeing a crocodile and subsequently going somewhere, the sentence does not provide enough information to establish a complete event. The lack of elaboration prevents readers from understanding the relationship among the actions represented in the sentence. This example demonstrates the student's difficulty in expanding an initial idea into a complete and comprehensible account.

A similar problem appears in the following excerpt:

"After that we house."

The sentence remains incomplete because the student did not clearly explain what happened after the preceding event or how the participants returned to or interacted with the house. The expression suggests an intended transition to another event, but the student did not develop the idea into a complete proposition. This limited elaboration interrupts the continuity of the recount and leaves the event insufficiently explained. The example therefore reflects difficulty in transforming a basic idea into a complete sentence that contributes meaningfully to the narrative sequence.

Idea development difficulties accounted for 7.6% of the total errors identified in students' writing. Although this category represented the smallest proportion among the four identified difficulties, the findings show that several students still struggled to elaborate their ideas into complete and comprehensible sentences. The combined writing, observation, and interview findings indicate that students' recount-writing difficulties involved both linguistic and cognitive dimensions. Linguistic difficulties primarily concerned grammar and vocabulary, whereas cognitive difficulties involved organizing events and developing ideas coherently. These findings correspond with Byrne's (1988) theory that writing difficulties involve linguistic, cognitive, and psychological dimensions (Kusuma et al., 2020; Schmid, 2010).

Discussion

Grammar emerged as the most prominent difficulty in students' recount writing, particularly in the use of the simple past tense and accurate sentence construction. Students' recurring difficulties in selecting appropriate past-tense verb forms indicate that they had not yet consistently applied the grammatical conventions required for recount texts. This finding supports Hassan et al. (2021), who reported that EFL learners commonly encounter grammatical difficulties during writing activities. Salsabila et al. (2023) similarly identified grammar, vocabulary, and idea organization as recurring challenges in students' writing. The present findings therefore reinforce previous evidence that grammatical competence remains an important challenge for EFL learners when producing written texts.

Vocabulary difficulties further indicate that students possessed limited lexical resources and frequently selected inappropriate words when constructing recount texts. Restricted vocabulary affected their ability to communicate experiences precisely and contributed to repetitive or unclear expressions. Students also encountered organizational and idea-development difficulties that affected their ability to arrange events chronologically and construct coherent paragraphs (Fahmi, 2025; Sari et al., 2024). These difficulties demonstrate that effective recount writing requires students to coordinate lexical knowledge with the cognitive ability to sequence, connect, and elaborate events. The interaction among these components helps explain why difficulties in one area can reduce the overall clarity and coherence of students' written texts.

Picture series provided useful visual support by helping students generate ideas and recognize the chronological sequence of events before writing. Despite this support, the media did not completely eliminate the linguistic and cognitive difficulties identified in students' recount texts. Some students continued to struggle with expressing ideas clearly, applying grammatical rules accurately, selecting appropriate vocabulary, and developing coherent paragraphs. Teachers can address these difficulties by combining picture series with more intensive grammatical guidance, vocabulary development, structured writing practice, and constructive feedback (Fernando et al., 2024; Sinta & Astutik, 2019). Such instructional support can strengthen the role of picture series as a visual scaffold while addressing the specific linguistic and organizational difficulties that students encounter during recount writing.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that tenth-grade students at MPI Silo Bonto Private Islamic Senior High School experienced various difficulties in writing recount texts, particularly in grammar, vocabulary, organization, and idea development. Grammar emerged as the most prominent difficulty, accounting for 61.5% of the total errors, particularly in the use of the simple past tense and sentence construction, followed by vocabulary at 19.2%, organization at 11.5%, and idea development at 7.6%. Students frequently produced grammatical errors, selected inappropriate vocabulary, and encountered difficulties in arranging events chronologically, connecting ideas logically, and developing coherent paragraphs. The use of picture series facilitated idea generation and helped students recognize the chronological sequence of events during the writing process, although some students continued to experience difficulties in expressing their ideas clearly and cohesively. These findings demonstrate that picture series can provide useful visual support for recount writing, but their effectiveness depends on complementary instructional support that addresses students' linguistic and cognitive difficulties.

English teachers should combine picture series with explicit grammatical instruction, vocabulary development, structured writing activities, and continuous constructive feedback to strengthen students' ability to produce accurate and coherent recount texts. Teachers should also provide sustained opportunities for students to practice organizing events chronologically and developing ideas into complete paragraphs rather than relying solely on visual media to facilitate the writing process. The findings should nevertheless be interpreted within the specific context of this descriptive qualitative study, which involved only 27 tenth-grade students from a single school and focused specifically on recount writing through picture series media; these characteristics limit the transferability of the findings to different student populations, educational settings, writing genres, and instructional media. The study also examined students' difficulties within a particular instructional period and did not investigate changes in their writing performance over an extended period or compare picture series with alternative instructional media. Future research should therefore involve broader and more diverse participants, examine different writing genres and instructional media, and employ longitudinal or complementary research designs to provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' writing difficulties and the instructional strategies that may address them.

REFERENCES

- Chico, K. Z. H. (2022). An Analysis of Factors Influencing EFL Learners' Writing Skills. *Canadian Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, 2(2), 28–38. <https://doi.org/10.53103/CJLLS.V2I2.38>
- Colpaert, J. (2006). Pedagogy-Driven Design for Online Language Teaching and Learning. *Calico Journal*, 23(3), 477–497. <https://doi.org/10.1558/cj.v23i3.477-497>
- Fahmi, F. (2025). Analysis of Students' Difficulties in Writing English Recount Texts. *JLLE: Journal Language and Literature Education*, 1(2), 21–31. <https://glonus.org/index.php/jlle/article/view/349>
- Fernando, I., Purwaningsih, D. I., & Yolanda, A. (2024). An Analysis of Students' Difficulties in Writing Recount Text at Tenth Grade Students of SMAN 5 Pontianak. *Jurnal Jendela Pendidikan*, 4(04), 364–374. <https://doi.org/10.57008/jjp.v4i04.965>
- Hassan, I., Rahman, A. M. A., & Azmi, M. N. L. (2021). Development of English Writing Skills through Blended Learning among ESL Learners in Malaysia. *AWEJ: Arab World English Journal*, 7(7), 377–389. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/call7.26>
- Jamshed, M., Ahmed, A. S. M. M., Sarfaraj, M., & Warda, W. U. (2024). The Impact of ChatGPT on English Language Learners' Writing Skills. *International Journal of Interactive Mobile Technologies (IJIM)*, 18(19), 18–36. <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijim.v18i19.50361>
- Jamshed, M., Albedah, F., Ansari, M. S., & Banu, S. (2025). Assessing the Efficacy of AI-Driven Corrective Feedback via WhatsApp Application to Improve ESL Learners' Writing Skills. *International Journal of Interactive Mobile Technologies (IJIM)*, 19(07), 190–205. <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijim.v19i07.52709>
- Kusuma, A. A. I. R. S., Santosa, M. H., & Myartawan, I. P. N. W. (2020). Exploring the Influence of Blended Learning Method in English Recount Text Writing for Senior High School Students. *JET (Journal of English Teaching)*, 6(3), 193–203. <https://doi.org/10.33541/jet.v6i3.1913>
- Liddicoat, A. J. (2008). Pedagogical Practice for Integrating the Intercultural in Language Teaching and Learning. *Japanese Studies*, 28(3), 277–290. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10371390802446844>
- Moses, R. N., & Mohamad, M. (2019). Challenges Faced by Students and Teachers on Writing Skills in ESL Contexts: A Literature Review. *Creative Education*, 10(13), 3385–3391. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2019.1013260>
- Salim, M. T. H. (2023). Restoring Language to Literature Pedagogy: Towards an Interactive Approach. *Indonesian Journal of English Language Studies (IJELS)*, 9(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.24071/ijels.v9i1.5340>
- Salsabila, F., Ayu, C., & Hardi, V. A. (2023). An Analysis on Students' Problems in Writing a Recount Text at The Eleventh Grade Students of Senior High School. *Ideas: Journal on English Language Teaching & Learning, Linguistics & Literature*, 11(2), 1277. <https://doi.org/10.24256/IDEAS.V11I2.4076>
- Sari, L. N., Mayasari, I. B. Y. H., & Fathuredha, H. (2024). An Analysis of Students' Difficulties in Writing Recount Text at Tenth Grade at One of Senior High School in Jambi. *Jurnal Ilmiah Wahana Pendidikan*, 10(8), 629–635. <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.11109542>
- Schmid, E. C. (2010). Developing Competencies for Using The Interactive Whiteboard to Implement Communicative Language Teaching in The English as a Foreign Language Classroom. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education*, 19(2), 159–172. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1475939X.2010.491218>
- Sinta, N. A., & Astutik, Y. (2019). Difficulties in Writing Recount Text Faced by Senior High School Students in Indonesia. *Proceedings of The ICECRS*, 59–68. <https://doi.org/10.21070/picecrs.v2i1.2404>