

Developing Writing Materials for Eighth Grade Students: A Design-Based Research at SMP N 3 Jambi

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***Abstrak.** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengembangkan bahan ajar menulis bahasa Inggris yang sesuai dengan kebutuhan siswa kelas VIII SMP N 3 Jambi. Metode yang digunakan adalah Design-Based Research (DBR) dengan tahapan meliputi analisis kebutuhan, penyusunan course grid, pengembangan draf awal, validasi melalui expert judgment, revisi, dan produk akhir. Subjek penelitian adalah 88 siswa kelas VIII dengan rentang usia 13–15 tahun. Hasil analisis kebutuhan menunjukkan bahwa siswa menyadari pentingnya menulis, namun masih mengalami kesulitan dalam aspek tata bahasa, pengorganisasian ide, dan pemilihan kosakata. Berdasarkan temuan tersebut, dikembangkan tiga unit bahan ajar menulis yang berfokus pada teks deskriptif, recount, dan naratif, dengan menerapkan empat tahapan proses menulis: pre-writing, drafting, responding, dan editing. Hasil validasi ahli menunjukkan bahwa bahan ajar yang dikembangkan tergolong “sangat baik” dari segi isi, bahasa, penyajian, dan tampilan grafis, meskipun masih memerlukan revisi kecil pada tata bahasa dan desain visual. Dengan demikian, bahan ajar ini layak digunakan untuk meningkatkan keterampilan menulis siswa SMP serta dapat menjadi alternatif bagi guru dalam mengembangkan perangkat pembelajaran berbasis kebutuhan siswa.*

Kata kunci: pengembangan bahan ajar, keterampilan menulis, design-based research, SMP

Abstract. This study aims to develop appropriate English writing materials for eighth-grade students of SMP N 3 Jambi. The research employed a Design-Based Research (DBR) approach, consisting of several stages: needs analysis, course grid development, drafting the initial materials, expert validation, revision, and final product development. The participants were 88 students aged 13–15 years. The needs analysis revealed that although students recognized the importance of writing, they still faced difficulties in grammar, idea organization, and vocabulary use. Based on these findings, three units of writing materials were designed, focusing on descriptive, recount, and narrative texts. Each unit followed the four stages of the writing process: pre-writing, drafting, responding, and editing. Expert judgment indicated that the developed materials were categorized as “very good” in terms of content, language, presentation, and graphic design, with minor revisions needed in grammar accuracy and visual layout. Therefore, the developed materials are feasible to be implemented in junior high school classrooms and provide an alternative resource for teachers to design need-based instructional materials that enhance students’ writing skills.

Keywords: material development, writing skills, design-based research, junior high school

INTRODUCTION

Writing is recognized as one of the most essential productive skills in language learning. Scholars define it as both a physical and a mental act. Brown (2000) considers writing as the graphical representation of spoken language, while Solokik (2003) explains that it is a

physical activity involving writing or typing as well as a mental process of developing, organizing, and expressing ideas so that they can be understood by readers. Similarly, Hibbard and Wagner (2013) view writing as a process of thinking, reflecting on what is read, and translating it into written form. In short, writing is a productive skill that allows learners to transform their ideas into graphic symbols and convey meaning to others.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are many kinds of texts that can be introduced in writing instruction. Brown (2001) mentions nonfiction, fiction, letters, greeting cards, diaries, journals, memos, announcements, academic writing, advertisements, and many more as examples of written texts. Hedge, as cited in McDonough and Shaw (2003), categorizes types of writing into personal, public, creative, social, study, and institutional writing. Within the Indonesian junior high school curriculum (KTSP 2006), however, the focus is on teaching students how to write descriptive, recount, and narrative texts. This indicates that writing instruction should be contextualized to meet curriculum demands while also exposing students to various genres to enrich their communicative competence.

Teaching writing has been approached in two main ways: the product-oriented and the process-oriented approach. The product approach emphasizes the final product of writing, focusing on accuracy, correct grammar, rhetorical style, and organization (Harmer, 2007; Nunan, 1991; Brown, 2000). By contrast, the process approach regards writing as a cyclical activity, where students generate ideas, draft, receive feedback, revise, edit, and evaluate their work (White & Arndt; Hedge; Seow in Richards & Renandya, 2002). This perspective stresses that writing should not be taught as the production of a perfect final draft, but rather as an ongoing process that helps learners develop their ability to compose, communicate, and craft texts effectively.

In the context of junior high school, teaching writing requires a deep understanding of learners' characteristics. Eighth-grade students in Indonesia are mostly between 12 and 15 years old and belong to the adolescent category. Harmer (2001) points out that adolescents face unique challenges as they search for identity, self-esteem, and peer approval. They may easily lose interest in class if lessons are monotonous, yet they are also highly capable and motivated if challenged with engaging and meaningful tasks. Teachers, therefore, play a crucial role in stimulating motivation, maintaining students' interest, and creating a supportive classroom atmosphere through relevant and enjoyable writing activities.

Materials development is another fundamental aspect of teaching writing. Graves (2000) defines it as the process of planning, creating, and organizing lessons and units to achieve learning objectives, while Tomlinson (1998) states that it involves providing language input and maximizing opportunities for intake. Graves (1993) suggests that activities in materials should be relevant to learners, authentic, confidence-building, problem-solving, integrative, and varied in form. Jolly and Bolitho, as cited in Tomlinson (1998), propose systematic steps in developing materials: identifying needs, exploring needs, contextualizing, pedagogical realization, producing materials, using them in class, and finally evaluating them. This framework ensures that teaching materials are both pedagogically sound and practically useful for learners.

In conclusion, the grand theory of writing instruction emphasizes that writing is not merely a product but a process involving physical, mental, and social dimensions. Teaching writing requires the integration of various text types, suitable approaches, and attention to learners' characteristics. Materials development serves as the foundation that connects theory to practice, ensuring that writing activities are relevant, authentic, and effective. Together,

these theoretical perspectives provide a strong basis for developing appropriate and engaging writing instruction for junior high school students.

Observations conducted at SMP N 3 Jambi show that students' writing ability is still low. They often struggle to generate ideas, face vocabulary limitations, and make frequent grammatical errors, particularly in sentence structure, capitalization, and punctuation. Students also have difficulty maintaining cohesion and coherence, especially in using conjunctions appropriately. Furthermore, the teaching materials used in class are limited to conventional worksheets (LKS), which students find monotonous and uninspiring. Since the curriculum requires students to produce narrative, recount, and descriptive texts, there is a strong need for engaging and relevant writing materials. Materials designed according to learners' needs are expected to improve their motivation and writing ability.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study applied Educational Research and Development (R&D). According to Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003), R&D is an industry-based development model in which research findings are used to design educational products and procedures, which are then systematically tested, evaluated, and refined until they meet the criteria of effectiveness and quality. In this research, the product developed was English writing materials for eighth-grade students at SMP N 3 Jambi.

The subjects were 88 eighth-grade students, aged 13–15 years, divided into three classes. These students were chosen because they represent the target users of the developed materials.

The research procedure was adapted from Jolly and Bolitho in Tomlinson (1998) with modifications, consisting of five steps: (1) conducting needs analysis, (2) writing the course grid, (3) developing the first draft of materials, (4) obtaining expert judgment, and (5) revising the draft into the final product.

A needs analysis was conducted to identify students' characteristics and learning needs. Based on the results, a course grid was designed as the framework for the materials. The first draft of three units of writing materials was then developed according to the curriculum and the students' needs. Expert judgment was conducted by distributing evaluation questionnaires to language teaching experts. Finally, revisions were made based on expert feedback to produce the final version of the materials.

Two techniques were used to collect data: (1) needs analysis through questionnaires distributed to students to explore their target needs and learning needs, and (2) expert judgment, in which experts evaluated the appropriateness of the developed materials.

Two sets of instruments were employed: needs analysis questionnaires for students and expert judgment questionnaires for experts. The needs analysis questionnaire was designed to gather information on students' reasons for learning English, their necessities, lacks, wants, preferences, and interests. The organization of the instrument is shown below:

Table 1. Organization of the Needs Analysis Questionnaire

Question Numbers	Purpose of the Questions	References
1–3	To obtain students' personal information	Graves (1993)
4	To explore reasons for learning English	Graves (1993)
5	To identify students' necessities	Hutchinson & Waters (1987)
6	To identify students' lacks	Hutchinson & Waters (1987)
7–11	To identify students' wants and interests in writing input	Nunan (2004)
12	To identify preferences for learning activities	Nunan (2004)
13	To identify the preferred learning setting	Nunan (2004)
14	To identify preferences related to students' roles	Nunan (2004)

The second instrument, the expert judgment questionnaire, was adapted from the BSNP (Badan Standar Nasional Pendidikan) instrument for evaluating English textbooks. It was intended to evaluate the appropriateness of content, language, presentation, and design.

Table 2. Organization of the Expert Judgment Questionnaire

Question Numbers	Purpose of the Questions	References
1–6	To collect respondents’ profile information	BSNP
1–6	To evaluate the content appropriateness	BSNP
1–9	To evaluate the language appropriateness	BSNP
1–7	To evaluate the presentation appropriateness	BSNP
1–7	To evaluate the design appropriateness	BSNP

The data obtained from the need’s analysis were analysed using percentage formulas to identify students’ learning needs. The percentage was calculated using the following formula:

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

where P = percentage, f = frequency, and N = total number of respondents.

The data from expert judgment were analysed using a Likert scale (1–4). The mean score was then calculated and interpreted based on Suharto’s (2005) conversion table:

Table 3. Data Conversion (Suharto, 2005)

Scale Range	Category
$1.00 \leq x \leq 1.74$	Poor
$1.75 \leq x \leq 2.49$	Fair
$2.50 \leq x \leq 3.24$	Good
$3.25 \leq x \leq 4.00$	Very Good

This analysis provided the basis for revising the developed materials and ensuring their quality and appropriateness for classroom use.

Quantitative data were analysed by calculating percentages and mean scores, while qualitative data were derived from expert comments and student responses.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The participants of this study consisted of 88 eighth-grade students of SMP N 3 Jambi. Their age ranged from 13 to 15 years old, which is typical of Indonesian junior high school students. As shown in Table 8, the respondents were almost equally distributed between male and female students (43 male and 45 female).

Table 4. Respondents of Needs Analysis

Number of Respondents	Male	Female	Age (13–15)
88	43	45	13–15

This demographic profile is important because age and developmental stage influence students’ characteristics in learning English. Adolescents at this stage are in the process of identity formation and often seek approval from peers, which affects their learning motivation (Harmer, 2001). Consequently, writing materials must be engaging, challenging, and relevant to their real-life contexts to maintain students’ interest.

1. Students’ Opinions of Writing

Table 5. Students’ Opinions of Writing
(adapted from questionnaire results)

Aspect	Category	Percentage (%)	Description
Difficulty	Very Difficult	6.8	Students reported challenges in generating ideas, vocabulary, and grammar.
	Difficult	53.4	
	Easy	9.1	
	Neutral/Other	30.7	
Importance	Very Important	25.0	Most students acknowledged writing as necessary for academic success.
	Important	50.0	
	Less Important	25.0	
Frequency	Often	9.1	Only few students frequently practiced writing.
	Sometimes	72.7	Majority reported occasional writing practice.
	Rarely/Never	18.2	

Source: Results of students’ needs analysis questionnaire (2024)

The results of the needs analysis reveal several important findings regarding students’ perceptions of writing in English. More than half of the respondents (53.4%) perceived writing as *difficult*, while 6.8% considered it *very difficult*. Only a small proportion (9.1%) viewed writing as *easy*. The major challenges identified were generating ideas, limited vocabulary, and grammar usage. These results are consistent with Fareed et al. (2016), who emphasized that EFL learners often struggle with mechanics and the organization of ideas.

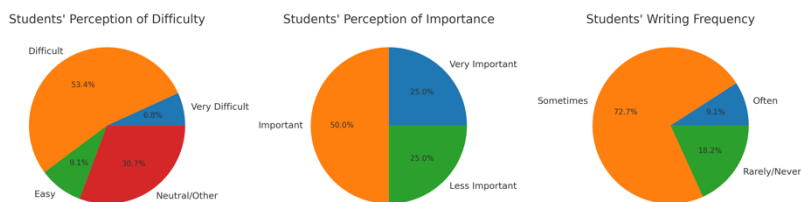
Despite these difficulties, the majority of students (75%) acknowledged that writing is *important* or *very important*. This indicates that students are aware of the role of writing for academic purposes and for effective communication in English. However, such awareness has not translated into consistent practice. The majority (72.7%) of students reported that they only *sometimes* practiced writing, while very few wrote regularly.

These findings highlight a paradox: students recognize the importance of writing but are hindered by difficulties and a lack of consistent practice. This situation emphasizes the necessity of providing engaging and scaffolded materials that not only reduce their writing anxiety but also give them meaningful opportunities to write.

The following is a visualization of the results of Table 9 in the form of three pie charts:

- Students’ Perception of Difficulty → the majority considered writing *difficult* or *very difficult*.
- Students’ Perception of Importance → most students regarded writing as *important* or *very important*.
- Students’ Writing Frequency → the majority reported writing only *sometimes*, with very few students practicing frequently.

Chart 1. Students' Opinions of Writing



2. Target

Necessities refer to what students must know in order to function effectively in the target situation (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). The analysis revealed that students needed to master vocabulary, grammar, and text organization. For example, most students reported difficulties in constructing coherent sentences and choosing appropriate vocabulary. This finding indicates that writing materials should emphasize vocabulary enrichment activities, grammar exercises contextualized within writing, and guided practice in structuring texts.

Lacks refer to the gap between students' current proficiency and the target competencies. The questionnaire results indicated that many students lacked sufficient vocabulary and grammar mastery. They also lacked strategies for idea generation, which often led to confusion at the beginning and middle of writing tasks. For instance, students often wrote incomplete texts, became "stuck" in the middle, and abandoned their writing tasks. This demonstrates that scaffolding and structured writing stages are crucial in material development.

Wants refer to students' personal preferences and expectations. The findings showed that students wanted engaging and visually supported materials. They preferred exercises with pictures, guided examples, and step-by-step instructions rather than abstract writing prompts. This finding supports Nunan's (2004) assertion that learners' preferences should be considered to ensure materials are motivating and effective.

3. Learning Needs

Learning needs describe how students learn most effectively. The analysis focused on four components: input, procedure, setting, and roles.

a. Input

Students preferred visual and contextualized inputs, such as pictures, dialogues, and sample texts. They reported that visual prompts helped them to generate ideas more easily. This implies that the developed materials should include multimodal input, such as images, charts, and examples of authentic texts.

b. Procedure

In terms of procedures, students favoured step-by-step activities. They preferred starting with vocabulary exercises, followed by sentence construction, and finally moving to paragraph writing. This supports the adoption of the process approach to writing (Seow, 2002), where pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing are emphasized.

c. Setting

Most students preferred a combination of individual and group work. Individual work was seen as necessary for personal practice, while group work was helpful for idea sharing. This suggests that materials should balance independent writing tasks with collaborative activities.

d. Roles of Teacher and Students

Students expected the teacher to play an active role in guiding, motivating, and correcting their writing. At the same time, they wanted opportunities to be more autonomous and creative. Therefore, the teacher should act as a facilitator, providing scaffolding while allowing students to take responsibility for their learning.

4. Course Grid

Based on the results of the needs analysis, a course grid was developed. The grid outlined the competencies, objectives, input, language focus, activities, and assessment. Three units were designed, each representing one text type in the curriculum: descriptive, recount, and narrative texts.

Each unit was structured according to the stages of the writing process:

1. **Pre-writing** – brainstorming, vocabulary building, and analyzing models.
2. **Drafting** – constructing sentences and paragraphs.
3. **Responding and Revising** – peer or teacher feedback.
4. **Editing** – correcting grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
5. **Final Writing** – producing the final version of the text.

This design ensured that students received systematic guidance from idea generation to final production, reducing confusion and promoting confidence.

6. Developed Materials

The developed materials consisted of three units:

1. **Unit 1: Descriptive Text** – focused on describing people, animals, and places. Activities included matching adjectives with pictures, constructing descriptive sentences, and writing short descriptive paragraphs.
2. **Unit 2: Recount Text** – centered on past experiences. Activities involved arranging jumbled sentences into chronological order, using past tense verbs, and writing personal recounts.
3. **Unit 3: Narrative Text** – emphasized storytelling. Activities included completing story maps, sequencing events, and writing short narratives with a clear orientation, complication, and resolution.

Each unit was accompanied by colourful illustrations and engaging layouts to maintain students' interest.

7. Expert Judgment and Revisions

The draft materials were evaluated by an expert using BSNP criteria, covering four aspects: content, language, presentation, and graphic design.

Table: Expert Judgment Result (summary)

- **Content:** Very Good
- **Language:** Very Good
- **Presentation:** Very Good

- **Graphic Design:** Very Good

The overall mean score placed the materials in the “very good” category. Expert feedback suggested minor revisions, such as clarifying instructions, balancing task difficulty, and improving layout consistency. After revision, the final product was considered appropriate for classroom use.

Discussion

The present study set out to develop appropriate writing materials for eighth-grade students of SMP N 3 Jambi through a design-based research (DBR) approach. The findings from the needs analysis, material development, and expert judgment provide several insights into students’ learning needs, the characteristics of suitable materials, and their potential impact on writing instruction.

1. Students’ Perceptions of Writing

The findings revealed that although most students perceived writing as important, they also considered it difficult. This dual perception has been consistently reported in previous studies (Fareed, Ashraf, & Bilal, 2016; Richards & Renandya, 2002). Writing is cognitively demanding because it requires simultaneous control of content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics (Nunan, 1989).

At SMP N 3 Jambi, the difficulties were mainly related to grammar, vocabulary, and generating ideas. These challenges are typical in EFL contexts, where limited exposure to English reduces learners’ opportunities to practice writing (Hyland, 2003). The findings reinforce the argument by Raimes (1983) that writing not only reflects linguistic competence but also engages learners in developing their cognitive and expressive skills.

The fact that students acknowledged the importance of writing indicates a readiness to learn, but their lack of practice and difficulties in execution highlight the need for carefully scaffolded materials. Without structured guidance, students may remain demotivated, despite recognizing the value of writing.

2. Target Needs and Learning Needs

The needs analysis identified three dimensions of target needs: necessities, lacks, and wants (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Necessities were found in the mastery of grammar and vocabulary, while students’ lacks centered on their inability to generate ideas and construct coherent texts. Their wants, however, emphasized engaging and visually supported materials.

This triangulation of necessities, lacks, and wants emphasizes the role of needs analysis as the foundation of material development (Graves, 2000; Nation & Macalister, 2010). Ignoring any of these aspects would result in materials that are either linguistically inadequate, irrelevant, or demotivating. The findings thus confirm the importance of adopting a learner-centered approach to materials design.

3. The Process Approach to Writing

The developed materials were structured around the process approach to writing, which includes pre-writing, drafting, responding, revising, and editing (Seow in Richards & Renandya, 2002). This approach contrasts with the traditional product-oriented approach, which focuses only on the final output (Nunan, 1991).

The findings suggest that the process approach is particularly suitable for junior high school students, who often struggle to generate ideas and develop coherence in writing. By providing structured stages, students are guided step-by-step, reducing the cognitive load associated with writing. This is consistent with Hyland (2013), who argued that the process approach encourages learners to view writing as a recursive activity, promoting reflection, feedback, and gradual improvement.

4. Materials Development and Validation

The three developed units—descriptive, recount, and narrative texts—addressed both the curriculum requirements and the students’ identified needs. The inclusion of visual aids, contextualized vocabulary activities, and guided writing tasks reflected the students’ wants and learning preferences.

Expert judgment indicated that the materials achieved a “very good” rating across all aspects: content, language, presentation, and graphic design. This suggests that the materials not only align with pedagogical principles but also meet professional standards for teaching resources.

Conclusion

This study aimed to develop appropriate English writing materials for eighth-grade students of SMP N 3 Jambi by adopting a research and development (R&D) approach. The findings revealed that students generally perceived writing as important but difficult, mainly due to their limited vocabulary, grammar challenges, and difficulties in generating and organizing ideas. Further needs analysis showed that students required engaging, visually supported, and step-by-step materials that would scaffold their writing process.

Based on these findings, three units of writing materials were developed, focusing on descriptive, recount, and narrative texts. Each unit incorporated the process approach, guiding students through pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing stages. The materials were designed with colourful illustrations, contextualized vocabulary activities, and structured writing tasks to address both students’ target needs and learning preferences.

Expert judgment evaluation indicated that the materials were rated “very good” in terms of content, language, presentation, and graphic design. Minor revisions were made based on expert feedback, resulting in a final product that is appropriate for use in the classroom.

The study concludes that well-designed, needs-based, and process-oriented writing materials can enhance students’ motivation and provide more effective support in developing writing skills. Teachers are encouraged to adopt similar approaches, integrating needs analysis into material design and emphasizing the process approach in classroom instruction.

Future research should implement the developed materials in classroom settings to examine their effectiveness in improving students’ writing performance. Longitudinal studies and larger-scale trials are recommended to strengthen the evidence base for the use of process-based, needs-driven writing materials in EFL contexts.

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