The Use of Brainstorming in Descriptive Writing Class: A Case Study

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Abstract: Many students encounter difficulties in writing descriptive texts, particularly in generating ideas, organizing paragraphs coherently, and using appropriate vocabulary. This study aimed to explore teachers' strategies in implementing brainstorming techniques in descriptive writing classes and to examine students' responses to these strategies. The research employed a qualitative single case study design, conducted at SMAN 1 Blitar with one English teacher and five eleventh-grade students selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and documentation such as student writing samples and teaching materials. Analysis involved organizing, summarizing, and interpreting the data to identify emerging patterns and themes. The results showed that the teacher implemented brainstorming at the pre-writing and drafting stages by going through a structured five-step process in the writing strategy: pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Students showed notable improvement in generating ideas, maintaining paragraph coherence, and applying appropriate vocabulary. They also demonstrated higher motivation and engagement in writing activities. In conclusion, brainstorming offers an effective and systematic approach to enhance students' descriptive writing skills, supporting their ability to write with greater clarity and confidence.

INTRODUCTION

English is one of the most widely used languages globally, functioning not only as a medium of everyday communication but also as a key tool in education, business, science, technology, and diplomacy (Crystal, 2003). In the Indonesian context, English is taught as a compulsory subject in senior high schools to prepare students for the demands of globalization, academic advancement, and professional competitiveness in the international job market (Mauliska & D'Angelo, 2024; Rahmah, 2023). To succeed in this context, students are expected to master the four core language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these, writing is widely acknowledged as the most difficult skill for EFL learners because it requires not only knowledge of vocabulary and grammar but also the ability to

organize ideas logically, apply rhetorical strategies, and consider sociocultural contexts (Hyland, 2023).

Writing is considered a productive skill that enables students to express ideas and communicate meaning in a structured manner. According to (Hyland, 2023)Writing is a recursive and complex process that goes beyond stringing words together. It involves cognitive planning, linguistic accuracy, and social awareness. (Ridge, 2013) Also emphasizes that writing requires learners to organize information and arguments coherently for a specific audience, making it both a communicative and academic activity. In the Indonesian EFL classroom, however, students often struggle with writing tasks because they lack exposure to authentic English use and opportunities for meaningful writing practice. (Brown & Lee, 2022). This gap in practice highlights the importance of effective instructional strategies that guide students through the writing process.

To facilitate the process of writing, scholars such as Hyland (2023) divide the activity into stages: pre-writing, drafting, responding, revising, editing, and publishing. The pre-writing stage is particularly critical because it serves as the foundation for idea generation. Without sufficient preparation during this stage, students often experience writer's block, weak organization, and a lack of coherent argumentation. (Mulyasin et al., 2022). Descriptive writing, one of the text genres mandated by the national curriculum, illustrates this challenge well. Its purpose is to objectively describe people, places, or objects in detail. (Anderson & Anderson, 2003; Gerot & Wignell, 1994). However, studies have shown that Indonesian students struggle with descriptive texts due to three main problems: (1) difficulty in understanding the generic structure, (2) limited vocabulary and grammar knowledge, and (3) weak mechanics such as spelling and punctuation.(Agustin et al., 2023; Hartina et al., 2024). These problems result in fragmented, incoherent paragraphs and demotivated learners. (Yuniar & Siswana, 2024).

To overcome these challenges, teachers are encouraged to use explicit instructional strategies that scaffold students' writing development. (Hattie, 2009) asserts that teacher effectiveness has a stronger influence on student learning outcomes than other factors such as class size or socio-economic background.

(Graham & Perin, 2007) further emphasize that teaching strategies involving collaboration, explicit instruction, and constructive feedback significantly improve students' writing performance. In writing instruction, teachers play multiple roles as facilitators, motivators, and feedback providers (Desai & Dr. Singh Shivkumar, 2023), guiding students through activities such as brainstorming, peer discussions, and structured practice. These findings underscore the necessity of strategy-based writing instruction in the EFL classroom.

Among various strategies, brainstorming has emerged as a widely recommended pre-writing technique. Brainstorming involves generating and organizing ideas freely before composing a draft. It activates students' prior knowledge, encourages creative thinking, and fosters collaborative interaction. (Martinez-Lopez, 2021; Rahman, 2020). (Gultom & Gurning, 2014) Found that brainstorming significantly contributes to students' ability to plan, develop, and revise their writing more purposefully. Similarly, (Martinez-Lopez, 2021) Highlighted that brainstorming increases student motivation and supports better organization of ideas. Brainstorming is particularly useful for descriptive texts, as it helps students generate sensory-based ideas that can later be structured into coherent paragraphs.

Several empirical studies have supported the effectiveness of brainstorming in improving students' writing. For instance, Sudrajad et al (2023) conducted classroom action research and reported substantial gains in students' descriptive writing performance, with mastery levels increasing from 10% to 70% across cycles. (Kembaren & Patmala, 2022), through a qualitative case study, showed that brainstorming encouraged critical thinking, vocabulary mastery, and confidence in writing among junior high school students. (Juliani et al., 2020) employed visual aids in brainstorming and found significant improvements in students' descriptive writing scores. Likewise, (Anggraini et al., 2020), in a quasi-experimental study, confirmed that students taught with brainstorming significantly outperformed those taught through conventional methods. These findings collectively demonstrate that brainstorming fosters idea generation, enhances engagement, and improves overall writing quality.

Despite the proven benefits, most previous studies tend to emphasize the quantitative outcomes of brainstorming strategies, focusing primarily on improvements in test scores. Far fewer have examined the qualitative aspects of how teachers actually implement brainstorming in classroom practice and how students respond to it in real contexts. For example, while (Anggraini et al., 2020) Confirm the effectiveness of brainstorming; their study does not provide details on specific classroom strategies used by teachers. Similarly, (Juliani1 et al., 2020) Demonstrate the impact of image-based brainstorming, but fall short in describing how teachers facilitate the process and adapt it to students' needs. This lack of detailed qualitative inquiry leaves a gap in understanding how brainstorming functions as a practical teaching tool in EFL classrooms, particularly at the senior high school level.

The present study addresses this gap by investigating teachers' strategies in implementing brainstorming in a descriptive writing class at SMAN 1 Blitar and analyzing students' responses to its application. By employing a qualitative case study design (Yin, 2018)The research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how brainstorming is applied in real classroom contexts, including the step-by-step techniques, adaptations to student needs, and the challenges encountered by teachers. Moreover, the study explores student reactions to the strategy, focusing on how brainstorming influences their motivation, engagement, and writing outcomes.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on both teacher practice and student experience, offering a holistic perspective that is often overlooked in previous research. Unlike prior studies that measure success only in terms of test results, this research situates brainstorming within the broader process of teaching and learning descriptive writing. In doing so, it provides updated knowledge on how pre-writing strategies can be effectively integrated into EFL pedagogy. The findings are expected to enrich theoretical discussions on genre-specific writing instruction and contribute practically to the development of teaching models that enhance students' writing competence through brainstorming.

In terms of contribution, this research has both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it expands the literature on pre-writing methodologies by showing how brainstorming can be adapted to the descriptive genre in EFL contexts. This is particularly relevant because much of the existing literature treats brainstorming as a general strategy without considering genre-specific applications. Practically, the study provides teachers with evidence-based strategies for integrating brainstorming into writing lessons, offering insights into effective implementation, common challenges, and ways to enhance student engagement. For educational institutions, the findings can inform teacher training programs and curriculum design, ensuring that innovative teaching strategies like brainstorming are systematically incorporated into writing instruction.

In conclusion, this study seeks to explore how teachers at SMAN 1 Blitar implement brainstorming in descriptive writing classes and how students respond to it. By addressing the identified research gap, the study not only advances theoretical understanding of brainstorming as a pedagogical tool but also provides practical guidance for teachers seeking to improve students' writing outcomes. The expected impact extends beyond descriptive writing to the broader field of EFL pedagogy, contributing to more effective teaching practices that foster creativity, motivation, and competence among learners.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with an embedded single case study design. (Yin, 2018), focusing on the implementation of brainstorming strategies in descriptive writing instruction. The research was conducted at SMAN 1 Blitar during the academic year 2024/2025, with data collection carried out from May to June 2025. The site was purposively selected due to its relevance, as one of the English teachers actively applies brainstorming in writing classes.

The research subjects included one English teacher and five eleventh-grade students from class XI-5, who were directly involved in the implementation of brainstorming activities. Participants were selected using a combination of purposive sampling (Patton, 2014) to identify the key informant (the teacher) and

snowball sampling (Noy, 2008) to select student participants recommended by the teacher based on their active involvement in brainstorming sessions.

Data were collected through three main techniques: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and documentation. (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Interviews were conducted with both the teacher and students to capture their perspectives and experiences. Classroom observations were carried out to record real-time interactions and teaching practices during the brainstorming sessions. Documentation, including lesson plans, student notes, and writing products, was collected to complement and verify data from interviews and observations.

The researcher was physically present during the study to ensure contextual depth and authenticity of the data. To enhance trustworthiness, data were triangulated across the three sources.

Data analysis followed the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2019), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Coding was carried out in three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, to identify themes related to teachers' strategies and students' responses. This approach allowed the researcher to develop a rich and comprehensive understanding of how brainstorming was implemented and perceived in the classroom.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that the English teacher at SMAN 1 Blitar employed several strategies in implementing brainstorming during descriptive writing instruction. These strategies included guided class discussions, the use of visual prompts such as pictures, and structured listing activities based on the five senses. Such techniques enabled students to generate and organize ideas before drafting their texts. The teacher also provided scaffolding through questions and feedback, which encouraged students to contribute actively. This finding aligns with previous studies (Juliani et al., 2020; Martinez-Lopez, 2021), which emphasized that brainstorming supports idea generation and lowers writing anxiety.

Table 1. Teachers' Strategies in Implementing Brainstorming

Strategy	Description	Evidence from Data
Guided Class Discussion	The teacher initiates whole-class discussions to stimulate idea generation.	Observations, Teacher Interview
Visual Prompts	Use of pictures or objects to trigger students' imagination and vocabulary.	Lesson Plans, Observations
Five-Senses Listing	Students list details based on sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.	Student Worksheets, Documentation
Scaffolding and Feedback	The teacher provides guiding questions and feedback to structure the students' ideas.	Teacher & Student Interviews

The table illustrates that the teacher initially forms discussion groups to help students generate ideas for their writing topics. To support this process, the teacher provides visual examples, such as images of locations, that can serve as subjects for descriptive texts. Before students observe the selected locations, the teacher distributes an observation sheet based on the five senses to guide students in identifying details that will later be included in the first draft of their descriptive texts. After completing the initial draft, students exchange their work with other groups to receive peer feedback and initial impressions from readers. Throughout the process, the teacher offers continuous guidance, suggestions, and feedback to support students in developing their descriptive writing.

Table 2. Students' Responses to Brainstorming

Response Theme	Description	Supporting Data
Increased Motivation	Students felt more enthusiastic and less anxious about writing.	Student Interviews
Idea Generation Support	Brainstorming helped them generate ideas faster and with more variety.	Observation Notes
Improved Organization	Students produced more	Student Writing Samples

	coherent paragraphs after brainstorming.	
Reliance on Teacher Prompts	Some students depended heavily on teacher input rather than their own initiative.	Interview, Observation

Based on the table above, students' responses indicated positive engagement with brainstorming activities. They expressed that brainstorming made writing tasks less intimidating and more enjoyable. Many students noted that they could produce ideas more quickly and organize their paragraphs more coherently after the brainstorming sessions. These responses reflect (Rahman, 2020) Claim that brainstorming reduces psychological barriers and increases motivation in writing. However, challenges also emerged, particularly the tendency of some students to rely heavily on the teacher's prompts instead of independently generating ideas. This suggests that while brainstorming fosters creativity, teachers must gradually shift responsibility to students to build autonomy in writing.

Table 3. Data Tringalutation

Research Focus	Source of Data	Key Findings	Conclusion
Teachers' strategies in implementing brainstorming	Teacher Interview	The teacher applied brainstorming in pre-writing using group discussions, mind mapping, listing, and prompts.	The teacher systematically integrated brainstorming to guide idea development.
	Classroom Observation	Strategies implemented effectively; student participation varied depending on guidance.	Implementation was consistent, but required teacher support for active engagement.
	Documentation	Lesson plans showed structured use of brainstorming (e.g., five senses, worksheets).	Documentation confirmed planned and systematic application.
Students' responses to brainstorming	Student Interviews	Students felt brainstorming helped them generate ideas, structure texts, and increase confidence.	Students responded positively; brainstorming enhanced clarity and motivation.
	Classroom	Students were more	Collaborative

	Observation	active in group discussions and mind mapping; some were still passive without guidance.	activities encouraged participation when supported by the teacher.
	Student Work	Student writing improved in structure, idea development, and sensory detail integration.	Final products reflected the success of brainstorming in descriptive writing.

The triangulation of data from interviews, classroom observations, and documentation provided a holistic understanding of how brainstorming was implemented and perceived in the classroom. From the teacher's perspective, brainstorming was systematically applied through multiple techniques, including group discussion, mind mapping, and five-senses listing. Classroom observations confirmed that these strategies fostered collaboration and enhanced interaction, although some students remained reliant on teacher prompts for active participation.

Students reported that brainstorming reduced their writing anxiety and enabled them to generate and organize ideas more effectively. This was further supported by observations, which revealed higher levels of engagement during collaborative activities, and by documentation of student work, which showed improved structure and richer use of descriptive details.

Taken together, the triangulated findings demonstrate that brainstorming is an effective pre-writing strategy that supports both the cognitive and affective dimensions of descriptive writing. Nevertheless, its success is closely tied to sustained teacher guidance and the gradual promotion of learner autonomy. These results reinforce the theoretical framework that brainstorming not only facilitates the pre-writing stage but also lowers the affective filter in language learning (Krashen, 1982).

In summary, the study highlights that teachers' adaptive strategies in applying brainstorming significantly influence student engagement and outcomes in descriptive writing. The novelty of this research lies in its qualitative insights into how brainstorming is operationalized in real classroom contexts, offering

practical implications for integrating pre-writing strategies into EFL instruction under the Merdeka Curriculum.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored the implementation of brainstorming strategies in descriptive writing classes at SMAN 1 Blitar. The findings show that the teacher applied several adaptive strategies, such as guided class discussions, visual prompts, five-senses listing, and scaffolding through questions and feedback. These strategies helped students generate and organize ideas more effectively during the pre-writing stage.

Students' responses to the implementation were generally positive. They reported increased motivation, reduced anxiety, and improved ability to organize ideas into coherent paragraphs. However, some students still relied heavily on teacher guidance, indicating the need to gradually encourage greater learner autonomy. Overall, brainstorming was found to enhance classroom interaction, writing quality, and student participation, supporting its role as an effective pre-writing strategy in EFL descriptive writing instruction.

The novelty of this study lies in its qualitative insights into how brainstorming is operationalized in actual classroom practice and how students respond to it. The findings contribute to the development of pedagogical practices in teaching writing under the Merdeka Curriculum by providing concrete evidence of how brainstorming can lower affective barriers and promote active engagement.

Future research may extend this study by involving a larger number of participants across different schools to provide broader generalization. Comparative studies between brainstorming and other pre-writing strategies could also be conducted to evaluate relative effectiveness. In addition, longitudinal studies are recommended to examine the long-term impact of brainstorming on students' writing proficiency and autonomy. Finally, integrating digital tools into brainstorming activities could be explored to enhance creativity and align with current trends in technology-based learning.

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