

**The Writing Ability of Short Stories of Eighth Grade Students at SMP
Negeri 5 Panca Rijang, Sidenreng Rappang Regency**

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the short story writing ability of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 5 Panca Rijang in the 2025/2026 academic year. This research employed a descriptive quantitative approach. The sample consisted of 18 students from Class VIII.1, comprising 8 males and 10 females, selected using a random sampling technique. Data were collected through a short story writing test and documentation, then analyzed based on the aspects of theme, plot, setting, point of view, and language style. The results showed that all students achieved scores above the Minimum Mastery Criteria (≥ 75), with a 100% classical mastery rate. A total of 55.56% were categorized as Very Good, while 44.44% were categorized as Good. Students in the Very Good category were able to compose short stories coherently and completely, whereas students in the good category still showed weaknesses in certain aspects. Overall, the students' short story writing ability was categorized as good, although improvement is still needed in several components.

Keywords: Writing Ability; Short Story Elements; Learning Mastery

INTRODUCTION

Education is a continuous learning process that takes place throughout life, encompassing formal, non-formal, and informal pathways. Its primary goal is to develop each individual's potential so that they can effectively fulfill their roles in society (Halean et al., 2021). Schools, as one of the formal institutions, function not only as centers for academic learning but also as social institutions entrusted by the community to nurture and educate the next generation. In this context, education is understood as an effort to humanize humans, improve their quality of life, and prepare them to uphold societal values and norms across generations (Akbar et al., 2021).

Every individual is endowed with abilities as a gift from God Almighty. While some are fully aware of their potential, others have yet to recognize or develop it. Skills, in this regard, represent a person's capacity to process and produce something of value. When honed through knowledge, creativity, and consistent practice, such skills can result in meaningful works that benefit both the individual and society (Arwita Putri et al., 2023). Language skills are closely linked to cognitive processes. The better a person's command of language, the clearer their thinking patterns will be, particularly in problem-solving and idea expression. In the Indonesian language curriculum, the aim is to equip students with competent communication skills across four domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Through these skills, students can express emotions, convey information appropriately, and respond sensitively to their surroundings. These abilities encompass both academic writing and creative writing outputs (Alparezi, 2024).

Writing is a productive language skill that involves expressing ideas, thoughts, and emotions in written form. It requires mastery of various components, including grammar, punctuation, vocabulary choice, sentence construction, paragraph organization, and idea development. Writing also demands creativity in discovering and elaborating ideas into coherent texts. This process is influenced by the writer's prior knowledge and cognitive ability (Sukirman, 2020). Among the four language skills, writing is often regarded as the most challenging to master, even for native speakers. This is because writing requires not only linguistic competence but also the ability to integrate and organize ideas into a coherent structure. In practice, many students face difficulties in writing due to insufficient mastery of fundamental skills and the complexity of generating and developing ideas. These challenges are also evident in creative writing tasks, such as composing short stories (Sofyan et al., 2024).

Preliminary observations conducted at SMP Negeri 5 Panca Rijang revealed that many students struggle to translate their ideas and imagination into written short stories. They often find it difficult to begin, develop, and conclude their narratives. The main obstacle lies in their limited understanding of key story elements, as well as challenges in connecting different ideas into a unified plot. This condition calls for innovative teaching strategies that can facilitate idea organization and make the writing process more accessible and enjoyable for students.

Given these circumstances, it is important to conduct research that can assess students' ability to write short stories in a structured manner. Such research will not only describe their current skill level but also identify the strengths and weaknesses in specific story elements, including theme, plot, setting, point of view, and language style. This information will be valuable for developing targeted teaching interventions aimed at improving students' creative writing skills. Based on this background, the present study focuses on examining the short story writing ability of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 5 Panca Rijang, Sidenreng Rappang Regency. The research specifically aims to answer the following question: What is

the level of short story writing ability among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 5 Panca Rijang.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language skills consist of four core components: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These skills are interrelated and mutually supportive in the process of communication and learning. Listening and speaking are generally acquired naturally during early childhood, while reading and writing typically develop through formal education. The acquisition of these skills forms an integrated whole, often referred to as the “*catur tunggal*” or fourfold unity in language learning (Chasanah et al., 2021). Each skill requires continuous practice, as mastery is inseparable from the cultivation of cognitive abilities and critical thinking (Solihatulmilah & Mualimah, 2023). Writing occupies a significant role among the four language skills as it is a productive activity that enables individuals to generate new texts based on their thoughts, experiences, or imagination. According to the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (1993:968), writing is the activity of expressing ideas or feelings in written form so that they can be understood by readers. This definition underscores writing as both a cognitive and communicative process, requiring not only the ability to encode language but also to organize and structure ideas coherently (Mahmur et al., 2021).

As a communication medium, writing has a variety of purposes, including informing, persuading, educating, entertaining, motivating, and expressing emotions (La'ia & Harefa, 2021). In educational contexts, writing plays a pivotal role in fostering intellectual growth, enhancing creativity, and developing critical thinking. Nurgiyantoro (Inayah & Subaweh, 2023) emphasizes that the ability to write well is a hallmark of an educated society, as it reflects an individual's capacity for clear reasoning and effective expression. The benefits of writing extend beyond academic achievement. Dalman (2018) notes that writing can improve memory retention, stimulate creativity, build confidence, and enhance the ability to collect and synthesize information. Similarly, Susanto (2016) asserts that writing activities help students recall prior knowledge, generate new ideas, and organize their thoughts systematically. These benefits highlight the importance of writing instruction as a key component of literacy education.

In the domain of creative writing, short stories (*cerpen*) represent one of the most accessible yet impactful literary forms. A short story is a brief fictional narrative, typically under 10,000 words, that focuses on a single incident or a small number of characters. It is designed to be read in one sitting and often leaves a lasting impression through a concise but meaningful exploration of human experience (Noviyanti et al., 2022). The construction of a short story requires mastery of intrinsic elements such as theme, plot, setting, character, point of view, and moral message (Oktariansyah et al., 2025). The intrinsic elements of a short story function as its structural foundation. The theme serves as the central idea around which the narrative revolves. The plot organizes the sequence of events into a coherent whole,

while the setting establishes the time, place, and atmosphere. Characters and their traits provide depth and relatability to the narrative. The point of view determines the perspective from which the story is told, influencing the reader's engagement. Finally, the use of language, including diction and figurative expressions, shapes the story's tone and style (Hasnur Ruslan, 2023).

In addition to intrinsic elements, short stories are also influenced by extrinsic factors such as the author's personal background, cultural context, and socio-political environment. These elements can subtly or overtly shape the themes, settings, and character portrayals within a work (Ikbal, 2021). A writer's lived experiences, beliefs, and values often permeate their creative output, providing unique perspectives that distinguish their stories from others. Previous studies have shown that mastery of short story elements directly correlates with students' overall writing performance. For instance, Fujiatun et al. (2022) found that students who demonstrated a solid grasp of narrative structure and linguistic conventions produced more coherent and engaging stories. However, many students still struggle with developing compelling conflicts, using varied sentence structures, and applying expressive language effectively. These findings underscore the need for targeted instructional strategies that address both the structural and stylistic dimensions of short story writing.

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study employed a descriptive quantitative approach aimed at systematically describing the short story writing ability of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 5 Panca Rijang without manipulating the variables under investigation. Descriptive quantitative research focuses on gathering factual data, presenting it in numerical form, and analyzing it statistically to reveal patterns, trends, and levels of achievement (Amriyah & Isnaini, 2021). This approach was considered appropriate because it allows for an objective assessment of students' performance in writing short stories, as measured by specific criteria, while still providing descriptive interpretations of the results. The population of this study consisted of all eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 5 Panca Rijang in the academic year 2025/2026. The target population included two classes: VIII.1 with 18 students and VIII.2 with 17 students. The sampling technique applied was random sampling, which gives each member of the population an equal chance of being selected. As a result, the sample comprised all 18 students from Class VIII.1, consisting of 8 male and 10 female students. This selection was intended to ensure that the sample represented a variety of abilities and backgrounds within the population (Sugiyono, 2019).

Instrument and Procedure

Two primary instruments were used to collect data: a short story writing test and documentation. The writing test served as the main instrument to directly assess

students' abilities by assigning them to write a short story based on a given theme within a set time frame. The test allowed the researcher to observe students' mastery of short story elements, including theme, plot, setting, point of view, and language style. Meanwhile, documentation served as a supplementary instrument to capture and store evidence of the writing process and outcomes, including photographs and students' written works. The writing test was designed to be both clear and engaging, ensuring that the theme was accessible to all students while still allowing for creativity and originality. Students were given between one and two hours to complete their stories. The scoring rubric was based on five key aspects: theme (25 points), setting (15 points), point of view (15 points), plot (20 points), and language style (25 points), with a maximum total score of 100 points. This rubric ensured that the evaluation was comprehensive and balanced across both structural and stylistic components (Jumiati, 2016). Documentation provided an additional layer of data validation by including physical and digital copies of students' works as well as photographs of the writing activity, ensuring that all stages of the research were recorded for verification and further analysis. For data collection, the researcher prepared and validated the test instructions, scheduled the writing session with the classroom teacher, administered the writing test under exam-like conditions, and gathered all completed works along with photographic records. These steps were structured to maintain uniformity and fairness across all participants, ensuring that results reflected actual differences in ability rather than inconsistencies in administration.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, specifically percentage analysis, to present the distribution of students' abilities in a clear and interpretable manner. The percentage formula

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

Where P represents the percentage, f the number of students in a given category, and N the total number of students. Students' scores were categorized into four levels: Very Good (90–100), Good (75–89), Fair (60–74), and Poor (<60). This categorization provided a straightforward interpretation of the results in relation to the school's Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM) of 75. The methodological framework of this research was designed to ensure accuracy, validity, and reliability. By combining quantitative measurement with descriptive interpretation, the study not only determined the overall level of short story writing ability among the students but also identified specific strengths and weaknesses in their performance, thereby providing actionable insights for teachers seeking to improve students' creative writing skills.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

SMP Negeri 5 Panca Rijang is a public junior high school located in Jalan Pu Rangreng, Desa Bulu, Kecamatan Panca Rijang, Kabupaten Sidenreng Rappang, Sulawesi Selatan Province. Established in 1998 under the Ministry of Education and Culture Decree No. 13a/0/1998, the school holds a “B” accreditation as per the National Accreditation Board for Schools/Madrasahs Decree No. 614/BAN-SM/SK/2019. As an educational institution, the school consistently strives to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, with a commitment to developing students’ potential in both academic and creative fields. This research focused on assessing the short story writing ability of eighth-grade students, with emphasis on the mastery of five main elements: theme, setting, point of view, plot, and language style. Data were obtained through a writing test in which each student composed a short story based on a given theme. The scoring rubric awarded a maximum of 100 points, distributed across the five aspects. The Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM) was set at 75. The evaluation results are presented in Table 1, which displays each student’s score in the five assessed aspects, their total score, and the corresponding category. Scores ranged from a minimum of 84 to a maximum of 96, with none of the students scoring below the KKM. This indicates that all participants achieved the minimum competency level required for short story writing.

Table 1. Short Story Writing Ability Scores of Class VIII 1 Students

No	Student Code	Theme	Setting	Point of View	Plot	Language Style	Total Score	Category
1	AHFA	25	10	14	18	22	89	Good
2	ALZH	25	13	15	19	22	94	Very Good
3	ARSA	25	14	15	20	22	96	Very Good
4	FAHL	25	13	15	20	23	96	Very Good
5	FASA	25	13	14	20	23	96	Very Good
6	HURI	25	13	14	17	21	90	Very Good
7	IRKA	24	12	13	19	22	90	Very Good
8	JULI	25	13	15	17	20	90	Very Good
9	KHDJ	25	12	15	18	21	91	Very Good
10	MOIK	23	13	14	17	20	87	Good
11	MUAL	25	12	15	18	20	90	Very Good

12	MUAN	25	12	14	17	18	86	Good
13	MUIR	25	13	15	17	18	88	Good
14	NAHJ	25	13	14	18	20	90	Very Good
15	NERA	24	12	13	17	18	84	Good
16	NUSO	24	13	15	17	18	87	Good
17	NUZA	24	12	14	17	18	85	Good
18	RIAD	25	13	15	18	18	89	Good

Analysis of the scores revealed that theme was the strongest aspect, with most students scoring between 24–25 points, indicating their ability to select and develop relevant topics effectively. The setting aspect showed greater variability (scores ranging from 10–14), suggesting some students struggled to vividly describe time, place, and atmosphere. For point of view, scores ranged from 13–15, reflecting consistent narrative perspectives among most students. Plot scores generally fell between 17–20, indicating that while most narratives were logically structured, some lacked smooth progression between events. The language style aspect, with scores from 18–23, showed that while diction and sentence variety were adequate, there was still room for more stylistic refinement. The categorization of scores showed that 10 students (55.56%) were classified as Very Good (90–100), while 8 students (44.44%) were in the good category (75–89). No students fell into the Fair (60–74) or Poor (<60) categories. This reflects a 100% classical mastery rate, meaning all students met or exceeded the KKM. These findings demonstrate that most students are already proficient in basic short story construction, particularly in determining themes and structuring plots, though targeted improvement is still needed in descriptive detail and stylistic expression.

The findings of this study confirm that eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 5 Panca Rijang have achieved a satisfactory to excellent level of competence in short story writing. The high performance in the theme aspect aligns with previous research by Azizah et al. (2024), who found that a clear understanding of the story's core idea is fundamental to successful narrative composition. Students' ability to establish relevant and engaging themes suggests that they can generate ideas effectively when guided by specific prompts. The variability in setting scores reflects a common challenge in descriptive writing, as also noted by Waruwu (2022). While some students could vividly portray time, place, and atmosphere, others offered minimal or generic descriptions. This indicates a need for instructional strategies that enhance sensory detail and contextual immersion, such as descriptive drills or model text analysis. The point of view scores suggest that most students can maintain a consistent narrative perspective, an essential skill for coherent storytelling. This is consistent with Fujiatun et al. (2022), who emphasized that narrative consistency significantly impacts reader engagement. However, occasional shifts in perspective in some works indicate that reinforcement is needed in this area.

The plot results reveal that most students could develop logical storylines, though a few narratives lacked smooth event transitions. These findings parallel those of Fikri & Mayong (2020), who observed that many young writers struggle with building tension and resolving conflicts effectively. Focused lessons on narrative arc development and conflict resolution could address these gaps. The language style aspect emerged as a critical area for growth. Although students used correct grammar and basic vocabulary effectively, their use of figurative language and varied sentence structures was limited. This observation supports Jurnal & Cendekia (2023), who found that exposure to literary models and stylistic exercises significantly improves writing richness.

The overall high level of achievement with 100% of students meeting or exceeding the KKM demonstrates that the teaching methods currently applied in the classroom are effective for meeting basic competency standards. However, the transition from “Good” to “Very Good” performance will require deliberate emphasis on stylistic enhancement and descriptive depth. The results also highlight the potential for peer review and collaborative writing activities to improve weaker areas. By analyzing each other’s works, students may become more aware of the importance of detail, pacing, and language choice, as recommended by contemporary writing pedagogy. While the current outcomes reflect a strong baseline in short story writing, continuous refinement particularly in setting description and stylistic development will be essential for moving students toward higher levels of literary competence. This aligns with the broader educational goal of fostering not only functional literacy but also creative and expressive proficiency.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that the short story writing ability of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 5 Panca Rijang for the 2025/2026 academic year falls within the Good to Very Good categories. All 18 students in the sample achieved scores above the Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM) of 75, resulting in a 100% classical mastery rate. The highest scores were achieved in the theme aspect, demonstrating students’ strong ability to identify and develop relevant story ideas, while the lowest average scores occurred in the setting and language style aspects, indicating areas for targeted improvement. These findings suggest that the current instructional approach is effective in building foundational narrative writing skills, especially in structuring plots and maintaining consistent points of view. However, challenges remain in enhancing descriptive detail, narrative atmosphere, and stylistic variety. Addressing these aspects will require a more focused instructional strategy, including exercises in imagery, sensory description, and the use of figurative language. Overall, this research underscores the importance of balanced development across all short story elements to achieve literary competence. While students have met the minimum competency standards, ongoing training, exposure to quality literary models, and opportunities for peer feedback will be essential to elevate their writing from structurally sound to artistically engaging. The outcomes

of this study can serve as a reference for teachers in designing more targeted and creative approaches to teaching short story writing in junior high school settings.

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