CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language at the secondary school level, with students typically beginning their formal English education in primary school and continuing through to high school(Nisa et al., 2023). As they progress in their studies, students are expected to develop a range of skills, including reading, speaking, listening, and writing (Khasanah et al., 2022). However, many researches have shown that writing is often the hardest skill for many EFL students, especially when it comes to using and understanding vocabulary. Indonesian EFL students face challenges in academic writing, particularly with vocabulary and grammar (Pasaribu et al., 2024). The limited input of varied lexical items in classroom writing tasks restricts students' opportunities to enhance their vocabulary control (Yunianti et al., 2022; Ro'ifah & Rosiana, 2023). This is particularly relevant in the context of descriptive writing, where detailed and varied vocabulary plays a key role in producing clear and informative texts.

Writing is a fundamental skill in education, which serves not only as a means of communication but also as a tool for critical thinking and building knowledge. It helps people share their ideas, organize their thoughts, understand things more clearly, and improve what they already know (Graham & Perin, 2007). In the context of second language (L2) acquisition, particularly English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the development of writing skills is essential for

1

academic success, Effective EFL instruction requires adaptation of teaching methods to address learners' needs (Saiful, 2019; Ro'ifah & Hamsia, 2022).

Among the different types of writing, descriptive writing helps students express their thoughts by describing people, places, and experiences in detail using clear and varied vocabulary. Descriptive texts require students to choose words carefully to paint a clear picture, this type of writing is a good choice for analyzing lexical complexity. Looking at how students write descriptively can show how well they use vocabulary, how much variation they include, and whether they can use more advanced or expressive words. By studying lexical complexity in descriptive writing, we can better understand how students are developing their vocabulary and how well they can write with detail and clarity in English (Bayraktar Balkır et al., n.d.)

Lexical complexity is an important indicator of writing proficiency because it indicates not only the writer's vocabulary knowledge but also their ability to use words effectively and appropriately in different contexts (Crossley et al., 2015). This term refers to the range, variety, and sophistication of vocabulary used in written texts. Research has shown that students who demonstrate higher lexical complexity tend to write more coherent, structured, and meaningful texts. It is also closely linked to their cognitive development, as it indicates their ability to think critically, make thoughtful word choices, and communicate more deeply (Ayadi, 2024). Therefore, fostering lexical complexity is essential, not only to improve writing quality but also to prepare students for advanced academic tasks and real-world communication in English skill is often

2

underdeveloped in many students, partly because they don't have enough exposure to more advanced vocabulary or struggle with using words correctly in different contexts.

However, despite its importance, lexical complexity in secondary school students' writing, especially in a non-English-speaking context such as SMA Muhammadiyah X Surabaya, remains relatively underexplored. While previous studies such as (Mulyanti & Soeharto, 2020) examined English textbooks and found that vocabulary complexity tends to increase across grade levels, suggesting that instructional materials should be adjusted to learners' linguistic development. The role of lexical richness in primary students' writing, demonstrates vocabulary diversity and sophistication are significant indicators of proficiency, even at an early stage (Asing, 2024). However, while much of the existing research has focused on lexical input (e.g., textbooks) or younger learners, there remains a lack of studies examining lexical complexity in the actual writing of senior high school students, particularly in descriptive texts. Descriptive writing requires learners to use specific, varied, and often sophisticated vocabulary to convey details clearly and vividly. Therefore, investigating lexical complexity in students' descriptive texts provides valuable insights into their vocabulary control and academic language development. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the lexical complexity of eleventh-grade students' descriptive writing and exploring the underlying factors that may influence.

This study was conducted in an inclusive classroom environment where one of the students has special educational needs.

The presence of an inclusion student in the class offers a valuable perspective for understanding lexical complexity development in a more diverse student population. Exploring both mainstream and inclusive students' writing performance provides insights into the effectiveness of current instructional approaches and highlights potential areas for pedagogical improvement, especially in supporting inclusive learners. Having a strong vocabulary is important for academic success because it helps students express their ideas more clearly and understand and produce written texts better (Nation, 2001) This gap in lexical complexity has the potential to hinder their ability to perform academic tasks that require sophisticated language use, such as essays, research papers, and presentations.

This study aims to analyze lexical complexity in the writing of grade high school students, focusing on vocabulary diversity, lexical density, and sentence complexity, also to explore how students use diverse vocabulary and sentence complexity to convey ideas in their writing, and how this relates to their academic writing ability.

Ultimately, this research seeks to enhance the understanding of lexical complexity in student writing at SMA Muhammadiyah X Surabaya and contribute to the broader field of EFL writing instruction. It is hoped that the findings will lead to practical recommendations for teachers, helping them design more effective vocabulary instruction and writing tasks that support students in developing higher levels of lexical complexity.

1.2 Research Question

The research questions for this study are:

1. What is the level of lexical complexity in the writing of XI grade students at SMA Muhammadiyah X Surabaya?
2. What factor influence the level of lexical complexity in the Descriptive Text of XI grade student at SMA Muhammadiyah X Surabaya ?

1.3 Research Objectives/Purposes

The objectives of this study are to:

1. To assess the level of lexical complexity in the writing of XI grade students at SMA Muhammadiyah X Surabaya.
2. To identify the factors that contribute to or hinder the development of lexical complexity in students' Descriptive Text.

1.4 Significance of The Research

This study has significant value for various stakeholders, including educators, students, and researchers in the fields of applied linguistics and English language education. By investigating the level of lexical complexity in the writing of grade XI students at SMA Muhammadiyah X Surabaya, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of students' writing skills, especially those related to their vocabulary use. The following points highlight the importance of this study:

1.4.1 Contribution to Educational Practices

For educators at SMA Muhammadiyah X Surabaya and similar institutions, this study offers valuable insights into students' vocabulary development at the senior high school level. By analyzing

5

the level of lexical complexity in students' writing, teachers can gain a clearer understanding of students' vocabulary skills and identify areas that require improvement. This can inform the design of targeted teaching strategies that focus on vocabulary enrichment and the development of more advanced writing skills. In addition, this study can highlight the need for tailored teaching methods for students at different proficiency levels, helping to ensure that vocabulary instruction is effectively differentiated (Nation, 2001)

For example, students at different proficiency levels may require varying levels of support in learning to incorporate more advanced vocabulary into their writing. For students at lower proficiency, teachers can focus on basic vocabulary development exercises, while for students at higher proficiency, more complex tasks involving the use of advanced lexical items can be introduced (Coxhead, 2000). Therefore, the findings of this study can have direct implications for teaching methods, curriculum design, and classroom activities aimed at improving writing quality.

1.4.2 Contribution to Student Development

This study has the potential to raise awareness of the role of lexical complexity in academic writing. By understanding how the use of advanced vocabulary can improve their writing skills, students may be motivated to expand their vocabulary and use more words in their written texts. This increased awareness may improve their writing skills, helping them produce more coherent, sophisticated, and effective essays and assignments (Crossley et al., 2015)

Furthermore, the findings of this study may help students understand the relationship between their writing skills and lexical

6

complexity. Students who may struggle with vocabulary use may benefit from the insights provided by this study, particularly in terms of practical recommendations for improving their vocabulary knowledge and writing strategies (Skehan, 1996).

1.4.3   Implications for Language Policy and Curriculum Development

More broadly, this study has implications for language policy and curriculum development at the school and national levels. As the Indonesian Ministry of Education continues to refine its curriculum for EFL education, understanding the challenges students face in developing lexical complexity can help shape policies and guidelines that encourage more effective vocabulary acquisition strategies (Grabe and Kaplan, 2017). Curriculum developers can use the findings of this study to create more targeted and vocabulary-focused exercises, resources, and assessments that are appropriate to the needs of students at different levels of proficiency.

In addition, this study contributes to the broader literature on second language acquisition, particularly as it relates to the development of writing skills. Given that most existing research on lexical complexity focuses on higher education or English-medium institutions (Coxhead, 2000; Crossley et al., 2011), this study provides a valuable perspective on lexical complexity in the context of senior secondary school students in Indonesia, an area that is relatively under-explored.

1.4.4   Implications for Future Research

This study also lays the groundwork for future research in the area of EFL writing and lexical complexity. By exploring how lexical complexity manifests itself in secondary school students' writing, this study paves the way for further research on related topics, such as the impact of different instructional strategies on vocabulary development, the role of extensive reading and English exposure in building lexical knowledge, and how lexical complexity correlates with other dimensions of writing, such as fluency, coherence, and grammatical accuracy (Biber, Conrad, & Reppen, 1999). Future research could also expand the study by comparing lexical complexity across schools, regions, or groups of students with varying levels of English exposure. In addition, research could investigate whether lexical complexity is a predictor of overall writing proficiency or if other factors, such as the type of writing task and the use of writing aids, influence lexical choice (Biber et al., 1999).

1.4.5   Contribution to the Field of Applied Linguistics

The findings of this study will also contribute to the field of applied linguistics by expanding the understanding of lexical complexity in L2 writing. While much of the existing literature focuses on advanced learners or college students, this study shifts the focus to high school students in a non-English speaking environment. By examining the lexical complexity of Indonesian high school students, this study adds a valuable case to the broader discourse on language acquisition and writing development in L2 contexts (Nation, 2001) Specifically, this study will offer insights

into how students in non-English-medium-taught (non-EMI) contexts develop their writing skills, particularly with regard to vocabulary use. This can contribute to the ongoing conversation about the relationship between writing proficiency and lexical complexity, and provide practical recommendations for improving language instruction in secondary schools (Grabe & Kaplan, 2014).

1.5   Scope and Limitation

This study focuses on analyzing lexical complexity in descriptive texts written by eleventh-grade students at SMA Muhammadiyah X Surabaya. The research is limited to measuring lexical density, lexical variation (NDW and TTR), and lexical sophistication using the Lexical Complexity Analyzer (LCA). Additionally, a questionnaire was used to investigate factors influencing students' lexical complexity. The participants included 29 students, consisting of mainstream students and one inclusion student. The presence of the inclusion student is acknowledged as a limitation, as this student's significantly lower results may affect overall data trends and should be interpreted cautiously within the inclusive education context.

However, there are some limitations to this study. Since it only focuses on one classroom, the results may not fully represent the writing abilities of all Indonesian high school students. Additionally, the research is limited to descriptive text, meaning the findings might not apply to other types of writing, like narratives or argumentative texts.

Another important consideration is that lexical complexity alone does not determine the overall quality of writing. While

vocabulary plays a big role, other factors : such as grammar, coherence, and structure, also impact how well a piece of writing is developed, but they are not the main focus of this study. Furthermore, while LCA provides valuable insights, it does not fully capture the meaning behind students' word choices or how appropriate they are in context.

Despite these limitations, this study offers useful insights into how Indonesian eleventh graders use vocabulary in descriptive writing. The findings can help educators design better strategies to improve students' writing skills, particularly in expanding their vocabulary and making their text more effective.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

To make sure there's no confusion or misunderstanding, the researcher explains the meanings of key terms .

- **Vocabulary:** A well-developed vocabulary helps students express their thoughts more clearly and improves their ability to understand and write texts. (Dauletova & Rahimova, 2022).
- **Lexical Complexity:** Lexical complexity is about how difficult the words in a text are, which can influence how well readers understand it. Lexical complexity is a task in NLP that uses machine learning to determine how difficult a word is to understand by a particular person or group of people according to (Shardlow et al., 2024).
- **Writing Proficiency:** Writing proficiency is the ability to write clearly, effectively, and in a way that fits the purpose

10

of communication. It includes good grammar, a strong vocabulary, proper text structure, and the skill to share ideas in an organized way (Macrothink & Martin, 2012) explain that writing is the most effective way to use language because it helps express thoughts, emotions, and events, keeping them alive for the future through good use of words.