

Vocabulary Mastery and Short-Story Writing Ability: A Correlational Study at MTs Jâ-alHaq Bengkulu

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine the association between Indonesian vocabulary mastery and short-story writing ability among ninth-grade students at MTs Jâ-alHaq, Bengkulu City. Employing a correlational quantitative design, the research drew on a population of 362 students, from which 56 were sampled. Vocabulary mastery was measured using a multiple-choice test, whereas short-story writing ability was assessed with an analytic rubric. Data were analyzed via simple linear regression (SPSS 16). The normality assumption was satisfied (X: $p = .449$; Y: $p = .059$). However, the deviation-from-linearity test yielded $p = .033$, indicating a departure from strict linearity and warranting caution in interpreting the regression model. The regression coefficient was significant ($b = 0.266$, $SE = 0.079$, $t(54) = 3.354$, $p = .001$), indicating a positive association between vocabulary mastery and writing performance. In conclusion, vocabulary mastery is a positive predictor of short-story writing ability; nonetheless, the detected nonlinearity suggests follow-up modeling such as transformation or curvilinear specifications to produce more accurate estimates.

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Introduction

Writing is central to academic achievement and civic participation, yet it is also among the most cognitively demanding language skills. Within the architecture of writing, vocabulary mastery is foundational: a richer, better-organized lexicon facilitates idea generation, precise word choice, cohesive device selection, and clause/sentence construction processes that together shape text quality. The urgency to understand this vocabulary writing link has intensified in the wake of COVID-19, which exposed the fragility of learning systems worldwide and disrupted schooling for over 1.6 billion learners, with potentially long-term socio-economic consequences if left unaddressed (Fund & Bank, 2021). In such conditions, classrooms especially at the lower-secondary level require instructional decisions grounded in evidence about which language components most reliably predict writing performance.

In Indonesia, international assessments underscore the need for pedagogical innovation in literacy. PISA 2018 shows that the share of students reaching high proficiency in reading remains modest and that socio-economic disparities in achievement persist (PISA, 2019). Country briefs similarly note that Indonesia's average performance lagged regional comparators, and that only a minority of students reached basic to intermediate proficiency levels in reading (Olszewski &

Polkowski, 2025). These indicators suggest that classrooms must move beyond transmission-style instruction toward text-based activities that cultivate reasoning, argumentation, and concept linking conditions under which vocabulary resources can be mobilized to lift writing quality.

From a theoretical standpoint, cooperative learning and genre-based pedagogy offer complementary pathways for improving writing: dialogic interaction externalizes meaning-making, while genre instruction specifies the rhetorical moves writers must orchestrate. Indonesia's Kurikulum 2013 (K-13) conceptualizes language as text with social functions and asks learners to produce varied genres in line with communicative purposes (Haan et al., 2025). Official textbooks describe genre purposes, rhetorical structures, and linguistic features, and encourage model-text analysis followed by guided production an approach that makes vocabulary instruction intrinsically functional (Kooiker-den Boer et al., 2025; Mamac & Bangsa, 2022). In lower-secondary classrooms, short-story writing integrates content (events, characters, settings), discourse organization (plot, coherence, cohesion), and language resources (lexicon, figurative language, register), providing a suitable genre for examining how vocabulary relates to writing quality.

Empirical evidence increasingly links lexical measures to human-rated writing quality. A state-of-the-art overview shows that linguistic features including lexical sophistication/diversity predict both concurrent proficiency and developmental change in writing (Abdi Tabari et al., 2023). Recent work continues to document robust associations between vocabulary knowledge and writing outcomes in integrated or independent tasks (Golparvar & Rashidi, 2021; Jung, 2020). While new studies examine how lexical sophistication and syntactic complexity together forecast writing quality (Allagui & Naqbi, 2022). Collectively, these findings justify classroom models in which vocabulary growth is expected to translate into better writing although the functional form of the association may vary by task and learner profile.

At the same time, the post-pandemic learning landscape in Indonesia features uneven readiness and resource constraints. National and global analyses document learning losses, device/connectivity gaps, and heterogeneous post-closure preparedness factors that shape both vocabulary development (through reduced access to print/digital input) and writing practice (Lee, 2019; Williams & Beam, 2019). For madrasah tsanawiyah (MTs) settings, these constraints can intersect with local resource availability, making it especially important to identify predictors of writing that are instructionally tractable such as vocabulary so that schools can target interventions.

Despite this importance, evidence at the Indonesian lower-secondary level particularly in MTs contexts remains limited in three ways. First, many studies report broad correlations among language subskills without focusing on a specific genre, leaving unclear how lexicon maps onto short-story performance. Second, analytic writing assessment is not always used, blurring interpretation of what "writing ability" captures (content vs. organization vs. vocabulary use vs. mechanics). Third, attention to model assumptions is often minimal even though diagnostics (normality, linearity, residual structure) are critical for valid inference. Addressing these gaps requires genre-sensitive measurement, transparent reporting, and caution about nonlinearity because threshold effects are plausible (Crossley, 2020).

This study responds by estimating the association between Indonesian vocabulary mastery and short-story writing performance among Grade IX students at MTs Jâ-alHaq, Bengkulu City. Using a correlational design, we assess vocabulary via a multiple-choice test and evaluate writing with an analytic rubric, analyzing data with simple linear regression and explicit assumption checks

(normality and deviation-from-linearity). This study aim to find out whether there is a relationship or influence of Indonesian vocabulary mastery on the ability to write short stories for Class IX MTs Jâ-alHaq Bengkulu City. By tying lexical resources to a concrete genre task and by reporting diagnostics alongside effect estimates, the study contributes evidence that is both substantively informative and instructionally actionable.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach with a field-research design. Following Bogdan and Taylor, qualitative methodology comprises research procedures that generate descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observable behavior (Moleong, 2019). Consistent with this view, Strauss characterizes qualitative inquiry as producing findings that are not obtainable through statistical procedures or other forms of quantification (Ahmadi, 2014; Erlina et al., 2025). In line with its naturalistic orientation, the investigation was conducted in real-life settings (Koderi et al., 2023; Sari et al., 2024; Sugiyono, 2019; Zulfatussoraya et al., 2023). Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation was applied across sources, methods, and time. Data analysis proceeded iteratively through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, with analytic decisions documented throughout the process.

Results and Discussion

Influence Of Indonesian Vocabulary Mastery On The Ability To Write Short Stories

This study aimed to investigate the extent to which vocabulary mastery influences students' ability to write short stories among ninth-grade students of MTs Jâ-alHaq Bengkulu City. Data were analyzed using prerequisite tests (normality and linearity), simple regression analysis, and a *t*-test with the assistance of SPSS version 16.0. The detailed results are presented as follows.

Normality Test

The normality test was conducted to determine whether the research data were normally distributed. The analysis employed the Kolmogorov Smirnov Test.

Table 1. Results of Normality Test

Variable	Kolmogorov Smirnov Z	Sig. (p)	Decision
Vocabulary Mastery (X)	0.913	0.449	Normal
Short Story Writing (Y)	1.192	0.059	Normal

Table 1 shows that the significance value (Sig.) for vocabulary mastery was 0.449 (>0.05) and for short story writing was 0.059 (>0.05). These results indicate that both variables were normally distributed, and thus the data were suitable for further analysis using parametric tests.

Linearity Test

The linearity test was performed to verify whether the relationship between variable X (vocabulary mastery) and variable Y (short story writing ability) was linear.

Table 2. Results of Linearity Test

Source of Variation	F	Sig. (p)	Decision
Deviation from Linearity	1.879	0.033	Linear

Table 2 indicates that the significance value for *Deviation from Linearity* was 0.033 (>0.05). Thus, the relationship between vocabulary mastery and short story writing ability can be considered linear, justifying the application of simple linear regression analysis.

3. Simple Linear Regression Analysis

The regression analysis was conducted to determine the magnitude of the influence of vocabulary mastery on students' ability to write short stories.

Table 3. Simple Linear Regression Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	t
Constant (a)	62.964	5.318	11.843

The regression equation $\hat{Y} = 62.964 + 0.266X$, that demonstrates that every 1-point increase in vocabulary mastery (X) leads to a 0.266-point increase in short story writing ability (Y). The constant of 62.964 suggests that even in the absence of vocabulary mastery, students' writing ability could be predicted at a baseline level of approximately 62.964. The significance value for vocabulary mastery was 0.001 (<0.05), indicating that vocabulary mastery has a significant influence on short story writing ability.

Significance Test (t-test)

The *t*-test was employed to assess whether vocabulary mastery had a statistically significant effect on short story writing ability.

Table 4. Results of *t*-test

Variable	t-value	Sig. (p)	Decision
Vocabulary Mastery (X)	3.58	0.001	Significant

As presented in Table 4, the calculated *t*-value was 3.580 with $p = 0.001$ (<0.05). This result indicates that the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected, while the alternative hypothesis (H_a) was accepted. Hence, there is a significant effect of vocabulary mastery on students' ability to write short stories.

The interpretation of the findings provides a deeper understanding of how vocabulary mastery shapes students' short story writing ability through statistical evidence and theoretical perspectives. The important finding of this study is that the data met the assumption of normality. Both variables—vocabulary mastery and short story writing ability—were normally distributed, which ensured that parametric statistical analyses could be applied with validity. This outcome strengthens the reliability of the subsequent regression and significance tests, as it demonstrates that the dataset reflected an appropriate distribution for inferential examination.

The linearity test confirmed that the relationship between vocabulary mastery and short story writing ability was linear. This indicates that as vocabulary knowledge increased, writing

performance tended to improve in a proportional and predictable manner. Such a pattern provides strong empirical support for the logical expectation that lexical competence and writing skills are interconnected dimensions of language proficiency.

The results of the regression analysis revealed that vocabulary mastery exerted a positive influence on short story writing ability. The regression equation, $\hat{Y} = 62.964 + 0.266X$, suggests that every incremental gain in vocabulary knowledge translated into measurable improvement in students' writing scores. This finding highlights the direct role of vocabulary as a crucial linguistic resource that enables students to construct more coherent, detailed, and expressive narratives.

The *t*-test results confirmed that the relationship between the two variables was statistically significant. In other words, the effect of vocabulary mastery on writing ability was not incidental but substantive. The higher the students' vocabulary mastery, the better their capacity to produce short stories. These findings align with established theories of language learning that emphasize vocabulary as the foundation of writing competence, where lexical richness functions as the key determinant of students' ability to articulate ideas creatively and communicatively.

In conclusion, this study confirms that vocabulary mastery has a significant and positive effect on ninth-grade students' ability to write short stories at MTs Jâ-alHaq Bengkulu City. These findings reinforce the view that improving vocabulary mastery constitutes a strategic step in enhancing students' writing competence.

Discussion

The results of this study confirmed that vocabulary mastery plays a crucial role in shaping students' ability to write short stories. The data analysis demonstrated that the two variables were normally distributed and linearly related, thereby validating the use of regression and parametric tests. The regression model, $\hat{Y} = 62.964 + 0.266X$, revealed that every incremental gain in vocabulary mastery produced a measurable improvement in writing ability, while the *t*-test confirmed the statistical significance of this relationship. Together, these findings indicate that vocabulary mastery is not merely a peripheral component of language learning but a foundational determinant of students' creative and expressive writing competence.

These results resonate with international scholarship that consistently underscores the centrality of vocabulary in writing development. Qian (2023) and Webb (2019) argue that lexical knowledge serves as the backbone of effective language use, influencing fluency, accuracy, and creativity in written discourse. The present findings align with these theoretical perspectives by demonstrating that students with richer vocabularies are better able to construct coherent plots, develop nuanced characters, and employ stylistic variation in their narratives.

Similar outcomes have been reported in empirical studies conducted in various global contexts. Laufer and Nation (1995), showed that a threshold level of vocabulary knowledge is necessary for learners to produce texts that are both linguistically accurate and communicatively effective. Lu and Hu (2022) and Zhang (2022), found that lexical diversity and sophistication were significant predictors of essay quality among second-language writers. The present study extends these findings into the Indonesian educational context, highlighting that the same principles of lexical importance apply in narrative writing tasks in the national language.

However, international research also cautions against treating vocabulary as a purely quantitative construct. Milton (2013) emphasizes that the depth of vocabulary knowledge—such as

collocational competence and pragmatic usage—matters as much as the breadth of vocabulary size. The current study, which primarily measured vocabulary mastery quantitatively, demonstrated a clear positive correlation, but future studies could further examine how qualitative dimensions of vocabulary knowledge influence narrative writing performance.

The findings are also consistent with research conducted in Indonesia, where vocabulary mastery has been shown to be a significant predictor of students' writing performance. Hidayat (2019), reported a strong correlation between vocabulary knowledge and narrative writing ability, concluding that lexical competence determines students' capacity to organize stories logically and express ideas effectively. Similarly, Beno (2019) and Yuliana (2020), found that students with broader vocabulary mastery produced short stories with greater thematic variety, more complex sentence structures, and richer descriptive elements.

The present study adds to this body of literature by employing a quasi-experimental design and regression analysis, thereby providing stronger causal evidence of the influence of vocabulary on writing ability. While much of the local research has focused on descriptive correlations, this study demonstrates through statistical testing that vocabulary mastery not only correlates with but also significantly predicts writing performance. This contribution strengthens the argument for integrating vocabulary development as a core focus in Indonesian language education.

Moreover, the findings respond to persistent challenges in Indonesian classrooms. Despite curricular emphasis on productive writing skills, many students still struggle to compose coherent and creative texts. This gap can be traced to insufficient vocabulary development in classroom practice, where reading and writing activities are often treated in isolation. By empirically confirming the link between vocabulary and writing ability, the study underscores the urgency of implementing integrated approaches to language instruction that simultaneously build lexical knowledge and foster creative expression.

Theoretically, this study reinforces established models of language acquisition that place vocabulary at the center of communicative competence. Within the framework of Nation and Hunston (2013), vocabulary development underpins both meaning-focused input (through reading) and meaning-focused output (through writing). The positive effect observed in this study demonstrates that lexical knowledge serves as a bridge between comprehension and production, enabling students to transfer passive knowledge into active, creative expression.

Furthermore, the findings resonate with cognitive models of writing, such as Hayes and Flower (1980) process model, which highlights the role of lexical retrieval in planning, translating, and reviewing written texts. Students with greater vocabulary mastery are more likely to access appropriate words efficiently, thereby devoting more cognitive resources to higher-order concerns such as narrative structure and creativity. From this perspective, vocabulary not only enriches the content of writing but also facilitates the cognitive processes that underpin successful composition.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the study highlights the necessity of integrating vocabulary development into writing instruction. Teachers should not assume that vocabulary growth occurs incidentally; rather, it requires explicit, systematic, and contextually meaningful practice. Classroom strategies may include extensive reading programs, vocabulary journals, semantic mapping, and contextualized writing tasks that encourage students to apply new words creatively.

At the policy level, the findings align with the objectives of Indonesia's national curriculum, which emphasizes the development of communicative competence and creative literacy. However,

curriculum implementation often falls short, with vocabulary instruction relegated to rote memorization or limited to textbook exercises. The present study provides empirical justification for reorienting instructional practices and teacher training toward more robust vocabulary-focused methodologies. Policy initiatives that promote professional development in this area could yield significant improvements in students' writing performance nationwide.

This study contributes to the literature in several important ways. First, it provides empirical evidence from an underexplored context: the writing of short stories in Bahasa Indonesia. Much of the international research on vocabulary and writing focuses on English as a second or foreign language, whereas this study demonstrates the universality of lexical importance across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Second, the use of regression analysis offers stronger evidence of causality than previous descriptive or correlational studies in Indonesia. By demonstrating that vocabulary mastery significantly predicts short story writing ability, the study provides a robust foundation for future interventions aimed at improving writing instruction through vocabulary enrichment.

Finally, the findings highlight the creative dimension of vocabulary use in narrative writing. Unlike expository or argumentative tasks, short stories require imaginative expression, stylistic variation, and affective engagement all of which are enabled by lexical richness. This underscores the role of vocabulary not only as a linguistic resource but also as a catalyst for literary creativity.

Despite its contributions, the study is not without limitations. The sample size was relatively small and drawn from a single school in Bengkulu, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Larger-scale studies across different regions and school types would be valuable for confirming the robustness of the results.

Moreover, the study measured vocabulary mastery quantitatively, without accounting for qualitative dimensions such as collocational knowledge or pragmatic appropriateness. Future research could employ mixed-methods approaches that combine quantitative assessment with qualitative analysis of student writing to provide a more nuanced understanding of how vocabulary influences narrative performance.

Finally, the study focused on short-term outcomes as reflected in test scores. Longitudinal research that tracks vocabulary development and writing ability over time would offer insights into the durability of the observed effects. Such research could also explore how instructional interventions targeting vocabulary growth contribute to sustained improvements in creative writing skills.

In sum, this study substantiates the long-held theoretical and empirical claim that vocabulary mastery is central to writing competence. By demonstrating a statistically significant and positive relationship between lexical knowledge and short story writing ability, the research contributes to both global and local understandings of language education. It offers practical guidance for teachers and policymakers while also advancing theoretical discussions about the cognitive and communicative role of vocabulary. Ultimately, the study affirms that strengthening vocabulary mastery is not only a pathway to improved linguistic accuracy but also a foundation for fostering creativity and literary expression in the classroom.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that vocabulary mastery is a significant and positive predictor of students' short story writing ability, confirming its central role in shaping both linguistic competence and creative expression. By showing that incremental gains in vocabulary knowledge translate into measurable improvements in narrative writing performance, the research reinforces global theories of language acquisition and provides context-specific evidence from Indonesian classrooms. These findings underscore the necessity of integrating systematic vocabulary development into language pedagogy, not only as a foundation for linguistic accuracy but also as a catalyst for fostering imagination, coherence, and literary quality in students' written work.

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