



Senior High School Students' Experiences and Perceptions of Wordwall in Writing Descriptive Texts

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Abstract. *This study explores senior high school students' experiences and perceptions of using Wordwall, a gamified learning platform, in writing descriptive texts in an Indonesian EFL classroom. Many learners face challenges such as limited vocabulary, low motivation, and writing anxiety. To understand how students experience the use of Wordwall, a qualitative descriptive design with a phenomenological approach was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations, and analysis of student writing samples. Thematic analysis revealed that Wordwall helped students improve vocabulary, boost motivation, and reduce anxiety by offering engaging, interactive tasks like quizzes and instant feedback. Students described their learning process as more enjoyable and confidence-building. Despite minor technical issues, most participants found Wordwall beneficial in supporting their writing development. These findings highlight the value of gamified tools in enhancing student engagement and confidence in EFL writing classes. The study provides practical insights for educators seeking to integrate meaningful digital tools into language instruction.*

Keywords: *Wordwall, descriptive writing, EFL Classroom, student perceptions*

Abstrak. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi pengalaman dan persepsi siswa SMA terhadap penggunaan Wordwall, sebuah platform pembelajaran berbasis gim, dalam menulis teks deskriptif di kelas EFL di Indonesia. Banyak siswa menghadapi tantangan seperti keterbatasan kosakata, motivasi rendah, dan kecemasan dalam menulis. Untuk memahami bagaimana siswa mengalami penggunaan Wordwall, penelitian ini menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan fenomenologis. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, diskusi kelompok terfokus, observasi kelas, dan analisis tulisan siswa. Analisis tematik menunjukkan bahwa Wordwall membantu siswa memperkaya kosakata, meningkatkan motivasi, dan mengurangi kecemasan melalui aktivitas interaktif seperti kuis dan umpan balik instan. Siswa menggambarkan proses belajar mereka sebagai lebih menyenangkan dan membangun rasa percaya diri. Meskipun terdapat beberapa kendala teknis, sebagian besar peserta merasa Wordwall bermanfaat dalam mendukung keterampilan menulis mereka. Temuan ini menyoroti potensi media gamifikasi dalam meningkatkan keterlibatan dan kepercayaan diri siswa dalam pembelajaran menulis bahasa Inggris. Studi ini memberikan wawasan praktis bagi guru dalam mengintegrasikan teknologi digital secara bermakna dalam pengajaran bahasa.

Kata kunci: Wordwall, penulisan deskriptif, pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris, persepsi siswa

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is often regarded as one of the most demanding skills to master in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, particularly among senior high school learners. Unlike receptive skills such as listening and reading, writing requires learners to actively generate and organize ideas while conveying them through accurate vocabulary and grammar. In Indonesian classrooms, one essential genre taught is descriptive writing, which helps students articulate detailed information about people, places, or objects. Yet, many learners encounter difficulties

in this area due to limited word choices, lack of confidence, and minimal engagement, often resulting in repetitive, unclear, and underdeveloped compositions.

Previous research (Toba et al., 2019; Dwi et al., 2019) highlights that vocabulary limitations remain a key barrier in students' writing development. Learners frequently rely on basic and overly general adjectives like "good," "nice," or "big," which hinder their ability to create vivid and precise descriptions. Teachers also observe a general disinterest in writing activities, especially when traditional instructional methods are used. These recurring challenges underscore the importance of integrating alternative teaching strategies that can simultaneously enrich vocabulary knowledge and stimulate student motivation.

In response to these issues, digital learning tools have emerged as promising alternatives in language instruction. One such tool is Wordwall, a web-based platform that allows educators to design interactive learning games—such as matching exercises, puzzles, and gap-fills—that promote vocabulary reinforcement. Although Wordwall is not explicitly designed for writing instruction, its engaging features may indirectly support students' descriptive writing by strengthening their lexical repertoire. Since vocabulary depth is closely linked to writing fluency (Nation, 2001), consistent exposure to targeted word practice can assist learners in expressing their ideas more effectively and confidently.

Additionally, Wordwall's gamified components—such as real-time feedback, scoring systems, and visual interactivity—can foster emotional engagement and create a more stimulating learning atmosphere. Game-based environments are known to enhance intrinsic motivation and reduce anxiety (Deterding et al., 2011), which may encourage students to participate more willingly in classroom writing tasks. However, while existing studies have investigated Wordwall's influence on vocabulary outcomes and learner motivation through quantitative frameworks, there is a noticeable lack of research that explores students' lived experiences with the platform, particularly in the context of writing instruction.

Most of the available literature (e.g., Amri & Rahmawati, 2023; Saputra et al., 2024) emphasizes measurable outcomes such as test scores or engagement levels, yet often fails to capture students' subjective experiences and perceptions. Especially in EFL environments, understanding how learners perceive technological tools in writing tasks is crucial, as writing is not merely a cognitive skill but also an affective one, shaped by attitudes, confidence, and the learning setting (Kalyani, 2024).

This study seeks to address that gap by examining the experiences and perceptions of eleventh-grade students from a public high school in Sidoarjo, Indonesia, regarding the use of Wordwall during descriptive writing lessons. Rather than focusing on academic performance,

this research aims to uncover how students engage with the platform, how it supports their vocabulary use, and how it influences their motivation and self-assurance in writing. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the study draws data from interviews, focus group discussions, and students' writing samples to provide a comprehensive understanding of how digital tools like Wordwall can support writing instruction in a learner-centered and meaningful manner.

2. THEORITICAL STUDY

A. The Role of Technology in Language Learning

The integration of technology in education has significantly reshaped language learning methodologies, offering interactive and student-centered experiences. Alharbi and Alsolami (2020) emphasized that digital tools foster authentic linguistic engagement and collaboration, enhancing both motivation and participation. In EFL contexts, particularly in writing instruction, technological platforms provide learners with opportunities to engage with language in meaningful and low-anxiety settings. For instance, gamified tools like Wordwall support vocabulary acquisition and learner independence by turning writing-related tasks into interactive experiences.

Motivation, a key factor in language acquisition, is strongly supported by the presence of digital tools. When learners are actively engaged through interactive content, they are more likely to develop confidence and express their ideas creatively. As such, educational technologies can serve as enablers of effective writing instruction—especially in genres like descriptive writing, which requires precision, imagination, and lexical control.

B. Wordwall as an Interactive Learning Tool

Wordwall is a web-based platform that allows educators to design game-based tasks tailored to specific learning outcomes. Although not a writing tool per se, it is often used as a pre-writing aid to enhance students' lexical competence. Amri and Rahmawati (2023) highlight its capacity to foster engagement, collaboration, and motivation—factors critical in supporting students' writing development. Grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, Wordwall serves as a mediational tool that helps learners move within their zone of proximal development (ZPD), especially when scaffolding is provided during collaborative learning.

Activities such as matching, sorting, and sentence completion expose students to descriptive vocabulary in structured yet engaging ways. These features not only promote vocabulary retention but also support the internalization of language patterns needed for constructing coherent and vivid descriptive texts. Furthermore, the gamified elements—

badges, scores, and leaderboards—provide extrinsic motivation that reinforces learner participation and reduces anxiety.

C. Writing Development in EFL Contexts

Writing, particularly descriptive writing, is one of the most demanding skills for EFL learners due to its emphasis on lexical variety, organization, and vividness. Harshalatha and Sreenivasulu (2024) argue that descriptive writing is essential for learners to articulate ideas clearly and systematically. However, many students face difficulties due to insufficient vocabulary, limited exposure, and low interest. Platforms like Wordwall address these challenges by providing students with a safe and engaging environment to experiment with descriptive language.

Wordwall's emphasis on vocabulary repetition, contextual application, and immediate feedback supports learners in internalizing words that can later be transferred into writing. For example, activities such as adjective-noun matching or descriptive sentence building help students become familiar with the linguistic tools necessary for descriptive writing. By making vocabulary practice enjoyable and dynamic, Wordwall bridges the gap between passive word recognition and active word use in writing.

D. Wordwall as a Tool for Improving Writing Skills

Descriptive writing requires learners to express detailed observations using vivid language, clear structure, and appropriate cohesive devices. Wordwall plays a strategic role in scaffolding this process by providing vocabulary input, sentence modeling, and pre-writing activation. Teachers can use it at various stages of the writing process—from brainstorming and vocabulary review to post-writing reflection and assessment. Activities like "missing word," "group sort," or "sentence arrangement" not only reinforce grammar and vocabulary but also help students visualize sentence patterns used in descriptive texts.

Additionally, the platform's feedback mechanisms and collaborative nature promote peer learning and self-correction—key components in the development of writing fluency (Fleckenstein et al., 2023). These elements collectively enable learners to gain confidence, deepen their understanding of writing conventions, and produce more coherent and descriptive paragraphs.

E. Descriptive Texts Writing

Descriptive texts require the integration of sensory language, spatial organization, and lexical richness. Students are expected to use adjectives, adverbs, and specific verbs to construct vivid imagery, as well as appropriate cohesive devices to maintain logical flow (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). However, research by Purnamasari et al. (2021) shows that many

students still struggle with aspects such as vocabulary use, sentence structure, and cohesion, leading to poorly developed texts.

Wordwall contributes to addressing these issues by offering repeated exposure to descriptive word categories—colors, textures, sizes, and positions—through contextualized games. This exposure supports both vocabulary acquisition and syntactic awareness, which are essential for producing effective descriptions. Moreover, using Wordwall in pre-writing stages activates relevant lexical fields, making it easier for students to construct vivid and organized written outputs.

F. Student Experiences and Perceptions

Understanding learners' perceptions of educational tools is crucial for optimizing instructional strategies. Several studies (e.g., Sartika, 2017; Saputra et al., 2024) report that students respond positively to the use of Wordwall in writing classes, particularly because it transforms abstract tasks into concrete, enjoyable experiences. The platform's visual cues, feedback system, and collaborative features align well with Vygotsky's theory of mediated learning, empowering students to take greater ownership of their writing process.

While existing research often focuses on test results or engagement metrics, limited attention has been given to students' lived experiences when using Wordwall in writing tasks. Addressing this gap, the present study adopts a qualitative lens to explore how students perceive Wordwall's role in improving their descriptive writing. This approach aims to capture emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions of students' engagement with the platform, providing a deeper understanding of how gamified tools support writing development in EFL classrooms.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to investigate how students experience and perceive the use of Wordwall in learning to write descriptive texts within an Indonesian EFL classroom context. The primary objective was to explore the influence of Wordwall on students' vocabulary acquisition, engagement, motivation, and confidence during writing activities. The participants consisted of eleventh-grade students from a public senior high school in Sidoarjo. Using purposive sampling, ten students were selected to represent a range of writing abilities and familiarity with Wordwall-based instruction. All participants had participated in at least three learning sessions where Wordwall was integrated into descriptive writing lessons.

As noted by Creswell (2015), qualitative research seeks to understand social phenomena from the perspective of the participants. In line with this, data collection involved four instruments: semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), classroom observations, and analysis of student writing tasks. During the data collection period, the researcher worked in collaboration with the English teacher, who facilitated the Wordwall-integrated lessons. Meanwhile, the researcher assumed a non-participant role, observing classroom dynamics through detailed field notes and a structured observation checklist focusing on indicators such as student participation, interaction, and levels of motivation.

Individual interviews were conducted with all selected participants to gain insight into their personal experiences, emotional reactions, and challenges encountered when using Wordwall in writing. Each interview lasted approximately 25 minutes and generated detailed accounts of students' reflections on the learning process. To complement these individual narratives, focus group discussions were carried out in small groups of four to five students. These group sessions provided a space for participants to collaboratively reflect on their experiences, offering a richer understanding of how Wordwall supported or challenged their writing in a peer-based context.

Additionally, to observe any changes in students' writing performance, samples of their written texts were collected both before and after the Wordwall-based instruction. These writing samples were analyzed to examine developments in vocabulary usage, syntactic accuracy, and the clarity of description. Thematic analysis was used as the primary analytical method, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. This process involved coding data, identifying patterns, and grouping them into emerging themes such as increased enjoyment, vocabulary improvement, enhanced motivation, and greater self-confidence. These themes were interpreted in relation to existing literature on gamified learning strategies and EFL writing pedagogy.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the findings of the study thematically, based on the analysis of data collected from interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), classroom observations, and students' writing products. The themes are organized according to students' experiences and perceptions in using Wordwall in writing descriptive texts.

A. Students' Experiences in Using Wordwall

1. Fun and Motivation

Students described their experience using Wordwall as enjoyable and different from traditional learning. The gamified format, including quizzes, matching activities, and visual tasks, created a more relaxed learning environment. Student A stated:

"I feel happy because I can learn while playing and not get bored."

Student B supported this sentiment:

"Wordwall makes writing practice more fun with interactive models such as quizzes, match games, and puzzles."

These comments were supported by classroom observation notes, which recorded more student laughter, increased participation, and visible enthusiasm compared to previous lessons. This aligns with Deterding et al. (2011), who argued that gamification fosters intrinsic motivation.

2. Active Engagement and Interactivity

The interactive features of Wordwall encouraged students to be more involved. During classroom sessions, students who were previously passive began to engage in writing tasks more actively.

Student D shared:

"The activities in Wordwall make learning more interesting and help me improve my writing skills such as vocabulary and better understand text structure through examples in Wordwall quizzes."

Observation data confirmed that student participation increased, with students responding eagerly during Wordwall activities and voluntarily interacting with the game-based content.

3. Collaboration and Peer Interaction

Wordwall also promoted student collaboration. During group-based Wordwall activities, students discussed answers, compared choices, and helped each other understand vocabulary and grammar rules.

Student C stated:

"With Wordwall, I can easily share ideas and get feedback from friends about my writing."

Similarly, Student H reflected:

"The collaborative activities on Wordwall make me feel more confident to participate in class discussions."

These findings align with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, where social interaction and scaffolding enhance learning. Observations also indicated that peer interaction was more frequent and supportive during Wordwall sessions.

B. Perceived Benefits of Using Wordwall

1. Improvement in Vocabulary Mastery

The most frequently mentioned benefit of Wordwall was vocabulary enhancement. Students reported they could remember and use more descriptive vocabulary, supported by the images and repetition within games.

Student E noted:

"I remember the vocabulary better because there are fun pictures and games in class."

FGD participants echoed this, stating that Wordwall helped them recall vocabulary faster during writing. Document analysis confirmed this claim.

Table 1. Comparison of Vocabulary Use in Descriptive Texts Before and After Wordwall

Student	Before Wordwall – Simple Sentence	Adjectives	After Wordwall – Enhanced Sentence	Adjectives
A	"The place is beautiful."	1	"The park is full of tall green trees and colorful flowers."	4
B	"It is a nice beach."	1	"The beach has white sand, blue water, and is very peaceful."	5
C	"My school is big."	1	"My school has a wide green yard and clean classrooms."	4
D	"I like my classroom."	0	"My classroom is bright, neat, and comfortable."	3

On average, students used only 0.75 adjectives per descriptive paragraph before using Wordwall. This increased to 4.0 adjectives per text after using the platform, showing a notable improvement in lexical richness and precision.

2. Confidence and Instant Feedback

Another key benefit was enhanced writing confidence, particularly due to the real-time feedback offered by Wordwall.

Student G reflected:

"I feel more confident using Wordwall because it shows where I went wrong and gives immediate feedback."

This live correction process helped students self-assess and revise independently, reducing their fear of failure. Observations supported this, showing that students became more willing to take writing risks and self-correct during practice.

3. Ease of Use and Motivation to Continue

Despite some initial confusion, students adapted quickly to Wordwall's interface. Student A stated:

"Wordwall is easy to use. There may be some difficulty, but it doesn't interfere with learning."

Student I added:

"After a few tries, Wordwall became easier and made writing feel like a game."

Most students expressed interest in continuing to use Wordwall in future English classes, suggesting its potential for sustained classroom use.

C. Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that the use of Wordwall significantly enhanced students' descriptive writing, especially in terms of vocabulary development, motivation, and classroom engagement. Through consistent exposure to target words in interactive game-based activities, learners were able to better internalize and apply descriptive vocabulary, supporting Nation's (2001) claim that vocabulary mastery is essential to writing fluency. In addition, the platform's gamified features, such as point scoring and instant feedback, increased students' enjoyment and reduced writing-related anxiety, leading to higher levels of participation. This aligns with Deterding et al. (2011), who note that gamification can improve intrinsic motivation and learner engagement.

Moreover, the immediate feedback provided by Wordwall empowered students to identify and correct their mistakes independently, contributing to a greater sense of self-confidence and autonomy in writing. This reflects Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development, where learners progress with the aid of scaffolded support. Collaborative interactions also emerged during Wordwall activities, as students frequently shared answers and discussed ideas, reinforcing the social dimension of learning and the importance of peer support in developing writing skills. Although Wordwall is not a writing platform per se, its application during the pre-writing stage effectively scaffolded the writing process by activating relevant vocabulary and modeling useful sentence structures. Used strategically, it served as a valuable tool to support idea generation and improve the overall quality of students' descriptive texts.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study explored students' experiences and perceptions regarding the use of Wordwall in writing descriptive texts within an Indonesian EFL classroom. Regarding the first research question, students experienced Wordwall as an enjoyable and engaging tool that transformed writing lessons into more interactive and motivating activities. It fostered classroom participation, peer collaboration, and a sense of fun, which made the learning environment more dynamic.

In response to the second research question, students perceived several benefits from using Wordwall, including improved vocabulary mastery, increased writing confidence, reduced anxiety, and greater motivation to write. The platform's instant feedback and gamified features played a significant role in enhancing both their cognitive and emotional engagement with the writing process.

Overall, the integration of Wordwall supported students not only in developing descriptive writing skills but also in fostering a more positive attitude toward learning. These findings suggest that gamified tools can be effectively used to enhance EFL writing instruction and encourage student-centered learning.

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