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The Effect of the Direct Observation Method on Seventh-Grade Students' Descriptive Text-Writing Ability at SMPN 2 Nainggolan in the 2024/2025 Academic Year

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Abstract

This study addresses the persistent challenge of low descriptive text writing ability among seventh-grade students, which is largely attributed to conventional teaching methods that lack authentic experiential engagement. The research aimed to evaluate the impact of implementing the Direct Observation Method on students' descriptive writing proficiency. Using a one-group pretest–posttest design, 30 seventh-grade students from SMPN 2 Nainggolan were selected through cluster random sampling. Data were collected using a performance test scored with a validated rubric based on Nurgiyantoro's framework. Statistical analysis employing a paired-samples t-test revealed a significant improvement in students' writing performance (t observed = 7.677 > t critical = 1.699), with mean scores increasing from 54.33 (Very Poor) to 77.83 (Good), representing a 23.50-point gain. The method showed its strongest effects on content development (+8.1 points) and organization (+6.3 points), while linguistic aspects exhibited more moderate improvement. These findings indicate that direct environmental engagement substantially enhances students' ability to generate and organize descriptive content and offer educators a practical strategy for bridging the gap between theoretical instruction and authentic writing experiences in descriptive text composition.

Keywords: Direct Observation Method; Descriptive Writing Skills; Seventh-Grade Students; Authentic Learning; Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

Language functions as the primary medium of human social interaction, whether spoken or written (Wati & Sudigdo, 2019). In the context of education, language proficiency comprises four core skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, with the first two categorized as receptive and the latter two as productive (Magdalena et al., 2021). Among these, writing is often regarded as the most challenging skill, as it demands critical thinking, information processing, and the structured expression of ideas and emotions (Munawarah & Zulkiflih, 2020). According to Sobari (cited in Rifdah & Rizkiani, 2022) writing is an activity that involves transforming ideas, thoughts, or feelings into linguistic symbols with the aim of ensuring that the intended message is received and understood by the reader. Writing also plays a crucial role in fostering students' critical thinking, enabling them to analyze and articulate responses to currently relevant social issues through written expression (Permanasari, 2017). Under the School Level Curriculum (KTSP), one of the stated learning objectives for writing instruction is to enable students to construct descriptive paragraphs based on direct observation, thereby reflecting improvement in knowledge, attitude, and skill domains (Simaremare & Thesalonika, 2021).

Writing serves multiple communicative purposes, including recording, documenting, persuading, reporting, conveying information, and influencing readers. Proficient writing allows individuals to express ideas, thoughts, and emotions with clarity and coherence. A descriptive text, as defined by Subarna et al. (2021) is a written representation that presents a detailed portrayal of an object, enabling readers to visualize or experience the described subject as if firsthand. Its key characteristics include (1) concrete depiction of objects, places, or atmospheres; (2) multisensory engagement in presentation; (3) the intention to provide readers with a direct experiential impression; and (4) inclusion of specific details concerning color, shape, size, and condition (Febriani & Sulanjari, 2022). Thus, description is not merely informative; it also constructs mental imagery and enhances readers' comprehension of the subject (Budiani et al., 2023). An effective descriptive text evokes sensory experiences—visual, auditory, and tactile—mirroring those perceived by the writer (Asyifa et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, classroom reality reveals that students frequently encounter difficulties in writing descriptive texts. Primary challenges include (1) limited understanding of textual structure and descriptive conventions; (2) insufficient vocabulary and reference

resources; and (3) monotonous and decontextualized instructional methods. Consequently, student motivation to write remains low, participation is minimal, and learning outcomes often fall short of the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM). Internal factors, such as low self-confidence, and external factors, including nonconducive learning environments, further exacerbate the problem. Students exhibit varying levels of descriptive writing proficiency: while some demonstrate competence, others continue to struggle significantly. This disparity underscores the urgency of addressing writing instruction in junior secondary schools through more effective and efficient pedagogical strategies.

Prior studies have demonstrated the efficacy of various approaches in enhancing descriptive writing ability. For instance, Jayanti and Fachrurazi (2020) confirmed that the discovery method supported by pictorial media improved university students' descriptive writing skills. Meanwhile, Nurfidah (2019) identified persistent weaknesses in students' structural and lexical control, particularly in idea development and word choice. However, most of these studies focus on higher education contexts or employ indirect media (e.g., images), thus overlooking authentic, firsthand experience as the foundational source of descriptive content—despite the fact that direct observation lies at the core of descriptive writing.

A classroom action research conducted by Amini, Slamet, and Sukarno (2023) targeted descriptive writing skills among 27 fourth-grade students at SD Muhammadiyah Imam Syuhodo Polokarto, implementing the Direct Instruction model. The study reported progressive improvement in classical completion rates: from 14.81 percent in the preintervention phase to 40.74 percent in Cycle I, 66.67 percent in Cycle II, and 85.2 percent in Cycle III. Key distinctions from the present study include the following: (1) research design, namely classroom action research in contrast to a quasi experimental design; (2) treatment variable, specifically the Direct Instruction model as opposed to the Direct Observation Method; and (3) participant profile, involving fourth grade elementary students rather than seventh grade junior secondary students.

Another study by Amra, Rukiyah, and Missriani (2023) reported increased learning mastery from 19 percent (5 students) in the pre cycle stage to 45 percent (12 students) in Cycle I and 81 percent (21 students) in Cycle II, applying a contextual approach with direct observation objects as instructional media. This research shares the closest resemblance to the current study in its use of real objects and seventh-grade junior secondary participants.

Nevertheless, a fundamental difference exists in research design: Amra et al. employed classroom action research, aimed at iterative pedagogical improvement, whereas the present study adopts a one group pretest posttest design to statistically measure the treatment effect, not to refine teaching practice.

Dian Ekasari (2020) examined the descriptive writing ability of seventh grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Sindue using the Mind Mapping method. Differences from the current study include the following: (1) research design, specifically a qualitative descriptive approach as opposed to a one group pretest posttest design; and (2) intervention focus, namely Mind Mapping as a strategy for organizing ideas in contrast to Direct Observation as a strategy for generating ideas.

Thus, a pedagogical strategy that enables students to interact directly with real objects is warranted. According to Sugiyono (cited in Hurotul & Aini, 2024) the direct observation method, defined as the process of observing objects, events, or phenomena firsthand in the surrounding environment, offers a relevant solution This method not only strengthens the connection between learning and real life but also stimulates multisensory engagement in the creative writing process. Consequently, students do not merely write *about* something; they write *from* experience, producing texts that are more authentic, vivid, and meaningful. This method not only strengthens the connection between learning and real life but also stimulates multisensory engagement in the creative writing process. Consequently, students do not merely write about something; they write from experience, producing texts that are more authentic, vivid, and meaningful. (Nuraiha, 2020).

For many individuals, writing remains a demanding endeavor. Prior to articulating ideas in written form, one typically engages with related reading or listening materials. Additional barriers include insufficient commitment to the writing process and limited effort in refining written output. Such attitudes should be avoided, as writing yields significant benefits and may even serve as a potential source of income. Hence, cultivating writing interest from an early stage, particularly during formal schooling, is essential, as this habit yields long term intellectual and professional advantages.

Theoretically, writing constitutes a systematic process of transforming ideas into written symbols, and this skill can be developed through sustained practice (Alawiyah, 2021). Writing further delivers dual advantages: it sharpens cognitive ability, fosters creativity, builds confidence in expressing ideas, and enhances information synthesis skills

(Tabelessy, 2019). Moreover, the purposes of writing, namely informative, persuasive, educative, and explanatory functions, are all pertinent to descriptive instruction (Khalik, 2021). The strength of the Direct Observation Method lies in its alignment with learning by doing and experiential learning principles, rendering instruction more meaningful, personalized, and contextually grounded.

In light of the identified gaps, this study introduces a key innovation: the experimental implementation of the Direct Observation Method at the junior secondary level, specifically within descriptive text instruction. Unlike previous studies that relied on indirect visual media, this research situates students in direct engagement with real objects in the school environment, thereby enabling empirical measurement of the method's effect on writing performance. As such, this study not only evaluates the effectiveness of an instructional approach but also contributes to the growing discourse on experiential learning in lower secondary education

METHODS

This study employs a quantitative approach with a one group pretest posttest research design. Allen, (cited in Dalimunte et al., 2025) states that this design involves only one group as the experimental subject, measured twice—before and after treatment. Its primary limitation is the potential threat to internal validity due to the absence of a comparison group. The one group pretest posttest design entails administering a pretest to assess the initial condition of a single test group, followed by the implementation of a treatment or intervention, and concluding with a posttest to measure changes attributable to the treatment. This design is utilized to determine treatment effects by comparing scores obtained before and after the intervention within the same group (Parlindungan et al., 2023). It was selected in this study to examine the effect of the independent variable—namely the Direct Observation Method—on the dependent variable—descriptive text writing ability—through comparison of test results before (pretest) and after (posttest) the intervention applied to the same group of participants.

The population of this study comprises all seventh grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Nainggolan during the 2024/2025 academic year, totaling 90 students. Cluster random sampling was employed as the sampling technique. Based on this procedure, Class VII 1

was selected as the research sample, consisting of 30 students. Data were collected using a descriptive text writing performance test, administered twice: once during the pretest and once during the posttest. Students' written work was evaluated using a scoring rubric adapted from Nurgiyantoro (2022) covering five main criteria:

- Content and Ideas: Appropriateness of title and development of ideas
- Content Organization: Coherence and logical progression of the text
- Grammar: Sentence complexity and effectiveness
- Language Style: Accuracy of word choice (diction)
- Spelling and Mechanics: Correct use of spelling and punctuation

The scores from all five criteria were summed and converted to a 0–100 scale. These numerical scores were then transformed into qualitative performance categories to facilitate interpretation.

Table 1. Scoring Interpretation

Category	Score Range
Excellent	85 – 100
Good	74 – 84
Satisfactory	65 - 74
Poor	55 – 64
Very Poor	Below 55

Prior to implementation, the research instruments—namely the writing test and scoring rubric—underwent a pilot test. The pilot test was conducted with participants outside the research sample to ensure instrument validity and reliability. The instruments were confirmed valid and reliable before being administered to collect pretest and posttest data from the sample class. The research procedure was carried out systematically across three main phases: the preparation phase, the implementation phase (treatment), and the evaluation phase. The complete research flow is presented in Chart 1.

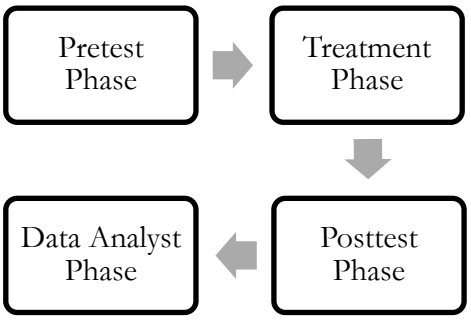

Chart 1. Research Flow

In the pretest phase, the researcher administered an initial writing test to 30 students of Class VII 1. Students were instructed to compose a descriptive text on a predetermined topic—daily life—without employing the Direct Observation Method. The results of this pretest served as baseline data on students' initial writing ability. During the treatment phase, the researcher implemented the Direct Observation Method. Students were guided outside the classroom to conduct firsthand observation of objects within the school environment. They were required to record salient features, actively engage their five senses, and gather descriptive data directly from real objects and settings.

In the posttest phase, students completed a final writing test. They were assigned to write a descriptive text based on their recent direct observation experience. The posttest results were collected as final ability data. Data analysis in this study encompassed descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, variance, minimum and maximum scores for both pretest and posttest), normality testing, and hypothesis testing. The normality test was conducted to verify that the pretest and posttest scores originated from a normally distributed population. The Lilliefors test was employed for this purpose. The decision rule was as follows: if $L_{observed}$ is less than $L_{critical}$ at the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$, the data are considered normally distributed.

To test the research hypothesis—There is a significant effect of the Direct Observation Method on students' descriptive text writing ability—a parametric paired samples t test was applied. This test was selected because it aligns with the one group pretest posttest design, which compares the means of two repeated measurements (before and after treatment) on the same subjects. The hypothesis testing criteria were:

- The null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected if $t_{observed} > t_{critical}$
- The alternative hypothesis (H_A) is accepted if $t_{observed} > t_{critical}$

Acceptance of H_A indicates that the increase in scores from pretest to posttest is statistically significant, thereby confirming the effectiveness of the Direct Observation Method.

RESULTS

General Description of Learning Outcome Data

Student performance data were collected through two assessments: the pretest (before treatment) and the posttest (after treatment). A comparative descriptive statistical analysis of the two test results is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparative Descriptive Statistics of Pretest and Posttest Scores

Statistical Indicator	Pretest Score (Before Treatment)	Posttest Score (After Treatment)
Number Of Subjek (N)	30	30
Mean	54,33	77,83
Mean Category	Kurang	Baik
Standard Deviation (SD)	11,52	11,78
Varians	132,88	138,8
Highest Score	80	95
Lowest Score	35	50

Table 2 reveals a marked improvement. The mean score increased substantially by 23.50 points, shifting the class achievement level from Poor (54.33) to Good (77.83). This improvement is further supported by positive shifts across the entire score distribution: the lowest individual score rose by 15 points (from 35 to 50), and the highest score also increased by 15 points (from 80 to 95). These patterns indicate that the intervention yielded uniformly positive effects across the full spectrum of student ability levels.

Detailed Description of Student Achievement

To examine the treatment impact more closely, student scores were categorized according to mastery levels. The distribution of students across these categories for both pretest and posttest is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Frequency Distribution of Student Performance Categories (Pretest versus Posttest)

Category	Score Range	Pretest Frequency (Students)	Pretest Percentage	Posttest Frequency (Students)	Posttest Percentage
Excellent	85-100	0	0%	12	40%
Good	75-84	2	6,7%	11	36,7%
Satisfactory	65-74	3	10%	3	10%
Poor	55-64	9	30%	2	6,7%
Very Poor	< 55	16	53,3	2	6,7%
Total		**30**	**100%**	**30**	**100%**

Table 3 presents an even more compelling picture. In the pretest, more than half the class (16 students, or 53.3%) fell into the Very Poor category, with no student achieving Excellent status. Following the intervention, the situation reversed dramatically. The number of students in the Very Poor category plummeted to only 2 (6.7%), while the Excellent category saw a surge to 12 students (40.0%). This shift demonstrates that the implemented method not only raised the overall mean but also successfully transitioned the majority of students from non competent to competent levels of performance.

Analysis of Results by Assessment Aspect

To understand why the improvement occurred, student scores were analyzed across the five assessment criteria used in the instrument. Estimated mean scores per criterion (on a maximum of 20 points per criterion) reveal distinct patterns.

Table 4. Estimated Mean Scores for Pretest and Posttest by Assessment Criterion

No	Assessment Criterion	Mean Pretest Score (Max 20)	Mean Posttest Score (Max 20)	Increase
1	Content or Ideas	10,8	18,9	+8,1
2	Content Organization	10,2	16,5	+6,3
3	Grammar	9,5	13,8	+4,3
4	Language Style	9,8	14,2	+4,4
5	Spelling & Mechanics	14	14,4	+0,4

The data in Table 4 are particularly revealing. The Direct Observation Method produced the strongest impact on Criterion 1 (Content and Ideas), with a dramatic increase of +8.1 points. Significant gains were also observed for Criterion 2 (Content Organization).

However, improvements in technical linguistic aspects (Grammar and Language Style) were more moderate. The negligible increase in Criterion 5 (Spelling and Mechanics) suggests that the treatment was not designed to target mechanical accuracy—consistent with its focus on ideational richness rather than formal correctness.

Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis testing was conducted to provide a statistical answer to the research question. After the pretest and posttest data were confirmed to follow a normal distribution via the Lilliefors test ($L_{observed} = 0.110 < L_{critical} = 0.161$ for the pretest; $L_{observed} = 0.107 < L_{critical} = 0.161$ for the posttest), a paired samples t test was performed. The research hypotheses were:

- H_0 (Null Hypothesis): The Direct Observation Method has no significant effect on descriptive text writing ability.
- H_A (Alternative Hypothesis): The Direct Observation Method has a significant effect on descriptive text writing ability.

Analysis yielded a $t_{observed}$ value of 7.677. At a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ with degrees of freedom (df) = 29, the $t_{critical}$ value is 1.699. The decision rule was: H_a is accepted if $t_{observed} > t_{critical}$. Since $t_{observed}$ (7.677) exceeds $t_{critical}$ (1.699), H_0 was rejected and H_A was accepted. This result statistically confirms that the Direct Observation Method significantly enhances seventh grade students' descriptive text writing ability at SMP Negeri 2 Nainggolan.

DISCUSSION

The principal finding of this study is unequivocal: the Direct Observation Method significantly and substantially enhances students' ability to write descriptive texts, with a class mean score increase of 23.50 points. Acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (Ha) is not merely a statistical formality; it reflects a genuine pedagogical transformation that occurred in the classroom. This discussion provides an in depth analysis of why this method is effective, interprets specific patterns in the results, situates the findings within relevant theoretical frameworks and prior research, and openly acknowledges methodological limitations and scholarly implications.

The key to the method's success lies in its capacity to resolve a fundamental challenge in writing instruction—the shift from abstract learning to concrete experience. Descriptive writing demands that authors "paint with words," a skill fundamentally dependent on acute observational capacity and a rich lexical repertoire. In the pretest, students scored Poor (mean = 54.33) not because they lacked conceptual understanding of descriptive texts, but because they faced ideation block: they struggled to generate what to write. Their texts tended to be generic, clichéd, and lacking in vivid detail—a clear reflection of conventional instructional practices that may overemphasize theoretical knowledge delivered within the confines of the classroom. The Direct Observation Method directly targets this core difficulty. By guiding students into direct interaction with real objects in their immediate environment, the method triggers three primary cognitive effects:

• Sensory Activation: Students no longer imagine an object; they actively observe it using all five senses. This sensory engagement—seeing textures, hearing ambient sounds, smelling natural scents—provides abundant, authentic raw material for writing.

• Lexical Prompting: Direct interaction compels students to seek more precise and context sensitive vocabulary. Instead of writing merely "tree," a student may describe "the rough, moss covered trunk of a mango tree." This process fosters the development of a richer, more contextualized vocabulary.

• Enhanced Motivation: As evidenced by the posttest improvement, student centered learning situated in real environments proves inherently more engaging. Heightened emotional engagement and curiosity directly contribute to improved learning outcomes, as reflected in the marked score increase.

This interpretation is empirically reinforced by the detailed data in Table 4. The most dramatic improvement—+8.1 points—occurred in Aspect 1 (Content and Ideas), providing quantitative confirmation that ideation block was effectively overcome. Students now possessed ample material to write about. The significant gain in Aspect 2 (Content Organization) follows logically: when learners have abundant ideas, they naturally begin to structure them—for instance, moving from general to specific descriptions or organizing details spatially.

Nonetheless, an equally critical finding is the more moderate improvement in technical linguistic aspects. While gains were observed in Aspect 3 (Grammar) and Aspect

4 (Language Style), they were considerably smaller than those in ideational aspects. This pattern is highly significant: the Direct Observation Method functions as a powerful idea generator, but it is not a universal remedy for all linguistic challenges. Students may now know what to express, yet still grapple with how to formulate it grammatically or with lexical variety. This indicates that the method should be complemented by explicit, targeted instruction in linguistic mechanics.

This result corroborates prior studies—for example, Jayanti and Fachrurazi (2020), who similarly identified positive effects of visual media or direct experiential input on writing performance. Moreover, it offers empirical support for constructivist and contextual teaching and learning (CTL) theories. Rather than passively receiving knowledge (as in behaviorist models), students in this study actively constructed their understanding of descriptive writing through authentic environmental interaction.

Furthermore, a critical comparison with previous studies highlights the specific contributions of the present findings. Unlike the research conducted by Amini, Slamet & Sukarno (2023) and Amra, Rukiyah & Missriani (2023), which employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design for cyclical pedagogical improvement, this study adopted a one-group pretest–posttest quasi-experimental design.

This difference in research design is fundamental. The CAR design aims to enhance teaching practices, whereas the design applied in this study seeks to measure the significance of the method's effects as an isolated intervention. Therefore, this study not only confirms that the students experienced improvement (as also found in the CAR-based research) but also provides quantitative statistical evidence ($t_{observed}$ = 7.677) regarding the magnitude of the Direct Observation Method's effect itself.

Moreover, while the study by Dian Ekasari (2020) focused on idea organization strategies (Mind Mapping), the present findings specifically demonstrate the effectiveness of the Direct Observation Method as an idea generation strategy, as reflected by the greatest improvement in Aspect 1 (Content and Ideas).

Despite its significance, this study has methodological limitations that must be transparently acknowledged. First, the internal validity of the one group pretest posttest design is inherently vulnerable. We cannot fully rule out alternative explanations for the score improvement, such as: (a) testing effects (students performed better on the posttest due to familiarity with the task format), (b) maturation (natural cognitive or linguistic

development over the intervention period), or (c) history (uncontrolled external events influencing performance). Second, the scope of generalizability is limited. With a sample of only 30 students from a single school (SMP Negeri 2 Nainggolan), the findings may not readily transfer to other educational contexts—particularly urban schools with markedly different physical or sociocultural environments.

The implications of this research extend well beyond the study site. Scholarly, it strengthens the theoretical foundation of contextual learning within Indonesian language education, providing empirical evidence that productive language skills—particularly writing—are most effectively cultivated through active, authentic sensory engagement, rather than through theoretical instruction alone. Practically, it serves as a call to Indonesian language teachers to move beyond textbook based routines and harness the school environment—however rich or modest—as a dynamic, authentic language laboratory. For future researchers, this study opens several promising avenues: (1) employing more robust research designs (e.g., quasi experimental with a control group) to confirm and extend these findings; (2) testing the method's applicability and efficacy for other text types, such as poetry, observational reports, or personal narratives; and (3) developing integrated or blended instructional models that strategically combine the ideational strength of the Direct Observation Method with explicit, scaffolded instruction in grammatical accuracy and stylistic refinement.

CONCLUSION

This study definitively concludes that the implementation of the Direct Observation Method significantly enhances the descriptive text writing ability of students in Class VII 1 at SMP Negeri 2 Nainggolan. This conclusion is robustly supported by strong inferential statistical evidence: the paired samples t test yielded a $t_{observed}$ value of 7.677, which substantially exceeds the $t_{critical}$ value of 1.671 at the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$. Acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is not a mere statistical formality; rather, it reflects a profoundly substantive pedagogical impact.

Quantitatively, this effect is manifested in a dramatic 23.50 point increase in the class mean score—rising from 54.33 (classified as Poor) in the pretest to 77.83 (classified as Good) in the posttest. Crucially, this improvement was not confined to the mean; it catalyzed a transformation across the entire spectrum of student performance. Frequency

distribution data (Table 3) corroborate this shift: the proportion of students in the Very Poor category plummeted from 53.3% to only 6.7%, while the proportion achieving Excellent status—which was 0% prior to the intervention—surged to 40% after treatment.

The primary scholarly contribution of this research to the fields of language didactics and the cognitive psychology of writing instruction lies in its elucidation of why this method works effectively. The findings empirically demonstrate that the Direct Observation Method specifically addresses a fundamental challenge in writing pedagogy: ideation block. Detailed aspect based analysis (Table 4) reveals that the largest improvement occurred in Aspect 1 (Content and Ideas), with an increase of +8.1 points, followed by Aspect 2 (Content Organization) at +6.3 points. This pattern provides quantitative confirmation that the method excels at facilitating both idea generation and the logical structuring of those ideas. By providing students with authentic, concrete sensory experiences through direct observation, the method supplies abundant, high quality raw material for writing.

Nonetheless, this study also yields an important insight regarding the method's boundaries. The data indicate that improvements in technical linguistic aspects—namely Aspect 3 (Grammar) and Aspect 4 (Language Style)—were comparatively moderate. Its scientific contribution, therefore, is twofold: first, it affirms that the Direct Observation Method is an exceptionally effective idea catalyst; second, it establishes that for optimal outcomes, this method should ideally be integrated with explicit, focused instruction in linguistic mechanics, including grammar and lexical precision.

In practical terms, this study serves as an invitation for language educators to utilize the school environment as a dynamic and authentic language laboratory. For future research, several directions are recommended: (1) employing a more rigorous research design, such as a quasi-experimental design with a control group, to confirm the present findings; (2) examining the application of this method to other types of texts, such as observation reports or poetry; and (3) developing an integrated instructional model that strategically combines the ideational strengths of the Direct Observation Method with explicit instruction in grammatical accuracy and stylistic refinement.

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