

ON CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS: INVESTIGATING STUDENTS' ANALYTICAL EXPOSITION ESSAY

Agus Supriyadi¹
¹SMA Negeri 2 Batu
Email: agussupriyadi@sman2batu.sch.id

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menggali kemampuan berfikir kritis siswa Sekolah Menengah Atas Batu melalui teks analytical eksposisi yang ditulis oleh siswa. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif. Subyek penelitian adalah siswa kelas XI yang mengambil mata pelajaran pilihan Bahasa Inggris lanjut. Salah satu tujuan pembelajaran yang harus dicapai adalah bahwa siswa bisa menulis dan menyajikan teks analytical eksposisi. Teks tersebut bertujuan untuk bisa meyakinkan pembaca. Teks analytical eksposisi yang ditulis oleh siswa di analisis dengan menggunakan Illinois critical thinking writing rubric. Rubric tersebut memiliki enam bagian yaitu fokus, alasan pendukung, penalaran, organisasi, konvensi dan integrasi. Penilaian tiap bagian dilakukan dengan menggunakan penskoran 1-6. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa rata rata skor kemampuan berfikir kritis siswa adalah 2,88. Skor tersebut menunjukkan bahwa kemampuan berfikir kritis siswa masih dalam tahap awal perkembangan.

Kata kunci : Writing, Analytical exposition, Critical Thinking

ABSTRACT

This study aims at investigating students' critical thinking in writing analytical exposition text. It employed qualitative descriptive approach. The subjects of study were second year students of SMA Negeri 2 Batu, taking Elective English Subject. One of the instructional objectives for this text is that students was able to write and present analytical text with objective of convincing the readers. Students' essays of analytical exposition are then analyzed by using Illinois Crtical Thinking Skill. It consists of six features. They are Focus, Supporting Reason, Reasoning, Organizaing, Convention and Integration. Each feature is then scored by using score of 1-6. The finding show that the average score obtained is 2.88. It indicates that that Students Critical Thinking Skills are still on early level of development. Abstract Title written with Arial 11 Bold Center. Consists of a maximum of 200 words. It only consists of one paragraph and no special subtitles. The content of the abstract is the Introduction cultivated in one paragraph. The method is brief. The results are written in general and can contain numbers of research results. Conclusions are filled with brief conclusions from the conclusions that have been made on the content. References are not allowed to be included in the abstract or are not allowed to include citations.

Keywords : Writing, Analytical exposition, Critical Thinking

INTRODUCTION

Among the four language skills, writing is considered as the most challenging skill for students to master since it requires students to have linguistic knowledge, to master adequate vocabulary, syntactic patterns and good ability in using cohesive devices. In addition, it requires students to be able to generate, organize ideas and translate them into easy-to-read text (Nunan, 2003). Writing might be in the form of paragraph,

essay, short paper, journal, proposal and report. Thus, writing is taken as a complex process to be taught for students.

Writing in foreign language gives more challenges to students. They have to undergo four processes of writing. The first step is prewriting to obtain ideas that they want to express. This step results in topic chosen and all things related to the topic. Drafting is the second step. During this step, changes and corrections are conducted during this step. The third step is editing the draft in which correction and revision are conducted. The last step is writing final essay (Houge, 2008).

In *Kurikulum Merdeka*, writing is one of the elements of instruction that should be taught to students in addition to other elements namely listening, speaking, reading, viewing and presenting. English language instruction for Senior High School students in *Kurikulum Merdeka* aims at developing communicative competence by using various multimodal texts, developing intercultural competence to understand and appreciate Indonesian and foreign perspectives, practices, and cultural products. It also aims at developing students' self confidence to express themselves as independent and responsible individuals and to develop students' critical and creative thinking skills (Kemendikbudristekdikti, 2024).

English instruction in Senior High School is delivered in two phases of instruction. They are phase E for first year students and phase F for second- and third-year students of senior high school. Accordingly, the types of text for each phase are different. For phase E, the text types are fiction and non fiction and fiction and factual text. For phase F, *Kurikulum Merdeka* also provides instructional objectives for Elective English instruction for senior high school. Text types taught are narratives, exposition and discussion text (Kemendikbudristekdikti, 2024).

Exposition text, consisting of analytical and hortatory exposition is a text discussing about phenomena occurs in our society. It is supported by Untoro (2016) stating that topic of analytical exposition text should be related to recent and important problems that happen and need to be explored. In addition, analytical exposition text presents information, ideas or issues to inform and to persuade the reader or listener (Kartini & Farikah, 2015). It is in line with the social function of analytical exposition text which is to persuade the reader with the writers' opinion about something that happen in our society.

Writing analytical exposition text is quite hard for senior high students even for those taken the elective English subject. It is due to the structure of text containing thesis statement stating the writers' purpose and position, a body paragraph which elaborate arguments and evidences and conclusion of summarizing the topic (Djuharie, 2007). In making analytical exposition text, the writers have to clarify their side when bringing upon the topic and provide supporting evidence. The writers must have deep knowledge on the topic in order to convince the reader of their arguments (Evagorou et al., 2023). Therefore, writing analytical exposition text is considered as the most difficult type of writing.

Students often face significant challenges when writing analytical exposition texts, which can be attributed to three primary factors: lack of proficiency, lack of effective strategies, and lack of knowledge. The first is related to factors such as spelling, the use of upper and lower case and choice of words. The second concerns with planning and revising the text. The last, lack of knowledge is concerned with students' understanding on topic. Specifically, it concerns with how students formulate their thesis and arguments (Ismayanti & Kholiq, 2020).

Thus, writing analytical exposition text also requires students to think critically. It demands students to develop their critical thinking and analytical skills as well as the ability to develop an objective defend and argument (Thompson, 2019). The development of critical thinking is, of course in line with the aims of English instruction in *Kurikulum Merdeka* which is to promote critical thinking skills on the part of the students.

Critical thinking acquisition, as well as literacy and numeracy skills acquisition is a fundamental global competence facilitating personal growth and development in social, economic, and cultural context of both presently and in the future. It is crucial for language learning also as it encourages students to interpret, engage in collaborative language practice, employ written convention, apply knowledge, solve problems related to subject matter and reflect on language usage and engage in discourse (Hayat & Yusuf, 2010). Critical thinking is a reasonable and reflective thinking that focuses on determining what to believe or do (Ennis, 2011). It includes the ability to draw valid conclusion, identify relationship, analyze probabilities, make logical predictions and decisions and solve complex problems.

Critical thinking skills are those enabling students to come up with crucial questions and issues, to formulate them clearly and properly, to collect and assess information, to make use of ideas to interpret them

in order to obtain clear conclusion and solution, to test them against relevant criteria and standards in the system of alternative thinking, recognizing and assessin their needs, assumptions, implications and practical consequences and communicating effectively with other to seek solution for complex problems (Elder & Paul, 2009).

Proper critical thinking includes Critical Thinking Skills (CTS) and dimension of disposition (CTD). Those skills are 1) interpretation, 2) analysis, 3) evaluation, 4) conclusion, 5) explanation, and 6) self-regulation. Dispositions of Critical Thinking are 1) truth-seeking, 2) curiosity, 3) purity, 4) analysis, 5) openness, 6) systematic and 7) confident. The core of critical thinking is interpretation, analysis, evaluation, conclusion, explanation, and self-regulation (Facione, 2013; Facione, 2011). In relation to writing of analytical exposition text, critical thinking of students is judged based on three basics criteria. Those are claims which are a statement, true or false expressing the opinion or belief; and issues or questions which are thing raised when a claim is called into question and the last is argument.

There are several ways of how to analyze students' critical thinking from their writing. One of them is by using Illinois Critical Thinking Essay Scoring Rubric developed by Marguerite Finken and Robert H. Ennis. The rubrics is elaborated into six features. Those are Focus, Supporting Reasons, Reasoning, Organization, Convention and Integration (Finken & Ennis, 1993). The first feature, namely Focus is more than a thesis statement and/or listing of subordinate points. It is more on whether subject/issue of text is clear or not and writers' position/opinion is explicitly pronounced and maintained throughout the text. Supporting reason features focuses on quality and detail of reasons or subpoints. The third feature, which is Reasoning, elaborates writers' reasoning, recognition of alternative viewpoints and degree of clarity. The next feature, namely Organization concerns with whether the text shows clear structure or plan of development, and whether the points are logically related to each other. Convention feature deals with sentence construction such as subject/verb agreement, the use of pronoun reference, and word spelling. The last feature which is Integration is dealing with evaluation of how clearly the text achieves its predetermined goal.

This study aims at investigating students' critical thinking skill. It is conducted by examining their composition of analytical exposition text to shed light on students' level of critical thinking skill. It is expected that the findings are able provide insights for improving instructional practices especially for writing resulting in improving the quality of English instruction in Senior High School.).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to answer research question. It was conducted in SMA 2 Batu. Subjects of study were eleventh-year students taking Elective English subject consisting of two classes namely ENG 4 and ENG 5 Class in 2023/2024 academic year. Respectively, the number of students was 36 for ENG 4 and 35 for ENG 5. Elective English subjects for eleventh-year students were delivered five hours each week.

There were two types of text taught for the second semester. They were narrative and analytical exposition. Time allotment for teaching analytical exposition text was 8 weeks. Final instructional objective for teaching analytical exposition essay was that students were able to write and present analytical exposition text with predetermined topic. It should be of relevant topic to students' life. The essay should consist of at least 200 words. The essay should contain generic structures of analytical exposition text which were thesis, supporting arguments and conclusion.

Students' essays were then collected and analyzed by using Illinois Critical Thinking Essay Scoring Rubrics. It consisted of six features. They were Focus, Reasoning, Organization, Convention and Integration. Focus was concerned with degree to which main idea/theme or point of view was clearly presented and maintained. Supporting reason dealt with degree to which supporting reasons and evidence are clear, believable and taken from credible sources. The third feature, reasoning concerned with degree to which conclusions were supported by evidence; alternatives were clearly addressed and arguments were clearly presented. organization, the fourth feature was about degree to which logical flow of ideas and explicitness or the plan were clearly presented and connected. Convention was related to the use of standard English. In addition, the last feature, integration measured the effectiveness of essay to use basic features to address the assigned issue.

Each feature were then scored with the range of 1 – 6. The scoring rubric was given in Table 1.

Table 1. Critical Thinking Scoring Rubric

Feature	Scoring Guidelines					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Focus	Unclear; absent; insufficient length to ascertain maintenance	Confusing; attempted; main point unclear or shift	Underpromise, overdeliver; overpromise; underdeliver; infer two or more positions without unifying statement	Bare bones; position clear; main point previewed	Position clear; generally previewed	All main points are specified and maintained
Supporting reason	No support; no credible sources; unbelievable vague; confusing	Attempted; dubious sources; inaccurate vague	Some sources and/or reasons/evidence dubious; some vagueness	Some sources credible; reasons/evidence generally believable; sometimes second levels; specific (where appropriate clear)	Most sources credible; most reasons/evidence believable; often at second level; specific (where appropriate); clear	All sources credible; all reasons/evidence believable, second level/beyond specific (where appropriate clear)
Reasoning	Conclusion unsupported; no reasoning attempted; insufficient	Conclusion minimally supported; alternatives unmentioned; muddled; confused	Some insufficient support; alternatives prejudicially mentioned; keyterms undefined	Moderate support; alternatives mentioned fairly; some vagueness	Conclusions well-supported; alternatives well-recognized; clear	Strong support; alternatives thoroughly addressed; clear
Organization	No plan; insufficient length to ascertain maintenance	Attempted plan is noticeable	Not knowledgeable in paragraphing	Some cohesion and coherence from relating to topic; plan is clear	Most points connected; coherent; cohesive; using various methods	All points are connected, signaled with transitions/cohesive devices
Convention	Many errors; unreadable; confused meaning; problems with sentence construction; insufficient length to ascertain maintenance	Many errors; conclusions	Some major errors; many minor; sentence construction below mastery	Developed few major errors; some minor, meaning unimpaired; mastery of sentence construction	A few minor errors but no more than one major error	No major error; one or two minor error

Adopted From Illinois Critical Thinking Skills Rubrics (Finken & Ennis, 1993)

Initially, there were seventy-one essay papers that had been collected. Five papers were sorted out due to failing to fulfill requirements. They contained less than 200 words. The remaining papers were then analyzed and scored by using the above rubrics to investigate student's critical thinking skills. Then, the data were analyzed, interpreted and presented to answer research question.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

Essay papers that had been collected were then analyzed by using Illinois Critical Thinking Scoring Rubrics. There are six features adopted on the rubric. They are Focus, Supporting Reason, Reasoning, Organization, Convention, and Integration. Each feature is then scored 1 – 6 based on guidelines presented in previous section. Table 2 presents the results of scoring for each class of study.

Table 2 The Scoring Result for ENG-4 Class.

No	Features	Average Scores
1	Focus	3,06
2	Supporting Reason	2,89
3	Reasoning	2,81
4	Organization	2,81
5	Convention	2,83
6	Integration	2,69
7	Average	2,86

For Eng-4 Class, the average score of critical thinking is 2,86. Concerning each feature of critical thinking, most scores of them are below 3; 2,89 for Supporting Reason, 2,81 for Reasoning, 2,81 for Organization, 2,83 for Convention and 2,69 for Integration. The first feature only, namely Focus obtains 2,06. Table 3 presents scoring result for Eng-5 Class.

Table 3 The Scoring Result for ENG-5 Class.

No	Features	Average Scores
1	Focus	3,19
2	Supporting Reason	3,17
3	Reasoning	2,81
4	Organization	2,64
5	Convention	2,64
6	Integration	2,92
7	Average	2,90

Average score of critical thinking skill for Eng-5 Class is slightly higher than that of Eng-4 Class. There are two features with score of more than 3 namely Focus and Supporting Reason. The other four features obtain a score of below 3. They are 2,81 for Supporting Reason, 2,64 for Organization, 2,64 for Convention, and 2,92 for Integration. Overall, critical thinking skill of students of both class are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Average Score for Both Classes.

No	Features	ENG-4	ENG-5	Average
1	Focus	3,06	3,19	3,13
2	Supporting Reason	2,89	3,17	3,03
3	Reasoning	2,81	2,81	2,81
4	Organization	2,81	2,64	2,73
5	Convention	2,83	2,64	2,74
6	Integration	2,69	2,92	2,81
7	Average	2,86	2,90	2,88

Table 4 shows that the average score of critical thinking skill is 2.88. Two features obtain higher scores than others. They are Focus and Supporting Reason with score of 3,13 and 3,03 respectively. The other features obtain below 3 namely Reasoning, Organization, Convention, and Integration. Their scores are 2,81, 2,73, 2,74 and 2,81 respectively.

Discussion

On average, students' critical thinking skills are low as indicated by the average score of 2.88. As stated in Illinois Critical Thinking Skills Scoring Guidelines, score of 1-3 indicates that the skill is absence or in "developing" stage. Score of 4-6 indicates that the features of Critical Thinking Skill are basically or well-developed (Finken & Ennis, 1993). This suggests that students scoring in this range are struggling to demonstrate the basic elements of critical thinking, such as analyzing arguments, evaluating evidence, and synthesizing information effectively. Previous research found that students whose low to medium critical thinking ability may deal with specific challenges in problem-solving, drawing conclusions, and providing advanced explanations (Afriana et al., 2021; Fajariatin et al., 2024; Paulstin & Kolsto, 2022). This emphasizes the importance of focusing on instructional practices that foster critical thinking to enhance students' writing performance.

For the first feature, which is Focus, the average score is 3.13 indicating that students' ability in formulating thesis statements is still low. The score also shows inability of students to explicitly announce and maintain their position throughout the paper. Lack of effective conclusion at the end of paper is also found on most students' paper justifying the low score for Focus feature of Critical Thinking Skill. Specifically, students of ENG-5 class obtained a bit higher score than that of ENG-4 class. It is due to that students of ENG-5 class, on average, were better in formulating clear and accurate thesis statement containing their firm position on relevant topic.

For Supporting Reason, the second feature of Critical Thinking Skill, the score is 3.13. This feature deals with degree to which students are able to provide good and proper detail of reasons or subpoint. The

quality of Supporting Reasons depends on their specificity, depth, accuracy and credibility. Having examined students paper, generally they are not able provide specific and detail reason to support their position. Their supporting reasons are more like conclusion because they are too general. Again, students of ENG-5 class obtain higher score. It is because their ability to specify their supporting reasons by supplying example.

The average score for the third feature is 2.81. Both classes obtain similar score for this feature. Students of both classes fail to provide sufficient reason for conclusion that they take. They miss the logic of inferring resulting in in clarity of their position and conclusion. This is big problem for the students. They could not provide proper and clear flow of thought from their thesis statement of position, its supporting reason, the reasoning and conclusion. Many times, their reasoning are way beyond their position making their position weak and less convincing for the readers.

The next feature of Critical Thinking Skill is organization with average score of 2.74. This feature is concerned with structure or development of essay. It also deals with whether or not the points are logically related one to another. For this feature, students of ENG-4 class shows better achievement than that of ENG-5 class. It is because, though still low, they have better coherences than that of ENG-5. However, both classes fail to good coherences and cohesions. Their paper indicates lack of adequate usage of pronouns, synonyms, parallel structure, connectives and transition. It result in, again, weak and less convincing point that they try to propose.

Convention, the next feature, is related to occurrence of errors and and the degree to which they interfere communication of points in the essay. The average score of two classes for this feature 2.74. Most errors found are subject-verb agreement. For instance, there is no addition on verb when the subjects are third person singular such as he, she or someone' name. The verb should be added by "s" or "es". Incorrect pronoun reference is also mostly found on papers written by students of both classes. In general, students have difficulty in making proper sentence construction.

The last feature is integration for which students' average score is 2.88. Again, it indicates the absence of this feature. In addition, it might also indicate that students' skill for this feature are still on early level of development. This feature is concerned with degree of clarity for the paper to achieve the goal. Since it is analytical exposition essay, then this feature examines whether or not the essays are able to convince the reader. Low score for this feature is influenced by low scores for the first three features. They are Focus, Supporting Reason and Reasoning. Students' inability in formulating clear and accurate thesis statements result in less focus of problems they trying to solve. To make it worse, students are not able to provide proper supporting reasons to clarify their thesis statement. Lack of examples is also found making the paper less convincing for the reader. The above problems lead to in order reasoning.

Overall, students have big problem in writing analytical exposition text. They are not able to achieve the purpose of text which is to convince others. As stated in background, analytical exposition text is hard for students of senior high school and this study justify the phenomena.

CONCLUSION

This study investigates students' critical thinking skills. it examined through students' writing of analytical exposition text. The analysis employs Illinois Critical Thinking Scoring Rubric consisting of six features. The findings of the study shed light on current state of students' critical thinking skills. It is crucial for students to master the skill because they have to write analytical exposition text.

The findings show that in general, students' critical thinking skills are on low level of development shown by scores of the six features ranging from 2,74, the lowest to 3,13, the highest. Students have problems in formulating thesis statement, providing supporting sentences and examples. They also have problems in ordering their arguments and thought resulting in poor reasoning. Therefore, conclusion taken is less convincing due to lack of accurate thesis statements, inadequate supporting reasons and poor reasoning. The effect is that they are not able to achieve the purpose of analytical exposition text writing which is to convince the readers.

The findings have several implications for language instruction practices. First, there should be a creative way of teaching analytical exposition text writing. For instance, mindmapping might be a good idea to help students organize their thought and arguments. Topic selection is also crucial. Teachers should choose topics which are relevant for students. It will facilitate students to formulate their thesis statement as

well as supporting arguments. In addition, since this is commonly-found problems in senior high school writing instruction, there is a need for collaborative works on the parts of teachers to find out ways, technique or approach for analytical exposition writing instruction.

For future researchers, it is recommended to conduct experimental studies to test the effectiveness of various instructional techniques for analytical exposition writing. These studies can provide empirical evidence on the impact of different teaching methods, helping to identify which approaches are most beneficial for developing students' critical thinking and writing skills. Experimentation with new techniques, such as integrating technology into writing instruction or incorporating peer review processes, can offer valuable insights into how to best support students in mastering analytical exposition text writing.

REFERENCES

- Afriana, N., Halim, A., & Syukri, M. (2021). Analysis of the characteristics of students' critical thinking skills in completing national exam questions. *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan IPA*, 7(2), 196-201.
- Djuhari, O. S. (2007). *Genre Dilengkapi 700 Soal Pemahaman*. Rama Widya.
- Elder, L., & Paul, R. (2009). Critical thinking: The nature of critical and creative thought. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 43(1), 34.
- Ennis, R. (2011). The nature of critical thinking: An outline of critical thinking. In *Presentation at the Sixth International Conference on Thinking at MIT*.
- Evagorou, M., Papanastasiou, E., & Vrikki, M. (2023). What do we really know about students' written arguments? Evaluating written argumentation skills. *European Journal of Science and Mathematics Education*, 11(4), 615-634.
- Facione. (2013). *Critical Thinking: What It Is and Why It Counts*. Measured Reasons and The California Academic Press.
- Facione, P. A. (2011). Critical thinking: What it is and why it counts. *Insight assessment*, 1(1), 1-23.
- Fajariyatin, N., Masyuri, M., & Mahardiani, L. (2024). An Analysis of Critical Thinking Skills Students of Batik 1 Senior High School Surakarta in the 2022/2023 Academic Year. *Path of Science*, 10(2), 2009-2013.
- Finken, & Ennis. (1993). *Illinois Critical Thinking Essay Test*. Illinois Critical Thinking Project. Department of Educational Policy Studies University of Illinois.
- Hayat, B. dan Yusuf, S. (2010). *Benchmark Internasional Mutu Pendidikan*. Bumi Aksara.
- Hogue, Ann (2008). *First Step in Academic Writing: Second Edition*. Longman.
- Ismayanti, Eni & KHoliq, Abdul (2020). Analysis of Students' Writing Descriptive Text. *Journal E-Link*, 7(10).
- Kartini and Farikah (2015). Analysis of Theme of the analytical Exposition Text Written By Third Semester Student of Tidar University. *Unpublished Thesis*. Department of English Education. Tidar University.
- Kemendikbudristekdikti (2024). Keputusan Kepala Badan Standar Kurikulum dan Asesmen Pendidikan Nomor 032/H/KR/2024 tentang Capaian Pembelajaran Pada Jenjang Pendidikan Usia Dini, Jenjang Pendidikan Dasar dan Jenjang Pendidikan Menengah Pada Kurikulum Merdeka. Jakarta
- Nunan, D. (2003). *Practical English Language Teaching*. Mc Graw Hill.
- Paulsen, V. H., & Kolstø, S. D. (2022). Students' reasoning when faced with test items of challenging aspects of critical thinking. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 43, 100969.
- Thompson (2019). What Students Learn From Writing an Argumentative Text. <http://www.penandthepad.com>
- Untoro, B. (2016). The effect of group investigation and learning style on students' writing of analytical exposition. *IJEE (Indonesian Journal of English Education)*, 3(1), 29-45.