

Barriers Faced by Students in Writing Hortatory Exposition Texts

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Abstract

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Writing hortatory exposition texts poses considerable challenges for EFL students, particularly at the senior high school level. This study aimed to investigate the barriers faced by XI-1 students at SMAN 1 Sidayu in composing hortatory exposition texts and identify the factors influencing their writing performance. Using a descriptive quantitative approach, data were collected through students' writing tasks and questionnaires administered to 32 participants. The research involved analysing students' written texts and administering a questionnaire to uncover both internal and external factors. The results revealed that students struggled most with constructing arguments and applying accurate grammar, despite reporting high levels of self-motivation. Furthermore, external support from family, school, and the surrounding environment was perceived as minimal

Kata Kunci:

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Abstrak

Menulis teks hortatory exposition merupakan tantangan besar bagi siswa EFL, terutama di tingkat sekolah menengah atas. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki hambatan yang dihadapi oleh siswa kelas XI di SMAN 1 Sidayu dalam menulis teks hortatory exposition serta mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi kinerja menulis mereka. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan deskripsi kuantitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui hasil tulisan siswa dan kuesioner yang melibatkan 32 partisipan. Penelitian ini menganalisis teks tulisan siswa dan menyebarkan kuesioner guna mengungkap faktor internal dan eksternal yang memengaruhi kemampuan menulis mereka. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa paling banyak mengalami kesulitan dalam menyusun bagian argumentasi dan menggunakan tata bahasa (grammar) secara tepat, meskipun mereka melaporkan tingkat motivasi diri yang tinggi. Selain itu, dukungan eksternal dari keluarga, sekolah, dan lingkungan sekitar dinilai masih sangat minim.

INTRODUCTION

As one of the fundamental skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, writing is considered vital for communication and academic achievement. It is not merely putting words on paper, but a complex cognitive process that involves generating, organizing, and clearly expressing ideas in coherent sentences and paragraphs (Novia et al., 2024). Through writing, individuals can communicate their thoughts in ways that readers can understand and interpret, allowing for personal expression and social engagement that reflects each writer's unique perspective (Hyland, 2019). Therefore, as a key indicator of language proficiency and academic success, mastering writing is essential for EFL students (Sari et al., 2024).

Writing instruction aims to help students express their ideas clearly and improve language skills; however, many students face significant challenges, such as generating ideas, organizing thoughts, mastering grammar and vocabulary, and maintaining motivation throughout the process (Khofifa et al., 2024). Writing is particularly demanding for EFL students in secondary schools because they must master it with limited exposure, as English is neither their first nor second language (Kuyyogsuy, 2019; Nguyen & Suwannabupha, 2021). Thus, many students face issues with limited vocabulary and frequent grammatical errors. In addition, many students often struggle to choose clear topics, maintain focused paragraphs, and coherently connect their ideas (Stevani et al., 2025). Those issues often lead to negative attitudes toward writing, such as low motivation and writing anxiety.

Both students and teachers encounter challenges in writing instruction, including insufficient instructional skills and the continued reliance on the grammar-translation method (Sultan et al., 2023). Teachers often struggle with time management when implementing writing projects, while students frequently lack the motivation to participate in writing tasks. Furthermore, many teachers feel unprepared to assist students with their writing difficulties (Rietdijk et al., 2017). Contextual factors, including time constraints, inadequate resources, unmotivated and mixed-ability students, further impede effective writing instruction. As a result, writing instruction is often neglected, with many teachers overlooking its

importance for students' English proficiency (Wardani, 2011), partly because writing activities demand a structured process and sustained effort to convey ideas effectively (Wardani et al., 2025).

On the other hand, Indonesian secondary school students are required to master various genres of writing, including descriptive, narrative, recount, report, news item, and expository texts. The students also have to adhere to the generic structure and language features associated with each genre (Mulyani & Mu'man, 2024). Among those genres, expository text is emphasized in the Indonesian curriculum for its focus on logical reasoning, clarity, and evidence-based arguments (Budiharso, 2017; Rasyimah et al., 2023; Wulandari et al., 2024). This genre is used to report, summarize, explain facts, and share opinions with supporting evidence (Graham & Perin, 2007).

Within this genre, two important text types are involved they are analytical and hortatory exposition. Analytical exposition needs to be supported by logical arguments, while hortatory exposition often ends with a recommendation (Afifah & Sarudin, 2020; Nazara et al., 2023). Although both share structural features such as a thesis and supporting arguments, they differ in rhetorical purpose and communicative intent. Analytical exposition presents ideas or viewpoints on a topic that require more attention, explanation, or clarification, without attempting to convince the reader to agree or disagree; meanwhile, hortatory exposition persuades readers to take action by convincing them that something should or should not happen (Badriyah et al., 2022).

Mastery of these genres is crucial for academic achievement and the development of students' reasoning and persuasive communication (May, 2022; Rahman & Ekkayokkaya, 2024). Nevertheless, many Indonesian high school students struggle with organizing ideas and constructing logical arguments in expository texts due to limited exposure. The students are unsure of what to write in the thesis and argument sections, which are the key components of expository texts (Elfa, 2020). Similar writing challenges are also faced by the eleventh-grade students at SMAN 1 Sidayu, Gresik, who often struggle with limited vocabulary,

grammar errors, and difficulties organizing ideas. These problems hinder their ability to produce well-structured expository texts, especially hortatory exposition.

Previous studies confirm that Indonesian high school students often struggle with content and organization in expository writing. Nurlatifah and Yusuf (2022) identified that students faced cognitive, linguistic, and motivational barriers in writing expository texts. Whereas, Reski et al. (2021) noted poor content and organization due to students' over-reliance on copied texts from internet sources. Similarly, Hasibuan et al. (2020) found that students struggled with content and organization in hortatory exposition writing, as they often confused it with analytical exposition. In addition, Purba and Kinanti (2022) found that issues in writing hortatory exposition were worsened by students' overuse of translation tools.

Despite existing research, little attention has been paid to the specific root causes of these problems. This study addresses that gap by examining both internal and external factors influencing the eleventh graders of SMAN Sidayu, to offer more targeted strategies for improving expository writing. Thus, this study aims to explore the barriers faced by eleventh-grade students of SMAN Sidayu in writing hortatory exposition texts and to identify the factors influencing these issues.

METHOD

This study was conducted at SMAN 1 Sidayu, Gresik, East Java, involving 32 students from Class XI-1 as the participants. This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design to investigate the difficulties faced by eleventh-grade students in writing hortatory exposition texts and to identify factors influencing their writing performance. The quantitative aspect involved numerical data collection, such as students' scores and questionnaires, to identify measurable patterns in students' writing performance (Fitriana & Wardani, 2024). Therefore, a descriptive quantitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to describe phenomena systematically using numerical data, such as frequencies and percentages, without manipulating variables (Creswell, 2012; Sugiyono, 2018).

The data were collected from students' hortatory exposition writing texts. The researchers analyzed the generic structure and the language features used by the students in their writing. In addition, the researchers also assessed their writing in hortatory exposition through the five components of writing, namely: content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. The results obtained from these assessments served as quantitative data to measure students' writing and identify specific areas of difficulty. Furthermore, questionnaires distributed to the students aimed to explore students' opinions of the problems they face in writing hortatory exposition texts and to identify both internal and external factors that may influence their writing performance.

The research process consisted of several stages: (1) preparing research instruments, including the scoring rubric and questionnaire; (2) administering a writing task in which students produced a hortatory exposition text; and (3) distributing the questionnaire to gather students' opinions on their writing experiences. For data analysis, the data obtained from students' writing tests and questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results of the writing assessment were calculated in terms of frequencies and percentages to describe students' performance in the generic structure, language features, and writing components. Similarly, questionnaire responses were analyzed quantitatively to identify dominant internal and external factors influencing students' writing performance. The findings were then interpreted to determine common problem areas and contributing factors in students' writing of hortatory exposition texts.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Performance in Writing Hortatory Exposition Texts

After analysing the students' writing, it was found that many eleventh-grade students encountered significant challenges in composing effective hortatory exposition texts. These challenges were particularly evident in how they constructed the generic structure and applied relevant language features. The table below presents the key issues identified in both aspects of the genre.

Table 1: Students' Performance in Constructing the Generic Structure and Using Language Features in Hortatory Exposition Texts

	Aspects	Succeed		Fail	
		F	(%)	F	(%)
Generic Structure	Thesis Statement	22	69%	10	31%
	Arguments	20	62%	12	38%
	Recommendation	22	69%	10	31%
Language Features	Abstract Nouns	28	87%	4	13%
	Simple Present Tense	31	97%	1	3%
	Modal Auxiliaries	18	56%	14	44%
	Passive Voice	5	16%	27	84%
	Connectors	27	84%	5	16%
	Evaluative Words	15	47%	17	53%
	Thinking Verbs	8	25%	24	75%

Table 1 above revealed that only 69% of students successfully included a clear thesis statement, while 31% failed to present a clear thesis statement on the chosen topic. Similarly, only 62% of students were able to provide supporting arguments, whereas 38% did not sufficiently elaborate their ideas to reinforce their thesis statements. The recommendation section also posed challenges, with 31% of students failing to complete the recommendation. They concluded their exposition texts with a general statement rather than offering specific advice or suggested actions.

Regarding language features, most students demonstrated a good understanding of abstract nouns (87%) and the simple present tense (97%). However, the use of modal auxiliaries and the passive voice was less consistent, with only 56% and 16% of students using these features appropriately. Although the majority of students (84%) used connectors to link their ideas, more than half (53%) struggled to incorporate evaluative language, and 75% did not use thinking verbs, particularly in their thesis statements.

Next, the students' writing was evaluated based on five key writing components: content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. The rubric used for the evaluation was adapted from Brown (2007) to ensure consistency and validity. The results of this evaluation are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of Student Scores in Writing Components

Components	Score	Performance	Students' Results	
			F	(%)
Content	16 - 20	The topic is clear, and the details are related to the topic.	14	44%
	11 - 15	The topic is clear, and most details are related to the topic.	16	50%
	6 - 10	The topic is clear, but some details are not related.	2	6%
	1 - 5	The topic is not clear, and the details are not related.	0	0%
Organization	16 - 20	Identification is complete with proper connectives.	6	19%
	11 - 15	Identification is complete with a few connectives.	7	22%
	6 - 10	Identification is not complete, with some misuse of connectives.	17	53%
	1 - 5	Identification is not complete without any connectives.	2	6%
Grammar	16 - 20	Very few grammatical or agreement inaccuracies.	8	25%
	11 - 15	Few grammatical or agreement inaccuracies without effect on meaning.	19	50%
	6 - 10	Numerous grammatical or agreement inaccuracies.	5	16%
	1 - 5	Frequent grammatical or agreement inaccuracies.	0	0%
Vocabulary	16 - 20	Very effective word choices and word forms.	6	19%
	11 - 15	Effective word choices and word forms.	22	69%
	6 - 10	Some confusing words and word forms.	4	13%
	1 - 5	Poor knowledge of words and word forms.	0	0%
Mechanic	16 - 20	Correct spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.	10	31%
	11 - 15	Occasional errors of spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.	19	59%
	6 - 10	Frequent errors of spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.	3	9%
	1 - 5	Dominated by errors of spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.	0	0%

Based on Table 2 above, half of the students (50%) scored between 11–15 in content. It indicates that most details were related to the topic, though not fully developed. In terms of organization, 53% of students fell within the 6–10 range, suggesting incomplete identification and misuse of connectives. For grammar, half of the students (50%) also scored in the 11–15 range, showing minor grammatical or agreement inaccuracies that did not affect meaning. Regarding vocabulary, 69% received a score of 11–15, reflecting generally effective word choices and word

forms. Finally, for mechanics, 59% scored in the 11–15 range, meaning that occasional errors in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization were present, but did not significantly hinder understanding.

Factors Influencing Students' Writing Performances

To identify the factors influencing students' writing performance in hortatory exposition texts, a questionnaire consisting of ten items was administered to the students. The first two questions aimed to explore whether students experienced challenges in constructing the generic structure and applying the writing components of hortatory exposition texts. The results are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Students' barriers in writing hortatory exposition

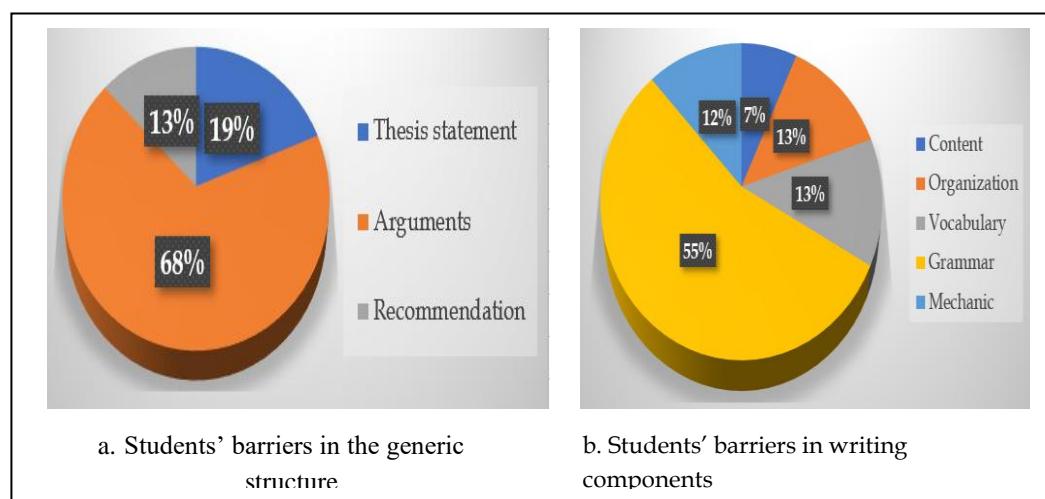


Figure 1a displays the students' perceived difficulties in writing the generic structure of hortatory exposition texts. Notably, 68% identified arguments as the most difficult component, 19% selected the thesis statement, while 13% considered the recommendation section the most difficult to write. These findings suggest that the majority of students struggled most with developing the argument section of the text.

Meanwhile, Figure 1b shows students' responses regarding difficulties with writing components. The majority of students (55%) reported that grammar was the most challenging aspect. In comparison, four students (13%) indicated difficulties with organization, and another four students (13%) identified vocabulary as their problem. The rest of the students considered mechanics (12%) and content (7%) as

their barriers in writing. These results indicate that grammar posed the greatest challenges for most students when writing hortatory exposition texts.

The rest of the questionnaires investigate further the factors influencing students' writing performance. Eight statements were designed to explore both internal and external factors that may affect students' ability to express their ideas in writing. Table 3 presents the frequency and percentage of students who responded "Yes" or "No" to each statement.

Table 3: Results of Factors Influencing Students' Writing Performances

Statements	Yes		No	
	F	(%)	F	(%)
I find it difficult to express my ideas in writing.	23	72%	9	28%
My English vocabulary is limited, which makes it difficult to express my ideas in writing.	26	81%	6	19%
My English grammar is still poor, which makes it difficult for me to express my ideas in writing.	31	97%	1	3%
I have self-motivation in expressing my ideas in writing.	27	84%	5	16%
My school environment supports and motivates me to express my ideas in writing.	2	6%	30	94%
My English teacher always supports and motivates me to express my ideas in writing.	22	69%	10	31%
My family always supports and motivates me to express my ideas in writing.	1	3%	31	97%
The social environment around me supports and motivates me to express my ideas in writing.	4	13%	28	87%

As shown in Table 3, a large number of students reported internal challenges in writing. Around 72% of students admitted that they found it difficult to express their ideas in writing, and 81% stated that their limited vocabulary made this task more difficult. Notably, 97% of students acknowledged that their poor grammar affected their ability to write effectively.

In terms of internal motivation, 84% of students agreed that they had self-motivation to express their ideas in writing. However, when it came to external support, the responses were more concerning. Only 6% of students felt supported and motivated by their school environment, while just 3% felt such support from their families. Additionally, only 13% of students agreed that the social environment around them helped motivate them to express their ideas in writing. In contrast, 69% of students felt supported by their English teacher. It indicates that teacher encouragement may be a key factor in students' writing development.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that eleventh-grade students encountered various challenges in writing hortatory exposition texts, both in terms of generic structure and language features. The majority of students struggled particularly with writing the arguments section of the text and had noticeable difficulties with grammar. The findings are consistent with previous research that identifies grammar as one of the most prominent challenges faced by students in writing hortatory exposition texts. Hasibuan et al. (2020) reported that 93.3% of eleventh-grade students at SMAN 1 Pinangsori struggled with grammar. Similarly, Purba and Kinanti (2022) also found that 93.3% of students from SMA Taman Siswa Pematangsiantar also encountered grammatical difficulties when writing hortatory exposition texts. These repeated findings across different schools and regions emphasize grammar as a consistent barrier in students' writing development.

Results from questionnaires revealed that although the majority of students have a high level of self-motivation in writing, they felt that their linguistic limitations, such as poor grammar and limited vocabulary, hinder their writing abilities. Ghorbani et al. (2020) found that linguistic factors play a major role in students' writing success, which supports this study's conclusion that limited vocabulary and grammar significantly impact performance. However, this study also highlights the lack of external support (e.g., from family and the school environment) as a contributing factor. This is supported by Vacalares et al. (2023), who found that the classroom environment significantly affects students' writing abilities. Moreover, the results are also in line with Vasilyeva et al. (2018), who demonstrated that the family atmosphere and parental approach to literacy have a direct effect on children's written and spoken language skills. The findings of this current research, therefore, not only reaffirm the linguistic challenges commonly reported but also bring attention to the environmental and socio-affective factors that are often overlooked in writing instruction.

This study signifies that self-motivation is not the only factor influencing students' writing performance. The apparent mismatch between students' self-motivation and their actual performance highlights that linguistic competence

remains a critical barrier, particularly in grammar and vocabulary. Moreover, the lack of consistent external support from families, schools, and the broader social environment further limits students' opportunities to develop their writing skills outside the classroom. These issues imply that writing instruction should not only focus on formal aspects, such as structure and mechanics, but also address the environmental and affective factors that influence student performance. Greater involvement from schools and families is also needed to create a supportive environment in which students feel encouraged to write confidently.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that eleventh-grade students at SMAN 1 Sidayu face significant challenges in writing hortatory exposition texts, particularly in organizing coherent arguments and applying accurate grammar and vocabulary. Although many students reported high levels of self-motivation, their writing performance was predominantly hindered by limited linguistic competence and insufficient external support from families, schools, and their communities.

The study offers meaningful contributions to understanding writing instruction in EFL contexts, particularly in the hortatory exposition genre. By combining performance analysis with student self-assessment data, this research highlights specific problem areas in students' writing and identifies key internal and external influences. This approach can be beneficial as a practical reference for English teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers to design more supportive environments for studying.

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