



Students' Difficulties in Constructing Argumentative Texts: A Genre-Based Analysis at SMPN 27 Medan

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ABSTRACT

Writing argumentative texts is one of the essential skills that students need to develop in English language learning. However, many students still experience difficulties in constructing argumentative texts effectively. This study aimed to identify the difficulties encountered by eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 27 Medan in constructing argumentative texts and to analyze the generic structures and language features used in their writing. This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. The participants consisted of 24 eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 27 Medan. The data were collected through writing tasks and documentation. The students were asked to write argumentative texts based on several assigned topics. The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), including data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analysis was conducted based on Genre-Based Analysis proposed by Gerot and Wignell (1994), focusing on generic structures and language features of argumentative texts. The findings revealed that argument development was the most significant difficulty experienced by students, with 75% producing underdeveloped arguments. Grammatical errors were found in 71% of the texts, while 67% of the students demonstrated limited vocabulary usage and 58% showed inappropriate use of logical connectors. Despite these difficulties, all students were able to construct thesis statements and conclusions appropriately. The study concludes that students possess a basic understanding of argumentative text structure but still require greater support in developing arguments, improving grammatical accuracy, enriching vocabulary, and applying cohesive devices effectively. These findings highlight the importance of genre-based instruction in improving students' argumentative writing competence.

Keywords: argumentative writing, genre-based analysis, students' difficulties, generic structures, language features

INTRODUCTION

Writing is widely recognized as one of the most challenging skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it requires students to organize ideas, apply appropriate grammar and vocabulary, and communicate meaning effectively. Among various text types taught in Indonesian junior high schools, argumentative text is considered particularly important because it enables students to express opinions, develop logical reasoning, and persuade readers through well-structured arguments. Under the Merdeka Curriculum, eighth-grade students are expected to construct argumentative texts by applying appropriate generic structures and language features. Therefore, the ability to write argumentative texts is an essential component of students' academic literacy and critical thinking development.

Despite its importance, many EFL students still experience considerable difficulties in constructing argumentative texts. Previous studies have reported that students often struggle to formulate clear thesis statements, develop arguments with sufficient supporting details, and use appropriate linguistic features to create coherent and persuasive texts. Research conducted by Pham and Bui (2021) revealed that many EFL learners have difficulty understanding the communicative purpose and structural conventions of argumentative writing. Similarly, Lee and Lee (2024) found that students' argumentative writing competence does not develop automatically and requires explicit instructional support. In the Indonesian context, Oktaviani et al. (2023) reported that students frequently encounter problems related to text organization, language use, and critical thinking when producing argumentative texts.

These challenges are also evident among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 27 Medan. Preliminary observations of students' writing indicated that many students were unable to develop clear arguments, provide supporting explanations, and maintain coherence throughout their texts. Although students generally understood the topic being discussed, they often produced short and underdeveloped arguments with limited vocabulary and grammatical inaccuracies. Such difficulties may reduce the effectiveness of argumentative texts and hinder students from achieving the expected learning outcomes.

To investigate these issues systematically, this study adopts Genre-Based Analysis (GBA) as the analytical framework. Genre-Based Analysis, which is grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics, provides a useful approach for examining how students construct texts according to their communicative purposes, generic structures, and language features. Through this framework, students' argumentative texts can be analyzed in terms of their thesis statements, argument development, conclusions, and the use of language features such as simple present tense, logical connectors, modal verbs, and opinion expressions. This approach allows the researcher to identify specific areas where students experience difficulties and to understand how those difficulties affect the overall quality of their writing.

The present study aims to identify the difficulties experienced by eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 27 Medan in constructing argumentative texts and to analyze the generic structures and language features used in their writing. The findings reveal that argument development constitutes the most significant difficulty experienced by students, while grammar usage, vocabulary mastery, and logical connectors also present considerable challenges. Nevertheless, most students are able to construct thesis statements and conclusions appropriately. These findings contribute to the growing body of research on EFL argumentative writing and provide practical insights for teachers in designing more effective genre-based writing instruction. Furthermore, the study highlights the need for greater instructional support in developing students'

argumentative competence and suggests directions for future research on genre-based writing pedagogy at the junior high school level.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to investigate students' difficulties in constructing argumentative texts and to analyze the generic structures and language features utilized in their writing. Qualitative research is considered appropriate for exploring and understanding phenomena from participants' perspectives and for providing detailed descriptions of observed conditions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The participants of this study were 24 eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 27 Medan. The participants were selected purposively because argumentative text is one of the text genres taught in the eighth-grade English curriculum under the Merdeka Curriculum. To obtain the research data, students were assigned to write argumentative texts individually on topics related to social and environmental issues, including *Do Not Litter*, *The Importance of School Discipline*, *Students Should Read More Books*, *Keeping the Environment Clean*, and *Why Students Should Obey School Rules*. The students' written texts served as the primary source of data for the study.

The main instrument employed in this research was a writing task sheet designed to elicit authentic samples of students' argumentative writing. Through this task, students were required to compose an argumentative text individually based on the assigned topic. The writing task enabled the researcher to examine students' ability to construct argumentative texts, particularly regarding the use of generic structures and language features. In addition, documentation was used as a supporting instrument. The documentation consisted of students' written argumentative texts and records of assignment submissions. These documents were collected and organized systematically to support data management and enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model of qualitative data analysis proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the data condensation stage, the researcher selected, classified, and organized relevant information from the students' argumentative texts. The analysis focused on identifying students' difficulties related to argument development, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary usage, text organization, and coherence. Furthermore, the students' texts were examined through Genre-Based Analysis as proposed by Gerot and Wignell (1994), emphasizing the identification of generic structures, namely thesis, arguments, and reiteration, as well as language features such as the use of simple present tense, logical connectors, modal verbs, and opinion expressions. In the data display stage, the findings were presented in the form of tables and descriptive explanations to facilitate interpretation and understanding. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the emerging patterns and findings to answer the research questions concerning students' difficulties in constructing argumentative texts and their mastery of the generic structures and language features of argumentative writing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study were obtained from the analysis of 24 argumentative texts written by eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 27 Medan. The analysis focused on students' difficulties in constructing argumentative texts as well as the realization of generic structures and language features.

1. Students' Difficulties in Constructing Argumentative Texts

The analysis revealed several difficulties experienced by students in writing argumentative texts. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Students' Difficulties in Constructing Argumentative Texts

No	Aspect Analyzed	Category	Percentage	Number of Students
1	Thesis Statement	Successfully written	100%	24
2	Conclusion/Reiteration	Successfully written	100%	24
3	Argument Development	Well-developed arguments	25%	6
4	Argument Development	Underdeveloped arguments	75%	18
5	Grammar Usage	Grammatical errors found	71%	17
6	Vocabulary Usage	Limited vocabulary	67%	16
7	Logical Connectors	Inappropriate use	58%	14

The data indicate that argument development was the most dominant difficulty experienced by students. Most students produced arguments without sufficient explanation or supporting details. Grammatical errors, vocabulary limitations, and inappropriate use of logical connectors were also frequently identified.

2. Generic Structures of Argumentative Texts

The generic structure analysis focused on thesis statements, arguments, and reiteration.

a. Thesis Statement

All students successfully constructed thesis statements. Most texts clearly introduced the topic and expressed the writer's position.

Table 2. Thesis Statements in Students' Argumentative Texts

No	Example of Thesis Statement	Category
1	Students should not litter because it makes the environment dirty.	Appropriate
2	School discipline is important for students.	Appropriate
3	Reading books can increase knowledge and improve learning ability.	Appropriate
4	Students must obey school rules to create a good environment.	Appropriate

b. Argument Development

The analysis showed that argument development remained problematic for many students.

Table 3. Argument Development in Students' Texts

No	Example of Arguments	Category
1	Littering can cause floods because garbage blocks water drainage.	Well-developed
2	Reading books helps students gain more information and improve vocabulary.	Well-developed
3	Littering is bad.	Underdeveloped
4	Students should obey rules because rules are important.	Underdeveloped

Most students provided simple statements without elaboration, supporting evidence, or detailed explanations.

c. Reiteration or Conclusion

Most students successfully restated their opinions in the concluding section.

Table 4. Reiteration or Conclusion in Students' Texts

No	Example of Conclusion	Category
1	Therefore, we should keep the environment clean by not littering.	Appropriate
2	In conclusion, students should obey school rules for a better school environment.	Appropriate
3	Therefore, reading books is very important for students.	Appropriate

3. Language Features of Argumentative Texts

The analysis of language features focused on simple present tense, logical connectors, modal verbs, and opinion expressions.

d. Simple Present Tense

Table 5. Use of Simple Present Tense

No	Example	Category
1	Littering causes environmental problems.	Correct
2	Reading books improves students' knowledge.	Correct
3	Garbage make environment dirty.	Incorrect
4	Students obey school rules because it important.	Incorrect

The findings indicate that grammatical errors related to subject–verb agreement and sentence construction were still common.

e. Logical Connectors

The analysis revealed that several students misused logical connectors such as *because*, *therefore*, and *moreover*. These errors affected the coherence and logical flow of the texts.

f. Modal Verbs

Most students used modal verbs such as *should* and *must* appropriately to express suggestions and obligations. However, several grammatical inaccuracies were still identified.

g. Opinion Expressions

Students generally employed opinion expressions such as *I think* and *I believe* to indicate their stance. Nevertheless, some students failed to maintain consistency in expressing their viewpoints throughout the text.

Discussion

1. Students' Difficulties in Constructing Argumentative Texts

The findings indicate that argument development was the most significant difficulty experienced by the students. A total of 75% of the students produced underdeveloped arguments, while only 25% were able to provide explanations and supporting details. This finding supports Harmer's (2007) view that developing ideas is one of the most challenging aspects of writing. In argumentative texts, students are expected not only to express opinions but also to justify their opinions through logical explanations and evidence. However, many students tended to write brief statements without elaboration, indicating limited critical thinking and idea development skills.

The findings also revealed that grammatical errors were found in 71% of the students' texts. Common errors included subject–verb agreement and incorrect sentence construction. This result is consistent with Harmer (2007), who argues that grammatical mastery is essential for producing meaningful and understandable texts. The occurrence of grammatical errors suggests that students still experience difficulties in applying English grammatical rules when expressing their ideas in written form.

Vocabulary limitation was another difficulty identified in this study. Approximately 67% of the students relied on simple and repetitive vocabulary. This finding confirms Harmer's (2007) assertion that limited vocabulary restricts students' ability to express ideas effectively. Students who possess insufficient vocabulary knowledge often avoid writing detailed explanations, resulting in simple and underdeveloped arguments.

In addition, inappropriate use of logical connectors was found in 58% of the texts. This finding indicates that many students still struggle to establish logical relationships between ideas. As a consequence, the coherence and flow of the arguments were weakened. The result supports previous studies which reported that inadequate use of cohesive devices is a major factor affecting the quality of students' argumentative writing.

2. Generic Structures of Students' Argumentative Texts

The analysis of generic structures showed that all students were able to construct thesis statements and conclusions appropriately. This finding suggests that students generally understand the overall structure of argumentative texts, particularly the functions of introducing and concluding ideas. According to Gerot and Wignell (1994), a well-constructed argumentative text should consist of a thesis, arguments, and reiteration. The presence of these elements in most students' texts indicates that they have acquired basic knowledge of argumentative text organization.

Despite this achievement, difficulties were still evident in the argument section. Although students were able to state their opinions clearly, many failed to provide sufficient supporting reasons or explanations. Consequently, the arguments were less persuasive and did not fully achieve the communicative purpose of argumentative writing. This finding supports previous studies that identified argument development as one of the most challenging aspects of argumentative text construction among EFL learners.

3. Language Features of Students' Argumentative Texts

The findings related to language features demonstrated that students were generally familiar with the linguistic characteristics of argumentative texts. Many students successfully used simple present tense, modal verbs, and opinion expressions to communicate their viewpoints. These language features are important because they help writers express opinions, obligations, and recommendations effectively.

However, several inaccuracies were still identified, particularly in the use of simple present tense and logical connectors. According to Gerot and Wignell (1994), language features play a crucial role in supporting the communicative purpose of argumentative texts. Errors in grammatical structures and cohesive devices may reduce clarity and weaken the persuasive quality of the text. Therefore, students require additional practice and guidance in applying these language features accurately.

Overall, the findings suggest that students possess a basic understanding of argumentative text structure but continue to experience difficulties in developing arguments and applying language features effectively. These results highlight the importance of genre-based instruction that focuses not only on text organization but also on argument development, grammar accuracy, vocabulary enrichment, and the appropriate use of cohesive devices. Such instructional support may help students produce more coherent, logical, and persuasive argumentative texts.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the difficulties experienced by eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 27 Medan in constructing argumentative texts and analyzed the realization of generic structures and language features in their writing. The findings indicate that argument development is the most significant challenge faced by students, followed by difficulties in grammar usage, vocabulary mastery, and the use of logical connectors. Although most students were able to construct appropriate thesis statements and conclusions, many were still unable to elaborate arguments effectively and support their opinions with sufficient explanations.

The study also reveals that students generally understand the basic structure of argumentative texts and are familiar with several language features of the genre. However, further instructional support is needed to strengthen students' ability to develop logical arguments and apply language features accurately. These findings highlight the importance of genre-based writing instruction in improving students' argumentative writing competence and may serve as a reference for English teachers in designing more effective writing activities.

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