

A STUDY ON STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION PROBLEMS IN ANALYTICAL EXPOSITION TEXTS AT SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi kesulitan pemahaman bacaan yang dialami oleh siswa SMA saat bekerja dengan teks eksposisi analitis. Menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini mengumpulkan data melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan individu dengan 38 siswa kelas XI di sebuah SMA negeri di Jawa Barat, Indonesia. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keterbatasan kosakata, terutama istilah akademik, abstrak, dan evaluatif, merupakan hambatan yang paling menonjol dan luas. Kalimat yang kompleks dan panjang yang mengandung nominalisasi, kalimat pasif, dan klausa ganda menjadi tantangan utama kedua. Siswa juga mengalami kesulitan signifikan dalam membedakan fakta dari opini, menemukan ide utama, dan mengikuti alur argumen secara logis akibat fitur retorika dan linguistik khas genre tersebut. Kurangnya latihan membaca dan ketidakhadiran pengajaran eksplisit tentang strategi membaca dalam pengajaran kelas reguler semakin memperparah masalah ini. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa kesulitan yang diidentifikasi terkait erat dengan karakteristik unik teks eksposisi analitis daripada kelemahan membaca secara umum. Temuan ini menekankan pentingnya pengajaran kosakata yang terarah, pengajaran eksplisit tentang struktur teks, dan pelatihan strategi yang sistematis untuk meningkatkan kemampuan siswa dalam memahami teks argumentatif secara efektif dalam konteks sekolah menengah atas di Indonesia.

Kata kunci: pemahaman membaca, teks analytical exposition, kesulitan kosakata, teks argumentatif, sekolah menengah atas.

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the reading comprehension difficulties experienced by senior high school students when working with Analytical Exposition texts. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research collected data through individual semi-structured interviews with 38 Grade 11 students at a public senior high school in West Java, Indonesia. The results show that limited vocabulary, especially academic, abstract, and evaluative terms, represents the most prominent and widespread obstacle. Complex and lengthy sentences featuring nominalization, passive voice, and multiple clauses rank as the second major challenge. Students also struggle significantly to distinguish facts from opinions, locate main ideas, and follow the logical progression of arguments due to the specific rhetorical and linguistic features of the genre. Insufficient reading practice and the lack of explicit teaching of reading strategies in regular classroom instruction further aggravate these problems. The study concludes that the identified difficulties are closely linked to the unique characteristics of Analytical Exposition texts rather than general reading weakness. Findings underline the necessity for targeted vocabulary instruction, explicit teaching of text structure, and systematic strategy training to enhance students' ability to comprehend argumentative texts effectively in the Indonesian senior high school context.

Keywords: reading comprehension, analytical exposition text, vocabulary difficulties, argumentative text, senior high school.

INTRODUCTION

Reading skills are a fundamental ability that senior high school students must master in English lessons. Through reading, students not only understand literal information but also analyse text structure and interpret hidden meanings. They must evaluate arguments presented in the text. In the Indonesian high school English curriculum, Analytical Exposition is one of the main text types taught. This text presents the writer's opinion on an issue supported by logical reasons. Therefore, it demands strong critical thinking skills from students.

However, many students still face serious difficulties when reading Analytical Exposition texts. Limited vocabulary is the most common problem because the texts contain many academic words and abstract terms. Complex sentence structures, such as compound clauses, passive voice, and nominalization, make comprehension harder. Students often fail to identify the main idea or distinguish arguments from supporting examples. They also struggle to follow logical connections between ideas. Lack of critical reading skills worsens the situation as many students only focus on explicit information.

Teaching approaches also contribute to these difficulties. Many reading lessons still concentrate only on answering questions without teaching specific strategies. Students rarely receive clear guidance on how to recognise argument patterns or find the thesis. Evaluating the strength of reasons is seldom practised. As a result, students do not develop the skills needed for argumentative texts. This traditional approach limits their overall reading progress.

Although several studies have explored students' reading difficulties in analytical exposition texts, important gaps still exist. Most previous research only identifies problems such as lack of vocabulary, difficulty in making inferences, finding main ideas, and understanding references without deeply connecting them to the unique features of analytical exposition (Putri, 2024; Jayanti & Ariani, 2024; Aini et al., 2023; Nisa, 2021; Fitri & Rozimela, 2020). Earlier studies rarely examine how language features like modal verbs, connecting words, evaluative language, and the thesis-arguments-reiteration structure cause specific difficulties. Samples are usually limited to

one school or one city, so the findings cannot represent all Indonesian high school students. Comprehensive qualitative research that explores students' cognitive processes and links them to the argumentative nature of the text is still missing. Moreover, little attention has been given to difficulties related to the current Merdeka Curriculum texts.

This study aims to fill these research gaps by describing in detail the reading comprehension problems students face with Analytical Exposition texts. It will explore both linguistic and non-linguistic factors behind these difficulties using a qualitative approach. The results are expected to help teachers design more effective reading strategies. Better understanding of students' problems will improve critical reading instruction. Ultimately, this research will contribute to stronger English teaching practices at senior high school level. A deeper qualitative study is needed to support future curriculum development.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design following Creswell's (2013) framework for qualitative inquiry. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research is suitable when the researcher seeks to understand a phenomenon from the participants' own perspectives in their natural setting. A descriptive approach was selected because the purpose was to provide a rich, detailed portrayal of students' reading comprehension problems with Analytical Exposition texts without manipulating variables or testing hypotheses. The study was conducted at SMAN 1 Ciawigebang, Kuningan Regency, West Java, during the academic year 2024/2025. Thirty-eight Grade 11 students were purposively selected as participants because they had studied Analytical Exposition texts and represented a range of English proficiency levels.

Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews, which Creswell (2013) recommends as an effective method for obtaining in-depth insights into participants' experiences and meanings. Each interview lasted 10–15 minutes, used a combination of Indonesian and English for natural expression. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using

Creswell’s (2013) data analysis spiral: (1) organizing and preparing the data, (2) reading through all data, (3) coding and developing themes, (4) generating descriptions and themes, and (5) interpreting the findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

The data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews with 38 Grade 11 students at SMAN 1 Ciawigebang. All interviews were transcribed verbatim, and analysed thematically. The students’ responses were grouped into recurring themes and sub-themes that reflect their actual experiences, feelings, and difficulties when reading Analytical Exposition texts. To ensure authenticity, direct quotations (both in the original Indonesian/Bahasa mixed form and their English translations) are presented alongside each sub-theme. The table below summarises the main themes, sub-themes, descriptions, and representative student voices that emerged from the analysis.

| Theme Category | Sub-Themes | Descriptions | Representative Quotes |
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| 1. Students’ General Feelings | Confusion distinguishing facts vs opinions | Many students feel unsure when separating factual statements from opinions. | “I get confused between facts and opinions.” (Original: “Aku sedikit bingung antara fakta sama opini”) |
| | Neutral feelings (“difficult but manageable”) | Students acknowledge some difficulty but feel they can handle it with effort. | “It’s difficult but manageable.” (Original: “susah si, tapi masih bisa diatasi”) |

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| | Feeling overwhelmed by formal English | Formal/academic vocabulary creates discomfort and confusion. | “The English is too formal, so I don’t understand.” (Original: “bahasanya terlalu formal, jadi aku nggak ngerti”) |
| 2. Opinions About Analytical Exposition Texts | Positive – learning new perspectives | Students enjoy reading opinions and arguments. | “I like learning other people’s opinions, like writer’s opinion” (Original: “aku suka kalo belajar opini orang lain, kaya penulis gitu.”) |
| | Negative – difficult vocabulary | Students dislike the text because vocabulary is complex. | “The vocabulary is too difficult.” (Original: “kosakatanya susah banget”) |
| | Mixed feelings | Students like the ideas but struggle with the language. | “I like the idea, but I don’t understand the English.” (Original: “Aku suka gagasannya, tapi aku ga ngerti bahasa Inggris”) |

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| 3. Most Difficult Text Features | Vocabulary (most dominant) | Many unfamiliar, abstract, or academic words hinder comprehension. | “There are many words I’ve never seen before.” (Original: “Ada banyak kata yang belum pernah aku liat”) |
| | Distinguishing facts and opinions | Students struggle to identify factual vs opinion-based statements. | “It’s hardest to differentiate fact and opinion.” (Original: “paling susah kalo ngebedain fakta sama opini”) |
| | Complex sentence structures | Long and multi-clause sentences reduce comprehension. | “Long sentences are difficult to follow.” (Original: “Kalimat yang kepanjangan bikin susah buat dipahami”) |
| | Understanding the argument | Students lose track of argument flow. | “I get confused when the explanations are too detailed.” (Original: “Aku bingung pas penjelasannya terlalu banyak”) |

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| | Finding the main idea | Difficulty locating the main idea of each paragraph. | “Sometimes I don’t know which part is the main idea.” (Original: “Kadang aku gatau bagian mana yang ide utama”) |
| | Drawing conclusions | Students cannot make conclusions when vocabulary is difficult. | “It’s hard to conclude when the words are difficult.” (Original: “Susah buat nyimpulin kalo kata katanya ga ngerti”) |
| 4. Difficult Vocabulary Types | Abstract adjectives | Students struggle with descriptive and abstract terms. | “Usually adjectives that are unfamiliar.” (Original: “Biasanya yang adjectives yang bahasanya aneh tuh”) |
| | Words with unclear translation | Words remain unclear even after translation. | “After translating, the meaning is still confusing.” (Original: “Abis nerjemahin, artinya masih tetep ngebingungin”) |
| | Academic | Formal, argumentat | “The words are too |

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| | vocabulary | ive language is challenging. | formal.” (Original: “Kata katanya terlalu baku”) |
| 5. Difficulties with Long/Complex Sentences | Losing focus mid-sentence | Students forget the beginning of the sentence when reaching the end. | “I forget the beginning when I reach the end.” (Original: “Aku lupa awalnya pas mau baca di bagian akhir”) |
| 6. Strategies Used by Students | Guessing from context | Most common strategy used during reading. | “I guess the meaning from the context.” (Original: “Aku nebak artinya sesuai konteks”) |
| | Asking teachers or peers | Used when context clues are not enough. | “I ask my friend or the teacher.” (Original: “Aku tanya ke temen atau ke guru”) |
| | Using dictionaries | Less frequent but still used. | “Sometimes I open a dictionary.” (Original: “Kadang aku buka kamus”) |
| | Skipping difficult parts | Students skip challenging words and return later. | “I skip it first.” (Original: “Aku lewati dulu”) |

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| 7. Reading Strategies During Tests | Reading questions first | Most students start by reading test questions. | “I read the questions first.” (Original: “Aku baca pertanyaannya dulu”) |
| | Searching for keywords | Skimming/scanning to locate relevant information. | “I look for keywords.” (Original: “Aku liat kata kuncinya dulu”) |
| 8. Causes of Difficulties | Limited vocabulary | Most frequently mentioned barrier. | “I struggle because my vocabulary is limited.” (Original: “Aku kesusahan karena kosatanya masih sedikit”) |
| | Complex grammar | Students find sentence structures too difficult. | “The sentence structure is complicated.” (Original: “Struktur kalimatnya ribet”) |
| | Lack of reading practice | Students rarely practice reading. | “I rarely practice reading.” (Original: “Aku jarang baca baca”) |
| | Limited time | Time pressure reduces comprehension. | “The time is not enough.” (Original: “Waktunya ga cukup”) |

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| 9. Influence of Teacher's Method | Clear explanations improve understanding | Examples and simple explanations help comprehension. | "It's easier when the teacher gives examples." (Original: "lebih gampang kalau guru ngasih contoh") |
| 10. Classroom Environment Influence | Noisy classroom reduces focus | Students learn better in quiet conditions. | "I need a quiet place to focus." (Original: "Aku butuh tempat yang sepi biar bisa fokus") |

DISCUSSION

The findings are discussed under five main themes that emerged from the interviews with 38 Grade 11 students of SMAN 1 Ciawigebang.

1. Limited Vocabulary as the Dominant Difficulty

Vocabulary emerged as the most dominant and universal difficulty across all 38 students, mentioned in every interview without exception. Students repeatedly expressed frustration with unfamiliar academic words, abstract adjectives, formal expressions, and terms that even translation could not clarify. Typical statements included "There are many words I've never seen before" ("Ada banyak kata yang belum pernah aku liat"), "The words are too formal" ("Kata-katanya terlalu baku"), "After translating, the meaning is still confusing," and "Usually adjectives that are unfamiliar make me stuck." This finding strongly supports Putri (2024), Nisa (2021), Aini et al. (2023), and Jayanti & Ariani (2024), who consistently ranked limited vocabulary as the primary barrier in reading Analytical Exposition texts. The present study further reveals that the high density of evaluative, abstract, and genre-specific vocabulary (e.g., "detrimental," "imperative," "alleviate," "exacerbate") creates a far greater obstacle than in narrative or descriptive texts students encounter more frequently.

2. Complex and Long Sentences

Complex sentence structures ranked as the second most serious problem, with students frequently reporting that they lost the thread of meaning halfway through a sentence. They described forgetting the subject or the beginning by the time they reached the end, especially when passive voice, nominalization, and multiple clauses were combined. Representative quotes were "I forget the beginning when I reach the end" ("Aku lupa awalnya pas mau baca di bagian akhir"), "Long sentences are difficult to follow" ("Kalimat yang kepanjangan bikin susah buat dipahami"), and "The sentence structure is complicated, too many clauses." This directly confirms Putri's (2024) observation about high readability difficulty caused by the typical linguistic features of Analytical Exposition texts—nominalization, embedded clauses, and heavy use of connectors—which make sentences significantly longer and denser than those in other genres taught at the same level.

3. Difficulty Distinguishing Facts from Opinions and Following Arguments

A large number of students expressed clear confusion when trying to separate factual information from the writer's opinions and when following the logical flow of arguments. They often felt overwhelmed by detailed explanations and lost track of the writer's position. Direct statements included "I get confused between facts and opinions" ("Aku sedikit bingung antara fakta sama opini"), "It's hardest to differentiate fact and opinion," "I get confused when the explanations are too detailed," and "Sometimes I don't know which part is the main idea." These responses align closely with Fitri & Rozimela's (2020) finding that students performed weakest on inference and evaluation questions, reinforcing that the argumentative nature of Analytical Exposition its thesis-arguments-reiteration structure, heavy use of modal verbs, connective words, and evaluative language—produces specific comprehension challenges not commonly found in non-argumentative texts.

4. Lack of Reading Practice and Exposure

Students openly admitted very limited reading practice both inside and outside the classroom, which they saw as a major reason for their

struggles. Many said they rarely read English texts voluntarily and had little prior experience with argumentative writing even in Indonesian. Illustrative quotes were “I rarely practice reading” (“Aku jarang baca-baca”), “I only read when there is homework,” “The English is too formal, so I don’t understand because I’m not used to it,” and “I like the idea, but I don’t understand the English.” This supports Jayanti & Ariani’s (2024) observation about laziness in careful reading and limited reading habits, while the current data show that insufficient exposure creates a vicious cycle: low practice leads to poor vocabulary and unfamiliarity with structures, which in turn discourages further reading.

5. Influence of Teaching Methods and Classroom Environment

Although a few students appreciated teachers who gave examples or simple explanations (“It’s easier when the teacher gives examples”), the majority described lessons that focused only on answering questions without explicit strategy instruction. Noise, time pressure, and lack of systematic guidance were frequently mentioned as worsening factors. Students said “I need a quiet place to focus,” “The time is not enough,” “We just answer the questions, no explanation about how to read this kind of text,” and “We only guess or skip difficult parts.” While Putri (2024) recommended SQ3R and Munibi (2023) successfully implemented STAD, the present study reveals that such explicit, genre-based strategies remain rare in everyday classrooms, leaving students dependent on basic, often ineffective individual coping mechanisms.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative study reveals that Grade 11 students at SMAN 1 Ciawigebang experience significant and persistent difficulties in comprehending Analytical Exposition texts. The most prominent problems are limited academic and evaluative vocabulary, complex sentence structures characterized by nominalization, passive voice, and multiple clauses, and the inability to distinguish facts from opinions or follow the logical flow of arguments. These difficulties arise not merely from general weaknesses in English proficiency but are closely tied to the specific

linguistic and rhetorical features of the Analytical Exposition genre. Lack of regular reading practice outside the classroom and the absence of explicit, genre-based reading strategy instruction in daily teaching further deepen the challenges.

The findings highlight an urgent need for targeted pedagogical improvements in Indonesian senior high schools. Teachers should incorporate systematic vocabulary-building activities focused on argumentative and academic terms, explicit instruction on unpacking complex sentences, and structured guidance on recognizing the thesis-arguments-reiteration pattern and evaluative language. Introducing proven reading strategies and fostering regular exposure to argumentative texts will also help students develop the critical reading skills required by the current curriculum. Addressing these issues will enable students to engage more effectively with Analytical Exposition texts and better prepare them for higher-level academic reading demands.

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