

Analyzing Students' Difficulties in Writing English Essay



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ABSTRACT: Analyzing students' difficulties in writing essays is a valuable tool for educators to enhance their teaching methods, provide personalized support, and ultimately improve students' writing skills. It also allows educators to be responsive to the needs of their students and create a more effective and engaging English learning experience. This study investigates the quality of English essays written by college students. The research aims to understand the difficulties of students in writing English essays in particular in writing opinion essay. A qualitative method approach was employed by analyzing 23 students' English essays.

The findings reveal that while students generally demonstrate competence in structuring their essays and presenting arguments, there are common difficulties related to thesis development, evidence integration, and coherence. Therefore, it is suggested that students always implement the stages of writing an essay to be able to present their opinion in English easily and well.

KEYWORDS: Students' difficulties, writing essay

A. INTRODUCTION

Writing is a linguistic aptitude that necessitates a cognitive process for the purpose of expressing thoughts and emotions in a written format (Meiranti, 2012). The act of writing involves the articulation of ideas, opinions, thoughts, or emotions and should therefore not be seen as an innate talent, as it is a skill that can be developed via training (Setiawan & Dody, 2021).

To generate a well-crafted piece of writing, writers must take into account various components, including a clear objective, an effective structure, appropriate word choice, proficient language use, and coherent thoughts (Hyland & Jiang, 2017). The act of writing encompasses not only the generation of thoughts to be written but also the skillful arrangement of the various aspects of writing (Altunkaya & Ayranci, 2020). The author possesses the capacity to analyze and synthesize concepts in order to construct a coherent and meaningful narrative for the reader's comprehension. At the tertiary level of education, possessing proficient writing skills has become increasingly essential for all students. This is due to the fact that the majority of tasks undertaken by students necessitate the production of written documents, such as papers, articles, reports, assignments, final projects, and theses (Liu & Jeba, 2018). Hence, it is vital for individuals to consistently enhance their writing abilities. Furthermore, it is imperative for teachers to consistently develop innovative instructional approaches that stimulate students' writing abilities. (Setiowati, 2016). According to Abdulai (2014), students are expected to demonstrate the ability to simultaneously employ many talents in their writing. Prior to commencing the writing process, it is imperative for students to devise a comprehensive strategy encompassing the selection of appropriate topics as well as the organization and arrangement of thoughts. During the process of articulating his thoughts, he asserted the existence of multiple matters that require careful consideration (Nappu et al., 2022). The aforementioned explanation asserts that students should possess comprehension skills in writing. To achieve this, it is imperative to implement a well-structured and thoughtful writing curriculum that incorporates acceptable learning methodologies and utilizes relevant media, taking into consideration the individual needs and circumstances of the students

In the world of education, opinion essays are more than just assignments; they are windows into the evolving landscape of young minds. As we embark on this journey of analysis, prepare to be astonished by the insights they reveal.

According to a recent survey, 85% of educators believe that analyzing students' opinion essays can provide valuable insights into their critical thinking abilities. In this exploration, we will unlock the secrets hidden within these essays, shedding light on what makes them effective or not (Ahmed, et al. 2023; Nirwanto, 2021).

Setiowati (2016) asserts that the opinion essay is a frequently employed writing method in college-level writing. This specific genre of essay facilitates the development of students' critical thinking and logical reasoning abilities. Nevertheless, acquiring the skill of composing opinion essays might be challenging. Numerous students enrolled in the writer's composition course have asserted that the composition of opinion essays has a greater level of difficulty compared to other genres of essay writing, such as descriptive, narrative, and expository compositions. Setiawan & Dody (2021) stated that the composition of an opinion essay can be understood as a communicative endeavor, including the transmission of written messages to external recipients. An opinion essay

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entails the author assuming the role of a communicator, conveying a specific message or content to the readers. Moreover, engaging in this form of writing serves as a constructive and expressive endeavor. The terms "productive" and "expressive" encompass the essence of these two attributes, which function as vehicles for the transmission of information (Elton, 2010). Writing is commonly regarded as a productive endeavor, as it involves the creation of written works that stem from the articulation of one's thoughts and ideas. Expressive refers to the capacity or ability to convey visual representations, intents, concepts, and emotions (Kemal, 2015).

The process of writing entails multiple sequential steps (Bailey, 2018). In order to enhance students' opinion-writing skills, it is imperative to establish a systematic and well-structured writing process. This process should be executed in a step-by-step manner, ensuring that each stage is carefully addressed and completed. By following this approach, teachers can effectively guide students towards achieving proficiency in expressing their opinions through writing. Harmer (2004) argued that the writing process encompasses four distinct stages, the first of which is planning. During the preparation process, the writer must consider three primary concerns: Firstly, it is imperative for writers to carefully contemplate the intended aim of their writing. By gaining a clear understanding of the objective, individuals can make informed decisions regarding the most suitable linguistic style to employ. Consequently, the resultant written work will be very effective in achieving its intended purpose. Secondly, authors must also take into account the specific target audience for whom they are writing. The intended audience comprises those who engage in reading and writing activities. The audience has an impact on the linguistic style, diction, and paragraph structure of a piece of writing. Additionally, the writer's choice of the best order in which to present facts, ideas, or arguments affects the writing's structure and content. The second stage of the writing process is drafting. Drafting involves the process of transforming ideas into written form and organizing them into coherent sentences and paragraphs. The process of drafting is essential in assisting writers in organizing their ideas and determining the appropriate sequencing of content, from the first stages through the final stages of writing. The process of editing involves making revisions and corrections to a written document in order to improve its clarity, coherence, and overall quality.

Norquist (2015) defined that an opinion essay contains the writer's opinions or attitudes to influence the readers. Meanwhile, the stated evidence and data are to convince the readers. Thus, the writer needs to present a logical and valid opinion that is supported by facts to support the main idea. A lecturer must understand the learning approach to writing and how to develop students' writing skill. (Setiawan, Dody 2021). Moreover, opinion essay is an assignment that contains questions that allow students to share their point-of-view on a subject matter. Students should express their thoughts precisely while providing opinions on the issue related to the field within reasonable logic. Some opinion essays type require references to back the writer's claims (John, 2022).

The design of opinion essay process according to Parker (2022) are : 1) Writing opinion phase namely : Pre-Writing Phase, Drafting phase, Revision phase, editing and proofreading phase, final draft, reflection assessment. 2) Developing in thesis statement discuss about the best thesis statement. 3) Opinion essay structure discuss about 5 paragraph essay be interested in getting more information about introduction, thesis, body paragraph, and conclusion. 4) Introduce the key concepts related to the thesis statement in opinion essay discuss about a good introduction paragraph. In addition, thesis statement should be clear, specific, and provide a roadmap for the reader to understand the main points of the writing. The process of writing is essential .

The learning process provides a way to write opinion essays more effectively for students (Shona, 2019). This process also shows how to understand the main point of the essay, which can be seen in the content of the introduction, namely the opening hook and context, transition to the thesis statement, preview of the main points, and significance roadmap. By considering the process, it is hoped that each student in the English Education Department Faculty of Teachers Training and Education could be proficient in writing. One writing talent that students need to work on is the ability to write well-written essays in English. When writing, students must possess understanding of the subjects they are writing about.

Learning to write opinion essay is not easy. Many students in the writer's writing class have claimed that writing opinion essay is more challenging than other types. Therefore, the design a process in opinion essay as one way to make it easier for students to write their opinions. This design also provides phases in writing opinion essays and the standard five-paragraph-essay structure usually works well for opinion essays. In addition, 5 Paragraph Essay be interested in getting more information about introduction, thesis, body paragraph 1, body paragraph 2, body paragraph 3, and conclusion. Therefore, this study aims at knowing the quality of students' opinion essays and understanding their difficulties.

B. METHOD

The study employed a qualitative research methodology. Creswell & Creswell (2014) believe that qualitative research is a systematic investigation approach rooted in well-defined methodological traditions that aim to comprehend a social or human problem. For the purposes of this investigation, a sample of 23 students was deliberately selected and thereafter requested to compose an opinion-based essay. The essays were subjected to analysis in order to assess their quality. This analysis involved examining the paragraphs that encompassed the introduction, thesis statement, body paragraphs, and conclusion. Moreover, the challenges faced by students were evident in the paragraphs composed by the students themselves.

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C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Before giving students a chance to write five paragraphs, there are three stages of learning carried out in this study, namely the preparation stage, pre-writing stage, and writing stage (Oshima & Hoque, 1997). The preparatory stage aims to provide a foundation of knowledge on the topic covered; the second stage is pre-writing. At this stage, students are given exposure to opinion essays, then they formulate thesis sentences about their opinions about Adab through thesis sentences, and provide logical explanations in supporting thesis sentences. The third stage, or writing stage, is an introduction or opening paragraph that starts by introducing the topic, follows with a related explanation, and concludes with a thesis sentence. The next paragraph consists of two paragraphs of the content of the essay, which begins with a topic sentence that contains support for the opinion expressed in the thesis. Then followed explanatory sentences that support topic sentences that contain explanations, facts, or examples. The last paragraph created is the conclusion paragraph. This paragraph contains the conclusion of the discussion contained in the two content paragraphs. Then followed the author's opinion on the discussion given in the two paragraphs of content and the emphasis by the author regarding the importance of the adab discussed in the essay.

After analyzing students' opinion essays, it was found that most students have the ability to write the content of the essay that is shown by the topic of the sentence in each supporting paragraph that explains the reason for the opinion, especially in introductory paragraphs. This is in line with the assertion made by McCombes (2019) that a well-crafted introduction holds significant importance in the context of an academic essay. The introductory section of a written work establishes the argumentative framework and provides the reader with a preview of the next content while also offering contextual information pertaining to the topic (Mcmorrow, 2003). One of the introductory paragraphs, for example, can be seen in the following essay:

Life is a struggle. A struggle between happy and sad, good and bad and spacious and narrow. It all inevitably has to go through us. Likewise, human life is infinite in events, challenges, obstacles, opportunities, and experiences. All of this can be a lesson to each human being to be a better person day by day. Sometimes some people may have experienced or are going through a difficult and painful phase of life. So, a wise attitude in dealing with something is needed. Wise human beings are those who are able to learn a lesson from everything they experience and go through in their lives. Therefore, be a wise person in dealing with various problem.

In the paragraph, it can be seen that the student as author, who wrote an opinion essay about *Be a Wise Person Dealing with Various Problems*, is able to start the essay by introducing the topic to the readers. The author begins the introduction by explaining that *life is a struggle*. In the second sentence, the author immediately gives an example of struggle, saying the *struggle between happy and difficult, good and bad, and airy and narrow*. Furthermore, in the third sentence, the author writes *that all the above struggles are inherent in our lives*. In the fourth sentence, the author explains that *human life is faced with various events, challenges, obstacles, opportunities, and experiences*. Furthermore, in the fifth sentence, the author concludes that *all of the above can be a lesson for every human being to get better day by day*. In the 6th sentence, the author states that *sometimes a number of people have experiences or face phases of difficulty and pain in life*. Followed by the seventh sentence, *wise behavior related to something is necessary*. In the eighth sentence, *wise men are those who can take lessons from every experience of life*. In the ninth sentence, which is a thesis sentence, the author writes, *Therefore, be a wise man in the face of various problems*.

The first two and three sentences successfully start with the student stating that *life is a struggle. The struggle between happy and difficult, good and bad, and airy and narrow All of the above struggles are inherent in our lives*, although the third sentence is not clearly stated. In the fourth sentence, the author's sentence seems incoherent because not everything mentioned in the previous sentence is explained. This is similar with the research findings found by Chen (2011) and Nawir & Nappu (2019). The fourth sentence reads that human life is faced with various events, challenges, obstacles, opportunities, and experiences, so coherently, the author should write that in fighting for happiness, goodness, and greed, humans will be faced *with various events, challenges, and obstacles*. The fifth sentence can be put together with the sixth sentence, *which can then be a lesson to get better day by day*. In the 6th sentence, the author states that *sometimes a number of people have experiences or face phases of difficulty and pain in life*. The sixth sentence should be paradoxed with the previous statement so *that although difficulties and pain in life are often unavoidable*, this sentence can be connected directly with the seventh sentence to maintain *wise behavior in every indispensable situation*. It continued with the eighth sentence *because wise men are those who can take lessons from every experience of life*. In the ninth sentence, which is a thesis sentence, the author writes, *Therefore, be a wise man in the face of various problems*.

Furthermore, the ability of students to write the content of the essay is indicated by the topic of the sentence in each supporting paragraph that explains the reason for the opinion listed in the thesis sentence. Additionally, the supporting sentences provide more in-depth explanations of the sentence's topic in the form of justifications, examples, or comparisons. This is supported by Wong, et al. (2008) and Cuervo (2008) that a good introductory paragraph should contain a topic sentences along with supporting details.

. The following is an example of a content paragraph written by one of the students that represents average student writing in general.

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Being wise is actually not a difficult matter but the first thing to really do is to humble oneself before Allah. How do we realize that we lack wisdom, and ask Allah to give it to us. So we can say, a wise person is who has wisdom and advice in him because he will rely on Allah who gives him wisdom and a wise person will be able to give advice that if it is good. Just like I'm experiencing right now. Lately I feel lost. Many times I grew in my soul directions to hurt myself, and so it happened. But with friend beside me, I felt helped. She taught me how precious life is and then I regret my foolish actions

The thesis of the supporting paragraph above is "*Be a Wise Person Dealing with Various Problems*". The student as the author begins the first supporting paragraph by explaining that *being wise is actually not a difficult thing but the first thing to do is to humble yourself before God*. In the second sentence the author tells *us how to realize that we are not wise and ask God to give us wisdom*. Furthermore, in the third sentence, the author writes that therefore we can say that a wise person is one who has wisdom and advice because of *Him, because a wise person will rely on Allah who gives him wisdom and a wise man can give advice when it is something good*. In the fourth sentence the author says *as I am experiencing it today*. The author's fifth sentence explains that *lately I have felt lost*. The sixth sentence the author says *several times it came up in my heart to hurt myself, and it happened*. The seventh sentence the author says *but with a friend beside me, I find it helpful*. In the eighth sentence the author says *he taught me how precious life is and then I regret my stupid behavior*.

The student explains the thesis "*Be a Wise Person Dealing with Various Problems*" with the topic sentence "*being wise is actually not a difficult thing but the first thing to do is to humble yourself before God*". This topic sentence is not appropriate because wise humans are related to human relationships with humans, while those explained in the topic sentence by the author it is to be wise to be humble to God. The function of the next sentence is to explain the topic sentence. In the second sentence the author tells *us how to realize that we are not wise and ask God to give us wisdom*. This sentence also does not support the topic sentence or thesis sentence because the content actually discusses being wise must be asked of God even though the thesis sentence discusses being a wise person in dealing with various problems. The difficulties or problems found by students in writing topic sentence is in line with the findings revealed by Haryanti et al (2022)

Furthermore, in the third sentence, the student wrote that therefore we can say that a wise person is one who has wisdom and advice because of *Him because a wise person will rely on Allah who gives him wisdom and a wise man can give advice when it is something good*. This sentence is also incoherent the student is still discussing about the definition of a wise person and the behavior of a wise man. The incoherent sentences were also found by In the fourth sentence the author says *as I am experiencing it today*. In this fourth sentence, the student tried to explain a wise example by explaining what he is experiencing at this time. In the fifth sentence, the student explained how he feels, saying *I've been feeling lost lately*. In the sixth sentence the author says *several times it came to my heart to hurt myself, and it happened*. The seventh sentence the author says *but with a friend beside me, I find it helpful*. In the fourth to seventh sentences, the author recounts the turmoil he experienced, who then became aware because of the advice given by his friend, as told in the eighth sentence the student said he taught me how precious life is and then I regretted my stupid behavior. From the story of him facing turmoil, the student tries to explain that with the wise advice of his friend, he was finally able to realize the stupidity he almost did.

The paragraph also showed the ability of students to write essays related to content that contains a summary of the discussion contained in the supporting paragraphs of the essay or a thesis restatement using different words. This is also similar with the findings revealed by Kaufhold (2015) After writing the summary, continued with the student's opinion regarding the discussion ended with the significance of the discussion for the reader. The ability of students to write content in the conclusion of the essay is represented by one of the students in writing a conclusion, which represents the conclusion paragraph made by students in general. The example of conclusions written by student is:

Be a wise person in dealing with various problems is very important to us. Because whatever we face wisely, we will undoubtedly gain invisible strength and face all problems with peaceful heart. Just as with a wise friend, she will guide us to the right path because they rely on Allah who gives her wisdom. Likewise, be wise for your self can change you into a better person than before. Therefore, be wise in doing various things. Because in fact everything that is done based on wisdom undoubtedly all of it will not be in vain, even will have the value of worship by Allah.

The student begins the conclusion by repeating the thesis sentence that *being a wise person in dealing with various problems is very important*. In the second sentence, the author judges that *whatever we face wisely, we will surely gain unseen strength and face all problems with a peaceful heart*. Furthermore, in the third sentence, the author writes about *a wise friend who will guide us to the right path and rely on God who gives him wisdom*. The fourth sentence of the author saying *wise to yourself can change you into a better person than before*. The fifth sentence of the author is to write *wisely in doing things*. In the sixth sentence, the author writes that *everything that is done based on wisdom will undoubtedly not be in vain, it will even have this worship in the side of Allah SWT*.

In the first sentence, the student repeats what was written in the thesis sentence. In the second to sixth sentences, the author redefines and exemplifies wisdom as when he writes supporting paragraphs. This conclusion paragraph is similar to the supporting sentence he wrote. The content of this conclusion does not contain conclusions or re-explanations of the thesis in different words,

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nor does it provide its point of view regarding the discussion in the supporting paragraphs and does not explain the importance of the discussion to the reader.

From the paragraphs written by students in their opinion essays, it was found that, in general, students were able to demonstrate competence in structuring their essays and presenting arguments. These findings are similar to those of Annie and Sarah (2020), who conducted research at elementary schools and found that all students in grades K–5 could write an opinion essay that showed their understanding of the topic by generating their opinion and crafting evidence to support their opinion. It indicates that opinion essays could be written well not only by college students but also by elementary students.

Additionally, it was discovered from examining the students' opinion essays that, generally speaking, students struggled with developing their thesis statements, integrating their supporting details, and writing their essays coherently. Most students found it difficult to write an opinion essay, especially when it came to creating a thesis, include evidence to support the topic in the paragraphs, and structuring the sentences and paragraphs logically. The majority of students did not seem to be able to elaborate on their topic in the essay's opening paragraphs. The main ideas of their essay should be condensed into their thesis statement as the important part of introduction, as supported by McCombes (2019), a thesis statement is a sentence that succinctly and precisely captures the primary idea of a student's essay written in introductory paragraphs and offers the reader a path to comprehend the essay's major elements.

In order to effectively tackle these problems, students can derive advantages from receiving coaching, engaging in practice, and obtaining feedback. Educators possess the capacity to deliver guidance and educational materials to facilitate the enhancement of students' aptitude in opinion writing. Concurrently, students can actively engage in refining their writing abilities through consistent practice and diligent review. Moreover, engaging in the practice of reading and critically evaluating proficiently crafted opinion essays can serve as a highly beneficial educational resource.

D. CONCLUSION

Based on an analysis of students' English writing on opinion essays, it can be inferred that the majority of students exhibit proficiency in essay construction and effective argumentation. Nevertheless, a number of typical obstacles were encountered by these individuals in relation to the development of their theses, the integration of evidence, and the establishment of coherence. Hence, it is recommended that students consistently employ the sequential steps involved in composing an essay in order to effectively and proficiently articulate their viewpoints. In order to effectively tackle these problems, students can derive advantages from receiving coaching, engaging in practice, and obtaining feedback. Educators possess the capacity to deliver pedagogical guidance and furnish educational materials to facilitate the enhancement of students' aptitude in opinion writing. Simultaneously, students can actively engage in refining their writing abilities by means of consistent practice and diligent review. Moreover, engaging in the practice of reading and critically evaluating skillfully crafted opinion essays can serve as a highly beneficial educational resource.

Implication: Educators can use the analysis to identify common strengths and weaknesses in students' opinion essay writing. This information can guide them in providing targeted and tailored instructional support to address specific areas of improvement.

Analyzing students' essays can help educators provide individualized feedback to each student. By identifying each student's unique challenges and strengths, educators can offer personalized guidance, which is more effective in facilitating improvement. Recognizing that students have varying levels of proficiency in opinion essay writing, educators can implement differentiated instruction strategies. These strategies involve tailoring instruction to meet the diverse needs of students, which can lead to better outcomes for all learners.

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