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# STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING IN WRITING ANALYTICAL EXPOSITION TEXT

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***ABSTRACT***

*The goal of this study is to find out how tenth-grade students show and use critical thinking when they write analytical exposition texts. Critical thinking is very important especially when it comes to making strong arguments and backing them up with proof. This study used a qualitative descriptive method that included interviews and looking at students' written work. The researcher got information from 36 tenth-grade students at a public high school in Sidoarjo. The results showed that students used critical thinking in a number of important ways, such as finding problems, weighing evidence, making logical arguments, and coming to reasonable conclusions. But their ability to think critically was different. Some students were able to reason at a high level, while others only showed a basic understanding and application. The study also found that students' ability to show critical thinking was affected by how well they knew the topic, their own experiences, and their motivation to write. The results showed that students know how important critical thinking is, but they need more structured help and practice to learn how to use these skills well in academic writing. This study suggests future researchers explore larger samples or digital platforms to support students' critical thinking in writing This study also gives teachers ideas for how to make their lessons better at helping students think critically when they write.*

***Keywords:*** *Critical Thinking, Tenth Graders, Analytical Exposition Text.*

## INTRODUCTION

In today's world, critical thinking has become a key skill for students at all levels of education. This skill helps individuals analyze information, assess evidence, question assumptions, and make reasoned judgments. It allows learners to tackle problems logically, make informed decisions, and express their ideas clearly. In academic settings, critical thinking is more than just an educational goal; it is a crucial process that helps students engage with content and articulate complex ideas in writing. One type of writing that heavily relies on critical thinking is the analytical exposition text. This genre requires students to develop arguments, back up claims with evidence, and arrange their ideas logically.

In Indonesia's senior high school curriculum, writing is a major focus, and the analytical exposition text plays an important role in enhancing students' reasoning and argumentative skills. The Genre-Based Approach (GBA) in the national curriculum expects students to understand and produce different text types with specific communication goals and structures. The analytical exposition genre specifically aims to persuade readers by presenting arguments systematically and logically. To achieve this, students must use several critical thinking skills, such as interpreting issues, analyzing perspectives, evaluating evidence, and drawing conclusions, while also focusing on proper grammar, vocabulary, and coherence. Therefore, writing an analytical exposition text serves as a valuable platform for showing and developing critical thinking abilities.

Even with its importance, studies examining students' critical thinking in analytical writing have primarily focused on university-level research. Investigations by Marni et al. (2019), Rohayati (2017), and Supriyadi (2024) explored how university students and those in upper high school apply critical thinking in argumentative or analytical writing. These studies found varying levels of proficiency, with many students struggling to create strong thesis statements, use evidence effectively, and build coherent arguments. However, there has been limited research

specifically looking at tenth-grade students, who are in the early stages of developing academic argumentation. This gap presents a significant opportunity for exploration, especially since tenth grade is a critical point in students' academic development where instruction in critical thinking and writing can greatly influence future learning outcomes.

Previous research has also tended to focus on the finished written products of students, often missing the cognitive processes behind their writing. Understanding how students plan, organize, evaluate, and revise their work is essential for grasping how they apply critical thinking throughout the writing process. For instance, a student might produce a well-organized essay, but without insight into how they selected evidence or built arguments, it is hard to assess the depth of their reasoning. Likewise, basic writing may hide deeper analysis if students struggle with language. Thus, analyzing written texts alongside insights from student interviews can provide a fuller understanding of their critical thinking.

Another vital aspect is students' awareness and understanding of critical thinking. While some students may follow models to structure an analytical exposition, they may not fully understand the purpose of reasoning, evaluation, or questioning evidence. Others might use these skills instinctively without formally recognizing them as critical thinking. Examining students' perspectives and strategies in writing can reveal gaps between their knowledge and practice, helping to guide more focused teaching methods. It can also uncover how background knowledge, motivation, and writing habits affect their critical thinking performance.

In light of these points, this study investigates how tenth-grade students utilize and demonstrate critical thinking when writing analytical exposition texts. It specifically looks at two connected aspects: (1) how the students use their critical thinking to write analytical exposition text and (2) how critical thinking is shown in the students' analytical exposition text. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews and analysis of students' writing tasks. The goal is to provide descriptive and analytical insights into how students construct arguments, manage information, and how these reflect their critical thinking skills.

This research is notable for a few reasons. First, it fills a gap in the literature by focusing on younger students, who are often overlooked in studies on critical thinking. Second, it helps deepen the understanding of how critical thinking develops through writing within Indonesia's curriculum. Third, it offers practical insights for teachers aiming to incorporate critical thinking more effectively into writing instruction. By identifying strengths and weaknesses in students' writing processes and products, educators can better assist learners in developing the necessary cognitive and rhetorical skills for academic success.

In summary, this study highlights the connection between writing and critical thinking in analytical exposition texts. It stresses the importance of understanding students' thought processes alongside their writing. By examining how tenth graders articulate arguments, choose evidence, and draw conclusions, the study aims to illuminate the challenges and opportunities of promoting critical thinking through writing at the secondary school level.

## METHODS

### Research design

This study focus on analyzing the critical thinking in tenth graders' analytical exposition text. Thus, this study uses a qualitative research and employs a descriptive study design. Qualitative descriptive design is a research methodology that aims to provide a full and straightforward explanation of a phenomenon using qualitative data (Prime, 2020). In this study, a qualitative descriptive approach is selected as it effectively captures students' reasoning, argument development, and use of evidence in analytical exposition writing. This approach allows for detailed analysis of the three pillars of critical thinking — analysis, evaluation, and the synthesis of information — as represented in students' texts and described in their interviews. The use of both rubric-based writing analysis and thematic analysis of student

interviews allows for a nuanced composite, developing both an overview and in-depth understanding of how reportedly students develop critical thinking skills in constructing their arguments within their writing

**Research participants and Sampling Procedures**

The subjects of this study are the tenth-grade students in one of the Public Senior High Schools in Sidoarjo. From this subjects, a purposive sample of 36 students from one class were drawn. Tenth graders were selected for study not only because older students have been previously studied, but because this stage is particularly important for developing argumentation skills, which is in line with curriculum expectations, and preparing students for future writing in an academic and professional context. Furthermore, the class of 36 students were chosen because it represent a diverse range of abilities, making it an ideal sample for analyzing different levels of critical thinking skills. Additionally, this class is conveniently located for data collection, with suitability and cooperative learning environment, ensuring that the study procedure is practical and efficient.

**Data Collection Techniques**

To collect complete data on students' critical thinking skills in their analytical exposition texts writing, the researcher the first technique: Interview.This research employs semi-structured interviews as the initial data collection method. The researcher selected this technique because it facilitates the posing of specific questions while also granting students the opportunity to articulate their thoughts comprehensively. This adaptability aids in comprehending their application of critical thinking in writing. The format makes students feel free to say what they want, which can lead to deep and useful insights about how they write.

To help the researcher obtaining in-depth information about a specific topic, the researcher uses interview guide that adapted from Hardianti et al (2023) that contained five main categories: Background Information, Understanding Critical Thinking in Writing, Planning and Organizing Ideas, Developing Arguments and Reasoning, and Concluding the Idea (Evaluation). These five categories align with the components of critical thinking in academic writing, from understanding the concept to applying it throughout the writing process. Together, they provide a holistic framework to analyze how critical thinking is reflected in students' writing practices.

The second technique is analyzing students' writing task. Document collection, in line with document analysis, consists of analyzing numerous documents, such as books, media articles, academic journals, and institutional reports (Morgan, 2022). In this study, collecting the document means collecting students' analytical exposition text and then analyzed those texts using Illinois Critical Thinking Skills Rubric adapted from Finken & Ennis (1993) and Critical Writing Rubric adapted from Abdelrahim (2023). It contain 8 main criteria: application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. These eight criteria allow the researcher to assess students' analytical exposition texts' linguistic quality and cognitive depth in a fair and thorough way.

**Data Analysis Techniques**

The first technique that used to analyse the data is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis emerges as a proficient and versatile instrument for evaluating qualitative data in this research. It is a good choice for looking into tenth graders' critical thinking when they write analytical exposition texts because it can help them understand things deeply, can be used in many ways, and is methodical. The researcher utilized the following steps to assist in defining the data: getting familiar, assigning code, finding themes, reviewing themes, difining themes, and reporting the results.

The second technique is document analysis. After collecting the documents in the form of students' analytical expository writing task results, the researchers were analyzed the data using a rubric. Students' writing results evaluated in each category or components based on this rubric. After analyzing the text, the researcher draw a conclusion that answered the research questions.

And the last technique is triangulation. The information from two sources—interviews and documents analysis,—will be analyzed and integrated to make sure the findings are coherent and accurate. For example, the presence of critical thinking components in students' texts (document analysis) were supported with their explanations from interviews and behaviors noted during writing tasks. This technique yielded an extensive understanding of the manifestation of critical thinking in students' writing.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Interview Result

### Students' Attitudes Toward Writing and Initial Understanding of Critical Thinking

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 18 students of different writing skill levels, categorized as high, medium, and low. The interviews took place over three days and covered five main areas: students' writing background, understanding of critical thinking, planning and organizing ideas, developing arguments and reasoning, and concluding the text.

The students generally showed a positive attitude toward writing, though their level of enjoyment varied based on their familiarity with the topic and their emotional state. For example, Student 3 said, "Yes, I quite enjoy it because I have always liked writing." On the other hand, Student 13 noted that enjoyment depended on their mood: "So-so, if I'm in the mood, excited, I just enjoy writing." This suggests that students' motivation to write often relies on their personal interests and feelings.

When given writing assignments that require analysis and argumentation, students often felt confused at first. Most gradually adjusted once they understood the structure. Student 1 said, "At first, I was confused because I did not know how to write, but after understanding how it works, I could slowly work on it." This shows that writing analytically is not automatic for many students but can be learned through guidance and practice.

The findings also indicate a gap in students' understanding of critical thinking. Student 30 mentioned, "I've heard it a few times but I do not really know what it means. Maybe like thinking in a smart way?" Similarly, Student 31 guessed, "I do not know, maybe thinking to solve problems?" These answers show that while students recognize critical thinking as involving mental effort, they fall short of the deeper understanding expected from those who use critical analysis in their writing.

Nonetheless, students widely recognized the importance of critical thinking for writing, especially in analytical exposition texts. Student 26 stressed, "It's really important because analytical exposition needs arguments and analysis. If we do not think critically, we won't be able to analyze or explain the topic." While this suggests some understanding of its relevance, many students could not explain how they apply critical thinking in practice, such as comparing different views or evaluating evidence. This indicates a shallow understanding of the concept.

### Planning, Organizing, and Selecting Arguments

The findings show that most students take a systematic approach to the writing process. They typically begin by identifying the topic, narrowing it to a title, and then gathering supporting information. Students 15 and 26 described it as, "I have to know the theme first and then look for a title. After finding the title, I look for information about it. Once the information is ready, I just develop it." Meanwhile, Student 30 explained her initial approach as drafting the core content: "I usually make a draft from the core discussion of the title I took."

When organizing ideas, some students showed early signs of critical awareness. Student 26 explained, "I note which information is strong and which is weak, then I search for explanations and create an outline." This indicates an evaluative approach to selecting evidence, a key part of critical thinking. In contrast, Student 30 focused more on listing main points and expanding them, which shows basic organization skills but less evaluation depth.

Topic selection often came from personal experience, social relevance, or current issues. Student 19 said, “I thought of writing about stomach illness because I’ve experienced it myself.” Student 22 chose a theme based on its local relevance: “I picked a disease that many people around my house struggle with, so I could educate them.” Others like Student 25 picked topics based on popularity: “I chose the topic of mental health because it’s trending and people are talking about it.” These strategies show personal connection but few students considered the argumentative strength or scope of the topic, suggesting limited strategic thinking.

Most students selected evidence that was common, relatable, or widely discussed. Student 26 had one of the most thoughtful approaches: “I choose information that has a lot of explanations and is widely discussed, so I can get evidence from various perspectives. That way, my arguments will be more valid and trustworthy.” This reflects critical evaluation of credibility and diversity of sources. In contrast, Student 34 said, “I just write according to what is on Google. If it’s suitable, I use it,” showing a surface-level approach without deeper analysis.

Some students showed reflective thinking when asked how they verify the logic of their arguments. Student 30 said, “I read it over and over again to make sure it makes sense. If it’s not strong enough, I look for more reliable sources.” Meanwhile, Student 34 relied on popularity as proof: “When I Google it and most results say the same thing, I assume it’s strong and I use it.” These different responses highlight a range of reasoning skills, with some students depending on credible validation and others relying on quick shortcuts.

**Addressing Counterarguments and Writing Effective Conclusions**

One of the more advanced parts of critical thinking is how students handle opposing viewpoints. In this area, only a few students showed higher-level reasoning. Student 29 recalled an article that talked about the benefits of smoking. He chose not to include the counterpoint in his essay because it did not support his main claim, saying, “I read it carefully, but I didn’t pay much attention because the text I was writing didn’t need that information. I just used it as additional insight for myself.” This shows a developing understanding—recognizing contrasting views while keeping argumentative focus.

When asked how they conclude their texts, students mostly followed a summarization approach. Student 26 said, “I reread from the first paragraph, note the main ideas from each, and then combine them into the conclusion paragraph.” Student 35 used a similar method, adding a reflective touch: “I repeat the core content of the previous paragraphs, then add suggestions.” These responses indicate students understand conclusions should strengthen the essay’s central argument and provide closure.

Some students intentionally crafted strong conclusions. Student 13 said, “I use a strong conclusion to leave a strong and influential impression.” Student 15 added motivational elements: “I give words of encouragement and include the benefits of following my argument.” This shows awareness of the conclusion as a persuasive tool, not just a summary.

For reinforcing the main argument, Student 10 shared, “I add my personal opinion and review why this information is important to discuss.” In contrast, Student 17 expressed uncertainty: “I don’t seem to know what to answer.” This shows a range of ability levels, with some students reflecting and personalizing their conclusions while others still lack purpose and structure.

Peer and teacher feedback played a role in helping students assess the strength of their conclusions. Student 29 shared, “I reread the conclusion I had made, then asked my friends if it was enough to represent the content, and for more assurance I asked Mr. D (the teacher).” This practice of seeking feedback shows a strategy where students check their writing’s effectiveness through collaboration and reflection.

It can be concluded that while students recognize the importance of critical thinking in analytical writing, their understanding and application of it vary greatly. A few students displayed advanced skills like evaluating evidence, considering different perspectives, and

reflecting on counterarguments. However, many students operate at a surface level, relying on basic strategies and popular information without deeper analysis. These findings highlight the need for ongoing instruction in not just writing structure but also in developing critical literacy and evaluative reasoning skills.

**Students' Analytical Exposition Text Result**

The study examines how high school students show critical thinking skills through analytical exposition writing tasks. The researcher collected 36 analytical exposition texts and evaluated them using two rubrics: the Illinois Critical Thinking Skills Rubric (Finken & Ennis, 1993) and the Critical Writing Rubric (Abdelrahim, 2023). These rubrics assess eight indicators: application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. Each indicator is scored from 1 (very poor) to 3 (excellent), with a maximum score of 24. Based on the total scores, students were categorized as high (19–24), moderate (13–18), or low achievers (7–12).

**High Achievers**

Nine students were identified as high achievers. Their texts generally reflect well-developed arguments and effective use of evidence. An example is Student 13, whose essay titled "Say No to Alcohol" takes a clear stance against alcohol consumption. The essay organizes the argument into sections addressing the nature of alcohol, causes of addiction, its effects, solutions, and a call to action.

In terms of content, this student effectively applies knowledge and supports claims with medical and psychological insights. The breakdown of alcohol components, such as ethanol, acetaldehyde, and congeners, shows analytical skill. The student explains how alcohol affects the central nervous system and its role in addiction: "Ethanol is the main substance in alcohol that causes intoxication and disrupts the central nervous system. Acetaldehyde is a byproduct of ethanol metabolism that is toxic and can potentially cause cancer, especially in the liver and mouth."

Moreover, the student connects detoxification, therapy, and support groups into a cohesive treatment approach: "Detoxification is first, then therapy, especially Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, followed by the importance of peer support through groups like Alcoholics Anonymous." The student's evaluation is strong, arguing that rejecting alcohol is vital for health and social well-being. The conclusion emphasizes the need for awareness and prevention: "Say no to alcohol helps protect one's physical and mental well-being, strengthens social connections, and avoids the dangers of addiction." Despite strong content, the student's language contains grammar and spelling errors, such as "can potentially causes" and "comunity," which could be improved through proofreading.

**Moderate Achievers**

Twenty-six students fell into this category. Their essays showed critical thinking but were not as thoroughly developed as those of high achievers. Their texts often demonstrated effective application and analysis with some synthesis, but weaker evaluation. Example: Student 16 – "Flu and Cough Prevention" This essay revolves around four main arguments: reducing symptoms, preventing spread, avoiding complications, and improving quality of life. Each paragraph logically addresses one aspect and includes practical advice: "Proper treatment, such as adequate rest, drinking plenty of fluids, and using appropriate medications, can help reduce symptoms and make sufferers feel more comfortable." The student analyzes causes and consequences well, such as how ignoring the flu can lead to pneumonia. Synthesis appears in the integration of health practices and preventive behavior, but the evaluation is limited. The student encourages action but does not compare alternatives or explore counterarguments: "Handling flu and cough is very important. By taking the right steps, we can reduce symptoms, prevent the spread of disease, avoid complications, and improve quality of life." The organization is coherent, featuring a clear introduction, focused body paragraphs, and a conclusion that restates

the thesis. However, grammar and spelling errors, like “supperers” instead of “sufferers” and “essennal” instead of “essential,” detract from clarity.

Another example: Student 17 – “A Healthy Lifestyle” Student 17 writes about healthy habits, highlighting diet, exercise, and discipline. The essay shows basic application of health knowledge: “One of the main causes of illness is the habit of consuming unhealthy food.” However, the analysis and synthesis are relatively shallow. The student lists tips without connecting them to the thesis or explaining their interrelations: “1. Start by consuming the right food. 2. Regular exercise. 3. Get enough rest.” The evaluation is minimal, and the writing lacks deeper reasoning. The organization has abrupt transitions, and there is repetition. The essay also contains mechanical issues such as: “keyto” instead of “key to” “lifetyle” instead of “lifestyle” “being being consistent” (repetition). Nevertheless, the writer shows basic critical thinking in application and organization but needs improvement in the depth of analysis and clarity of expression.

**Low Achiever**

Only one student fell into the low achiever group: Student 34, who wrote “The Danger of Eating Late.” The writing is very short, underdeveloped, and shows minimal critical thinking. Content The student attempts to explain that skipping meals leads to health issues: “When you delay eating, your sugar drops, causing fatigue, headaches, and mood swings.” However, there is little analysis of how or why these symptoms occur, and the student provides no supporting data or elaboration. Synthesis is absent, and evaluation is completely lacking. The advice given is vague and unsupported: “My advice is not to eat late because it will reduce your energy…”

The ideas are disconnected, lacking logical flow and a clear argumentative structure. Organization and Language There is no thesis statement, paragraph development, or structured conclusion. Sentences are short and grammatically flawed. Vocabulary is basic and often inaccurate: “avarding” likely meant “avoiding” “food that are digest” should be “food that is easy to digest” “skiping” instead of “skipping” Capitalization is inconsistent (“Food,” “Such,” “Fruit”), and punctuation errors appear frequently. These mistakes disrupt coherence and readability. Conclusion

The findings show clear differences in how high, moderate, and low achievers demonstrate critical thinking. High achievers present strong arguments, good analytical depth, and logical structure but still need improvement in mechanics. Moderate achievers show a clear understanding and some reasoning but struggle with evaluation and consistent grammar. Low achievers lack depth, structure, and clarity, indicating the need for more direct instruction in analytical writing and critical thinking skills.

**Discussion**

**Student Critical Thinking Use**

In this study, critical thinking is defined based on Facione’s (2011) description, which focuses on purposeful, self-regulatory judgment involving skills like analysis, evaluation, and synthesis. The students' work showed signs of critical thinking at several stages of writing: during planning, constructing arguments, and concluding. Interviews revealed that students engaged in thinking processes like self-editing, collaborating with peers, and checking sources. However, many students admitted they were not familiar with the term “critical thinking,” although they naturally used some elements of it. This echoes Rohayati’s (2017) findings, which suggest that even university students often cannot define critical thinking but can still demonstrate it effectively in their writing.One strong insight is how students' motivation and engagement with writing depend on context. For example, Student 19 decided to write about stomach issues based on her personal experience, which made her more engaged with the topic. This shows that when students relate to the subject, they engage more deeply and improve their reasoning.

Another important finding is the influence of genre-based instruction (GBA). Students in this study, who received structured teaching, showed better awareness of genre elements, such as thesis statements, arguments, and summarization. This contrasts with findings in Supriyadi (2024), where older students struggled to structure their arguments coherently. This suggests that earlier and clear instruction about argumentative genres helps students better organize their ideas critically.

**Performance Levels and Patterns of Critical Thinking**

Based on rubric scores, students were divided into three groups: high achievers (19–24), moderate achievers (13–18), and low achievers (below 13). Each group displayed different abilities in using critical thinking in their analytical exposition texts.

**High Achievers**

High-performing students created clear and logical arguments. They supported claims with relevant evidence, used suitable vocabulary, and showed structural coherence. For instance, Student 13's text "Say No to Alcohol" illustrates this performance level well. She effectively used scientific knowledge by listing harmful substances in alcohol—ethanol, acetaldehyde, congeners—and connected them to social and health issues. Her explanation included not just facts but also synthesis and evaluation:

"Say no to alcohol helps protect one's physical and mental well-being, strengthen social connections, and avoids the dangers of addiction."

Additionally, students like Student 26 and Student 29 showed thoughtful strategies such as selecting evidence, avoiding logical fallacies, and making logical conclusions. They used conclusions not just as summaries but also to reinforce arguments with reflective or persuasive statements. This aligns with Toulmin's (2003) model of argumentation, where a claim is backed by data and justification, further supported by additional backing or rebuttal when necessary.

**Moderate Achievers**

Students in the moderate group could follow the expected genre structure but often lacked depth. While their arguments were mostly there, they sometimes did not provide strong justifications, rarely looked at different perspectives, and occasionally made overgeneralizations. For example, in Student 17's text about healthy living, statements like "Living healthy is simple and easy" were repetitive and unsupported. Although these students showed some application and basic analysis, their synthesis and evaluation were weak. This is similar to the findings of Marni et al. (2019), where students could create arguments but struggled to connect them critically.

The organization of ideas in moderate texts was functional, but transitions and logical flow were sometimes abrupt. Spelling and grammar errors were also more common here, such as using "supperers" instead of "sufferers" or "symproms" instead of "symptoms." Still, the overall intent of the writing remained clear.

**Low Achievers**

Only one student (Student 34) was classified as a low achiever. His text "The Danger of Eating Late" lacked development, used vague claims, and showed little engagement with the topic. For example:

"My advice is not to be late eating because it will reduce your energy…"

The essay did not have a clear thesis, included weak sentence structure, and had hardly any analysis or evidence. Furthermore, Student 34 thought that repeating facts from Google made them more credible, reflecting a misunderstanding of source reliability. This point is emphasized by Wineburg et al. (2016), who call for teaching digital critical literacy in education.

Most importantly, low-achieving texts showed little attention to counterarguments. Overall, the study found that very few students considered opposing views, which is a crucial step in dialectical reasoning. Only Student 29 mentioned another perspective, and even then, it was acknowledged without critique. This supports Kuhn's (1991) idea that young writers often

avoid the mental effort needed to address counterarguments.

**Language and Mechanics Across Levels**

Linguistic accuracy was closely linked to the clarity of arguments. High achievers had better control over grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics, which made their texts more readable and persuasive. Moderate achievers showed decent control but made frequent mechanical errors that sometimes obscured meaning. Low achievers struggled with subject-verb agreement, punctuation, spelling, and word choice, which significantly affected clarity. These findings support Turan et al. (2019), who argue that language skills and critical thinking development are closely related.

**Limitations Of The Study**

While the study provides useful insights, it has limitations. First, it focused on one tenth-grade class in a single public school in Sidoarjo, Indonesia. Therefore, the results may not represent all Indonesian high school students in different regions or school types.

Second, the study relied on student writings and interviews, which might not fully capture their thinking processes. Due to limited awareness of their own reasoning, students might struggle to explain how they plan or evaluate their arguments, making it hard to assess their true depth of thinking.

Third, students wrote under time pressure during class, likely limiting their ability to revise or think deeply, potentially underrepresenting their actual thinking skills.

Finally, the study only looked at analytical exposition texts. While these are good for assessing argumentation, they do not cover critical thinking across other writing genres, such as problem-solution, discussion, or narrative. Thus, general conclusions about critical thinking beyond this genre are limited.

## CONCLUSION

The results indicated that students displayed different levels of critical thinking. High-achieving students managed to present logical arguments, use relevant evidence, develop thoughtful conclusions, and follow the text structure well. In contrast, moderate achievers generally understood the structure but produced arguments that were shallow and lacked depth. Low-achieving students struggled to organize their ideas, rarely supported their claims, and often did not evaluate the reliability of the information they used.

Interview data showed that while most students could not clearly define "critical thinking," many unknowingly applied its elements. For example, they outlined their ideas, reviewed their writing, or consulted peers. Topics that were personally relevant led to deeper reasoning. A student who wrote about stomach problems based on personal experience, for instance, showed more thoughtful engagement with the subject.

Additionally, the study found that most students were not used to addressing opposing viewpoints in their writing. Only a few recognized alternative perspectives, and even fewer tried to refute them. This points to a lack of dialectical reasoning. The study also noted that students' digital literacy skills were limited; some believed that if information appeared frequently on Google, it must be true. This reflects a misunderstanding of credibility and highlights the need for instruction in evaluating online sources.

In conclusion, the study showed that tenth-grade students can demonstrate critical thinking in writing, though the level and consistency vary greatly. To support their growth, teachers should provide clear instruction on how to build logical arguments, evaluate evidence, and engage in reflective writing. Using rubrics that emphasize critical thinking indicators, along with promoting collaborative learning strategies like peer review and class discussions, can help students become more aware of their reasoning. This study also suggests future research opportunities on the impact of teaching methods, the role of writing genres, and the connection between reading and critical writing skills.

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