



APPRAISAL ATTITUDE IN STUDENTS' NARRATIVE WRITING: AN ANALYSIS OF EVALUATIVE ORIENTATION IN AN EFL CONTEXT

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Abstract

This study investigated the use of appraisal attitude resources in students' narrative texts to reveal their evaluative orientation and pedagogical needs in narrative writing. The topic is important because narrative writing is not only concerned with structure and grammar but also with how students construct evaluative meaning to engage readers and convey moral and emotional perspectives. The purpose of this study was to identify the types of appraisal attitude found in students' narrative texts, determine which attitude resources were most dominant, and explain what the dominance of particular resources reveals about students' evaluative orientation. The study employed a qualitative descriptive research design. The data consisted of students' narrative texts produced during regular classroom writing activities. The texts were analyzed using the appraisal framework, focusing on affective, judgmental, and appreciative resources. The findings showed that all three appraisal attitude subsystems were present in the students' narratives, although they were unevenly distributed. Judgment emerged as the most dominant attitude resource, followed by affect and appreciation. Capacity and tenacity were the most frequent judgment types, while inclination and happiness dominated affect. Appreciation appeared least frequently and was limited to reaction and valuation. These findings indicate that students tended to evaluate characters' actions and express basic emotions rather than develop reflective or aesthetic evaluations. The study concludes that appraisal analysis can serve as a diagnostic tool for understanding students' narrative writing and highlights the need for explicit instruction on evaluative language in narrative pedagogy.

Keywords: appraisal attitude, evaluative language, narrative writing, student writing

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INTRODUCTION

Narrative texts are an important genre in English language teaching at the senior high school level because they require students to organize events in sequence, develop characters, and express meanings through language. From a genre-based perspective, narrative writing is not only about telling a story but also about representing experience, showing relationships between characters, and conveying values or moral messages (Chambers, 2003; Keefe & Fisher, 2020; Sari, 2023). Therefore, students are expected not only to produce texts with correct structure, but also to express feelings, evaluate characters' actions, and position meanings within the story.

However, many studies in the Indonesian EFL context show that students' narrative texts, although structurally acceptable, tend to be limited in evaluative expression. Djatmika et al. (2024) reported that senior high school students were able to write narratives with clear structure and some emotive words, but their texts showed limited lexical variation and very little use of judgment to evaluate characters' behavior. Similar findings were reported by Hasanah et al. (2020), who found that students' narrative texts often showed weak characterization, minimal expression of feelings or judgments, and frequent use of empty adjectives and overly careful grammar. These findings suggest that students' problems in narrative writing are not only related to structure, but also to how they express interpersonal meaning.

Other studies have also identified linguistic problems that affect students' narrative writing. Prihandani (2023) found that many senior high school students made grammatical errors due to limited knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary, as well as interference from their first language. These errors reduced students' ability

to vary their language when writing narratives. In addition, Cahyani et al. (2024) reported that students often made errors in using grammatical cohesive devices, especially references, which caused problems in text clarity and comprehension. These issues may limit students' ability to develop ideas and evaluative meanings in their narratives.

Textbooks used in schools may also influence this condition. Kuncahya (2015) found that narrative texts in senior high school electronic textbooks showed strong lexical cohesion, with repetition as the most frequent cohesive device. While these texts provide good models of organization, they offer limited examples of how feelings or judgments can be expressed. As a result, students may learn how to organize narratives well but receive little support in developing evaluative language.

From the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics, this situation is related to limited control of interpersonal meaning. Interpersonal meaning refers to how language is used to express attitudes, evaluate behavior, and interact with readers (Badklang, 2022; Maharani & Samsi, 2024). Appraisal Theory provides a framework to analyze evaluative meaning in texts through three subsystems: attitude, engagement, and graduation (Martin & White, 2005). Among these subsystems, attitude—which includes affect, judgment, and appreciation—is especially important in narrative texts because narratives rely on emotional expression and moral evaluation of characters and events (Hart et al., 2018; Krieken et al., 2017).

Several appraisal-based studies on narrative writing have shown similar patterns. Research found that affect was the most dominant attitude resource in students' narrative texts, while judgment and appreciation appeared less frequently (Kurniawati et al., 2023; Putriyantina & Said, 2018). These studies also showed that students often relied on basic vocabulary and repetition when expressing feelings. Similar patterns were found in narrative texts from senior high school English textbooks (Magfiroh et al., 2021). Although these studies provide useful descriptions of evaluative language use, they mainly focus on identifying types and frequencies of attitude resources and do not further discuss what these patterns mean for students' evaluative orientation or learning needs.

Despite the increasing number of appraisal studies, research that examines appraisal attitude in senior high school students' narrative writing and interprets attitudinal dominance in relation to pedagogical needs is still limited, especially in the Indonesian EFL context. Many previous studies describe appraisal patterns without connecting them clearly to how students construct meaning or how teachers can respond to these patterns in instruction. This condition indicates a research gap that needs to be addressed.

Based on this background, the present study aims to analyze the types and distribution of appraisal attitude resources—affect, judgment, and appreciation—in senior high school students' narrative writing. In addition, this study seeks to examine how the dominance of certain attitude resources reflects students' evaluative orientation and limits their interpersonal meaning in narrative texts. By using appraisal analysis as a diagnostic tool, this study is expected to provide insights that can support teachers in improving narrative writing instruction in EFL classrooms. The study addresses the following research questions: (1) What types of appraisal attitude are found in students' narrative texts? (2) Which appraisal attitude resources are most dominant? and (3) What does the dominance of particular attitude resources show about students' evaluative orientation and pedagogical needs in narrative writing?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design with a discourse analysis approach. This design was selected because the study aimed to describe and interpret patterns of evaluative language in students' narrative writing rather than to test hypotheses or measure relationships between variables. Qualitative descriptive research is appropriate for studies that seek to provide a detailed account of linguistic phenomena as they naturally occur in texts (Creswell, 2013). In line with this orientation, discourse analysis was used to examine how students constructed interpersonal meaning through language choices in narrative texts, particularly through evaluative expressions.

The research was conducted during the second semester of the academic year at a public senior high school in Indonesia, where narrative writing is taught as part of the English curriculum. The participants were 25 senior high school students from one English class. They were selected using purposive sampling, as all participants had received instruction on narrative texts and were able to produce a complete narrative text independently. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research to select participants who are information-rich and relevant to the research objectives (Tajik et al., 2024). Each student produced one narrative text, resulting in a total of 25 narrative texts that served as the primary data source for this study. Data were collected through a classroom writing task administered during regular learning activities. Students were asked to write a narrative text based on a given topic within a specified time. The task was completed individually, and students were allowed to consult dictionaries during the writing process, as this practice reflects common classroom conditions for EFL learners. Allowing dictionary use was intended to reduce excessive lexical constraints and to enable students to focus on meaning construction rather than vocabulary recall alone. No other forms of assistance were permitted. All collected texts were treated as original student writing and were analyzed in their entirety.

Data analysis was guided by Appraisal Theory within the Systemic Functional Linguistics framework, with a specific focus on the attitude subsystem, which consists of affect, judgment, and appreciation (Martin & White, 2005). Appraisal Theory was chosen because it provides a systematic model for analyzing how writers express feelings, evaluate behavior, and assign value to phenomena, which are central aspects of narrative discourse. The analysis began with careful reading of each narrative text to understand its overall meaning and context. The texts were then segmented into clauses to facilitate the identification of evaluative expressions. Clauses and lexical items containing evaluative meaning were identified and classified into affect, judgment, or appreciation based on established definitions in Appraisal Theory. The frequency and distribution of each attitude type were examined to identify dominant patterns of evaluative language use. These patterns were subsequently interpreted in relation to the research questions in order to explain students' evaluative orientation and how it shaped their interpersonal meaning-making in narrative writing.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis, the categorization of evaluative expressions was conducted consistently by referring to theoretical descriptions of appraisal attitude categories. Repeated reading and rechecking of the data were carried out to reduce subjective interpretation, a strategy commonly recommended in qualitative text analysis (Miles et al., 2014). Representative excerpts from students' narrative texts were used to support analytical interpretations and to enhance transparency. Ethical considerations were also taken into account throughout the research process. Students' identities were anonymized, and the narrative texts were used solely for research and publication purposes with prior permission from the school and participants.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the study derived from the analysis of appraisal attitude resources found in students' narrative texts. The results are organized according to the research questions and are supported by tables that summarize the main findings. This section highlights the essential patterns identified in the data, while detailed theoretical interpretation is presented in the Discussion section.

Types of Appraisal Attitude Found in Students' Narrative Texts

The results show that students' narrative texts contain all three main subsystems of appraisal attitude, namely judgment, affect, and appreciation. Each subsystem was realized through several attitude types, although not all possible types were found in the data. As presented in Table 2, judgment was realized through normality, capacity, tenacity, and propriety. No instances of veracity were identified in the students' narratives. The presence of multiple judgment types indicates that students used evaluative language to assess characters' behavior, particularly in terms of ability and persistence.

Table 2. Distribution of Appraising Judgment

Types	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	Percentage (%)	
						Total	Frequency
Normality	1	0	2	0	0	3	12.5
Capacity	1	0	2	4	2	9	37.5
Tenacity	0	5	1	3	0	9	37.5
Veracity	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
Propriety	1	2	0	0	0	3	12.5
Total						24	100

In terms of affect, the students employed inclination, security, happiness, and satisfaction, as shown in Table 3. This indicates that students were able to express a range of emotional meanings related to desire, feelings of safety, joy, and fulfillment in their narratives.

Table 3. Distribution of Appraising Affect

Types	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	Percentage (%)	
						Total	Frequency
Inclination	0	0	2	2	1	5	35.7
Security	0	0	0	2	0	2	14.2
Happiness	2	0	0	0	3	5	35.7
Satisfaction	0	1	1	0	0	2	14.2
Total						14	100

With regard to appreciation, the students realized only reaction and valuation, while composition was not found, as presented in Table 4. This finding suggests that students valued events or objects mainly through immediate reactions rather than through structural or compositional evaluation.

Table 4. Distribution of Appraising Appreciation

Types	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	Total Frequency	Percentage (%)
Reaction	0	0	2	0	4	6	60.0
Composition	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
Valuation	3	1	0	0	0	4	40.0
Total						10	100

Dominant Appraisal Attitude Resources in Students’ Narrative Texts

In terms of overall dominance, a total of 48 appraisal attitude resources were identified across the students’ narrative texts. As summarized in Table 1, judgment emerged as the most dominant appraisal attitude, accounting for 24 occurrences (50%). This was followed by affect, with 14 occurrences (29.1%), while appreciation was the least dominant, with 10 occurrences (20.8%).

Table 1. Summary Distribution of Attitude

Attitude	Total Frequency	Percentage (%)
Affect	14	29.1
Judgment	24	50.0
Appreciation	10	20.8
Total	48	100

These results indicate that students relied more heavily on evaluating characters’ behavior than on expressing emotions or valuing events and settings in their narrative writing.

Evaluative Orientation Reflected by the Dominance of Appraisal Attitude Resources

The dominance patterns identified in Table 1–Table 4 reveal clear tendencies in students’ evaluative orientation. The prominence of judgment, particularly capacity and tenacity (Table 2), shows that students tended to evaluate characters mainly in terms of ability and persistence. The frequent use of inclination and happiness within affect (Table 3) indicates that emotional expression focused largely on desire and positive feelings. Meanwhile, the limited use of appreciation, especially the absence of composition (Table 4), suggests that students paid relatively little attention to valuing settings, events, or textual organization. Overall, these patterns show that students’ narrative writing was oriented more toward evaluating actions and expressing basic emotions than toward constructing more varied and reflective evaluative meanings.

The findings show that students employed all three appraisal attitude subsystems—judgment, affect, and appreciation—but with an uneven distribution. Judgment emerged as the most dominant attitude resource, followed by affect and appreciation. This dominance pattern answers the first and second research questions and suggests that students tended to evaluate narrative characters primarily through behavioral and moral assessments rather than through emotional depth or aesthetic valuation. From an appraisal perspective, judgment resources play a key role in positioning characters in relation to social norms and expected behaviors (Martin & White, 2005). The frequent use of judgment in students’ narratives therefore indicates that students were inclined to present stories as moral accounts, where characters are assessed based on what they do rather than how events are valued or atmospheres are constructed.

More specifically, the dominance of capacity and tenacity within judgment indicates that students focused on evaluating characters’ abilities and persistence. This pattern suggests that students conceptualized narrative characters mainly as agents who succeed, struggle, or persevere. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies on Indonesian EFL learners’ narrative writing, which show that students tend to rely on simple moral labels and behavioral evaluations when constructing narratives (Kumiawati et al., 2023; Putriyantina & Said, 2018). However, although judgment was frequent, its realization in the present study remained largely general and explicit, with limited elaboration. This confirms earlier observations that students’ narratives are often structurally acceptable but pragmatically flat, lacking nuanced evaluative development (Djatmika et al., 2024; Hasanah et al., 2020).

The use of affect as the second most dominant attitude resource further explains students’ evaluative orientation. Affect was mainly realized through inclination and happiness, indicating that emotional expression in students’ narratives centered on desire and positive feelings. This finding aligns with previous appraisal-based studies showing that affect tends to dominate students’ evaluative language due to its relative accessibility and

lexical simplicity (Haryudin et al., 2025). However, the limited range of affect types and the frequent repetition of basic emotional expressions suggest that students' emotional repertoire in narrative writing is constrained. This limitation may be attributed to restricted vocabulary knowledge and limited exposure to varied affective expressions in instructional materials, as also noted in studies on students' narrative writing difficulties in the Indonesian EFL context (Prihandani, 2023; Cahyani et al., 2024).

In contrast, appreciation appeared as the least dominant attitude resource, and its realization was restricted to reaction and valuation, with no instances of composition. This finding indicates that students paid relatively little attention to valuing settings, events, or textual organization. In Appraisal Theory, appreciation is crucial for constructing aesthetic and experiential meanings, particularly in narrative texts where atmosphere and setting contribute significantly to reader engagement (Martin & White, 2005). The absence of composition suggests that students rarely evaluated narratives in terms of balance, complexity, or organization, reinforcing the view that their narratives prioritize actions and feelings over reflective description. This pattern resonates with previous textbook-based and student-writing studies that report limited modeling of appreciation resources in narrative instruction (Kuncahya, 2015).

Taken together, these dominance patterns answer the third research question by showing that students' evaluative orientation in narrative writing is primarily action-centered and emotion-centered, rather than aesthetic- or reflection-oriented. This orientation helps explain why students' narratives often appear evaluatively shallow despite being structurally coherent. The findings suggest that students possess partial control of appraisal resources, particularly judgment and basic affect, but lack awareness and control of appreciation and more nuanced evaluative meanings.

From a theoretical perspective, this study confirms the applicability of Appraisal Theory as an analytical framework for uncovering evaluative patterns in students' narrative writing. The findings support previous appraisal-based research by demonstrating systematic dominance patterns across attitude subsystems, while also extending existing knowledge by highlighting how such dominance reflects students' evaluative orientation rather than mere frequency of language use. In this sense, the study reinforces the view that appraisal analysis can function as a diagnostic tool for understanding students' meaning-making practices in narrative texts.

Pedagogically, the findings imply that narrative writing instruction should move beyond teaching generic structure and grammar to include explicit instruction on evaluative language. Students need guided practice in expanding their use of judgment beyond capacity and tenacity, enriching affective expression with varied emotional meanings, and developing an appreciation to value settings, events, and narrative organization. Integrating appraisal awareness into narrative writing pedagogy may help students produce narratives with greater interpersonal depth and evaluative richness. These implications suggest that appraisal-informed instruction has the potential to improve not only students' linguistic performance but also their ability to construct meaningful and engaging narratives.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the types, dominance, and implications of appraisal attitude resources in students' narrative texts. As expected, the findings presented in the Results and discussed in the Discussion chapter demonstrate that students employed all three appraisal attitude subsystems—judgment, affect, and appreciation—although with an uneven distribution. The results confirm that judgment emerged as the most dominant appraisal attitude, followed by affect and appreciation, indicating that students' narrative writing was primarily oriented toward evaluating characters' actions and expressing basic emotions rather than constructing reflective or aesthetic meanings.

The dominance of capacity and tenacity within judgment, along with the frequent use of inclination and happiness within affect, shows that students relied heavily on accessible and explicit evaluative resources. Meanwhile, the limited use of appreciation, particularly the absence of composition, highlights students' difficulty in valuing settings, events, and textual organization. These findings align with the research objectives stated in the Introduction and provide clear empirical evidence of students' evaluative orientation in narrative writing.

Beyond identifying dominant appraisal patterns, this study contributes to the understanding of how appraisal analysis can function as a diagnostic tool in EFL narrative writing. The findings suggest that students possess partial control of evaluative language but require explicit pedagogical support to develop a more balanced use of appraisal resources. From an instructional perspective, integrating appraisal awareness into narrative writing pedagogy may help students expand their evaluative repertoire and produce narratives with greater interpersonal depth and coherence.

In terms of future research, further studies may explore the impact of explicit appraisal-based instruction on students' narrative writing development across different educational levels and genres. Longitudinal or experimental designs could provide deeper insights into how students' use of appraisal resources evolves.

Additionally, extending appraisal analysis to multimodal or digital narratives may offer broader perspectives on students' evaluative meaning-making practices in contemporary learning contexts.

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