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From “Spicing Up My Writing” to “Convincing My Supervisors”: EFL Learners’ Motivations for Using Promotional Language (‘Hypes’) in Academic Texts

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ABSTRACT

Background: The trend of promotional language (hypes) in academic discourse, such as *critical*, *robust*, *new*, *discover*, and *undoubtedly*, has raised concerns about the changing nature of scholarly communication. While previous studies have documented this trend in published texts, the motivations driving hype usage among developing academic writers, especially in EFL context, remain underexplored.

Purpose: This paper investigates Indonesian EFL learners’ use of hypes in theses and dissertations, examines their perceptions and the factors that motivate hype usage in unpublished academic texts.

Method: Through purposive sampling, we conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 12 Indonesian EFL learners whose theses and dissertations contained hypes, focusing on the intentions and reasons for using hypes. Hypes were analyzed using Millar et al.’s (2020) functional framework, and reflexive thematic analysis was conducted to identify motivational patterns underlying their usage.

Results: Through thematic analysis of in-depth interviews, this study reveals that participants generally viewed hypes positively and strategically used them across all functional categories, with a novel category targeting the research gaps. While viewing hypes positively as persuasive tools, they expressed concerns about appearing overconfident. Five external motivational factors were identified: supervisory expectations shaped by hierarchical power dynamics, audience awareness, AI tool influences, classroom instructions, and published writing conventions.

Conclusion: This study demonstrates that Indonesian EFL learners use hypes mainly to meet supervisory expectations rather than publication pressures. The findings offer three key theoretical contributions: first, that hype usage represents identity construction where EFL learners negotiate academic and cultural expectations; second, that power asymmetries in hierarchical context manifest linguistically through rhetorical compliance; and third, that AI tools now function as rhetorical agents alongside traditional human influences in academic discourse socialization.

KEYWORDS

academic identity; EFL learners; hypes; promotional discourse; reflexive thematic analysis; rhetorical stance

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INTRODUCTION

The spread of ‘publish or perish’ principle, which many scholars view as a negative and harmful pressure (Lambovska & Todorova, 2021), has contributed to making academic writing more promotional

(Millar et al., 2019; 2020; 2022; Hyland & Jiang, 2021a; 2021b). In addition, emerging technologies have enabled unprecedented schemes in research production and promotion (Raitskaya & Tikhonova, 2023), which further foster self-promotion in academic texts.



In academic texts, promotion can be identified through language that highlights and embellishes positive aspects of the text. In the literature, this phenomenon is commonly referred to as hype (Rinaldi, 2012; Millar, et al. 2019). The plural term, hypes, comprise any subjective language (Millar et al., 2019), such as descriptive words e.g., *excellent*, *sustainable*, *outstanding* (Scott & Jones, 2017), boosters and intensifiers e.g., *clearly*, *obviously*, *completely* (Hyland, 2005), emphatics e.g., *for sure*, *no way* (Hinkel, 2005), positive words e.g., *innovative*, *unique* (Vinkers et al., 2015), and theatrical words e.g., *reveal*, *discover* (Wheatley, 2014).

Most previous studies have focused on hypes in texts that belong to the high-stakes genre, such as published articles, high impact and grant submissions (e.g., Millar et al., 2019; 2020; 2022; Hyland & Jiang, 2021a; 2021b), with limited attention to the lower-stakes genre like unpublished theses and dissertations. These texts are written to convince supervisors and examiners while meeting institutional publication expectations, particularly in Indonesia, where competitive research funding supports student publication goals (Miasari et al., 2018; Arsyad, 2019). Such pressures may encourage writers to use hypes to accentuate research value and significance (Hyland & Jiang, 2021b) and to overstate the predicted outcomes of their work (Wäscher et al., 2020).

Our pilot analysis of hypes in Indonesian EFL learners’ theses did confirm a growing trend of hypes over the last ten years (Ishak et al., 2022). Hence, we speculated that the institutional requirement to publish was one of the factors contributing to the rise of hypes in this unpublished genre. However, this speculation remain untested as existing research on hypes has largely focused on frequency analysis rather than writer’s intentionality and reasons underlying hype usage. While studies like Millar et al. (2020) have begun to explore authors’ perspectives on hypes, studies into the motivational factors driving EFL writers’ use of hypes remain limited.

This gap is significant because writers’ rhetorical choices in academic discourse reflects the processes of identity construction and disciplinary socialization (Hyland, 2002; Ivanič, 1998). Therefore, understanding why EFL student-writers choose to use hypes can give some insights into how they position themselves as legitimate members of academic communities while navigating institutional expectations and cultural constraints.

To address the gap, the present study explores how student-writers perceive hypes in theses and dissertations, and why they choose to hype. Studies on sub-academic communities, such as the Indonesian EFL learners, where emergent academic writers are to gain more recognition through their academic works, are worthy of investigation. This is because such studies can give information about how the learners interact with and how they manage academic interactions in a wider academic community (Avena & Yumarnamto, 2022).

In addition, they can yield better understanding about learners’ preferred rhetorical practices in academic writing in order to meet the expectations of disciplinary communities in an international publication context (Martín & Pérez, 2014).

Furthermore, as most Indonesian EFL learners aim to enhance their international standing (Yannuar et al., 2014; Miasari et al., 2018), it is crucial to understand how and why hypes are used in their academic texts. This issue becomes more critical given the shift in international writing conventions from objective and impersonal to more interactive and interpersonal styles (Malmir et al., 2019). This study will investigate whether hype usage is encouraged by the desire for international recognition, as is common among other L2 writers (Martín & Pérez, 2014), or if the production of hypes is driven by other internal and external factors. These findings may help EFL learners make informed choices when using promotional language in theses and dissertations, especially when they aim to boost international recognition.

Given this background, this study explores hypes in theses and dissertations and the writers’ intentions when using hypes in these texts. Following Millar et al. (2020), this study investigates contributing factors to the use of hypes, including external and internal factors. To further investigate these issues, this paper aims to answer the following research questions.

RQ1: How do Indonesian EFL learners perceive hypes?

RQ2: What parts of the text are the most and least targeted by hypes?

RQ3: What are the factors that influence the writers to use hypes?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definitions of Hypes

Hypes are commonly defined as an overestimation of the significance of research findings, and focus more on the benefits than on the risks (Master & Resnik, 2011). They are often used in a hypercompetitive environment where writers are to increase their chances of having their work published and are usually shown by descriptive words (Scott & Jones, 2017). More broadly, hypes involve an exaggeration about the certainty of research findings, the promise of future application of the findings, and various beneficial aspects of science (Intemann, 2022). Millar et al.’s (2019) conceptualize hypes as “hyperbolic and/or subjective language that authors use to glamorize, promote, embellish and/or exaggerate aspects of their research” (p. 139). In this study, hypes encompass linguistic features that embellish research significance, design of the study, novelty, emphasize the credentials of the researchers, or simply reflect a positive attitude towards the results.

To explore hypes in the participants' academic texts, we compiled a set of lexical items that have been previously identified as hypes (e.g., Hyland, 2005; Hyland & Jiang, 2021b, McCarthy, 2015; Millar et al., 2019; 2020), such as *important, interestingly, critical, robust, new, discover, unveil, and undoubtedly*. While most of these studies mainly focused on the textual analysis of reports of randomized controlled trials (Millar et al., 2019), successful grant applications (Millar et al., 2022), highly cited articles (Hyland & Jiang, 2021a), and journal articles (Vinkers et al., 2015; Wang & Yang, 2015), the present study goes further by focusing on writers' intentions and motivations for using hypes. As Millar et al. (2020) argued, what should be further explored in the study of hypes is authors' intentions.

From a discourse analytic perspective, lexical items identified as hypes cannot be fully understood apart from the intentions that guide their use. To better understand how and why EFL learners use hypes in their theses and dissertations, this study draws on three complementary theoretical perspectives (see Table 1).

Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory, which focuses on how writers express attitude, judgement, and graduation, provide a lens for analyzing hypes as evaluative language that amplifies meaning through graduation. Swales' (1990) genre analysis approach helps explain strategic use of hypes at specific textual locations where writers must present the value and contribution of their work. Finally, Lillis and Curry's (2010) academic literacies framework conceptualizes academic writing as social practice that is shaped by power relations, cultural expectations, and institutional contexts. Taken together, these perspectives position hypes

not merely as lexical choices, but as rhetorical resources that writers use to meet disciplinary conventions, position their research, and negotiate their academic identities within complex sociocultural contexts.

Functions of Hypes

Previous studies have shown that hypes serve multiple promotional functions in academic texts. At the most basic level, they stress shared information (Hyland, 1999) and express authors' certainty in their claims (Hyland, 2005). More strategically, hypes amplify the novelty, scale, significance, and rigor of research projects, while conveying authors' evaluative stance (Millar et al., 2022). Additionally, hypes engage readers and draw more attention to the salient research features, which contributes to the readability and persuasiveness of claims by reinforcing interactivity (Hyland & Jiang, 2021a; Rinaldi, 2012).

These empirical findings align with the theoretical frameworks outlined above. Martin and White's (2005) graduation concept explains how hypes function as linguistic resources that allow writers to "turn the volume up or down" on their meanings, which makes them powerful tools for academic persuasion. From a genre perspective, Swales' (1990) CARS (Create a Research Space) model further shows why hypes may concentrate in specific textual locations. When writing academic texts, writers must establish territory, identify niches, and occupy those niches, all of which naturally invite the use of hypes. The strategic use of hypes thus reflects writers' genre awareness and their attempts to fulfill communicative purposes within established rhetorical structures.

Table 1

Theoretical Frameworks for Analyzing Hypes and Motivations to Hype in Academic Writing

Theoretical framework	Key concepts	Relevance to the concept of hypes	Contribution to analysis	Application to EFL learners' writing
Appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005)	Attitude. Judgement. Graduation. Evaluative language.	Views hypes as evaluative resources that amplify meaning through graduation	Provides a basis for analyzing how writers express their stance and intensify their claims	Explains how EFL learners use graduation to strengthen evaluative positions in theses and dissertations
Genre analysis (Swales, 1990)	CARS model. Rhetorical moves. Communicative purposes. Discourse community expectations.	Explains strategic placement of hypes in textual locations	Shows why hypes are likely to concentrate in particular sections and serve genre-specific functions	Reveals how EFL learners navigate disciplinary conventions and rhetorical structures through hype usage
Academic literacies framework (Lillis & Curry, 2010)	Social practice. Power relations. Cultural. Expectations. Institutional contexts.	Conceptualizes hypes usage as shaped by sociocultural factors, including supervisory relationships, assessment criteria, and institutional pressures	Contextualizes linguistic manifestations of hypes within social practices and power dynamics	Explains how Indonesian institutional contexts, publication pressures, and cultural expectations influence EFL students' hype usage

However, as emphasized by Lillis and Curry (2010), linguistic choices of writers cannot be separated from the social practices and power relations that shape academic writing. The institutional contexts in which theses and dissertations are produced, including supervisory relationships, assessment criteria, institutional and cultural expectations may influence how and why EFL writers use hypes. From these frameworks, it is apparent that hype usage reflects complex negotiations between individual rhetorical goals and socio-cultural constraints.

Ethical Debates of Hype Use

Despite their functions, the promotional nature of hypes has generated few concerns in academic communities. This is because the central feature of hypes is exaggeration (Intemann, 2022) and exaggerating is rarely considered a good thing (Rinaldi, 2012). Scott and Jones (2017) argued that scholars need to acknowledge that misinterpretation of findings through hype words such as *excellent*, *remarkable*, and *extraordinary* is a serious matter for scientific integrity and a disturbing trend in scientific writing.

In addition, Millar et al. (2022) argued that some rhetorical devices that function as hypes fall under the concept of spin (see Boutron et al., 2010), which potentially misreport and misrepresent research findings. Even though hyperbolic use of language is basically a natural tendency in human speech, it may lead to “a distortion of the truth” when used in texts (Leech, 1983, p. 148) and can damage the credibility of the texts (Hinkel, 2005). It may also undermine the real importance and objective of a study, subjugate authors’ attitude (Millar et al., 2020; Hyland & Jiang, 2021a), and bias readers’ interpretation of knowledge (Millar et al., 2019).

Another concern about hypes is they may create some air of excitement (Wheatley, 2014). For example, the word *reveal* in research articles, although grammatically correct, can give more dramatic effect compared to less emotive words such as *show*, *indicate*, or *tell*. Wheatley argued that claims such as “*We have revealed for the first time...*” is irritating because despite its truth, the authors declare themselves “as true pioneers by making prior claims, when the whole purpose of a primary research paper is to communicate new findings” (p. 14). Additionally, when hypes are used too frequently, they can become cliché and jargon-like to the point that they lose their force.

Existing Studies on Hype Use in EFL Contexts

In the last two decades, there have been some studies that investigate the linguistic manifestations of hypes in various texts within academic genre (e.g., Hinkel, 2005; Master & Resnik, 2013; Rinaldi, 2012; Martín & Pérez, 2014; Wheatley, 2014; Scott & Jones, 2017). These studies suggest that the linguistic manifestations of hypes differ from one text type

to another, and that certain parts of the text have a different range of hypes. Recent studies on hypes such as Millar et al. (2019, 2020, 2022), Moreno (2021), and Hyland and Jiang (2021a, 2021b) indicated a growing number of hypes used in academic texts over the years. What can, and should, be explored further, according to Millar et al. (2020), is writers’ reasons to employ hypes.

The answers to why writers hype can be elicited in two ways. The first approach is by examining what prior research indicates about the possible factors that foster hypes in academic texts. Literature on hypes have revealed that in academic texts, hypes are generally associated with the intentions to portray research in a positive light and gain public support for research (Master & Resnik, 2011). These tendencies can also be better understood by referring to the perspectives that view academic writing as socially constructed, where writers must navigate individual, local, institutional, and global expectations that shape how they present their work (Swales, 2004; Lillis & Curry, 2010). The second, more crucial, approach involves gaining direct insights to writers’ perspectives through in-depth interview. Unfortunately, this approach remains limited in hype research, with Millar et al. (2020) being among the few studies to use it.

Using in-depth interviews, Millar et al. (2020) interviewed writers of medical research articles who published research reports containing hypes. The study found that the reasons for hype are multifaceted and may be influenced by internal and external factors such as writers’ struggle for objectivity, interventions from editors, linguistic ability and replication of academic writing conventions. Furthermore, less sensitivity to the evaluative nuances of certain words among some non-native speakers of English, local context, and local academic cultures may also play a part. To confirm these findings, they suggest further studies to investigate “the language choices of authors from different backgrounds working in different contexts (p. 62)”, which the present study attempts to address.

METHOD

Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a purposive sampling method to explore hypes in Indonesian EFL learners’ theses and dissertations and the motivations and factors that influence their uses. For this purpose, our participant selection included both current students and alumni from the English Language Education (ELE) program at Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia. This is to ensure maximum representational diversity in academic writing practices. This approach allowed us to capture a broader spectrum of academic writing experiences and contexts, rather than limiting our analysis to a specific timeframe or cohort.

Semi-structured interviews and text analysis were used as the primary data collection instrument. The interviews were done to gain deeper insights into the students' perceptions, reasons, and decision-making process when using hypes that textual analysis alone could not reveal. The interview guide (see Appendix) was adapted from Millar et al.'s (2020) study on why authors of medical papers choose to hype. Additionally, the use of interviews aligns with our exploratory research objective of understanding the contextual factors that influence the use of hypes rather than generating broadly generalizable findings. Through means of a purposive sampling method, 12 students were selected and interviewed. This sample size and approach align with common practices in qualitative research, particularly those involving interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This sample size also follows Sandelowski (1995) who recommends that qualitative sample sizes be large enough to yield rich, new understandings of the studied phenomenon, yet small enough to allow for deep, case-oriented analysis.

The number of participants was also determined based on the principle of data saturation (Saunders et al., 2018). We found that after the ninth interview, there were no new themes emerged, which confirmed that informational redundancy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) has been achieved. We continued the interviews with another three participants to confirm this data saturation. This approach is consistent with qualitative research principles, where the focus is on depth and quality of data rather than quantity or generalizability (Patton, 2015). The data collected from the interviews are read and analyzed by two of the authors to categorize the factors that influence students' use of hypes. This practice also confirms saturation as the interview transcriptions are reordered and reanalysed several times (Constantinou et al., 2017).

Lastly, it is important to note that the limitation of this study is that it does not aim to generalize findings to all EFL learn-

ers or academic writing contexts. Instead, the intention is to provide a detailed, context-specific understanding of how hypes are perceived and why they are used in this particular setting. Thus, this study attempts to give some insights into a previously less explored area of academic writing among Indonesian EFL learners, which can serve as a foundation for future, more extensive studies in this field.

Classification of Hypes in Theses and Dissertations

As previously stated, this study is guided by Millar et al.'s (2019) concept of hypes. To identify hypes in the participant papers, we compiled a list of lexical items previously identified as hypes, which is largely based on the sources of hype in Hyland and Jiang (2021). Of these hypes were boosters and attitude markers (Hyland, 2005), positive words (Vinkers et al., 2015), and superlatives (McCarthy, 2015). We extended the list by including theatrical words (Wheatley, 2014), conversational intensifiers and overstatements (Hinkel, 2005), hyperbolic terms and hype items (Millar et al., 2019, 2020, 2022).

To ensure these items functioned as hypes, we established exclusion criteria: words were excluded if 1) they were supported by immediate justification (e.g., statistical evidence, expert validation, or pilot study findings), 2) they appeared in quotations from previous studies, or 3) they were extracted from interview excerpts. To code hypes in the participants' writings, we used Millar et al.'s (2020) five functional categories (Table 2). The sixth category, Research Gap (RG), was added based on our pilot analysis of the sample writings to capture instances where authors emphasized gaps in existing research to justify their work.

The process of assigning hypes to these categories was conducted collaboratively by two of the authors. Both coders independently applied Millar et al.'s (2020) framework to the

Table 2

Hypes' Functional Categories

Hype target	Definition	Example
Research Topic (RT)	comprises hypes referencing the overall domain of study and/or the specific research topic	<i>importantly, critical</i>
Research Method (RM)	comprises hypes targeting materials and methods used in the study, including the research design and the qualifications of the researchers themselves.	<i>experienced, certified, correct</i>
Research Outcome (RO)	refers to hypes that emphasise a positive aspect of the results	<i>importantly, highly</i>
Research Primacy (RP)	comprises hypes that refer to the research as superior or assign it priority, often in terms of newness	<i>notable, unique</i>
Research Conclusion (RC)	comprises hypes that magnify the implications of the results,	<i>essential, appropriate</i>
Research Gap (RG)	emphasized gaps in existing research to justify their work	<i>very, abundant, few</i>

Note. Adapted from Millar et al. (2020)

corpus of 12 participants’ papers using a manual coding. Although each instance of hype was carefully examined and categorized based on its context within the text, discrepancies still occurred in several cases, which primarily involved borderline instances where context determined hype functions. These discrepancies were resolved through several rounds of discussions. This process involved rereading the original text and revising the initial coding results. This approach ensured that the final categorization of hypes was as accurate and consistent as possible. The example of hype identification and classification can be found in Appendix 2.

Participant Selection

To investigate the motivations and factors influential to the use of hypes in theses and dissertations, 12 Indonesian EFL learners were selected through purposive sampling (Palys, 2008). Open-ended interview questions, which are useful for generating richer data (Ogden & Cornwell, 2010), were used, making the sample size sufficient to answer the research questions. As noted by Morse (2000), fewer participants are needed when more detailed data is collected from each individual.

Participants were selected based on three criteria: 1) they had written or were currently writing a thesis or dissertation, 2) they consented to be interviewed, confirmed by signed consent forms, and 3) they used hypes in their academic writing, as proven by a preliminary analysis of their work. Twelve student writers meeting these criteria participated in semi-structured interviews. They were fully responsible for writing their theses or dissertations and are anonymized in this paper as S1 to S12. All specialized in English Language Education, were native Bahasa Indonesia speakers, and used English as a foreign language. The group included two undergraduates, five master’s graduates, one current master’s student, and four second-year PhD students. Except for one, all participants worked as English teachers in high schools or universities in Indonesia.

Interviews

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted between January and March 2024, both in person and online via Zoom, with follow-up clarifications through WhatsApp to ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions. Each interview lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. Prior to the interviews, participants signed informed consent forms, agreeing to the interviews and the analysis of their writing. We identified hypes in their theses and dissertations, coded and categorized them based on Millar et al.’s (2020) five functional categories, as explained earlier. These highlighted hype instances informed the development of the interview protocols.

During the interviews, participants were shown the highlighted hypes in their writing and asked the questions in the

interview protocol (Appendix 1), which explored two main questions: 1) what they intended to communicate, and 2) why they chose those specific words. Follow-up questions explored their perspectives, expectations, and decision-making process regarding the use of hypes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, with transcriptions sent back to participants for review and clarification. Following interview transcription and verification with participants, we conducted thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006) to identify key themes related to the reasons and factors that influence hype usage.

Taking an inductive approach, we conducted line-by-line coding without predetermined themes (see Appendix 3). During this process, we assigned descriptive codes such as ‘supervisor influence’, ‘competitive pressure’ and ‘classroom instruction’. This coding process involved iterative refinement over several weeks, with regular consultation to ensure consistency. To improve trustworthiness, we employed prolonged engagement with the data over several months and maintained regular discussions throughout the analytical process to ensure the emerging themes accurately reflected the complexity of participant experiences.

It is important to note, however, that interpretive member checking was not implemented given the sensitive nature of discussing self-promotional behaviors, where participants might feel reluctant to validate findings that could appear professionally compromising. Instead, we employed alternative validation strategies: triangulation with textual analysis of participants’ actual academic writings, documentation of analytical decisions, and ongoing team consultation during interpretation phases.

RESULTS

The results are presented in three sections which correspond to the research questions. First, we examine how Indonesian EFL learners perceive hypes in academic writing. Second, we analyze which parts of academic texts are most and least targeted by hypes. Finally, we explore the factors that influence writers’ decisions to use hypes. This structure provides a systematic investigation of participants’ attitudes, practices, and the contextual forces shaping their use of promotional language in academic discourse.

Participants’ Perceptions on Hypes

Positive

Generally, eight participants had a positive view on hypes. These participants were aware of the concerns surrounding hypes, but believed that their benefits outweigh the concerns. S7 believed that hypes could make a text attractive. S12 also stated that hypes have a marketing force.

- [1] "If I didn't use hypes, I'm afraid my writing would sound monotonous. People nowadays like these kinds of words. Using hypes helps us as authors get as many readers as possible." (S7)
- [2] "Words and phrases that embellish parts of our research work basically add colors to our writing. This type of diction has a marketing force, so it is important to use it as it can attract as many readers as possible. I think authors should be able to promote the positive aspects of their work to have large readership and citation." (S12)

Similarly, S3 noted that hypes are linguistic features necessary to make a research report interesting to read.

- [3] "Academic texts can be so boring and heavy to read, so we need to add some spice and it can be done through hypes. They spice up my writing." (S3)

S4 and S8 described the way hypes helped them during thesis and dissertation supervisory. Hypes emphasizing the research strengths could persuade their supervisors and board of examiners, and serve as a 'signpost' that easily direct supervisors' attention to certain parts of the text.

- [4] "I think they [hypes] are necessary in academic texts. These words help me get my thesis approved. As a writer, I think it is important to show what's so good about our work so that people will be convinced that it is worth reading." (S4)
- [5] "I don't think supervisors have the time to read everything in my thesis. Using hypes can help them locate the important points quickly and focus on those." (S8)

Ambivalences

Three participants reported to have some ambivalences when using hypes. S6 mentioned that the ambivalences in using hypes came from concerns about projecting overconfident authorial voice.

- [6] "When hypes are overused, then the author is certainly exaggerating. Science must be communicated as it is. But if hypes are used in moderation and in the right place, then it's okay. They can be useful for convincing readers and attract them to our work, but overusing these words can make the authors sound overconfident." (S6)

In a similar line, S9 and S11 pointed out the need for moderation when using hypes to avoid appearing overconfident, and for argumentation and supporting piece of evidence to justify their uses.

- [7] "Overhying is bad, but not hying at all is also bad. As a writer we must be mindful about how much we can use them. Hypes will be meaningless if we fail to provide argumentation and supporting evidence. Overhying our claims will make us appear overconfident. Not using them at all can make the arguments sound weak and hence, unattractive to readers." (S9)
- [8] "When we use hypes, it is important to think about the supporting evidence. Using too many hypes can look like we fabricate things, so it is important to base the hyped claims on facts." (S11)

Negative

Only one participant (S5) held a negative view on hypes. This view was influenced by his personal experiences and reflections as a reader of academic works.

- [9] "I often read papers that contained hypes and when I read the whole text to check if hyped claims were proven, I found nothing. It turned out that the research was not as 'in-depth' as it claimed, which was disappointing. It felt like false marketing when the real product is far from the hyped claims made in the paper." (S5)

Parts of the Text Targeted by Hypes

The frequency distribution shows a clear pattern of hypes in participants' texts (Table 3). The high frequency of hypes targeting the research topic reflects participants' primary concern with establishing research relevance. As S12 explained: "*I want to show that this topic is really important nowadays, because it is used in everyday life. This is my way of making the readers interested to read my dissertation*" [10]. Similarly, S9 deliberately escalated from "important" to "crucial" to "*show readers that this was more than just important*". [11].

Hypes targeting the research method constituted the second-largest category. Using these hypes, participants emphasize procedural rigor to show their credibility. S8 noted: "*I explicitly mentioned the advantage of using this method because I want to show the readers that my research was on the right track*" [13], while S9 emphasized showing "*how careful I was as a researcher*" [14].

Furthermore, we identified three distinct rhetorical functions from the analysis. Justification strategies (Topic, Gap) legitimized research urgency; validation strategies (Method, Outcome) established trustworthiness and promoted applicability; differentiation strategies (Primacy, Conclusion) reinforced innovation and research value.

Participants demonstrated high audience awareness. Hypes targeting the research gap specifically anticipated thesis supervisors and examiners' questions related to justification for conducting the study. In contrast, outcome-focused hypes targeted audiences who are practitioners. S7 explained that emphasizing the technique proposed in her thesis was necessary because she "*wanted the technique to be used by teachers and pre-service teachers*".

Hypes targeting the research conclusion and primacy had the lowest frequency but served emphasis functions. S6 argued that readers "*needed to be ensured that the technique is really beneficial*" even when benefits had been previously stressed. The primacy-focused hypes appeared exclusively in studies using research and development design, where participants like S2 used the term "potential revolution" to "*sell the product or idea*" [17].

Table 3*Parts of Theses and Dissertations Targeted by Hypes*

Target	Frequency	Range	Sample hypes	Hyped claims	Primary function	Key motivation
Research Topic	39	11/12	<i>crucial; fundamental; important; paramount, urgent</i>	This study is <i>paramount</i> for the continuity of the subsequent research... [S1]	establish significance, show relevance	convince readers of importance
Research Method	22	10/12	<i>careful; comprehensive; deeper</i>	I will make a <i>careful</i> analysis both for discussing verbs and rhetorical moves... [S9]	show rigor	demonstrate research(er) credibility
Research Outcome	16	8/12	<i>many; successfully; significantly</i>	In the field of TEFL, the use of ICT has been demonstrated to have <i>many</i> benefits for both learners and teachers. [S10]	promote results	encourage application
Research Gap	7	5/12	<i>abundant; very</i>	There has been so far <i>very</i> limited research showing this activity... [S3]	emphasize urgency	justify research rationale to supervisors and examiners
Research Conclusion	3	2/12	<i>successfully; easy</i>	The implementation of making connection technique <i>successfully</i> achieved the criteria of success... [S6]	reaffirm benefits	reinforce product value
Research Primacy	3	3/12	<i>new</i>	This research will give a <i>new</i> insight on how GOs might be tailored to specific learning styles... [S12]	highlight innovation	establish novelty, encourage adoption

Factors Influencing the Production of Hypes

Our analysis revealed five external factors that foster EFL learners' use of hypes: supervisory expectations, audience awareness, digital writing tools, classroom instruction, and published writing conventions.

Supervisory Influence and Gatekeeping

Supervisory expectations emerged as the primary reason for hype usage. These expectations were either in the form of explicit directives or implicit modeling. Participants like S1 and S12 described using hypes in direct response to supervisory feedback about research significance and argumentative strength.

[18] “My supervisor used to question my research’s significance during supervision. By hyping the research significance, I could persuade her to approve my arguments and allow me proceed to thesis defense. If I did not emphasize the research significance, I was afraid I might have to revise the entire manuscript.” (S1)

[19] “Since then, my choice of promotional words aligns with their expectations, simply because I want my work to be approved by my supervisors. If I do not highlight the important parts from my work, my supervisors won’t approve it.” (S12)

Sometimes supervisors’ expectation about how much promotion should be used was not explicitly stated. When this happened, participants would observe their supervisors’

published works and senior students’ theses to decode acceptable promotional styles. By doing so, they were able to follow their writing styles, especially their uses of hypes. As S2 described:

[20] I used to read my supervisors’ published works just to observe the promotional language used in their work, so I can understand what and how positive aspects were highlighted. (S2)

The influence of supervisors on the use of hypes in student theses and dissertations goes beyond a matter of their expectations about which hype words to use and which part to hype. Their presence during face-to-face supervisory has created pressures. S6 and S3 described that the heightened pressure came from established relationships as well as supervisory expectations.

[21] “During face-to-face supervisory, I would get comments about my work right away. This gave me more pressure. My advisors were also my lecturers, with whom I have had a close relationship throughout the years. They knew the quality of my undergraduate thesis, so if I failed to show the strengths of my master’s thesis, it would be embarrassing.” (S6)

[22] “I would always picture who would read my thesis and that would be my supervisors. Sometimes I pictured how they would respond to my work during supervisory and that made me overthinking. I was always aware that I would be judged from my work.” (S3)

Furthermore, supervisors’ gatekeeping roles directly determine how much hypes are allowed, as stated by S7, or if they

are allowed at all, as mentioned by S5, which demonstrates supervisors' power over students' rhetorical choices.

- [23] "During consultation with my supervisors, they were all aware that the technique that I proposed in my thesis was new. They asked me to emphasize the benefits of this technique more to persuade the readers." (S7)
- [24] "I didn't really have the intention to hype certain parts of my thesis and I had supervisors who thought the same way. If they were the type that encourage the supervisees to do so, then I might have used hypes." (S5)

Audience Awareness

Participants' use of hypes reflect their awareness of multiple readerships and identity concerns. The anticipation of evaluation from supervisors, colleagues, and peers, as articulated by S2 and S4 below, has generated pressure to demonstrate competence through strategic emphasis.

- [25] "I would feel embarrassed if my work lacked good quality, as it would be read by my supervisors and colleagues." (S2)
- [26] "Sometimes the pictures of people who would read my work, like supervisors, my fellow teachers, and future university students, or other researchers make me quite pressured. I need to be really convincing so I can catch up to their level of expectations, which inevitably influenced my decision to hype" (S4)

Audience awareness also manifested in some kind of defensive strategies, with participants like S9 anticipating perceived methodological weaknesses and S11 ensuring clarity for readers who were not familiar with her research topics.

Digital tool Influence

This theme captures the role of (digital) writing tools and resources in shaping participants' hype usage. Participants explained that their use of hypes is sometimes influenced by AI tools, which often suggest options for word choices. To vary their diction and avoid repetition, they used dictionaries, thesauruses, and AI tools like Grammarly and Quillbot. While the final decision to follow these suggestions rests with the writers, the presence of these recommendations demonstrates the tools' impact on their use of hypes. S10 narrated as follows.

- [27] "When writing some claims in my dissertations, I used Grammarly and Quillbot to help me paraphrase my own sentence. But I was not dependent ...and very selective with the words that they suggest." (S10)

This influence highlights how AI tools subtly shapes academic discourse toward more promotional language. By offering more persuasive or emphatic word choices, these tools may have led writers towards a style that emphasizes the strengths and significance of their research.

Classroom Instruction

This theme addresses how the decision to hype or not comes from academic instruction. The analytic logic focuses on participants' accounts of how promotional strategy is explicitly addressed in classroom settings rather than solely during individual supervisory meetings. Participants mentioned that their decisions to use or avoid hypes in their theses and dissertations were also influenced by research courses they took. For instance, S9 and S10 had a similar experience of being advised by their professors in proposal development course to avoid making overly hyped claims and using strong words like *must* and *no* as in *we must* or *there is no study*.

- [28] "As far as I remember, my own supervisors did not really comment on my use of hypes. It was the professor in the Dissertation Proposal Seminar course who reminded us to avoid making claims that are too extreme." (S9)
- [29] "In terms of my choice of words, including hypes, I always try to not make claims that are too strong, like *we must*. I got this advice from my professor in class." (S10)

Public Writing Conventions

This theme examines how participants deliberately model promotional strategies of published authors. S6 noted that she would often imitate the way published writers structure their arguments and the type of language used their works to make her thesis appealing for readers. Similarly, S10 stated that the use of hypes in her dissertation was mostly influenced by the research papers she had read. Whenever her peers successfully published their work in journals, she would read and observe the language used in their work and try to imitate them. This replication represents deliberate engagement into disciplinary discourse conventions.

DISCUSSION

This study explores Indonesian EFL student-writers' perspectives on hypes, their strategic use across textual locations, and the factors that shape their use in theses and dissertations. Overall, Indonesian EFL student-writers generally viewed hypes positively, though some voiced concerns about the risks of overusing them. Despite the ambivalences, hypes were found to concentrate on research topic. This particular finding aligns with Arianto et al. (2023), who found that appeals to salience was the most common promotional strategy used by Indonesian authors writing in Indonesian or English.

Drawing on Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory, Swales' (2004) genre analysis, and Lillis and Curry's (2010) academic literacies framework, the following sections exam-

ine three emerging issues in the motivations underlying the use of hypes.

Supervision as Gatekeeping: Power Dynamics and Rhetorical Compliance

The most significant finding of this study is perhaps the central role of supervisory expectations in shaping students' use of hypes, which reveals supervision as a gatekeeping practice that has a direct influence on students' promotional rhetoric. This finding extends beyond simple compliance to reflect how hierarchical power relations, as theorized by Lillis and Curry (2010), shape students' use of hypes in their academic writing. As supervisors are likely to occupy a higher rank and greater knowledge, students often find themselves in a subordinate position (Deirich, 2023; Zhang & Hyland, 2021). Besides, the hierarchical nature of supervision cannot be fully eliminated, which makes supervisory relationships inherently imbalanced (Nangimah & Walldén, 2023). This asymmetrical power explains why participants in this study reported a higher pressure in promoting their theses and dissertations to the supervisors, compared to writing articles for publication.

The cultural context is particularly significant in this case. It is worth noting that based on Hofstede's cultural dimension, Indonesia scores 78 on Power Distance, which reflects significant power dynamics and causes hierarchical pattern (Liyanti, 2019). This hierarchical structure extends to Indonesian educational system which prioritizes respecting authority figures, including teachers and supervisors. In academic writing, this manifests through students' heightened awareness of supervisory approval, which leads to what can be understood as rhetorical compliance, that is, a strategic use of hypes to align with supervisory and institutional expectations. Thus, unlike the competitive publishing environment described by Scott and Jones (2017) and Hyland and Jiang (2021a; 2021b), where hypes often emerge from pressures to publish, the thesis and dissertation context reveals supervision as a site of discourse socialization where students learn disciplinary conventions through asymmetrical power negotiations.

As discussed in the earlier part of this paper, our diachronic study of hypes in Indonesian EFL learners' theses revealed an increase in promotional language, particularly in the year when publishing parts of theses in reputable journals became mandatory (Ishak et al., 2024). Nevertheless, findings from the present study suggest that this increase is not directly related to the competition to publish, which negates our initial speculation. Instead, participants indicated that their use of hypes was primarily motivated by supervisory expectations, rather than to succeed in journal publication or secure research funding.

Additionally, face-to-face meetings with supervisors add to the pressure, as students must be prepared to answer

questions directly. This heightened pressure may also be attributed to their personal relationships with the supervisors with whom they strive to maintain harmony, which is valuable in a collectivistic society like Indonesia (Hofstede, 1991). The participants' accounts of using hypes to catch up to their level of expectations and avoid embarrassment reveal the identity work embedded in promotional language choices. This aligns with Swales' (1990) understanding of genre as social action, where writers must fulfill communicative purposes as well as position themselves appropriately within disciplinary communities.

This tension between individual rhetorical choices, supervisory and institutional demands, though explored here in the Indonesian context, is likely to surface in other EFL contexts characterized by hierarchical academic cultures. In Iran, for example, the teacher-student relationship remains highly asymmetrical, with students occupying a largely passive role (Yusofi et al., 2018). Similarly, Chinese students often report authoritative supervisory interactions which limits dialogic negotiation of ideas (Huang et al., 2023). These supervisory dynamics may exert similar rhetorical pressures. It is plausible that in such settings, students also strategically use hypes not only to meet academic expectations but also to preserve interpersonal harmony and secure institutional success.

Identity Negotiation through Hypes

The participants' articulation of audience awareness (i.e., anticipating supervisors, peers, and future practitioners) demonstrates what Martin and White (2005) describe as heteroglossic engagement, where writers put themselves in relation to multiple voices and perspectives. Students' use of hypes to target different audiences reflect their understanding of academic writing as a social practice that requires careful navigation of competing expectations and identity positions.

Particularly important is the finding that students who employed research and development design tend to concentrate hypes on research outcomes and primacy, with the intention to sell the product or idea to encourage adoption. This reveals genre-specific identity positioning, where student-writers adopt entrepreneurial identities alongside academic ones. Such positioning challenges traditional boundaries between objective academic discourse and promotional communication, which suggests that contemporary thesis writing involves multiple, sometimes conflicting, identity negotiations.

Furthermore, the ambivalent attitudes expressed by some participants, who recognize both benefits and risks of hypes, indicate developing rhetorical sophistication. Their concerns about appearing overconfident and damaging credibility demonstrate emerging awareness of the importance of having balanced academic self-presentation. This

ambivalence reflects what Lillis and Curry (2010) identify as the tension between individual rhetorical goals and institutional constraints, where writers, in the context of this study, must negotiate competing demands for self-promotion and scholarly objectivity.

Digital Tools as Rhetorical Agents

An unexpected finding concerns the influence of digital writing tools, especially AI-powered platforms such as Grammarly and Quillbot, on Indonesian EFL students' use of hypes. This finding shows a unique trend in academic discourse socialization that moves from traditional human agents like supervisors, peers, and published authors, to include algorithmic influences on rhetorical choices. The participants' accounts of their selective adaptation of AI suggestions for word choices and paraphrasing reveal that technology plays an active part in shaping hyping practices.

The implication of this finding is in understanding contemporary academic literacy practices. While the participants maintained agency in their final word choices, the consistent availability of more promotional or persuasive alternatives through AI tools has the potential to shape academic discourse into more accepting, if not vulnerable, of hypes. This technological influence may also operate alongside, and to some degree amplify, the other socializing forces identified in this study, such as supervisory expectations, audience awareness, and published writing conventions.

The integration of AI tools into academic writing practices represents what Lillis and Curry (2010) would recognize as an emerging literacy practice that reshapes traditional power relations in academic writing. AI tools, unlike human supervisors or published authors, can provide quick, algorithmic feedback that may lack contextual awareness of disciplinary norms or ethical considerations around promotional language. This raises important questions about the role of technology in academic discourse socialization and the need for critical digital literacy in thesis writing instruction.

Pedagogical Implications for Thesis Writing Instruction and Supervisory Practices

As a whole, the findings of this study have several implications for thesis writing pedagogy and supervisory processes. The central role of supervisory expectations in shaping students' use of hypes suggests the need for explicit discussion of hypes, especially during supervisory practices. Supervisors should be more aware of their powerful influence on students' rhetorical choices and the potential consequences of implicit expectations for hype use. More importantly, thesis writing instruction should help students raise their critical approach to hypes, and include discussions about both the strategic functions and potential risks of using hypes as identified by Intemann (2022) and Scott and Jones (2017).

Students' limited awareness of broader implications on ethical concerns indicates that there is a need for more comprehensive coverage about hypes and ethics in academic writing curricula.

Finally, the influence of AI tools on promotional rhetoric calls for the need to include digital literacy components in thesis writing instruction. Teachers should equip students with critical frameworks for evaluating AI suggestions and understanding the impact of algorithmic influences on their use of hypes in academic writing. Moreover, institutional interventions should establish clear guidelines for AI tool usage in thesis writing and provide training programs that help students understand how AI algorithms are trained on existing academic texts, many of which already contain hypes. This could potentially create a feedback loop that amplifies hype usage over time. In addition, supervisory practices need to address AI-mediated writing, for instance, by asking students to identify which suggestions they accepted and why, and if AI suggestions genuinely improve accuracy, or merely add promotional embellishment. This approach can help students become thoughtful users of AI tools rather than passive recipients of their algorithmic recommendations.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Indonesian EFL students strategically use hypes, primarily targeting research topic, to navigate complex power dynamics within supervisory relationships rather than responding to publication pressures as found in previous literature. The dominant influence of supervisory gatekeeping, amplified by Indonesia's hierarchical culture, shows that hypes in student academic writing stem from complex power dynamics rather than simple stylistic choices.

These findings contribute to our understanding of promotional discourse in EFL academic settings in three important ways. First, regarding student identity formation, this study shows that EFL students engage in identity negotiation through hypes, as they adopt multiple identities: academic, entrepreneurial, and culturally compliant. Second, regarding power asymmetries, the findings reveal that supervisory gatekeeping operates through rhetorical compliance, where hierarchical cultural contexts create conditions for promotional language as students navigate asymmetrical power relations to maintain harmony and secure approval. Third, regarding promotional discourse in EFL settings, this study shows that hypes are heavily influenced by both humans (supervisors, published conventions) and algorithmic agents (AI tools).

The influence of AI-powered tools also requires immediate pedagogical attention. Writing instruction should include digital literacy that helps students critically evaluate AI sug-

gestions, particularly those that are related to hyping practice. As academic discourse is becoming increasingly promotional, the objective should not be eliminating hypes at all but raising critical awareness among students, supervisors, and institutions about their use in scholarly communication.

These findings challenge current approaches to academic writing instruction and supervisory processes. Rather than considering hypes as problematic, educators should help students critically understand when and how to use them appropriately. Furthermore, supervisors should recognize their powerful influence on student rhetoric and discuss hype usage explicitly. It is also important for them to clearly communicate their expectations regarding hypes and their impact on the credibility of academic work. Policymakers who evaluate student academic work should recognize that hypes are embedded in thesis and dissertation writing practices, which requires a critical evaluation of research claims rather than accepting them at face value, particularly when making academic and funding decisions.

The findings from this study have significant implications for understanding how EFL students use hypes to construct their academic identities and navigate power relationships in academic settings. This study shows that when EFL students use hypes, they are not merely following writing conventions but actively positioning themselves within hierarchical academic structures while managing cultural expectations and supervisory relationships. While this study focuses on Indonesian contexts, the interplay between supervisory gatekeeping, cultural hierarchies, and promotional discourse likely extends to other EFL academic settings where power asymmetries and cultural values shape student-supervisor relationships. Future research should examine these motivational patterns in other EFL contexts, particularly those with different cultural values and supervisory practices, to better understand how promotional lan-

guage functions in student academic writing across diverse educational, and cultural settings.

USE OF AI STATEMENT

No generative AI tools were used in the design, analysis, or interpretation of this study.

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None declared.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Cita Nuary Ishak: conceptualization; data curation; formal analysis; investigation; methodology; writing – original draft; writing – review & editing.

Yazid Basthomi: formal analysis; project administration; resources; supervision; validation; writing – review & editing.

Nurenzia Yannuar: data curation; investigation; resources; supervision; validation; writing – original draft.

Amelia Abdullah: methodology; visualization; resources; supervision.

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APPENDIX 1

The Interview Protocol with EFL Learners

Section 1. Demographic and other contextual information

1. What is your name?
2. How long have you been studying English?
3. What is your occupation?
4. How often do you use English?

Section 2. Writing experience

1. During your study, what sorts of academic texts have you written so far?
2. How often do you write academic texts now?
3. Who do you usually picture in your mind when you are writing academic the texts?
4. If you have the picture of your target readers, are you aware of their expectations?
5. How do this picture and your awareness of their expectation influence the language that you use in the texts?

Section 3. Reasons for hype

1. Why did you use this particular word or phrase [i.e., the item identified as hype]? Are you aware that these words are promotional?
2. What were you trying to communicate or emphasize in this sentence?
3. Was the use of this word in this section intentional? If so, what were your intentions?
4. What do you expect from using this particular word or phrase?
5. Why do you choose to emphasize this part [i.e., the section in the text that is hyped], and not the other parts?
6. During the supervising/ review process, has any of the promotor/ editor/ reviewer commented on these words?
7. Did you use any tools such as Grammarly and Quillbot? Did you use thesaurus? To what extent these tools influence your choice of words in the text?

Section 4. Follow up questions

1. Is it important for authors to show readers the positive parts of their work?
2. As a writer of academic texts, what is your opinion about hypes?
3. What are the benefits of using these words for authors?
4. Are you aware of their implications? What are they?

APPENDIX 2

Example of Hypes Coding

From a teacher’s point of view obtained from the needs analysis of this study, it was stated that they had **very little**¹ experience with online learning. Finding an app that is suitable for the needs of the curriculum at school and tailored to students’ needs are other difficulties that make them seldom use digital device as well as mobile applications for teaching. This is associated with the key issues found in a research on digital materials in the Australian context (Oakley, Pegrum, Faulkner, & Striepe, 2012). There are **very limited**² apps that are specifically developed for a particular group of students with appropriate content, pedagogically focused, and linked to the curriculum and learning framework. Especially for EFL learners in general, a small number of English learning apps for a particular skill and specific users in a certain context is available in app stores. Nevertheless, the **bombastic**³ number of language learning apps users indicated a new learning interest through mobile applications. As digital technology will continually evolve, expanding the variety of language learning application is **urgent**⁴ to bridge the limitations of learning in the classroom and to suit learners’ needs. [S6]

No.	Item	Hype	Category	Justification
1.	<i>very little</i>	x	-	The claim is a quotation from a participant from the pilot study.
2.	<i>very limited</i>	v	Research gap	The claim is not immediately supported by evidence.
3.	<i>bombastic</i>	v	Research topic	The claim promotes the relevance of the research topic, but is not immediately justified, carries exaggerated tone, and is replaceable with less promotional words such as <i>large</i> or <i>high</i> .
4.	<i>urgent</i>	v	Research topic	The claim promotes the urgency of the research topic.

APPENDIX 3

Example of Coding Framework for S3's Responses to Questions in Section 2 and 3

Raw data (participant quotes)	Key words	Initial codes	Final themes
"Obviously I would always picture who would be likely to read my thesis... I know that there are experts out there, including my supervisors, who will read my work"	Experts, supervisors, lecturers	Reader awareness	Audience awareness
"I'm afraid that I will be judged through my works... this is what makes me overthinking"	Afraid, judged, overthinking	Reader awareness, fear of judgement	Audience awareness
"When I wrote my thesis, the pictures of my supervisors came to mind... [compared to article writing,] the pressure was bigger when I wrote my thesis, because it would be very embarrassing to have it read by my supervisors"	Pressure, embarrassing, supervisors, gatekeeping	Authority, gatekeeping, fear of judgement	Supervisory influence
"So I was more careful when writing my thesis, compared to the article"	careful	Strategic writing	Supervisory influence
"For the word ' <i>reveal</i> ', I use it because based on my scholarly reading activities, it is largely used in academic texts... As I told you earlier that I often read and imitated the words that are often used in papers from highly reputable journals"	Scholarly reading, papers, reputable journals	Published text modeling, imitation, adhering to writing convention	Published writing conventions
"Moreover, when writing my thesis, I would read a lot of papers from Q1 journals, especially those about narrative inquiries. From these papers, I observed that many authors would highlight this value to the readers... I would imitate the practice and I believe it is a good idea because they are papers published in scopus-indexed journals"	Q1 journals, observed, imitate the practice, Scopus-indexed	Published text modeling, imitation strategy	Published writing conventions