

## The Quality of Arguments Made by EFL University Students in Their Conceptual Papers

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### Abstrak

Penulisan argumentatif sering digambarkan sebagai hal yang sangat kompleks dan memberikan kesulitan besar bagi pelajar Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing. Ini dibuktikan dengan penelitian yang menyatakan bahwa mahasiswa Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing tidak dapat mengembangkan elemen argumen dengan baik. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menggambarkan kualitas argumen yang ditulis oleh mahasiswa Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing di dalam artikel konseptual mereka, dengan menilai aspek elemen dan kualitas argumen. Penelitian dengan metode analisis konten kualitatif digunakan untuk menjawab dua rumusan masalah dalam penelitian ini. Terdapat 14 artikel konseptual dengan 44 argumen yang didapatkan melalui dokumentasi, dan dipilih berdasarkan beberapa kriteria. Argumen tersebut dianalisis dan dinilai berdasarkan kriteria penilaian kualitas argumen, yakni *RSA Triangle*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar argumen merupakan argumen yang lemah, disertai dengan alasan dan bukti yang tidak relevan, tidak logis, dan lemah. Sebagian besar mahasiswa yang berpartisipasi dalam penelitian ini juga gagal memuat keenam elemen argumentasi. Namun, dalam hal struktur, mayoritas argumen disusun dengan organisasi yang baik. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa struktur elemen argumen yang bagus tidak dapat menjamin memiliki kualitas argumen yang baik pula, begitupun sebaliknya.

**Kata Kunci:** argumentasi, kualitas argumen, artikel konseptual, pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing, keterampilan menulis

### Abstract

Argumentative writing is often described as a highly complex task that places enormous difficulty for EFL students in which they are mostly still unable to develop well-constructed arguments' elements. The purpose of this study is to describe the quality of arguments in EFL university students' conceptual papers, by assessing the surface and substance structure of argumentation. Qualitative content analysis is employed to answer the research questions. There are 14 conceptual papers with 44 arguments were collected through documentation, and was chosen based on some criteria. The arguments were then analyzed and assessed based on the argument quality assessment framework using *RSA Triangle*. The findings show that most arguments are unsound with irrelevant, not acceptable, and weak supports. Most university EFL students participating in this study also failed to include all six elements of argumentation. However, in terms of the surface structure, the majority of arguments are in a well-organized manner. In sum, the findings in the present study demonstrate that good surface structure of argument cannot necessarily guarantee well-thought-out substance aspect of argument, and vice versa.

**Keywords:** argumentation, quality of argument, conceptual paper, English as Foreign Language, writing skill

### INTRODUCTION

Writing is nonverbal communication that allows the writers to put their thoughts and ideas in a readable form, to organize their knowledge and beliefs into valid and convincing arguments, and to convey messages or meaning through a well-constructed text. It is a highly complex task that places enormous demands on the cognitive system (Flynn & Stainthorp, 2006). The

difficulties in writing are mostly in developing and organizing ideas, and transforming these ideas into a written form (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Writing requires the writers to focus on both high and low level skills. The process of writing can also become more complicated if the writers possess a low level of language proficiency.

In a particular English Department in one public university in Indonesia, the students are gradually taught

writing: from basic simple writing to scientific research paper writing. One of the crucial stepping stones to have the students be well-prepared with their scientific research proposal is to train them by developing a conceptual paper. This conceptual paper writing is taught in one course that discusses the basic concepts and the steps on how to write a coherent, unified, and scientific paper using acceptable language rules and rules of writing scientific paper.

Generally speaking, a conceptual paper is also considered as part of argumentative writing that requires the writers to examine a particular topic, to position the writer's stance, and to provide it with valid and acceptable data. Some educators argue that argumentative writing is the most challenging writing genre because the students are still unable to comprehend the criteria of good arguments. In addition, their content of argumentative writing tends to be inadequately developed with unsupported viewpoints and insufficiently developed evidence. A conceptual paper demands the writer to review literature from prior works and new ideas, to offer new combination of frameworks, and to highlight future directions (Gilson & Goldberg, 2015). It is not expected to offer empirical data because their focus is on integration and proposing new relationships among constructs. A good conceptual paper may also build a new theory by offering propositions to fill the gaps of the previous works, and those propositions have to be interconnected to testable hypotheses (Weick, 1989). In terms of format, conceptual paper generally consists of Introduction section, Literature Review section, and Conclusion section. It also may include Data Analysis section and Results section.

In developing a good argument, the primary elements of argument must be included. However, it will be way sound if the writer successfully integrates both the primary and secondary elements. The first primary three are important elements include a claim, grounds, and warrant. Another three additional elements such as qualifier, backing, and rebuttal can be added if necessary. However, several research (Clark & Sampson, 2008; Clark et. al., 2007; Erduran et. al, 2004) have reported problems making objective distinctions between the elements of data, warrant, and backing in analyzing argumentation, resulting in poor reliability (Savolainen, 2012). To avoid these problems, some research (Erduran et. al., 2005; Savolainen, 2012) collapsed the elements of data, warrant, and backing into a single category named grounds. The present study then employs the same methodological idea by composing those three elements into one element called grounds. Furthermore, drawing on the ideas of Jimenez-Aleixandre et al. (2000), Clark and Simpson (2007), Savolainen (2012), and Stapleton

and Wu (2015), the two elements of argument called counterclaim and rebuttal data were given addition to the framework of argument patterns of this study. This is because the writers of the conceptual papers may not only state their own claims and grounds, but they may also present counterclaims indicating disagreements to their claim. By the end of their argument, they may also give rebuttal and its data to the counterclaims to strengthen their claims. Therefore, the following elements of argument are analyzed in the present study: primary elements consist of (a) claim and (b) grounds/data, and additional elements consist of (c) counterclaim, (d) counterdata, (e) rebuttal claim, and (f) rebuttal data.

Quality of arguments in the present study means the quality of reasoning that describes the soundness or unsoundness of the arguments. A sound argument itself refers to an argument that has relevant, acceptable, and adequate reasoning (Stapleton & Wu, 2015). There are three criteria used to evaluate the soundness of an argument: relevancy, acceptability, and adequacy (Stapleton & Wu, 2015; Hughes & Lavery, 2015; Schwarz, Neuman, Gil, & Ilya, 2003; Bickenbach & Davies, 1997). For the evaluation of the quality of arguments, the researcher adapted a similar concept used by Means & Voss (1996), Bickenbach & Davies (1997), Hughes & Lavery (2008), and Stapleton & Wu (2015) in their study. This theory was first introduced by Johnson and Blair (1994), and has been widely used ever since. It is also known as the "RSA Triangle" to assess the soundness of arguments. The characteristics of each criterion are explained below.

Table 1. Argument Quality Assessment Framework

Quality	Characteristics
Relevancy	Supporting statement(s), and/or data, and/or reason(s) that is <b>relevant</b> to the claim in an argumentation. This quality is a necessary aspect for further consideration of "acceptability".
Acceptability	Supporting statement(s), and/or data, and/or reason(s) that is <b>logically acceptable</b> in an argumentation
Adequacy	Supporting statement(s), and/or data, and/or reason(s) that is <b>adequate</b> to justify the claim.

The urgency of developing argumentation skills through education has been significantly growing as it is important in academic contexts (Abdollahzadeh, Farsani, & Beikmohammadi, 2017; Toulmin, Rieke, & Janik, 1984). Unfortunately, there is only limited studies that focus on the quality of arguments of EFL students' writing, specifically in a particular state university in Surabaya, Indonesia. Most research in a field of argumentative essay writing (Hirose, 2003; Liu & Braine, 2005) only focused on the generic structure, language features, and others related to the writing system. Focusing on the arguments is necessary since it delivers

the ideas and thoughts of the writers to the readers. It is also essential, specifically for university students, to construct a better quality argument since they are highly expected to produce research papers in which they critically engage with the literature and evaluate their topic of interest. Furthermore, the importance of possessing argumentation skills is further stressed given the recent surge of English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners, including Indonesian students, applying for studies in English-medium universities abroad. Their English argumentative writing capabilities are often tested through some internationally standardized tests such as TOEFL, IELTS, and GRE (Educational Testing Service).

Also, it is even worst that most university students still find the activity of constructing an argument to be an extraordinarily complex task. Based on a previous study, the writing problems of the students in a particular university in Padang are mainly related to their inability to profoundly develop ideas logically, as well as their inadequate comprehension of the issues discussed (Oktavia, Yasin, & Kusni, 2014). Also, the students mostly stated that they tend to focus on grammar accuracy, and they are still unfamiliar with the criteria of sound, valid, and convincing arguments. It is in line with the fact that, in many EFL contexts, students mostly find difficulties in building academic arguments in their essays (Bacha, 2010). Some research (Bacha, 2010; Lu & Ai, 2015) claim that the primary contributing factor for this problem to occur, particularly for English foreign language learners, the different rhetorical system of students' first language (L1) and their target language which causes negative transfer. Furthermore, there are amount of research that analyze the arguments in students' writing; deep investigation on the quality of reasoning is not given so much attention. In constructing an argument, not only pay attention to its elements, but an individual must also focus on the quality of reasoning within these argumentative elements. Unfortunately, many studies that assess the quality of arguments tend to value the presence of these elements instead of their quality (Stapleton & Wu, 2015). Even if a student supports his claims with evidence and rebuts a fully supported counterargument as though he has followed a recommended formula in argumentation; however, if the meaningful content within those elements is inaccurate, irrelevant or illogical, the readers may remain entirely unconvinced (Sampson & Clark, 2008). They argue that most researchers in a field of argumentation are most likely to focus on the features of an argument. In their prior work, Clark and Sampson (2007) also found that the majority of students' arguments were still inaccurate, even though they employed relatively sophisticated

argument structure. Simon (2008) further claims that "by focusing on the structure of arguments, researchers do not explore the content of argumentation, so this perspective has limitations for evaluating the quality of reasoning" (p. 288). Therefore, based on the problems and reasons stated above, the research questions are formulated as follows.

1. How is the organization of argument's elements made by EFL university students in their conceptual papers?
2. How sound are the arguments made by EFL university students in their conceptual papers?

## METHOD

To meet the primary objectives of the study, this research employs qualitative design with document or content analysis approach.

The data of this research was collected through documentation, by compiling the final product of conceptual papers written by 90 English Department university students who took Paper Writing class in their fifth semester in the academic year of 2019/2020 in a particular university in Surabaya. The topics of all papers are mainly about the students' future study on education research and classroom action research.

Prior to data collection, the Person in Charge (PIC) of each Paper Writing class was briefed on the purposes of the study. Beforehand, all students were reassured that their papers are treated confidentially and used for research purposes only, and they could withdraw from the study if they desired to. Then, every PIC of each class asked for permission to his or her classmates for using their conceptual papers as the data. Having had approval from all the participants, the PIC of each class collected all the participants' papers and sent them all to the researcher by email. However, there are some students withdrawn from the study due to personal matters. Then, there were only 35 out of 90 students who willingly volunteered their paper.

Furthermore, there are some criteria of the data. First, their essays must be in a form of conceptual papers format. Second, the argument must consist of at least the primary elements of arguments (i.e., *claim* and *grounds*). Third, each paper must have more than two arguments to strengthen the writer's claim. Unfortunately, there were 21 essays excluded from the study because they did not meet the criteria. Therefore, there were 14 conceptual papers in hand.

To answer the first research question, the researcher made use of the categories specified based on Toulmin's argumentation elements (2003). A code was assigned to each element: 1) claim, 2) grounds, 3) counterclaim, 4) counterdata, 5) rebuttal claim, and 6) rebuttal data.

Furthermore, to answer the second research question, the researcher adapted a quality assessment framework to assess the argument soundness. During the evaluation process, the researcher first evaluated the relevancy of the reasons and/or data, whether the reasons and/or data is relevant to the claim or not. If an argument is judged to be relevant, then the researcher evaluated the acceptability of an argument where she assessed the degree to which the reasons and/or data is logical in supporting the claim. Finally, the researcher assessed the adequacy of the reasons and/or data whether it is judged to be weak or strong enough to support the claim. After assessing the arguments, the researcher interpreted and presented the results in a comprehensive way that concludes the overall quality of the arguments.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings showed that majority of arguments in the conceptual papers can be found in introduction and literary review section. Various organizational patterns of argument's elements are retrieved and it contributes to the overall soundness of arguments.

### 1. The Organizational Patterns of Argument's Elements

It is worth noting that the organization of argument elements is in a well-arranged manner. Also, there are five variations of argument pattern emerged. In terms of the argument patterns' frequent use, the students were most likely to construct their arguments in *claim-ground* pattern. Meanwhile, only a small percentage of students use patterns involving counterarguments and rebuttals.

EFL university students in this study organized most of their arguments in a deductive fashion. This finding is in accordance with previous research (Abdollahzadeh, Farsani, & Beikmohammadi, 2017; Hirose, 2003) with the argumentation mainly falls into the dominant categories of Deductive and Inductive. The majority of participants (77.27%) stated their positions clearly at the beginning of their argument (deductive) and at the end of their argument (22.72%). These learners seem to adhere to native English writers' use of a deductive pattern which they probably learnt it through various academic or non-academic training over the years (Abdollahzadeh, Farsani, & Beikmohammadi, 2017). On the other hand, the minimal employment of the inductive pattern might show as a non-English pattern (Abdollahzadeh, Farsani, & Beikmohammadi, 2017) considering that the participants are foreign learners of English.

Table 2. Argument Patterns

Argument Patterns	Total Arguments
Claim – Ground	31
Ground – Claim	10
Claim – Counterclaim	1
Counterclaim – Counterdata – Claim – Ground	1
Claim – Ground - Counterdata – Counterclaim – Rebuttal Claim	1

Based on Table 2, it is worth noting that most arguments were initiated by using *claim* (n = 33, 75%), and only some arguments that started with *ground* (n = 10, 22.72%), and one argument initiated with *counterclaim* (n = 1, 2.27%).

In *Claim – Ground* pattern, the students constructed the claim supported by grounds based on facts, personal beliefs, or research. Due to space constrain, only a few excerpt are presented below.

### Essay 2, Argument 1.

*To compete in a job market nowadays speaking is one crucial factor for engineering students after graduate for interviewing a job or communicate with other when entering an occupation. Therefore, engineering students need learn communicative ability in order to maintain relevance with global environment. According to Warrior, 2007 said that communication and soft skills and ability are very important for those who join the industry. In the business world, (Crosling & Ward, 2002) conducted study and surveyed 24 employers of Monash business graduates and found oral communication skills is one crucial factor for graduate success in job market. The factor is high frequencies of formal and informal forms of oral communication occur at the workplace, ranging from interpersonal communication to work-related communication. Next (Singh, Jageer Singh, Abd Razak, & Ravinthar, 2017) explained that oral communication skills in English is the most important criteria for IT industrial recruitment.*

In essay 2, the writer provided a *claim* that engineering students need to sharpen their communication skills as it is necessary for the workplace. To support his claim, the writer explained an opinion from the experts that agreed with his point of view. He also elaborated a study conducting a survey that carried out by some researchers in the related field. The results of surveying 24 employers of Monash University Business Graduates revealed that communication skill is highly necessary for industrial recruitment due to the high frequencies of formal and informal forms of communication occur.

Following by the second most used argument pattern is *Ground – Claim* pattern (22.72%). The students tended to present a shred of evidence or grounds before pointing out their claim. Below are a

few examples extracted from the students' conceptual papers.

### Essay 9, Argument 1.

*Some researchers also reflected that focus on meaning over related to L2 language learning and experience to comprehensible input is adequate in L1 acquisition by young children, which is as the basis for L2 or foreign language acquisition (Snoder & Reynolds, 2018). This means that how students master their L1 will influence in how they try to understand L2 or foreign language they accept. Therefore, students who have good ability in L1 will have better and faster understanding in L2 or foreign language.*

The writer described some studies that showed the correlation between students' L1 ability and their L2 learning. It is in line with the claim of the writer stating that students who are good at their L1 will be able to learn L2 or foreign languages quickly.

As for the *Claim – Counterclaim* pattern, there is only one argument (2.27%) that the researcher found in the students' conceptual papers. In this pattern, the claim is stated, and another point of view then follows it against the writer's claim (counterclaim). Below is the example of an argument with this pattern.

### Essay 1, Argument 2.

*Using audio visual input is more simple and flexible rather than reading because we can bring the material at our gadget (Chen, Wang, Zou, Lin and Xie 2019). However, there are a lot of people that still prefer reading to enhance their vocabulary because it becomes their habit.*

In essay 1, the writer argued that audiovisual input is preferable rather than reading. Her claim is also supported by some researchers. She then mentioned another opinion against hers stating that some people are still prefer reading to improve their vocabulary knowledge. However, this type of argument pattern is considered to be weak because there is no further explanation from the writer to rebut the counterclaim. In other words, it makes the writer's claim not quite strong.

Another type of pattern is organized from *Counterclaim, Counterdata, Claim, to Ground*. In this type of pattern, the writer begins his argument by stating a claim from others' perspectives that disagrees with his own. Counterdata also supports the counterclaim. The writer then states his claim provided with grounds to make his claim strong and acceptable. The following is an example of an argument using this pattern.

### Essay 5, Argument 2.

*Unfortunately, the scope of collaborative learning is limited in the writing of the L2 classroom. Most of the teachers still believed that writing is a skill which done individually, yet implementing collaboration in writing might have advantages for the student to construct the text. Collaborative writing provides interactions among learners that gives a good effect on their learning process. Interactions with the peer in the writing process are essentials to enable learners to get some feedback to make their writing better (Lestari, 2006). Collaborative writing is an active approach that provides opportunities for learners to share ideas and discussion to produce a single text. A study conducted by Nelson & Carson: 1998 stated that collaboration in writing begins mostly during brainstorming before produce the writing. Further, Dauite:1998 stated that collaboration in writing is not only about the collaboration acts' before producing the written text, but also during the process of producing it. Then, in recent years the use of collaborative writing is being an approach that uses collaboration in the whole process of producing text. The use of collaboration in the writing process believed could reduce the linguistic problem (Storch, 2005).*

In essay 5, the writer states an opinion against her claim about the limited scope of collaborative writing in the classroom. She also provides data to support the counterclaim describing the fact that most teachers still believe can only be done individually. Then, the writer begins to mention her claim stating that implementing collaboration in writing has some advantages for students. It is backed by some grounds she provides to strengthen her claim. This argument is quite sound because it involves almost all elements of arguments, particularly when the writer offers counterclaim and counterdata against hers.

Similar to the previous pattern, there is only one student (2.27%) who constructs his argument using *Claim – Ground - Counterdata – Counterclaim – Rebuttal Claim* pattern. In this type, the argument begins with stating the writer's claim without giving any data to back the claim. Instead, the writer directly mentions the data of another opinion against his along with its claim after. Moreover, the writer ends his argument by refuting the counterclaim, which can help him to strengthen his claim.

### Essay 8, Argument 1.

*Analytical rubric is appropriate for classroom assignments as it can provide valuable information to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses for teachers and students. In this type of rubric, multidimensional results can be evaluated simultaneously. Analytical scoring includes valuation of property in terms of handwriting, title, sentence, etc. Because of this; the property must contain the specified written expression. Evaluations are carried out separately in different parts of the property. As a result, the basic assessment using analytic rubrics takes a long time;*

however, "some scientists agree that analytic values are more comprehensive, broader and valuable" (Babin, & Harrison, 1999, p. 117) In (L. Beyreli, 2009). Basically, things that are prepared more mature will require sufficient time.

The example of this argument pattern is extracted from essay 8. Here, the writer states his claim, agreeing that analytical rubric is suitable for teachers in assessing classroom assignments. He then elaborates some reasons or data explaining the lack of using this type of rubric, followed by another claim against his. The *counterclaim* points out that using an analytical rubric is time-consuming. However, by the end of his argument, the writer refutes the counterclaim by explaining that assessment using analytic rubrics is more comprehensive, broader, and valuable even though it requires sufficient time. His rebuttal is also supported by some studies that can strengthen his claim.

Among the fourteen papers, it is worth noting that their organization of argument elements is generally in a well-arranged manner. The majority of students successfully integrated the primary elements alone, and some of them completely synthesized both the primary and secondary elements of argumentation.

Also, of all five variations of argument pattern constructed by the students, the analysis showed that about 77.27% (n = 34) of the participants state their positions or *claims* clearly at the beginning (deductive) of their argument. Meanwhile, 22.72% (n = 10) of the students present their *claims* at the end (inductive) of their arguments preceded by supporting reasons, shreds of evidence, even *counterarguments*.

In general, all students participating in this study employed all elements of argument; however, the extent of using primary and secondary elements was prominently distinct. The majority of arguments included the primary elements: the writer's opinion (claim) and supporting evidence (grounds or data). The current findings also revealed that most Indonesian EFL university students still failed to put forward counterarguments and rebuttals (Abdollahzadeh, Farsani, & Beikmohammadi, 2017; Qin & Karabacak, 2010). The students tended to consider only one side of the issue, or what is termed as my-side bias. Only some of the participants in this study successfully employed some form of counterarguments and rebuttals. Similarly, the finding in the study carried out by Cooper et. al.,

(1984) found that American university freshmen's argumentative papers used some basic Toulmin argument elements such as claims and data/grounds. Qin and Karabacak (2010) in their study also revealed the same finding that most L2 university students' argumentative papers only contained claims and data/grounds, though fewer papers presented counterarguments and rebuttals.

A probable factor for this phenomenon might be because of the cognitive constraints of developing secondary elements as they are more complex rather than the primary elements (Clark & Sampson, 2008; Golder & Coirier, 1994). Counterarguments play an important role in argumentation structure because the writers need to consider opposing views against theirs (Toulmin, Rieke, & Janik, 1984). However, as noted by Toulmin et al., (1979), the use of counterarguments and rebuttals are often optional and are depending on the complexity of the arguments. This statement is also supported by Crammon (1998) and McCan (1989) that the presence of these secondary Toulmin elements was often associated with expert writers or student in higher grades.

## 2. The Soundness of Arguments in the Conceptual Papers

In the present study, the researcher used her adaptation of argument assessment tool to assess the substance aspects of argumentation. In this section, the researcher the finding is elaborated into four categories.

### Profile 1: One-Sided Good Surface Structure and Sound Argument Quality

The first profile represents papers (n = 16) one-sided arguments in terms of structure as they stated only a claim and evidence, without alternative views. The term one-sided argument refers to an argument in which the writer depicted her claim without responding to alternative viewpoints. This profile can be considered good in surface structure by the standards of the adapted Toulmin's Model of Argumentation, with primary elements included: *claim* and *grounds*. Furthermore, the overall quality of arguments is sound because the reasons and/or evidence provided were relevant, acceptable, and adequate to justify the claim. Below is the example of arguments categorized to be in this profile.

#### Essay 12, Argument 2.

*One of the effective ways of assessing students during the extensive listening program is using journals.*

*Listening journal is a book that students can use it for the record their listening activities (Schmidt, 2016). The listening journal gives a new experience for students (Ivone & Renandya, 2019). (Chen (2019) stated that journals are used to plan, control, and asses the extensive listening program. In those activity, the students should write the materials of listening activity, where they got the materials, the unfamiliar words, difficult phrases, complex sentences, and how the materials are explained from start to the end. Also, they should summarize all the points of materials at the end of listening. This activity needs a student's responsibility and honesty. The teacher supervises all the students during the extensive listening program. At the end of the extensive listening program, they should give all the journals in order to accomplish their tasks. The teacher can decide the score from these journals. It makes easier for them because this journals help the teacher to know whether students do the task well or not.*

An excerpt above displays claim and grounds pattern of argumentation. For the grounds, the writer respectively elaborated the grounds by mentioning the benefits of using journals in the teaching listening process and explaining the procedures on how the listening journals work. Therefore, the grounds were judged as relevant to the claim. In terms of the acceptability and adequacy, the grounds provided are quite logical and valid because they are concrete and are supported by various reliable sources.

**Profile 2: One-Sided Good Surface Structure but Unsound Argument Quality**

Similar to the previous one, in terms of the surface structure, the second profile (n = 25) represents one-sided argumentation involving only the primary elements of argument: *claim* and *grounds*. However, the arguments' quality was evaluated to be most likely weak or unsound. Based on Table 3 illustrated below, among twenty five arguments, it was found that there are three qualities of unsound arguments.

Table 3. Quality of Unsound One-Sided Arguments

Quality	Total Arguments
Weak	12
Irrelevant	7
Not Acceptable, Weak	6

The majority of one-sided arguments in this profile (48%, n = 12) supplied a claim with not enough reasons or data, leading them to be weak or vague arguments, even though they are free of irrelevancies. A small percentage of arguments

(24%, n = 6) provided a claim with reasons or data that are relevant to the claim, but illogically acceptable and weak. Also, about 28% (n = 7) of the arguments are considered to be failed in providing relevant reasons or data. The following is the example of an argument classified in this profile.

**Essay 13, Argument 4.**

*Students are suggested to use vlog. It could help them to improve their English skills. Students could also get involved in the video-blog as a project assignment. This project assignment is effective for them to improve their communication in the foreign language. For example, teachers give instruction to create a short monolog about introduction. They are asked to video their monolog, edit it, and upload in their personal blog. Finally, the teacher can evaluate it as they do their project.*

The excerpt above is considered to be an unsound argument because it is weak as its failure to provide adequate reasons. The writer is suggested to add further studies concerning the reasons she believes such claims, rather than simply elaborated one reason with only one example. Nevertheless, this argument is judged to be free of irrelevancies and still acceptable.

**Profile 3: Two-Sided Poor Surface Structure and Unsound Argument Quality**

The third profile (n = 1) indicates a two-sided argument as it includes a counterargument, but fails to point out the rebuttals. Structurally speaking, the argument in this profile presents only the writers' assertion and the possible opposing views, without providing their corresponding justification. The absence of data creates poor quality of the argument. In terms of the surface structure, the writer needs to at least provide a claim with its supports to strengthen an argument. Below is the excerpt of an argument that belongs to this profile.

**Essay 1, Argument 2.**

*Using audio visual input is more simple and flexible rather than reading because we can bring the material at our gadget (Chen, Wang, Zou, Lin and Xie, 2019). However, there are a lot of people that still prefer reading to enhance their vocabulary because it becomes their habit.*

The claim above can be judged as moderately strong because a research in the related study supports it. However, there is no further explanation and concrete evidence to prove that the writer's statement is true. Instead, she only states an opposing view with no valid supports.

#### **Profile 4: Two-Sided Good Surface Structure but Unsound Argument Quality**

Not entirely different from the previous profile, an argument (n = 2) categorized to be in this profile successfully integrates the secondary elements of argumentation in their arguments. It is confirmed well to surface structure of an argument. However, the overall argument quality is still far from satisfactory.

#### **Essay 8, Argument 1.**

*Analytical rubric is appropriate for classroom assignments as it can provide valuable information to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses for teachers and students. In this type of rubric, multidimensional results can be evaluated simultaneously. Analytical scoring includes valuation of property in terms of handwriting, title, sentence, etc. Because of this; the property must contain the specified written expression. Evaluations are carried out separately in different parts of the property. As a result, the basic assessment using analytic rubrics takes a long time; however, "some scientists agree that analytic values are more comprehensive, broader and valuable" (Babin, & Harrison, 1999, p. 117) In (L. Beyreli, 2009). Basically, things that are prepared more mature will require sufficient time.*

As can be seen from an excerpt above, in terms of the surface structure, the argument almost successfully integrates all elements of an argument: no rebuttal data are given. However, in this case, a complete inclusion of argument elements does not necessarily define the quality of the argument. The writer fails to present adequate reasons or data to support its claim. Nevertheless, the rebuttal claim is effectively aligned with the counterclaim stating that the analytic rubric is time-consuming, but is weak because no data offered. In conclusion, this two-sided argument shows an almost high level of surface structure but is unsound.

## **CLOSING**

### **Conclusion**

In sum, the findings in the present study demonstrate that good surface structure of argument cannot necessarily guarantee well-thought-out substance aspect of argument, and vice versa. However, it is better if the writer can put forward both the primary and secondary elements with relevant, acceptable, and adequate reasons and/or data corresponding to the claims. In addition, significant majority of EFL university students still could not produce two-sided arguments as

they are highly complex (Abdollahzadeh, Farsani, & Beikmohammadi, 2017). However, even though most of them can produce only one-sided arguments, it does not often mean that the quality of their arguments is poor. It is the quality of their reasons and/or data corresponding to the claim that matters in the evaluation.

### **Suggestions**

It is highly suggested for EFL writing teachers to educate the learners to construct not only sound one-sided arguments but also two-sided arguments. This way, the students will be able to sharpen their critical thinking to see alternative views against theirs. Therefore, they will be able to refute the opposing views with well-grounded rebuttals to maintain their position on particular matters.

Future researchers are also suggested to conduct investigations on the factors that make the students unable to construct good quality two-sided arguments. In addition to that, they might perfect the findings of this study by conducting observations to ensure that their ability in constructing a good quality of argument in accordance with their writing behavior in EFL classrooms. Also, future researchers in the related field might offer argument assessment tools that are suitable to evaluate both the structure and the quality of arguments descriptively.

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