



ANALYSIS ON DIFFICULTIES OF EFL STUDENTS' ARGUMENTATIVE PARAGRAPH WRITING

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Abstract

In learning foreign language, writing skill is considered as the most difficult skill to be mastered by the English Foreign Learners (EFL) students. However, this skill is very needed and important to be mastered by the university students particularly in writing their final project. Therefore, this present study aims to find the difficulties of English Foreign Learners (EFL) students in argumentative writing in Institute Technology & Business of STIKOM Bali. The data source of this study was taken from the students' argumentative writings. They were required to make an argumentative writing with certain topic. The theories writing and argumentative writing were used in this study and the result of the previous researcher in the same area was also used as the literature review. The finding shows that the difficulties of the students are in their linguistic used and critical thinking. In terms of linguistic difficulties, there were found the lack of word formation, punctuation, structure, tenses, and developing the content. Based on the findings, the lecturers should find a proper strategy in guiding the students to be able to improve their skill in argumentative writing skill.

Key words: *Argumentative-Writing, EFL Students' Difficulties.*

Abstrak

Dalam pembelajaran bahasa asing, keterampilan menulis dianggap sebagai keterampilan yang paling sulit dikuasai oleh siswa English Foreign Learners (EFL). Namun, keterampilan ini sangat dibutuhkan dan penting untuk dikuasai oleh mahasiswa khususnya dalam penulisan tugas akhir mereka. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui kesulitan mahasiswa English Foreign Learners (EFL) dalam menulis argumentatif di Institut Teknologi & Bisnis STIKOM Bali. Sumber data penelitian ini diambil dari tulisan argumentatif siswa. Mereka dituntut untuk membuat sebuah tulisan argumentatif dengan topik tertentu. Penulisan teori dan penulisan argumentatif digunakan dalam penelitian ini dan hasil dari peneliti sebelumnya di bidang yang sama juga digunakan sebagai tinjauan pustaka. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kesulitan siswa dalam penggunaan linguistik dan berpikir kritis mereka. Dari segi kesulitan kebahasaan, ditemukan kekurangan dalam pembentukan kata, tanda baca, struktur, tenses, dan pengembangan isi. Berdasarkan temuan tersebut, dosen harus menemukan strategi yang tepat dalam membimbing mahasiswa untuk dapat meningkatkan keterampilan mereka dalam keterampilan menulis argumentatif.

Kata kunci: *Penulisan-Argumentasi, Kesulitan Siswa EFL.*

Introduction

English language has four skills, there are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Listening English language is very familiar for the English for Foreign Learner or EFL students. In making essay writing, the students must have idea to be developed. Therefore, it is considered that writing skill as the most difficult skill in language learning particularly

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English language. One important type of writing to be learned in school and in the university is argumentative writing (Alarcon and Morales, 2011); (Nippold, 2014). Argumentative writing is important to be mastered by the university students in order to prepare them in writing their final project of their study. One purpose of writing is to give an argument and it is called an argumentative writing.

Writing can help students to organize their idea systematically in order to be understood by the readers. It also can be an enjoyable activity if they can manage their idea. Writing is the thinker's way of exploring the world, and by writing, people can share their feeling and get some ideas and combine it into a good writing and the reader get something from their writing (Fulwiler, 2002). Through writing, people can describe their feeling and also able to make the readers agree with their point of view. There is an argumentative writing which has a purpose to persuade the readers to follow the opinion of the writer. This type of writing might be the most common activities that the university students usually do.

Heaton (1991) states that writing skill is complex and difficult to teach. EFL students usually have a problem in writing because they do not master writing in their first language. Then it is obviously affected their foreign language writing. They must understand the English sentence structure to be able to make a good writing. Based on the observation regarding to the students' writing, the students usually cannot do those stages of writing. The NAEP report showed that only about 25% of students' argumentative essays provide strong reasons and supporting examples, but they often fail to consider alternative perspectives. Evidence for my-side bias is widely found in the empirical literature (Ferretti & Graham, 2019). Certainly, argumentative writing skill is not at ease to get (Chanie, 2013); (Deane and Song, 2015) and the most difficult kind of writing among others (Ferretti et al., 2007) .

In the study of Sweller (2011), this kind of knowledge was classified in secondary biological knowledge, which cannot be achieved by "naturally" process. In other word, to attain this skill, someone has to train continually and be guided by expert (Magogwe, 2013). Students should practice continually and attempt to develop their own idea including their perspective for the particular issue. Teachers should guide the students and motivate them to be confidence in writing their ideas. Based on the descriptions, this study will investigate the EFL students' difficulties in argumentative writing.

Method

The location of this research was in ITB STIKOM Bali. The Dual-Degree Program students were chosen as the participants on this research. It is because they must write their final project in English. Besides that, they are also required to be more focused in using English in all of their assignments and presentation. Therefore, they must practice their writing skill particularly in argumentative essay or paragraph.

This study applies a descriptive qualitative study. The data was gathered from the students' argumentative essay writings. The students were required to write argumentative paragraphs. The number of the students in one class is 13 students. Data were collected from the students' argumentative writing assignments. The data collections were analyzed by descriptive qualitatively. The analysis was focused on the linguistic difficulty aspects and the critical thinking which is very important in argumentative writing.

Results and Discussion

This study focused on finding the difficulties of the EFL students in argumentative writing. The data of this research was the students' argumentative writings.

Writing is the highest and the most difficult skill among the other tree skills such as speaking, reading, and listening. The complexity of writing activity requires systematic and well-ordered thinking that must be mastered by students and which finally will be the way of their behavior (Jairos Gonye, 2012). (Hagemann, 2003) described conventions as the use of standard written English, involving correctness in sentence formation and structure, grammar, usage, and mechanics that include capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.

According to Oshima & Hogue (2007); Boardman & Frydenberg (2002); Brandon & Brandon (2013); and Connelly (2013) states that paragraph is the basic element of writing composition, containing a number of sentences or related statements that work together to develop one main idea. According to Zemach & Rumisek (2005) states that the sentences in a paragraph are five to ten sentences and/or six to twelve sentences; however the length and short of sentences are depending on the writing topic. It is also mentioned by Zemach & Rumisek, (2005) that the first sentence of a paragraph is usually indented (move in) in a few spaces.

Angelo in Khairiyani (2010) states that writing is a form of thinking, but it is thinking for a particular audience, and for a particular occasion. He says that writing can help someone to think critically. It enables him or her to perceive relationships, to deepen perception, and to solve problems. He also adds that writing can help one to discover what someone really thinks and feels about people, ideas, issues, and events only in the actual process of writing. Therefore, through writing, the students could express what they are thinking and their opinion using the proper and correct grammar. *Writing* is the expression of language in the form of letters, symbols, or words. The primary purpose of writing is communication. For the academic writing, it requires conscious effort and much practice in composing, developing, and analyzing ideas. The writing of the students in a second language is also faced with social and cognitive challenges related to second language acquisition. Writing is not only just transforming our thought or idea in written form but also it relays to the process of rereading and revising our writing, monitoring any single words or features that we have written and the process of rereading our writing. Keene (1992:2-3) write why we should bother with writing and purposes for writing

as follows:

1. Writing is a way of thinking and learning. Writing gives unique opportunities of explore ideas and enquire information. By writing, we come to know subjects well and make them our own.
2. Writing is a way of discovering. The act of writing allows us to make unexpected connections among ideas and language.
3. Writing creates reading, writing creates permanent, visible record of our ideas for others to read and ponder. Writing is powerful means of communication for reading information and shapes human thought.

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4. Writing ability is needed by educated people. Our skill writing is often considered to reflect our level of education.

Purpose for writing:

- a. To express yourself
- b. To provide information for your reader
- c. To persuade your reader
- d. To create a literary work

One purpose of writing is to give an argument and it is called an argumentative writing. According to Bill (1997), "An argumentative essay is built around a specific statement (or main premise) that is debatable within the field in which you are studying. In other words, at the centre of an argumentative essay is a statement with which your readers may disagree. Your essay will need to support that statement in a manner that convinces your readers of its truth".

Writing an argumentative essay is very important for the higher university students to build their ability in writing their perspective particularly in English language. Classifying the strategies using the taxonomy proposed by Mu (2007) revealed that most of the strategies reported fell into three of the four categories: rhetorical, cognitive, and social/search strategies. Rhetorical strategies were the most common.

Besides the strategy, in argumentative writing there are some models that can be used by the students. According to White & Billings (2008) they present three types of models that could be used in argumentation which are namely the classical model, the Toulmin model as well as the Rogerian model. According to them, in the classical model, the guidelines are straightforward. There are basically five parts to writing argumentatively in the classical model which are namely; the introduction, the statement of facts relating to the issue, the evidence, the refutation of challenging views and the conclusion (White, F., & Billings, 2008). White & Billings (2008) also explains the four elements in the classical model, the first being the introduction, for an introduction to be good, it must accomplish three things; (1) it presents the topic at hand or the problem that needs attention and briefly explains the thesis. (2) An introduction should establish a clear context for the problem and (3) it should draw the attention of the reader to understand "the whole picture". It is at this stage that persuasive appeals are to be addressed in order for the readers to believe one's stance (White, F., & Billings, 2008).

There was research done by Jhon Peloghitis (2016) with title "Difficulties and Strategies in Argumentative Writing: A Qualitative Analysis". This article was published in JALT Journal (Japan Association for Language Teaching) in November 2016. This research has been done at Japanese universities. According to the data of this research, it indicated that most participants perceived rhetorical features of English argumentative writing as the most problematic. The findings of this research suggest that participants primarily used cognitive, social, and search strategies to facilitate their argumentative writing, whereas metacognitive strategies were used minimally.

The main obstacle in argumentative writing is the indicator to measure the success. The success of argumentative writing is when reader can be persuaded, brought, and conveyed to the paradigm that is stated and believed by the writer (Pranowo, 2000).

Results

There were thirteen argumentative writings analyzed to find the difficulties in writing argumentative paragraphs. The analysis was focused on the linguistic difficulty aspects and the critical thinking which is very important in argumentative writing.

Student 1

Significant daily changes occurred during this pandemic era, where students who usually go to school and study directly with teachers and friends require that current learning be done online from their homes. The change is certainly not an easy thing to do because of course many factors can be a barrier in this policy, but this is expected to make it easier for students to still be able to get knowledge even though they do not go directly to school.

Although learning is done virtually, it is expected that students can still carry out their obligations as students well. This option provides convenience for students to continue their education in times like this, virtual learning is the best option that can be taken by the government. However, this does not rule out the possibility of negative things that can happen, many students who abuse the ease to laze. Online learning is also burdensome for students whose residence is in remote areas, the difficulty of internet access in their area becomes an obstacle for them in doing this online learning, in addition, many students are less able to buy a decent device or buy quotas to do online learning so as to impose their parents' economy especially during pandemics like this.

Behind it all, of course, the government considers online learning is the best choice for the current situation, we as students who have been given the convenience in carrying out education should be able to provide the best even though almost all activities are currently carried out online.

The above writing consists of three paragraphs. The first paragraph consists of two sentences, the second paragraph consists of four sentences, and the last paragraph consists of one sentence. The lack of sentences occurred in each paragraph, mostly in the last paragraph. It is also included the lack of sentence organization. Moreover, the use of incorrect vocabularies and punctuation are found in this writing. On the other hand, the writer is able to bring the topic, able to counterclaims, and also integrating the academic sources. The critical thinking of the writer still needs to be improved. Lecturer should give a better strategy regarding the argumentative writing.

Student 2

I think online learning is currently being done for the sake of mutual safety, in order to maintain health from the covid-19 virus, but many learning benefits that I do not feel. Learning becomes ineffective due to many disturbances when doing online learning such as signal interference, device limitations and others. Then also the

learning that was obtained was not satisfactory as it should have been directly practicable, it became an online practice which was only given a tutorial to do it and I could not ask freely.

The above writing consists of three sentences. Most of the sentences are the writer's statements, but there is also claim regarding the topic. In this case, the lecturer should give much more motivation and strategy regarding the lack of sentences, and on how to develop the writer's critical thinking.

Student 3

Online learning is not that effective. It makes a student become lazier the before. Also, some of the student might be not comfortable with this system because it can make some of the student hard to understand all the subject that have been taught. Because this is online learning system of course the student needs a stable internet to follow all the class. Some student sometimes had a bad signal or some trouble with their PC/laptop so they can't follow the lectures that well, and even not attend the lecturer. For some subject that have a tutorial class, not running effectively. And beside all of that, it also hard sometimes for the lecturer because they can't supervise the students properly.

The above writing only consists of seven sentences. The writer gives the claim regarding the topic almost in all sentences. The lack of critical thinking, organizing sentences, and vocabularies, punctuation and grammar become the issues of this writing.

Student 4

In this situation, whether we want it or not we must do our daily activities inside our house. Especially us as a student, we must do our learning in our house via online. This system is not efficient and has many flaws. For example, most of the students can't understand the material given by their lecturer because there are many distractions in their surrounding area. The student can't focus on the material and they don't know anything in the end. We also can't do a tutorial for some of the subject.

The above writing consists of six sentences. The first sentence is the writer's statement. There is also claim regarding the topic and followed by some counterclaims until the end of paragraph.

Student 5

Hard situation to explain, online learning on the one side, is very helpful, because besides studying, there are also many people who work, including me. If we apply online learning, we can save time and energy, in addition, students can also save transportation costs. But besides that, there are also unsupportive sides that make online learning less effective, as I experienced at the beginning of the semester where the media I used was not supportive and also the difficulty of the internet in my area. This greatly affects the concentration of learning and the intention to explore the learning being taken. There is not much that can be said, because something we do will certainly have good and bad sides, here if online learning continues to be applied

the possibility of social soul in a person will be reduced, because of the lack of interaction with the crowd and peers.

The above writing consists of five sentences. The paragraph is started with claim regarding the topic, and then followed by counterclaims until the end of the paragraph. There are lack of organizing the sentences, punctuation, and correct grammar in that writing and need more practice in writing. The lecturer also needs to give strategy to build the writer's critical thinking to advance the argumentative writing.

Student 6

Online learning is one of the best ways for students to study from home. This is due to the fact that not only are we in the midst of a global wide pandemic, making it safer for students to continue studying the given materials from universities, it is also an efficient learning system that allows students to take and study material at their own respective paces, as we know that everyone is different and how they learn can also differ from one another. This in turn improves students' focus in studying, from the comfort of their own lovely homes.

Not only that, this way of online learning also supports students that are not able to physically be present in a physical lecture environment, the students that does not have a portable laptop but instead has a non-portable desktop PC at home can also partake in online learning. Online learning clearly supports every situation that a student might be in, thus making it a superior style of learning, with this style, everybody from anywhere with an internet connection can have access to the stream of university knowledge.

There are two paragraphs on the above writing. The first paragraph consists of three sentences and it is started with the claim regarding the fact of the topic and it continues until the end of paragraph. The second paragraph consists of two long sentences. At the first paragraph the writer gave the sentence transition about the claim as well. There is no clear conclusion in both paragraphs. There are also lack of punctuation and correct grammar. The writer need to give a proper strategy in building the critical thinking which is very needed in making an argumentative writing.

Student 7

Online learning is one of the great learning system since the pandemic started. It allows people to attend their classes from their home or the place that they're staying at. One of the things that I like from this learning system are the students able to learn from the place that makes them to be more comfortable so they'll able to focus. Students also able to replay the materials that they've learned before if they forgot some of it. From all of that it is hope this learning system can become an additional system when the pandemic is over.

The above writing only consists of five sentences in one paragraph. The paragraph is started with claim regarding the topic, and then followed by statements. The paragraph is ended by the closing sentence about the writer's hope regarding the topic. However, there are lack of punctuation and correct grammar in the above writing. It is very much needed to give the writer a better strategy and more practice to improve the critical thinking, to advance the sentences and to make the correct grammar.

Student 8

The learning system currently applied, namely the online learning system has advantages and disadvantages. This learning system can help during the current Covid-19 pandemic, it may be able to help many students who find it difficult to focus on learning because things are usually calmer at home, and it can also save time to start lectures for students who live far from school. On the other hand, there may also be students who find it difficult to capture online learning, usually on internet constraints which cause students to not get the material optimally.

The above writing consists of three sentences. The first sentence is started by giving the claim of the topic of this writing. There is also counterclaim regarding the topic. However, this is a very short paragraph. An advance observation is very needed to build a strong critical thinking and to be able to write more sentences.

Student 9

There is no doubt that online learning has become very popular in recent years especially with the restrictions on community activities caused by covid-19. While opinions are still divided on the subject of online learning, many agree that it has brought more flexibility for students attending online classes. Time management is also a big factor because of not having to go to campus. Online learning does bring some cons with them as well. The lack of social interaction was considered one of the cons of online learning, but it seems that this is just a common misconception. While social interaction can be key for some, it can be a big burden for introverts. The biggest argument that raises doubt over online learning is the quality of online courses in comparison to conventional courses. It is hoped that in the future online learning will always make system improvements.

There is one paragraph on the above writing which consists of eight sentences. At the beginning of the paragraph, the writer gave the claim with some facts of the current situation regarding the topic, pros-cons, and then followed by some counterclaims. It seems that the writer has done a small observation regarding the topic. There is also a closing sentence as the conclusion about the writer's hope regarding the use of online learning in the future.

Student 10

In this pandemic situation, online learning is the only learning method that we can use. It's because online learning is a method that didn't require us to be present on campus or school by only using the internet and internet devices as the intermediary. You can also watch the recording whenever you want to. Besides that, there are a lot of disadvantages of this learning method. First, students wouldn't fully understand the lecture that was given by the lecturer as most of them are too lazy to ask as they didn't pay enough attention to the lecturer. Second, there isn't enough practice through this method since you can't do it by yourself to prevent any unexpected things. Lastly, it requires an internet connection, if we're not in a good connection, we might get lost in that subject.

The above paragraph consists of seven sentences. The first sentence is claim regarding the topic, and then followed by counterclaims in the rest of the sentences.

There is also a closing sentence regarding the writer's conclusion to give a clear statement.

Student 11

In my opinion online learning has 2 different views depending on the person himself, if i personally don't like learning online because i'm a typical person who can't study alone because i'm easily distracted by something and get bored easily in online learning. And also online learning has a very prominent drawback, namely the internet as the most important thing from online learning, because not all areas have good internet. Therefore, i hope that the pandemic will end quickly and i can study offline or face to face again so that learning is more effective.

The above writing consists of three sentences. It is started from the writer's statement regarding the topic. There is no clear general observation to support the opinion, but there is a closing sentence about the writer's hope regarding the current condition. The words are not well organized and the sentences as well. Therefore, giving more motivation and strategy to build the writer's critical thinking and interest is very much needed.

Student 12

In my opinion, online learning is less effective for those of us who are majoring in IT. This is because we cannot freely practice the material presented by the lecturer, especially material regarding Coding, which we should practice directly. If there are problems, we can ask them or discuss them with the lecturer concerned or with other friends. But with online learning, I can make better use of the time between classes, study, and rest. Especially with the atmosphere at home that always makes me want to be lazy with this online learning, I started to be more diligent (albeit with compulsion). Still, I had to carry out my obligations as a student, even though the atmosphere at home was like a magnet for lazing.

The above writing consists of one paragraph. It is started from the writer's point of view and experiences. There are no general facts based on observation to support the opinions. Besides that, the sentences are not well organized. The critical thinking of the writer should be built more with a proper strategy by the lecturer.

Student 13

Maybe the current learning that is done online in my opinion is less effective because students don't get special attention from the lecturers who teach, students also can't be free to ask the lecturers or maybe some of the students have problems with internet fees or network disruptions, I hope a pandemic in Indonesia ends quickly so that students can learn effectively.

The above writing only consists of one sentence. It tells about the writer's statement. There is no fact based on the observation to support the statements. Moreover, this writing is lack of sentences. In making a paragraph the writer needs to write more than one sentence or at least six sentences. It seems that the student has no strong motivation in developing the writing. The lecturer should create a better strategy in motivating the students and to build their critical thinking.

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Based on the analysis of the students' writings, it seems that the students need to be given more explanation and guidance in making an argumentative essay. From 13 students' writings, there is only one student was able to make an argumentative writing properly. There are many difficulties that the students seem to be faced. Most of them made short paragraph, it seems that they found it difficult in organizing and structuring the idea of the topic, making introduction, and also making a conclusion. Besides that, some of them wrote their own opinions. In argumentative writing, the writer should give the fact based on the observation and mention the evidence that can support the statement. The lack of grammar, vocabularies, and punctuation need to be improved in writing, and these are considered as the difficulties that also faced by the students.

Discussions

Based on the analysis of the argumentative writings, it seems that the students need to be given more motivation, strategy, and guidance in making an argumentative essay. From 13 students' writings, there is only 1 student was able to make an acceptable argumentative writing. There are many difficulties that the students seem to be faced. Most of them made short paragraph, it seems that they found it difficult to develop their writing. Besides that, based on the analysis it seems that they also have problems in word formation, punctuation, structure, tenses, developing the content, and the most important one is critical thinking. There were some studies regarding the investigation on the Indonesian EFL students' problem. Most of the studies revealed that the EFL students' problems are in linguistics, cognitive, and psychological terms. Those problems should be reduced since this is very important for students to master the argumentative writing to prepare them in making the final project. Besides that, building the critical thinking of students is also important and need more practice.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that there are some difficulties faced by the students in writing an argumentative paragraph. The difficulties of students are in word formation, punctuation, structure, tenses, developing the content, and the most important one in argumentative writing is critical thinking. The students require a special attention to be able to develop their writing skills. Lecturer has an important role to help the students and motivate them to improve their argumentative writing skills. Future study on the same area is much needed to enlarge the knowledge particularly as the reference for the teachers and lecturers in planning the lesson plan of writing subject.

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