

TOULMIN ARGUMENT PATTERNS IN ASIAN EFL LEARNERS' ESSAYS: GENDER AND TOPIC-BASED COMPARISON

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History Received: February 2025 Revised: April 2025 Published: July 2025	<i>This study explores Toulmin Argument Patterns (TAP) in argumentative essays by Asian EFL learners, focusing on gender and topic-based comparison. Using an adapted Toulmin model, it analyses argument components, claims, data, counter-arguments, and rebuttals, from the ICNALE corpus on topics “smoking” and “part-time job”. Indonesian female learners constructed higher-quality arguments with comprehensive rebuttals, whereas their male counterparts relied more on basic elements. Among Chinese learners, gender differences were minimal, with both genders showing balanced TAP use, reflecting structured critical-thinking education. Familiar topics like “part-time job” led to more complex arguments, while less relatable topics like “smoking” resulted in weaker argumentation. Cultural factors also influenced argument quality, with Confucian-influenced education fostering consistency among Chinese learners and diverse educational practices leading to variability in Indonesian learners. These insights can inform curriculum design by encouraging the integration of culturally relevant and gender-responsive writing tasks that support students’ critical thinking and argumentative skills. Future research should expand to broader linguistic and cultural contexts to refine TAP-based pedagogical strategies and deepen understanding of argumentative competence in EFL settings.</i>
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INTRODUCTION

Writing has traditionally served as a fundamental gauge of comprehension in academic settings (Budiana, 2023). As writing is a crucial social and cognitive skill that influences students’ academic and professional success and achievements (Wang & Chiu, 2024), most higher students develop their argumentation skills through writing argumentative essays (Noroozi, et al. 2023). Argumentation skills equip students with advanced cognitive and higher-order thinking abilities, enabling them to critically and logically debate, elaborate on, and synthesize various perspectives on knowledge to reach a conclusion (Noroozi, et al. 2023). Argumentation is a fundamental aspect of academic discourse, playing a crucial role in both establishing and sharing knowledge. In constructing knowledge, writers develop arguments by using scholarly evidence to support or to challenge specific claims or positions. Constructing well-structured arguments allows writers to both persuade and engage their audience while reinforcing their position. As a result, many English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instructors emphasize the importance of equipping learners with the skills to construct strong arguments, which are essential for effectively participating in their academic discourse communities (Yasuda, 2023). Writing an effective argumentative essay is considered a key indicator of second language (L2) writing proficiency, as academic essay writing

is a common component of standardized language assessments used to evaluate students' argumentative capabilities. This underscores that the quality of academic essay depends on the development of an argument (Crossley, 2020). Argumentative essays often act as gatekeepers to higher levels of education, further emphasizing their role in determining students' readiness for advanced secondary and tertiary studies (Yasuda, 2023). Additionally, Yasuda (2023) highlights that the ability to construct arguments is becoming increasingly vital as the number of students from non-English-speaking backgrounds grows in schools within English-dominant countries.

Research on argumentative writing suggests that understanding the structure of argumentation helps students present their opinions more logically, thereby enhancing their critical thinking skills (Yang & Pan, 2023). In English as a first language (L1) education, the Toulmin model of argument structure, developed by British philosopher Stephen Toulmin, has been widely applied to teaching and analyzing argumentative writing. This model is particularly useful for identifying and explaining the components that demonstrate the development of an argument in English argumentative essays. It has been frequently used both as an analytical framework for assessing argumentative writing in L1 contexts and as an instructional tool for teaching argumentation in both L1 and L2 environments (Qin & Karabacak, 2010). As a well-established framework for analyzing argument structure, the Toulmin model has gained significant traction among researchers, particularly in L2 contexts (Liu & Wan, 2020). Its widespread acceptance and applicability make it an effective tool for examining the structural components of argumentative writing. The model is especially suitable for ESL/EFL learners at the L2 level, as it provides a comprehensive framework that captures the meta-structures of argumentative discourse (Yang, 2022a).

Plethora studies have applied the model, such as Dwikoranto (2022) who examined the effectiveness of using a problem-solving model with Toulmin's argument pattern to improve students' analytical problem-solving skills in a Statistics course during the Covid-19 pandemic. The results showed a significant improvement in students' problem-solving skills, with most improvements falling in medium to high categories. Utomo (2019) investigated students' argumentation skills and measured the quality of their arguments. A qualitative design was used, with a sample of 90 eighth-grade students from two different schools. The findings revealed that more than half of the students did not demonstrate complete argument quality. Most students' arguments were limited to basic components: claim, warrant, and data.

Yang and Pan (2023) claim that there is a pedagogical problem since Chinese university students have encountered major obstacles and have made slow progress in writing argumentative essays in English in recent years. They undertake a study, employ an action research pedagogy, and carry out a 10-week intervention centered on teaching argumentative writing utilizing the Toulmin model of argumentation in order to address this issue. Three phases make up the holistic-to-specific strategy used in the teaching process: (1) the overall model introduction; (2) the teaching argumentative elements' primary dimensions; and (3) the teaching argumentative elements' subdimensions. Four writing evaluations, student interviews, and teacher diaries were used in the data collection process. Significant gains in students' overall performance and the caliber of their argumentation components were shown by repeated measures analyses as well as paired-sample t-tests across the phases.

Meanwhile, Alameda (2023) employs the Toulmin model to evaluate the strength and evidence of 10 published research' assertions and arguments regarding the academic writing difficulties of university students from different nations. The analyzed research spans the years 2019 through 2023. The majority of the arguments in these papers, even though they underwent peer review, were found to fall into type two, which is defined as having one or more claims with

basic grounds (data, warrant, and backing) but no rebuttal. There were only two studies with both, three with rebuttals, and five with support. This suggests that the majority of arguments were weak and could be readily refuted by a different claim that had thorough evidence, including facts, a counterargument, a rebuttal, and backing. For stronger arguments, it is advised to use every component of the Toulmin approach. In addition, authors submitting papers for publication ought to apply the Toulmin model, and journals ought to employ this technique to assess the coherence and strength of submitted arguments.

Investigating the role of gender in argumentative writing offers valuable insights into how learners construct arguments and organize their ideas within a structured framework like the Toulmin model. Farsani (2020) explored whether gender and age are influential factors in shaping participants' argumentative writing, using an adapted version of the Toulmin model. Her study compiled a corpus of argumentative essays written by 250 Iranian male and female graduate English language learners. Gender and age were treated as independent variables. The learners' argumentative writing was analyzed across six primary categories of argumentative structure, and the frequency of these categories was examined using MANOVA. The results revealed no statistically significant differences between participants' age or gender and the type or frequency of Toulmin elements used in their arguments. Nugroho & Sturdy (2023) investigated how male and female learners from Indonesia produce argumentative writing, focusing on whether they use the elements of argument structures in similar or different ways. The study used data from the ICNALE corpus, consisting of 30 writing samples, evenly divided between the two groups, 15 written by male learners and 15 by female learners. The findings revealed that only two out of the six identified elements were used by the learners in their writing. Those were claims and data. The analysis showed similarities in how male and female learners apply these elements in their paragraphs. Meanwhile, Amaliah (2024) investigated and compared the organizational structure of argumentative essays written by Indonesian and South Korean ESL students, using the Toulmin model as the theoretical framework for argument analysis. The study sample consisted of five male and five female respondents from Indonesia and Korea. The analysis focused on the use of Toulmin's structural elements in the students' writing. The findings revealed no significant differences in the cognitive abilities of male and female participants from either country. Overall, these results suggest that while certain patterns may emerge in the use of argumentative elements across different groups, demographic factors such as gender appear to have a nuanced impact.

The influence of topic familiarity on ESL/EFL argumentative writing underscores the connection between knowledge and rhetorical ability. Indah (2017) explored the ideal relationship among critical thinking, writing performance, and topic familiarity in EFL students at an Islamic university in Indonesia. Using an ex-post-facto design, the study involved English department students, assessing their skills through writing prompts and rubrics. The findings showed that with student-initiated topics, topic familiarity directly enhances critical thinking skills and also mediates its impact through writing performance. In contrast, for teacher-initiated topics, topic familiarity indirectly supports critical thinking through writing performance but does not have a direct effect. Jaijon (2021) investigated how familiarity with a topic affects the argumentative writing skills of Thai secondary students. The study focused on two dimensions: the overall quality or total scores of the essays and the level of argument complexity. A total of 37 Thai secondary students wrote four argumentative essays, covering both familiar and unfamiliar topics. The essays were evaluated using Stapleton & Wu's (2015) Analytic Scoring Rubric, and the results were statistically analysed using a t-test. Findings revealed no significant difference in the overall essay scores between familiar and unfamiliar topics. However, essays on familiar topics exhibited greater complexity, incorporating more advanced argumentative components. These findings indicated that while

familiarity with a topic encourages more sophisticated arguments, it does not necessarily enhance the overall quality of the essays. Meanwhile, Imanuella & Redhana (2024) examined the application of Toulmin's argument patterns, focusing on their frequency, argument quality, and inaccuracies in the context of redox reactions and electrochemistry topics as presented in a high school chemistry textbook. The study applied document analysis, ensuring validity through triangulation among three researchers. Argument quality, assessed using the Toulmin Argumentation Protocols (TAP), ranged from medium to high, while evaluation based on the Quality of Argument Structure Rubric (QASR) indicated a spectrum from fair to excellent. *Electrochemistry* topic showed lower argument quality compared to the *redox reactions* topic. Topic familiarity plays a crucial role in improving specific aspects of ESL/EFL argumentative writing, especially in fostering critical thinking. However, its influence differs depending on the context, indicating that effective teaching strategies should incorporate a mix of familiar and unfamiliar topics to develop well-structured argumentative skills.

Given the extensive application of the Toulmin model in English L1 education, it is worthwhile to explore how it can be applied to analyze the argumentative structures in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, particularly in Asia where English is learned as a second language. Understanding the Toulmin argument pattern in Asian EFL learners' essays across genders and topics can help educators develop tailored approaches to support both male and female EFL learners in mastering argumentative writing. The relevance of gender in argumentative writing lies in its potential to shape how learners construct and organize arguments. While some studies suggest gender differences in the frequency and complexity of argumentative elements (Nugroho & Stardy, 2023), others find minimal variation (Farsani, 2020). Similarly, the role of topic familiarity is well-documented as influencing critical thinking and rhetorical ability, with familiar topics often eliciting more complex arguments (Indah, 2017; Jaijon, 2021). Although numerous studies have examined either gender, topic familiarity, or cultural influences in isolation, few have triangulated these three factors within a unified Toulmin-based framework. This study address that gap by exploring how gender, topic familiarity, and cultural-educational background interact to influence the structure and quality of argumentative essays by EFL learners from Indonesia and China. Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the structures of argumentative essays written by L2 students using an adapted version of the Toulmin model of argument structure (1958, 2003) proposed by Qin and Karabacak (2010). This adapted model includes elements such as claim, data, counter argument claim, counter argument data, rebuttal claim, and rebuttal data. The following research questions guide this study:

1. What Toulmin elements are present in Asian EFL learners' argumentative essays?
2. How is the quality of their arguments evaluated based on Toulmin Argument Patterns (TAP)?
3. Do male and female learners differ in their use and quality of TAP elements?
4. How does topic familiarity influence the quality of argumentative structures?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This descriptive qualitative study seeks to examine the structures of argumentative essays composed by university students who speak English as a foreign language (EFL), utilizing an adapted version of Toulmin's (1958, 2003) model of argument structure proposed by Qin & Karabacak (2010). There are several components involved in crafting a strong argument. The claim, which acts as the argument's main point, is specific, concise, and open to critique. This claim is supported by various forms of evidence, including statistics, anecdotes, and expert quotes.

Counter-arguments acknowledge and anticipate potential challenges to the original assertion, demonstrating objectivity and intellectual honesty by supporting the opposing side with evidence. Addressing a counter-argument by offering rebuttals or highlighting flaws and inconsistencies in the counter-argument is known as making a “rebuttal claim”. A rebuttal claim must be supported by proof, such as counter-evidence, logical reasoning, or illustrative examples (Dharmawan, et al. 2023).

Source of Data

The participants in the study are selected from EFL learners’ writing corpus available at <https://language.sakura.ne.jp/icnale> within the ICNALE framework (Ishikawa, 2013, 2023). ICNALE provides access to a standardized corpus of argumentative essays written by ESL/EFL learners across various Asian contexts. The participants of this research include 5 females and 5 males from Indonesia and 5 females and 5 males from China. While the small sample size may limit the generalizability of findings, it aligns with the study’s qualitative design, allowing for an in-depth analysis of argumentation structures. This limitation is acknowledged, as the primary aim is to explore argumentation patterns rather than to make broad generalizations. Meanwhile, the topics under investigation are “Smoking” and “Part time job”. Prior studies, such as Indah (2017) and Jaijon (2021), highlight the impact of topic familiarity on argumentation, underscoring the importance of these choices for examining Toulmin Argument Pattern (TAP) elements. Each participant in this study is assigned a unique code that indicates their native language and current proficiency level according to the CEFR framework. The letter ‘W’ represents ‘written’, and the acronyms ‘IDN’ and ‘CHN’ indicate the participants’ countries of origin, Indonesia and China, respectively. The choice of participants from Indonesia and China reflects an intentional focus on contrasting linguistic and cultural backgrounds within the Asian EFL learners. The symbol ‘F’ indicates that the participant is female. The code ‘SMK’ and ‘PTJ’ refers to the topics ‘smoking’ and ‘part time job’. These topics were chosen for their relevance and varying degrees of familiarity to the participants. “Smoking” is a socially contentious topic likely to evoke diverse perspectives and critical reasoning. In contrast, “Part-time Job” is a relatable and personally relevant topic for many students, enabling an analysis of how topic familiarity impacts argument structure and quality. Each participant was assigned a unique code representing their gender (e.g., “M” for male, “F” for female). For examples: W_IDN_SMK0_015_B1-2 refers to an Indonesian male writing about “smoking”, while F-W_CHN_PTJ0_004_B1_2 refers to a Chinese female writing about “Part time job”.

Data Collection Technique

The identification of argumentative elements within student writing was strategically guided by recognizable semantic structures and linguistic markers that commonly signal the presence of specific rhetorical functions. In identifying claims, two primary linguistic patterns were observed. The first includes subjective markers such as “I think,” “I believe,” and “In my opinion,” which explicitly reveal the writer’s stance. The second involves assertive statements like “Without doubt, we should search the internet wisely,” which demonstrate a strong, declarative position intended to persuade.

For identifying data or evidence, the presence of explicit subordinating conjunctions such as “because” and prepositional phrases like “for that reason” or “for one thing” proved useful, as these typically introduce justification or support for a previously stated claim. Meanwhile, counter-arguments and rebuttals often occurred together, forming a dialogic structure within the text. These were signaled by transitional phrases and contrastive markers, such as “It is said that ... but ...,” “Some people claim that ... however ...,” as well as subordinators like “although,” “despite,” and

“even though.” These linguistic cues, as identified in previous research (Crammond, 1998; Qin & Karabacak, 2010; Stapleton, 2001), facilitated a systematic and consistent approach to analyzing argumentative structures, allowing deeper insight into students’ reasoning and writing strategies.

Data Analysis Technique

An analytical framework using a numerical scale from one to five is implemented to establish a metric for evaluating the effectiveness of an argument, can be seen in the following Table 2.

Table 1
Analytical Methods and Framework for Evaluating Argumentation Quality

Level	Description
Level 1	The argumentation is characterized by a basic structure of a singular claim pitted against either a counterclaim or another claim.
Level 2	Arguments that pit one claim against another and are backed by evidence (statistics, warrants, etc.) are indicative of level 2 argumentation. It is worth nothing, however, that there are no rebuttals to these claims in the arguments presented.
Level 3	At level 3 of argumentation, one typically encounters a sequence of claims and counterclaims that are supported by data, warrants, or backings, occasionally accompanied by a weak rebuttal.
Level 4	At level 4 of argumentation, the arguments presented entail a claim that is accompanied by a distinct and readily identifiable rebuttal. This line of reasoning may encompass multiple assertions and opposing viewpoints.
Level 5	The argumentation at level 5 is characterized by an elaborate presentation of the argument, which includes multiple rebuttals.

The essays were evaluated using a numerical scale adapted from Erduran, et al (2004), ranging from Level 1 (basic arguments) to Level 5 (arguments with multiple rebuttals). This scale provides a systematic approach for assessing argumentation quality. The scale is not based directly on the Toulmin model but serves as an extension to evaluate the depth and complexity of arguments (Erduran, et al. 2004). To reduce subjectivity and ensure consistency, the analysis involved two independent raters. The raters were doctoral students majoring in Applied English linguistics and were trained on the adapted Toulmin framework and analytical scale. Inter-rater reliability was calculated, achieving a Cohen’s kappa coefficient of 0.85, indicating strong agreement.

RESULT FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Research Findings

What Toulmin elements are present in Asian EFL learners’ argumentative essays?

The analysis of essays revealed notable differences in the use of Toulmin Argument Pattern (TAP) elements across Indonesian and Chinese learners. Both groups frequently employed claims (element 1) and data (element 2) as the foundational components of their arguments. However, the inclusion of more complex elements, such as counter-arguments (elements 3 and 4) and rebuttals (elements 5 and 6), varied significantly between groups and genders. Indonesian learners predominantly used claims and data, with minimal inclusion of counter-arguments and rebuttals, for instance:

Excerpt 1. [W_IDN_PTJ0_015_B1_2]

Personally, I think that these part time jobs are important to college students [CLAIM]. As we can see, not everyone in this world is rich [DATA]. The same applied to college students [DATA] Some of them can not their education fees and many need to have additional income source [DATA].

While Indonesian male learners often relied heavily on claims and data, female Indonesian learners demonstrated slightly more frequent use of rebuttals, indicating a more advanced argumentative structure, as can be seen in the following excerpt 2.

Excerpt 2. [F-W_IDN-SMK0-009_B1_2]

Everyone must have known that smoking is very dangerous [CLAIM]. It has given many bad effects to the smokers and people around them [DATA]. Smoking could give both active smokers and passive smokers many diseases [DATA]. It can grow chance, and many other health problems [DATA].

Chinese learners showed a more balanced use of TAP elements, incorporating counter-arguments and rebuttals more frequently than their Indonesian counterparts. For example:

Excerpt 3. [W_CHN_PTJ0_030_B1_2]

Part-time job has a lot of benefits [CLAIM]. First, it can prevent one from wasting time and can help him get some pocket money [DATA]. Then part-time job can enrich one's experience and widen one's horizon [DATA]. Sometimes, a part-time job can bring you something special like love and life-long friendship [DATA]. Also, there are some disadvantages of part-time job [COUNTERARGUMENT CLAIM]. For example, it may take up one's whole part time and he may have no time to rest himself [COUNTERARGUMENT DATA]. And it can also bring us a lot of pressure as we have the responsibility to do the job well [COUNTERARGUMENT DATA]. However, part-time job is only part-time job [REBUTTAL CLAIM]. We can choose whether to do it or not depending on our own conditions [REBUTTAL DATA].

Female Chinese learners especially excelled in integrating detailed rebuttals into their essays, as can be seen in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 4 [F-W_CHN_SMK0_008_B1_2]

The guests should not smoke in a restaurant [CLAIM]. Because the ash and smoke could directly get into the food then ate by the customers [DATA]. Meanwhile, smoking being banned does not mean you could not smoke during a meal [COUNTERARGUMENT CLAIM]. If you cannot afford to live without a cigarette at the moment, it is OK for you to smoke outside [COUNTERARGUMENT DATA]. Maybe it is a little inconvenient, but for other people's sake, do not complain [REBUTTAL CLAIM] For the two reasons mentioned above, and the fact that you can still smoke outside the restaurant during a meal, put your hands up to show that you are with me [REBUTTAL DATA].

The quality of their arguments evaluated based on Toulmin Argument Patterns (TAP)

Table 2
Argumentation Quality of Indonesian Learners

INDONESIA				
Gender	Smoking	Level	Part time job	Level
Male	W_IDN_SMK0_010_B1_2	1	W_IDN_PTJ0_010_B1_2	5
	W_IDN_SMK0_015_B1_2	5	W_IDN_PTJ0_015_B1_2	1
	W_IDN_SMK0_021_B1_2	1	W_IDN_PTJ0_021_B1_2	5
	W_IDN_SMK0_027_B1_2	1	W_IDN_PTJ0_027_B1_2	3
	W_IDN_SMK0_031_B1_2	4	W_IDN_PTJ0_031_B1_2	4
Female	F-W_IDN_SMK0_009_B1_2	1	F-W_IDN_PTJ0_009_B1_2	3
	F-W_IDN_SMK0_020_B1_2	1	F-W_IDN_PTJ0_020_B1_2	5
	F-W_IDN_SMK0_024_B1_2	1	F-W_IDN_PTJ0_024_B1_2	2

F-W IDN SMK0 034 B1 2	3	F-W IDN PTJ0 034 B1 2	5
F-W IDN SMK0 035 B1 2	1	F-W IDN PTJ0 035 B1 2	4

Table 3
Argumentation quality of China learners

CHINA														
Gender	Smoking				Level	Part time job				Level				
Male	W	CHN	SMK0	005	B1	2	4	W	CHN	PTJ0	005	B1	2	4
	W	CHN	SMK0	030	B1	2	1	W	CHN	PTJ0	030	B1	2	5
	W	CHN	SMK0	151	B1	2	5	W	CHN	PTJ0	151	B1	2	5
	W	CHN	SMK0	218	B1	2	3	W	CHN	PTJ0	218	B1	2	2
	W	CHN	SMK0	221	B1	2	3	W	CHN	PTJ0	221	B1	2	2
Female	F-W	CHN	SMK0	004	B1	2	3	F-W	CHN	PTJ0	004	B1	2	5
	F-W	CHN	SMK0	006	B1	2	1	F-W	CHN	PTJ0	006	B1	2	5
	F-W	CHN	SMK0	008	B1	2	5	F-W	CHN	PTJ0	008	B1	2	5
	F-W	CHN	SMK0	009	B1	2	1	F-W	CHN	PTJ0	009	B1	2	5
	F-W	CHN	SMK0	013	B1	2	1	F-W	CHN	PTJ0	013	B1	2	5

Tables 4 and 5 highlight argument quality differences by topic and gender. Indonesian learners displayed varied quality levels, particularly in “Smoking” essays, where many arguments remained at level 1. Essays on “part-time job” achieved higher quality, with frequent level 5 arguments characterized by comprehensive rebuttals. For instance, a male learner (W_IDN_PTJ0_010_B1_2) presented nuanced arguments on “part-time job” but simplistic reasoning on “smoking”. Chinese learners consistently demonstrated higher quality arguments, with numerous essays rated at level 5. Both male and female learners produced well-structured arguments on “part-time job”, leveraging personal familiarity with the topic. Essays on “smoking”, however, occasionally fell to level 1, highlighting topic-specific challenges. Meanwhile, gender-based comparisons revealed Indonesian female learners outperforming male counterparts in argument complexity and quality. Female participants used rebuttals more frequently, enhancing the persuasiveness of their essays. Among Chinese learners, gender differences were minimal, with both groups demonstrating balanced TAP usage.

Discussion

The findings from the analysis of EFL learners’ argumentative writing, using the Toulmin Argument Pattern (TAP), reveal insightful trends regarding gender and topic based variations in argumentation quality. The discussion synthesizes these findings and contextualizes them within the broader literature on argumentative writing.

Gender-Based Differences

The data indicate that gender plays a significant role in the quality of argumentative writing among Indonesian and Chinese EFL learners. Particularly, female learners tend to demonstrate higher consistency in argument quality compared to their male counterparts. This consistency is observed across different topics, suggesting a more stable application of argumentation skills among female learners. For Indonesian learners, the gender differences are more pronounced. Female learners exhibit a higher quality of argumentation in a larger proportion of writings. This trend aligns with previous studies that indicate female students often outperform male students in writing-based tasks (Noroozi, et al. 2023, 2020; Tsemach & Zohar, 2021). In contrast, the differences between male and female learners in the Chinese cohort are less distinct. Both male

and female Chinese learners show a balanced use of TAP elements, including claims, counter-arguments, and rebuttals. This balance might reflect a more uniform educational approach to teaching argumentation skills in Chinese classrooms, where rote learning and structured approaches to writing are emphasized for all students regardless of gender (Zhang & Zhang, 2021). The study's findings diverge from Noroozi, et al. (2023), who reported minimal gender-based differences across contexts, by revealing pronounced disparities among Indonesian learners.

Topic-Based Differences

The analysis reveals the topic of the essay significantly influences the quality of argumentation, with learners generally performing better on the topic “part-time job” compared to “smoking”. This trend aligns with prior research highlighting the critical role of topic familiarity in enhancing the quality of argumentative writing (Rahimi & Zhang, 2021). Familiar topics, such as “part-time job”, provide learners with relatable contexts and concrete experiences, enabling them to construct more coherent and well-supported arguments. By contrast, topics like “smoking” which may be less familiar or personally relevant, tend to result in weaker arguments due to limited prior knowledge or emotional investment (Kessler, et al., 2021). These findings corroborate Ha's (2022) observations from the ICNALE corpus, which indicated that topic familiarity impacts syntactic complexity and writing quality, as students tend to produce simpler structures and less convincing arguments for less familiar topics. Moreover, the results align with the argumentation challenges identified in EFL contexts, where learners often struggle with generating content for less familiar topics (El-Dakhs, 2020). In addition to topic familiarity, the findings suggest that emotional engagement and personal stance significantly influence argumentative quality. Emotional engagement has been shown to foster a more critical approach to argumentation, as learners are motivated to substantiate their claims (Widyastuti, 2018). On the other hand, less personally relevant topics such as “smoking” may result in superficial arguments, as learners struggle to connect emotionally or develop a strong perspective. Furthermore, while Zhang & Zhang (2021) highlighted balanced TAP usage among Chinese learners, the current study extends this by demonstrating topic-dependent performance variations.

Cultural Influences

Cultural factors also play a crucial role in shaping learners' argumentation quality (Ozfidan & Mitchell, 2020). The study of comparison between Indonesian and Chinese learners underscores the impact of educational practices and cultural attitudes towards argumentation. Indonesian learners, for instance, showed more variability in their argument quality, which might reflect a less standardized approach to teaching argumentation skills compared to the more uniform and structured methods observed in Chinese education. Chinese learners' balanced use of TAP elements, regardless of gender, demonstrates a strict educational framework that emphasizes critical thinking and structured argumentation. This approach is likely rooted in Confucian educational philosophies that prioritize discipline and academic excellence (Bahtilla & Xu, 2021). Consequently, Chinese learners might be better equipped to produce high quality arguments due to their exposure to these rigorous academic standards.

CONCLUSION

The study investigated the argumentation quality of Asian EFL learners' argumentative essays through a gender-based and topic-based comparison, employing the Toulmin Argument Pattern (TAP) as the analytical framework. The findings revealed significant insights to the influences of gender, topic familiarity, and cultural contexts on the argumentative writing of EFL

from Indonesia and China. One of the primary findings was the notable gender-based differences in argumentation quality among the learners. Female learners, particularly in the Indonesian group, consistently demonstrated higher quality arguments compared to their male counterparts. This trend aligns with previous research indicating that female students often excel in tasks requiring written expression and critical thinking. The higher consistency in argumentation quality among female learners could contribute to their approach to writing and greater attention to detail, which are essential for constructing coherent and persuasive arguments. In contrast, the gender differences in the Chinese cohort were less pronounced. Both male and female Chinese learners exhibited a balanced use of TAP elements, suggesting a more uniform approach to teaching argumentation skills in Chinese educational settings. This balance likely stems from the structured and strict nature of Chinese education, which emphasizes critical thinking and standardized methods of argumentation across genders.

The topic of the essay significantly influenced the quality of argumentation. Learners generally performed better on the topic of “Part-time job” compared to “Smoking”. This discrepancy is likely due to the greater familiarity and personal relevance of the “Part-time job” topic for many students. Personal experiences and concrete examples related to part-time jobs provided a richer foundation for constructing well-reasoned arguments. In contrast, the topic of smoking, which may be less familiar or less personally relevant, resulted in weaker arguments due to a lack of concrete knowledge and personal connection. The finding underscores the importance of topic familiarity in argumentative writing. Cultural factors also played a crucial role in shaping the argumentation quality of the learners. The comparison between Indonesian and Chinese learners highlighted the impact of different educational practices and cultural attitudes towards argumentation. Indonesian learners showed more variability in their argumentation quality, reflecting a less standardized approach to teaching argumentative skills. This variability could be linked to the diverse educational practices within Indonesia, where teaching methods may vary significantly across regions and institutions. On the other hand, Chinese learners demonstrated a more balanced use of TAP elements, indicating the structured educational approach prevalent in China.

The Confucian educational philosophy, which prioritizes discipline, academic excellence, and structured learning, appears to equip Chinese learners with strong argumentation skills that are consistently applied across different topics and genders. The findings suggest the need for curriculum designers to incorporate more familiar and personally relevant topics to enhance argument quality, and for educators to adopt gender-sensitive instructional strategies. Teaching training should also emphasize the use of Toulmin-based framework to help students construct more complete arguments, including counter-arguments and rebuttals. These steps can better support learners in developing critical thinking and academic writing skills across diverse educational contexts.

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