



LINGUISTIC, STRUCTURAL, AND COGNITIVE CHALLENGES IN INDONESIAN EFL STUDENTS' ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

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Abstract: Argumentative writing remains challenging for EFL learners due to its demands for accurate language, logical organization, and critical thinking. Although previous studies have addressed these aspects individually, limited research has examined how linguistic, structural, and cognitive difficulties interact in students' writing. This mixed-methods study investigated these interrelated challenges among 40 undergraduate students enrolled in an Essay Writing course at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu, Indonesia. Data were collected through essay analysis, student questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative analysis showed that 75% of students had difficulty with sentence complexity, 67% misused cohesive devices, and 82% lacked clear thesis statements. Structurally, 69% omitted counterarguments and exhibited weak coherence. Cognitively, 58% reported anxiety and low confidence, which negatively influenced their writing quality. A strong positive correlation ($r = 0.72, p < 0.01$) was found between language proficiency and essay organization. Following instructor feedback and guided instruction, 72% of students showed measurable improvement in their writing. Interview findings emphasized the perceived benefits of model texts, explicit feedback, and opportunities for revision in overcoming cognitive and structural barriers. This study contributes to the limited literature on the interplay of multiple constraints in EFL writing by offering an integrated view of the obstacles that students face. The findings suggest the need for a comprehensive instructional approach that simultaneously addresses linguistic accuracy, rhetorical structure, and cognitive support to enhance students' argumentative writing competence in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: *argumentative writing; linguistic challenges; cognitive challenges; structural challenges; writing proficiency.*

INTRODUCTION

EFL students struggle with writing strong argumentative essays, even though this skill is essential for academic success. Common problems include limited language control, weak organization, and underdeveloped critical thinking (Ghanbari & Salari, 2022; Mallahi, 2024a). Writing problems lead to unclear arguments, weak organization, and limited critical engagement, lowering both the quality of writing and students' confidence (Malahi, 2024b). Most studies treat writing difficulties separately, but few examine how language, structure, and thinking skills interact, especially in settings with limited instruction and weak critical thinking practices (Lu, & Xie, 2019; Trang, & Anh, 2020;

Yin, Saad, & Halim, 2023). Studying how these challenges are connected can help improve teaching and better support EFL students in writing clearer, more structured, and logical essays

EFL students encountered language, organization, and thinking challenges in argumentative writing, especially in vocabulary, grammar, and cohesion, which reduce clarity and coherence (Ghanbari, & Salari, 2022; Khotaba, 2022). Structurally, EFL students often struggle to write clear thesis statements, organize ideas logically, and include counterarguments, leading to weak and incomplete arguments (Arihastha, 2023). Cognitively, many find it hard to generate ideas, assess opposing views, or think critically,

especially when these skills are not taught directly (Wang, Y., & Said, 2024). These difficulties lower the persuasiveness and academic quality of their writing.

Effective instruction and feedback are critical to addressing these issues. Process-based approaches that involve planning, drafting, revising, and peer review help students structure their ideas more coherently (Behdani, Pour, & Moghaddam, 2024; Han, 2024; Paek, 2020; Pham & Bui, 2021). Teaching vocabulary and connectors clearly helps students write more cohesive sentences, and feedback helps them think more deeply about their ideas (Maimunah, 2025). Guided revision and reflective practice also foster critical thinking and build writing confidence (Razmi & Ghane, 2024). These teaching methods help strengthen students' academic literacy and gradually improve their argumentative writing skills.

Many studies have investigated EFL students' challenges in argumentative writing, but they often treat language, structure, and thinking skills as separate problems (Alsariera & Alsarairah, 2024; Sabir, Saeed, & Pathan, 2024; Zhao, Nimehchisalem, & Chan, 2024). Viewing writing challenges separately misses how language, structure, and reasoning influence each other. Poor language skills can blur arguments, and disorganized structure can weaken support or ignore opposing views (Hanh, 2021; Zhang & Ouyang, 2023). Without understanding how language, structure, and thinking challenges connect, teaching may fall short. Research that examines these areas together is needed, especially in settings where academic literacy and critical thinking are underdeveloped.

Argumentative writing is essential in academic success, but many EFL students still face challenges with using accurate language, organizing ideas clearly, and thinking critically (Khotaba, 2022; Mallahi, 2024a; Wang & Said, 2024). EFL students' linguistic, structural, and cognitive problems lead to unclear arguments, poor organization, and weak critical engagement, ultimately lowering writing quality and reducing their confidence (Nurkamto et al, 2024; Shahriari & Shadloo, 2019). Most studies examine EFL students' writing difficulties separately, not as interconnected issues. This lack of integration limits understanding of writing instruction and critical thinking support (Fan & Wang, 2024; Wang & Said, 2024). A holistic research approach is needed to understand how linguistic, structural, and cognitive challenges intersect, so that

teaching practices can better support EFL students in writing clear and well-argued academic texts.

In Indonesian EFL classrooms, writing instruction typically emphasizes grammar and rigid structure, with limited focus on developing arguments or revising ideas (Hapsari, Sudarman, & Utami, 2022; Sujito & Muttaqin, 2020). Students are rarely taught how to develop ideas, address counterarguments, or think critically because process-based writing instruction is not widely implemented (Fajrina et al, 2023). Instruction often focuses on correcting language errors rather than improving content or argument quality, leaving students unaware of how to write purposefully and persuasively. This hinders their academic literacy, especially in argumentative writing.

Although argumentative writing important, few studies have examined how language, structure, and thinking difficulties interact, limiting insights into their overall impact on writing quality (Mallahi, 2024a). Integrated research on how linguistic, structural, and cognitive challenges in students' writing remains limited (Alharbi, 2023; Zhao, Nimehchisalem, & Chan, 2024). Most existing studies examine these factors in isolation, which constrains a comprehensive understanding of their combined effect on writing quality (Fan & Wang, 2024; Wang & Said, 2024). This study examines how combined linguistic, structural, and cognitive challenges impact argumentative writing and how instruction and feedback can help address them.

The research was guided by the following questions: (1) What language and organization problems did students encounter in argumentative writing? (2) How did these problems influence argument clarity and development? (3) What cognitive or psychological factors shaped their performance? (4) How did linguistic, structural, and cognitive difficulties interact in students' writing? (5) What instructional practices or feedback strategies did students find effective?

This study is significant as it offers a holistic understanding of the linguistic, structural, and cognitive challenges that EFL students face in argumentative writing. By revealing how these dimensions interact, the findings can inform more targeted and effective instructional strategies, contributing to the development of students' academic literacy and the quality of writing pedagogy in EFL contexts.

METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods design to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges EFL students face in writing argumentative essays. By integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study captured both measurable patterns in writing performance and the nuanced personal experiences of students. Using multiple methods also facilitated data triangulation, which enhanced the validity and reliability of the findings (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2018).

The quantitative component involved writing assessments and structured questionnaires to identify common linguistic, organizational, and cognitive difficulties in student essays. The qualitative component consisted of semi-structured interviews and detailed analysis of students' written work, aiming to explore their perceptions, emotional responses, and support needs more deeply (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023).

A convergent parallel design was adopted, whereby quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed independently but interpreted together. This allowed comparison between students' actual writing behaviors and their reported experiences, providing a richer understanding of both surface-level errors and underlying cognitive and affective factors (Dörnyei, 2007).

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to include undergraduate students who had experience with academic writing and were currently engaged in an Essay Writing course focused on argumentative texts. This approach ensured that participants could provide detailed insights relevant to the research questions (Palinkas, 2015; Patton, 2015).

The sample comprised 40 undergraduates enrolled in the English Study Program at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu, Indonesia. Their English proficiency ranged from pre-intermediate to upper-intermediate levels, based on standardized placement tests. The group reflected diverse writing skills and confidence levels, offering a broad perspective on the challenges encountered.

Students completed two argumentative essays designed to evaluate linguistic accuracy, organizational coherence, and argument development. Essays were scored using an analytic rubric adapted from (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014), which assessed sentence complexity,

logical flow, thesis clarity, and support for claims. This provided quantitative data on writing quality linked to student-reported difficulties.

A structured questionnaire adapted from (Cheng, 2004) and White and Arndt, (1991) was used to gather self-reported data on students' difficulties in language use, essay organization, and cognitive aspects such as writing anxiety and idea generation. The questionnaire employed a 4-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree) to quantify the extent of these challenges.

Ten students were purposively selected for follow-up interviews based on variation in essay performance. Using Kvale & Brinkmann's, (2015) approach, interviews focused on their experiences with language and structural challenges, cognitive and emotional factors affecting writing, and responses to instructor feedback. Each interview lasted 20–30 minutes, was audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically (Braun, & Clarke, 2006).

The instructor's written feedback on student drafts was examined and classified into direct, indirect, and metalinguistic feedback types. This analysis sought to identify which feedback forms were most effective in supporting revision and improvement of argumentative essays.

Data from the questionnaires and essay scores were processed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations, to summarize students' performance and perceived challenges. Correlational analysis examined relationships between language proficiency, organization, and cognitive variables. Paired-sample t-tests assessed changes in performance before and after feedback and instruction. These analyses followed established protocols in second language writing research (Plonsky & Oswald, 2014).

Thematic analysis was conducted on interview transcripts and feedback comments using (Braun & Clarke's, (2021) six-step procedure. Two independent coders analyzed the data to enhance reliability, achieving a Cohen's kappa of 0.85, indicating strong inter-coder agreement (McHugh, 2012). This process identified key themes related to linguistic difficulties, organizational challenges, and cognitive-affective factors impacting writing.

To strengthen the study's validity, methodological triangulation combined quantitative survey and essay data with qualitative interview and feedback analyses. Cross-checking among different data sources and independent

coders reduced bias and confirmed the consistency of findings (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Linguistic challenges in EFL students' argumentative writing

Effective argumentative essays depend on logical flow, coherence, and the integration of counterarguments. This study confirmed that

students encounter persistent linguistic challenges affecting these elements. As illustrated in Figure 1, the linguistic challenges identified in students' argumentative writing primarily involved limited vocabulary, frequent grammatical errors, and inappropriate use of cohesive devices. These challenges made it hard for students to express complex ideas clearly and organize their arguments logically.

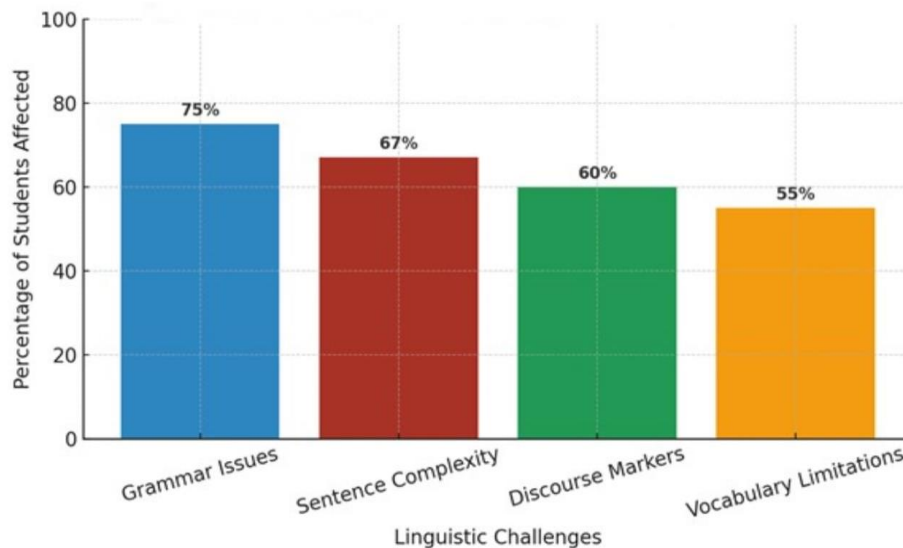


Figure 1. *Linguistic challenges in argumentative essay writing*

As shown in Figure 1, 72% of participants struggled with maintaining logical flow, which hindered the structured progression of their arguments. Coherence issues were reported by 65% of students, who often failed to use cohesive devices to connect ideas smoothly across sentences and paragraphs. Additionally, 70% experienced difficulties in argument structure, particularly in presenting claims, supporting evidence, and counterarguments in a clear, logical sequence. The integration of counterarguments proved especially challenging, with 58% of students unable to engage opposing views effectively, which reduced the persuasiveness of their essays.

The findings revealed the need for direct instruction on paragraph organization and cohesive devices. Although less frequent, difficulties in addressing counterarguments are still crucial, as ignoring opposing views weakens the overall argument. Interview data supported these results, with students frequently attributing their difficulties to limited vocabulary and grammar knowledge. One student explained, "Sometimes I know what I want to say, but I don't know how to say it correctly in English, so I just

write simple sentences." Another commented, "My writing feels jumpy. I don't know how to connect my ideas smoothly," pointing to difficulties with coherence. These responses show that language challenges affect not just grammar or vocabulary, but also the overall flow and clarity of writing. Some students also expressed confusion about how to include counterarguments. As one noted, "I don't feel confident giving a counterargument because I worry it will make my essay weaker, not stronger." Such reflections emphasize the interconnection between linguistic and cognitive challenges in argumentative writing.

Organizational challenges in EFL students' argumentative writing

Organizational skills are fundamental to develop clear and persuasive arguments. The study revealed that a majority of students faced difficulties in organizing their essays coherently. Figure 2 illustrates that 72% of students struggled with logical flow, resulting in fragmented and unclear arguments. Similarly, 70% had trouble structuring their overall argument logically, despite often generating relevant ideas. Coherence

problems were reported by 65%, indicating students struggled to integrate counterarguments effectively, which reduced the persuasiveness of their writing. Furthermore, 58% of

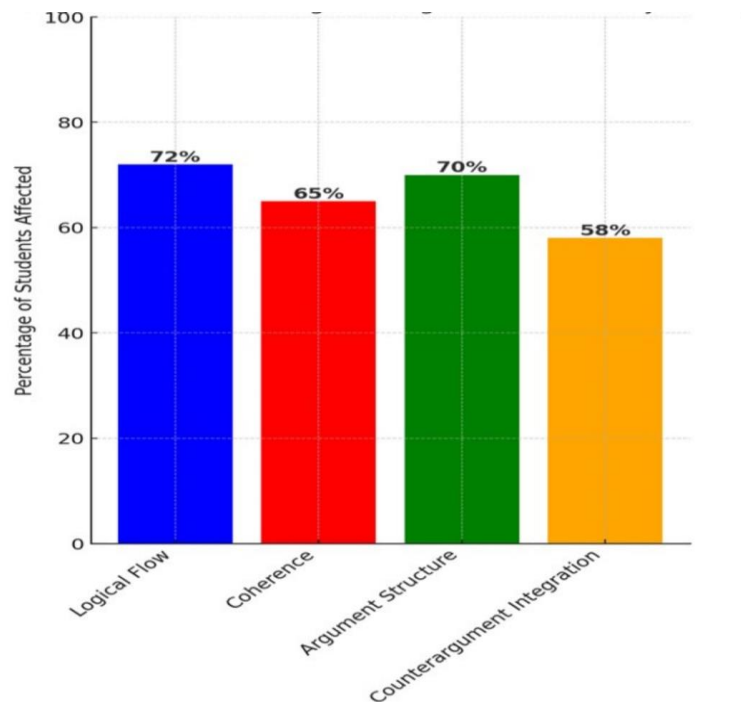


Figure 2. *Organizational challenges in argumentative essay writing*

Interview feedback supported these findings. Several students admitted to begin their writing without planning, leading to disorganized ideas. One student said, “I usually just start writing without outlining, so my ideas come out mixed and hard to follow.” Another asked, “It’s hard to know where to put the counterargument should it be in the middle or at the end?” These responses indicate gaps in understanding typical argumentative structures, particularly in placing key elements such as claims, evidence, and counterarguments. Additional comments revealed struggles with introductions and conclusions, with one student explaining, “I don’t know how to start and end my essay properly. I just write something general.” The qualitative findings reinforce the survey results and highlight the need for more

explicit instruction in essay planning and organization.

Cognitive challenges in EFL students’ argumentative writing

Argumentative writing requires advanced cognitive skills, including critical reasoning, idea generation, and reflection, in addition to language proficiency and structural awareness. This study found that many students experienced significant cognitive challenges.

To illustrate these cognitive challenges, Figure 3 presents data on the percentage of students experiencing writing anxiety and low self-efficacy.

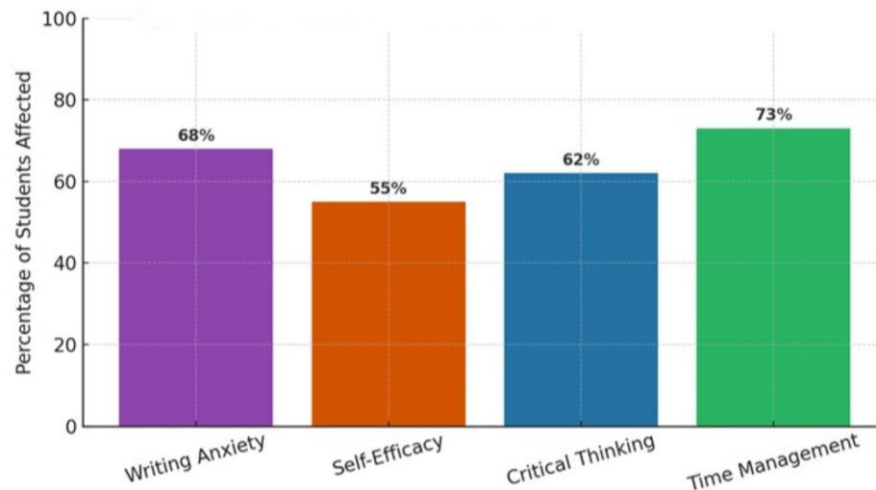


Figure 3. *Cognitive challenges in argumentative essay writing*

Figure 3 shows that 69% of students experienced writing anxiety, which interfered with their concentration and hindered their writing performance. Additionally, 67% struggled to generate ideas and provide substantive support for their arguments. Sixty percent found evaluating and responding to counterarguments particularly difficult, often avoiding or uncritically accepting opposing views.

Students described feelings of self-doubt and mental blocks during writing. One said, “I knew what I wanted to say, but I didn’t know how to put it in a strong way. I felt unsure about my arguments.” Another remarked, “Sometimes I got stuck because I didn’t have enough ideas to support my opinion.” Several noted discomfort with counterarguments, with one participant stating, “It was hard to disagree with something

when I didn’t feel confident in my own argument.” These reflections suggest that writing anxiety and underdeveloped critical thinking skills are significant barriers to produce effective argumentative essays.

Interplay between linguistic, organizational, and cognitive challenges

The study revealed that linguistic, organizational, and cognitive challenges are interconnected. Students with limited language proficiency often produced disorganized essays and reported higher levels of writing anxiety.

To describe these relationships, Figure 4 presents the correlation patterns among linguistic proficiency, organizational skills, and cognitive factors in argumentative writing.

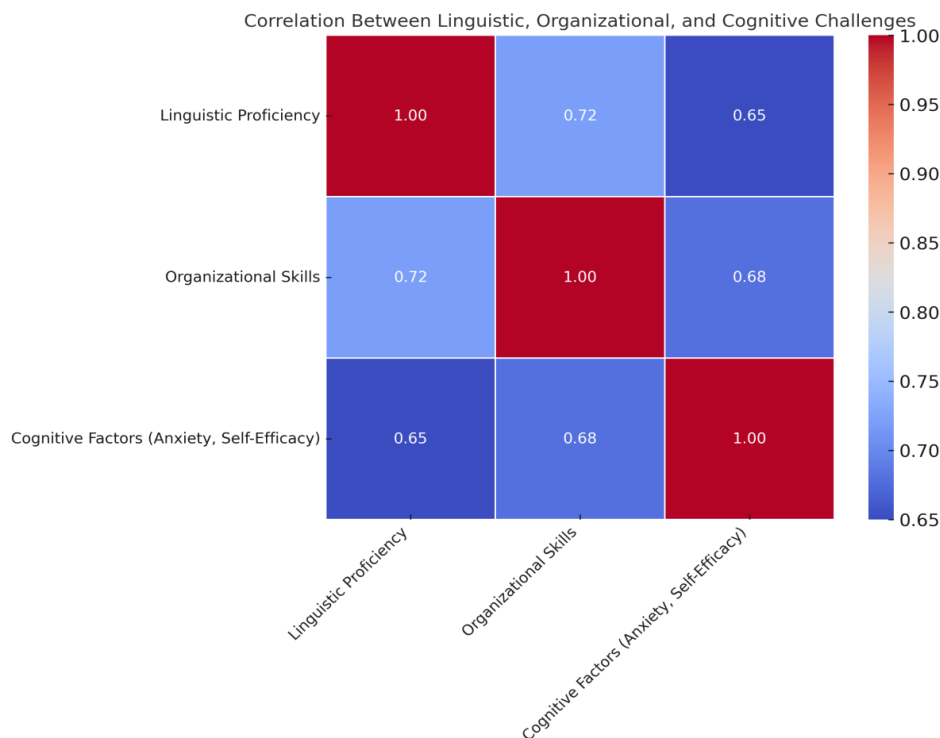


Figure 4. *Correlation between linguistic, organizational, and cognitive challenges*

Figure 4 presents correlations among linguistic proficiency, organizational skills, and cognitive factors, revealing a strong positive correlation between language ability and organizational quality ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.01$). Students with limited vocabulary and grammar tended to produce essays with less coherent arguments and weaker structure. Moreover, writing anxiety showed a negative correlation with organizational quality, as anxious students frequently omitted counterarguments and produced fragmented essays.

These findings highlight the need of integrated pedagogical approaches that focus on linguistic, organizational, and cognitive-affective dimensions of argumentative writing. Pedagogical strategies such as structured debates, guided essay planning, and peer feedback can foster both language development and argumentation skills. Moreover, process-oriented writing instruction

that reduces anxiety and builds confidence may contribute to improved coherence and argumentative quality.

Effective feedback & instructional strategies in EFL argumentative writing

Effective feedback was important to help EFL students improve their argumentative writing. It helped them fix language mistakes and guided them in organizing their ideas better, strengthening their arguments, and making their writing more coherent. This study confirmed that students strongly preferred clear, direct feedback from their instructors rather than general comments or feedback from peers.

To illustrate these connections, Figure 5 presented the effective feedback and instructional strategies that supported EFL students in improving their argumentative writing.

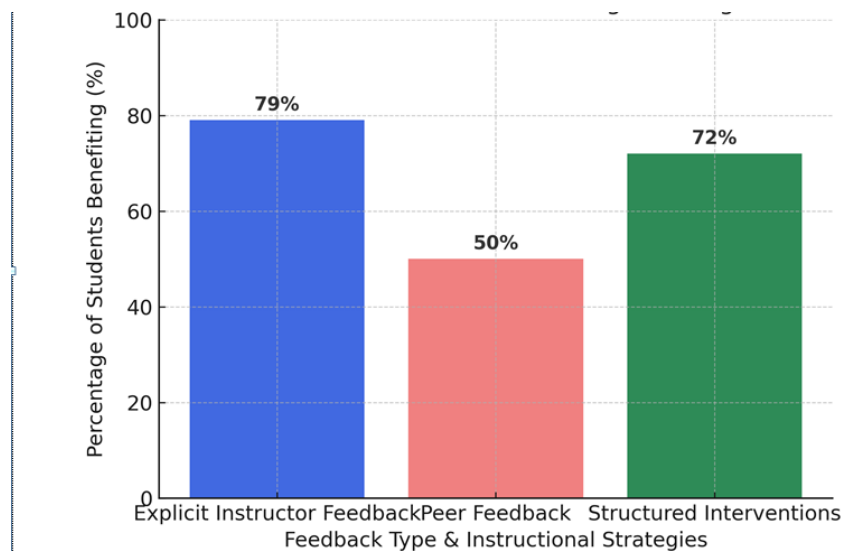


Figure 5. *The effectiveness of feedback and instructional strategies*

As shown in Figure 5, 79% of students reported that clear, specific feedback from instructors was more helpful than general comments or peer feedback. Detailed, focused feedback guided students in correcting language errors, reorganizing ideas, and strengthening arguments. Additionally, 72% of students showed measurable improvement in their essay scores after receiving targeted feedback, highlighting its effectiveness in developing argumentative writing skills.

Qualitative data supported these results, as students expressed appreciation for direct and structured feedback that clarified expectations and offered actionable guidance. The findings indicate that effective feedback enhances not only linguistic accuracy but also promotes critical thinking and sustained engagement in the writing process.

Linguistic challenges in EFL students' argumentative writing

The findings revealed that EFL students faced significant linguistic challenges that reduced their ability to construct coherent and persuasive arguments. Many struggled to organize ideas logically and sustain argumentative coherence, supporting earlier evidence that linguistic limitations constrain rhetorical clarity in EFL writing (Ananda, Mardiah, & Fajaryani, 2024; Tso, 2024; Wang, 2024). Students struggled to handle counterarguments, which made their essays less organized and convincing, showing a need for focused teaching on how to build cohesive arguments.

Interview data supported these results. Many students expressed frustration over limited vocabulary and grammar skills, which made it

hard for them to clearly and persuasively communicate complex ideas. One participant said, *"Sometimes I had good ideas in my mind, but I didn't know how to express them correctly in English."* Another shared, *"I was always worried about making grammar mistakes, so I focused too much on small details and forgot the main idea of my argument."* These reflections showed that linguistic limits affected sentence accuracy and the overall strength of their arguments.

Students frequently had difficulty selecting appropriate vocabulary and using cohesive devices, which affected the clarity and flow of their writing. Their limited knowledge of linking expressions led to disorganized essays that lacked coherence and logical flow. One participant shared, *"I didn't know many linking words, so my paragraphs looked like separate parts, not connected."* Students need direct instruction on using discourse markers and cohesion strategies to write coherent argumentative essays.

Linguistic challenges in EFL argumentative writing are not limited to grammar or vocabulary. They affect how students build and connect ideas. Integrating language instruction with rhetorical and organizational support is essential to improve clarity and persuasiveness (Sabir, Saeed, & Pathan, 2024).

Organizational challenges in EFL students' argumentative writing

The findings indicated that many EFL students encountered difficulties in organizing their ideas effectively when writing argumentative essays. Problems included weak logical flow, unclear structural progression, and limited cohesion across paragraphs. Many students struggled to include counterarguments, making this a

significant weakness in their argumentative writing. The findings align with previous research showing that EFL learners often struggle with academic writing norms and argument structure, resulting in disorganized essays (Oo & Okada, 2024; Wang & Said, 2024).

Interview data revealed that students lacked knowledge of how to organize their essays and sequence ideas logically, contributing to their writing difficulties. One participant stated, *"I have many ideas, but don't know how to arrange them in the essay. Sometimes I just write what comes to mind."* Students' responses showed they lacked planning and outlining skills, confirming that structured pre-writing activities are essential for developing ideas and ensuring essay cohesion (Hung & Van, 2018).

Students often failed to link paragraphs smoothly, which weakened the logical flow of their arguments. One student shared, *"My teacher said my paragraphs are not connected, but I don't know how to fix that."* This indicated limited knowledge of transitions and cohesive devices influenced textual coherence. Prior research similarly reports that many EFL students face challenges with cohesion, often due to insufficient instruction in discourse features and rhetorical structuring (Khotaba, 2022; Zhou, 2024).

These interview insights supported the survey results, showing that students' struggles with organizing their writing came from a lack of structure knowledge and confidence and limited strategy use (Asnas, Mustofa, & Ubaidillah, 2022; Riffel & Abrams, 2023). Many students did not know how to plan their essays or connect their ideas clearly. To overcome this problem, writing instruction should focus on teaching argumentative essay structure directly, using model texts and activities that guide students in organizing paragraphs (Chigbu et al, 2023). Providing students with practice in developing and responding to counterarguments can increase the persuasiveness and logical organization of their essays.

Confusion about how to integrate counterarguments also emerged as a main challenge. Some students perceived counterarguments as weakening their position, rather than strengthening it. One noted, *"I don't understand how to use counterarguments. I think it makes my writing less strong, so I don't include them."* This aligns with earlier findings indicating that many EFL students lack the rhetorical awareness and confidence necessary to engage

with opposing views effectively (Gronostay, 2016; Šandová, 2023).

These interview insights confirmed the quantitative findings that students' organizational challenges stemmed from a lack of structural knowledge and low self-efficacy and limited strategy use (Miller & Pessoa, 2016). Instructional interventions should therefore prioritize direct teaching of essay organization, including the use of model texts and guided planning. Additionally, structured activities that help students practice integrating and responding to counterarguments are essential for developing logically coherent and persuasive writing (Reza, 2023).

Cognitive challenges in EFL students' argumentative writing

The findings discovered that cognitive factors such as writing anxiety, low self-confidence, and limited critical thinking skills significantly hindered EFL students' ability to produce coherent and persuasive argumentative essays. These difficulties affected idea generation, argument development, and the ability to address opposing views. These results align with earlier research indicating that psychological and cognitive constraints, particularly anxiety, negatively influence writing fluency, coherence, and idea elaboration (Garcia & Asuncion, 2022; Kleemola, Hyytinen, & Toom, 2022).

Interview data provided deeper insight into students' experiences. Several students described feeling anxious when writing, especially due to fear of making grammatical errors or receiving poor evaluations. One student shared, *"When I write essays, I feel nervous and don't know if what I'm writing is correct. It makes me stop many times."* This confirmed that anxiety often disrupted the writing process, causing students to pause frequently and struggle to express their ideas clearly.

Low self-efficacy also appeared as a major obstacle. Several students said they didn't feel confident in their writing skills. One student shared, *"Even if I have ideas, I don't believe my writing is good. So I just keep it simple."* Because of this lack of confidence, many students wrote short and underdeveloped essays. This supports earlier research showing that low self-belief can lower both the quality and quantity of student writing (Yang, 2024).

Limited critical thinking was also evident. Some students could express personal opinions but struggled to justify them or respond to counterarguments. One noted, *"I can give my*

opinion, but I don't know how to argue it or explain why others are wrong." This indicates a problem in analytical reasoning and rhetorical awareness, suggesting that EFL learners often require explicit instruction in critical thinking and argumentation strategies.

These findings highlight the need for writing instruction that addresses emotional and cognitive barriers. Pedagogical approaches such as process-based writing, brainstorming techniques, and argument mapping can support idea generation and organization. Simultaneously, structured feedback, confidence-building activities, and anxiety-reducing strategies may enhance motivation and improve students' cognitive engagement in writing tasks (Alsariera & Alsaraireh, 2024; Kim, 2024).

Interplay between linguistic, organizational, and cognitive challenges

The findings indicated a strong interconnection between linguistic, organizational, and cognitive challenges in EFL students' argumentative writing. Lack of vocabulary and grammar often increased organizational difficulties and contributed to heightened writing anxiety. Students with limited language proficiency frequently struggled to maintain logical flow and coherence, confirming earlier findings that linguistic limitations are closely linked to organizational weaknesses and cognitive strain (Intja & Nahole, 2021; Miller & Pessoa, 2016; Sato, 2024). These interrelated difficulties suggest that writing problems are not isolated but interconnected, affecting overall writing quality (Ferretti & Graham, 2019; Jagaiah, Olinghouse, & Kearns, 2020; Xue et al., 2021).

Interview responses illustrated how these challenges interacted in real writing contexts. One student remarked, *"When I don't know how to say something in English, I just skip it or write something easy. But then, my essay looks messy."* This highlights how lexical and grammatical gaps led to content simplification and disrupted logical structure, reducing clarity (Maamuujav et al., 2021; Marlina, 2024). Another student explained, *"I have the ideas in my head, but when I try to write them, I get confused. Then I get nervous and just give up,"* reflecting the impact of writing anxiety and low self-efficacy on planning and organization (Cheng, 2004; Fan & Wang, 2024).

Moreover, difficulties with counterarguments were not merely cognitive but also linguistic. As one participant noted, *"I don't know the words to disagree politely or explain my opinion clearly, so*

I just avoid the other side." This avoidance weakened argumentative structure and coherence, showing that insufficient lexical resources can hinder critical engagement with alternative perspectives (Amaliah, 2024; Ghanbari & Salari, 2022). Without adequate mastery of specific language tools such as discourse markers (however, although), hedging expressions (it could be argued), and rebuttal structures (while some may claim...), students often omitted main argumentative components. This omission reduced the clarity, logical flow, and persuasiveness of their essays (Daud, Firmansyah, & Octasary, 2024; Sato, 2024).

These findings suggest a need for integrated instruction focus on language skills, argument structure, and cognitive strategies simultaneously. Instructional approaches such as guided debates, argument mapping, and annotated model texts can support the development of reasoning, academic vocabulary, and syntactic complexity in parallel (Abdullah et al., 2019; Nhung, 2024). Additionally, structured guidance that includes low-pressure writing tasks and formative feedback can help reduce anxiety and encourage risk-taking in writing (Fan, 2023; Goldin et al, 2017; Solfiyatzahro et al., 2019; Sherpa, 2021). When instruction targets these dimensions holistically, students are more likely to overcome challenges and build coherent, persuasive arguments.

Effective feedback & instructional strategies in EFL argumentative writing

The findings also highlighted the importance of teacher feedback and structured instructional support in enhancing EFL students' argumentative writing. Students demonstrated clear progress in organization, coherence, and argumentation after receiving targeted feedback. This confirms previous research showing that explicit, form-focused teacher feedback is more effective than general comments or peer suggestions in fostering writing improvement (Bitchener & Storch, 2016; Solfiyatzahro et al., 2019). Many participants preferred lecturer feedback to peer responses, valuing the clarity and directness of teacher input. This preference aligns with research showing that teacher feedback tends to be more effective, especially in foreign language learning contexts (Al-Othman, 2024; Guo et al., 2022).

Interview data reinforced the importance of instructional structured guidance. One student stated, *"When the teacher corrects my sentences*

and explains why, I understand what I did wrong. My classmate's only say, 'This is not clear,' but they don't know how to fix it." Another shared, "The examples and outlines from the teacher help me the most. I use them as models when I write my own essays." These responses point to the importance of lecturer modeling, exemplification, and direct instruction in supporting the development of effective writing (Solfitriyuzzahro et al., 2019; Zhan, Sun, & Zhang, 2021). When students received detailed feedback and clear expectations, they showed increased motivation and willingness to revise their work (Bitchener, & Storch, 2016; Shintani, Natsuko & Ellis, Rod & Suzuki, 2014)

Students also noted the motivational impact of constructive feedback. One participant commented, "When I get positive and clear feedback, I feel more confident to try again and improve." This illustrates that feedback not only facilitates revision but also fosters emotional engagement and persistence. Prior research has confirmed that well-delivered feedback enhances students' writing confidence, reduces anxiety, and promotes self-regulated learning (Alanazi, 2020; Liu et al, 2024; Wang, Li, & Shen, 2023). Encouraging, explanatory feedback allows learners to internalize writing standards and apply strategies for future tasks (Fan, 2023; Zhang & Chieh, 2025).

Based on these findings, writing instruction should integrate systematic feedback mechanisms. Lecturer should provide specific, actionable comments and use analytic rubrics and checklists to guide student focus (Sato, 2024; Xue et al., 2021). Complementary strategies like peer review training and multiple revision stages can help students develop self-monitoring skills and writing autonomy (Chukwuere, 2024; Puengpipattrakul, 2019; Tavanapour & Chalak, 2021). When feedback is timely, explicit, and integrated into meaningful writing tasks, it can significantly enhance students' writing competence and self-confidence.

This study highlights the need for an integrated approach to teaching argumentative writing in EFL contexts. Instruction should target linguistic elements, such as grammar and vocabulary that support students in organizing arguments coherently and managing writing-related anxiety. The findings indicate the value of structured instructional strategies, including explicit modeling, guided planning, and process-based feedback. Clear and constructive feedback from instructors, was shown to enhance students'

confidence and writing performance. Therefore, teacher education programs should prioritize formative feedback techniques and the development of students' critical thinking during writing tasks. The integration of cognitive, linguistic, and affective dimensions can improve EFL students' academic writing proficiency.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study involved a small sample of undergraduate students from a single institution, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Second, the reliance on self-reported data and interviews may have introduced subjectivity or recall bias. Third, although the study examined linguistic, structural, and cognitive aspects of writing; it did not address cultural norms or digital tools, which may shape students' writing practices. Finally, although lecturer feedback was explored in depth, the role of peer feedback was not fully examined. Future research could investigate peer interaction, cross-institutional comparisons, and the impact of digital platforms on argumentative writing development.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the linguistic, organizational, and cognitive challenges encountered by EFL undergraduate students in writing argumentative essays, and explored how instructor feedback contributed to overcoming these problems. The findings indicated that many students struggled to produce clear, logically structured arguments. Difficulties in linking ideas, presenting counterarguments, and maintaining coherence was related to limited vocabulary, grammatical weaknesses, disorganized structure, and writing anxiety. Limited language proficiency hindered idea expression and logical development, while low confidence and fear of making errors further restricted the construction of arguments. These challenges were interconnected, underscoring the need for integrated instructional approaches that simultaneously focus on language use, organizational structure, and cognitive demands. Instructor feedback was perceived by participants as an important support in developing their argumentative writing. Students valued clear, specific, and actionable feedback that identified errors and suggested concrete revisions. They also reported that the feedback helped improve their linguistic accuracy and coherence, increasing their confidence and motivation. These findings suggest that writing instruction should combine skill development with emotional support to help

students manage writing challenges. Teacher education programs should also emphasize how to provide effective feedback that builds students' confidence and motivation.

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