Forward-Thinking Approach to ESP Curricula for Argumentative Writing Skills Using Needs Assessment

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ABSTRACT

ESP curricula emphasizes on real-life relevance, focusing on equipping learners with the linguistic competencies required to excel in their chosen fields. The background literature stresses the importance of writing for the audience by tertiary students who lack the ability to propose credible thesis statements and construct coherent arguments, underscoring a gap in critical and analytical thinking. Thus, this study integrates needs assessment to identify the difficulties students face in writing argumentative essays to outline a written English course. A mixed method approach was used where the quantitative design was employed to have an overall understanding of the students' perceptions on their argumentative writing abilities and the data was analysed using SPSS whereas the qualitative approach was used to get a gist of the students' proficiency level using the discourse analysis. The samples of this study were students of English for Academic Writing of a public government university in Malaysia. The data was collected by using samples of students' second draft of their writing, a questionnaire using Rosettes' question types was constructed and semi-structured interviews to gather teachers' perceptions. This study explored the importance and need for a forward-thinking approach to curriculum development in ESP, addressing the needs of real-world demands and outlined an ESP course to meet the learner needs. The findings and recommendations aim to inform preservice and in-service teachers, university faculty, course designers, and others interested in educational research educators, in crafting adaptable and impactful programs ESP that cater to diverse and ever-changing learner requirements.

Keywords: ESP, needs assessment, argumentative writing, curriculum development, tertiary level

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1. Introduction

When embarking on the journey into college life, the importance of having strong writing skills cannot be overlooked. Whether natural sciences or human sciences, all students are expected to engage in writing at various stages of university life. It is common therefore to find many pre-requisites before one is formally accepted into a university. One such pre-requisite is to demonstrate a standard level of language proficiency. The language that one expects to be proficient in depends entirely on the medium of instruction of the program that one intends to apply for. Language proficiency however can sometimes be misconstrued by being loosely defined as one's ability to use a target language fluently. This can lead to outcomes whereby one believes that he or she is able to communicate fluently in a certain language yet wonders why they need to take a language course before being allowed to proceed to their desired major.

Different universities have different language requirements upon entry into a university. Most English medium universities across the globe expect an acceptable standard of English language proficiency and tests such language proficiency based on a standardized language test which could either be the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). Both tests measure non-native candidates' ability to use all the four major skills of English language namely; reading, writing, speaking and listening. It is noteworthy to remember that each university will have different requirements according to applicant's choice of course. An applicant who intends to study English language, literature or even philosophy would probably have higher English requirements compared to a student who intends to study accounting for example. It is imperative that a potential student meet such requirements of English language proficiency in all four language skills before beginning their course in the university.

ESL and EFL students find writing among the four language skills the most overwhelming due to its complexity (Yunus, Salehi & Nordin, 2012). Despite the importance of writing achievement for academic success and for career advancement, large numbers of students graduate from high school without having developed proficiency in writing. (MacArthur, Jennings, & Philippakos, 2019). Deane, Odendahl, Quinlan, Fowles, Welsh & Bivens-Tatum (2008) say that traditionally, college writing has put on a lot of emphasis on expository and argumentative writing. Delving deeper into some of the types of writing that are most intimidating, Ka-kan-dee and Kaur (2014) observed that argumentative writing is possibly one of the most difficult writing tasks for students compared to other forms of writing. They say that such writing is in fact very important at the tertiary level because university students are expected to be able to express their ideas clearly and critically in academic writing. Most writing tasks at the tertiary level do require students to be able to argue convincingly and critically. However, there is no denying that ESL and EFL students exhibit many difficulties when writing argumentatively. Nippold and Ward-Lonergan (2010) says that "argumentative writing is a challenging communication task that needs sophisticated cognitive and linguistic abilities". Such abilities are obviously challenging to ESL and EFL learners regardless of proficiency level. In order to rectify the problems associated to difficulties of ESL and EFL students in argumentative writing, a needs analysis on argumentative writing of upper-intermediate ESL learners will be conducted specifically on linguistic alternatives as well as providing writing tools to ESL learners for academic writing.

This study aims to identify the difficulties students face in writing argumentative essays and develop an ESP course outline for an English for Argumentative writing course. As established earlier, argumentative writing is an important writing genre for university students in order to provide quality academic work in their written assignments. Argumentation competence is an

important element at multiple levels of education because of its close connections to critical and higher-order thinking (Ferretti & Graham, 2019). Studies have shown that students struggle to write argumentatively. In addition to their lack in linguistic competence, providing clear arguments and organization of ideas seem to be overwhelming for students when writing academically. Therefore, it is first crucial to explore students' needs before designing an ESP course. By focusing mainly on argumentative writing, this study hopes to benefit course designers by initiating a comprehensive and valuable ESP course for tertiary level students to be proficient and productive writers.

2. Background

2.1 Importance of argumentative writing in Higher Education

Argumentation has been a fundamental cognitive strategy employed by humans throughout history to convey intellectual ideas effectively.Writing argumentative essays is indeed a cornerstone of higher education. It is not just about expressing opinions; it is about critical thinking, research skills, and the ability to construct a coherent and persuasive argument supported by evidence (Valerio, 2025). According to Yin (2012), writing is an imperative skill across all subjects. This is because writing reflects the way a student critically thinks as well as demonstrates their research abilities to come up with sound arguments.The entirety of the argumentative essay should center on bolstering and safeguarding the thesis statement through the use of evidence, analysis, and reasoning. A well-developed thesis is essential for providing clear direction to an essay and ensuring its effectiveness in persuading readers (Cheong et al., 2021).

Yunus et al. (2012) assert that writing in general requires a high-order thinking skills. They go on to include communication skills that involve "conceptualization, inference, creativity, organization, and the summarization of sophisticated ideas are required as well (p.138). White & Billings (2008) define argument as "a form of discourse in which the writer or speaker presents a pattern of reasoning, reinforced by detailed evidence and refutation of challenging claims, that tries to persuade an audience to accept the claim" (p.4). Argumentative essays encourage students to delve deep into a topic, analyze different perspectives, and articulate their stance effectively. They foster skills like logical reasoning, organization, and communication, all of which are invaluable in academia and beyond. So, mastering the art of writing argumentative essays is undoubtedly essential for success in higher education and beyond. Research on L2 academic writing should focus on argumentation abilities and ideas rather than other macro-skill tasks (Stapleton, 2002; Valeria, 2025). According to Chase (2011), students are expected to be holistic and global in their thinking, as they need to be able to comprehend, evaluate, and construct arguments. They also need to have the skill to stand firm in a particular point of view and be able to convince their readers to conform to their stance. This really requires not only a high level of cognitive ability but is also needs a solid amount of prior knowledge as well as high level of linguistic competence.

Deane et al. (2008) say that argumentative writing however differs from other forms of writing in a number of ways, "(a) methods of text organization and their relationship to domain knowledge and working memory, (b) the role of the audience, (c) mastery of textual cuing skills and other writing schemas appropriate to specific modes of writing, and (d) the role of reasoning skills" (p.25). According to Langan (2004), an English standard college argumentative essay is often known to have three parts: an introduction or the hook, a body paragraph, a counterargument paragraph, and a refutation paragraph. Research indicates that the structure and progression of an argumentative essay substantially influence students' proficiency in composing such essays. Critical thinking undeniably influenced students' writing processes, dramatically affecting their writing success. As a result, students have to think critically about the issue and provide logical

reasoning for the ideas they write (Dang et al., 2020).

Giridharan and Robson (2012) assert that argumentative writing requires students to bring forth their own ideas guided by theoretical ideas in order to engage their readers in an academic setting. When defining argumentation, White & Billings (2008) highlight three important elements in argumentation. The first is that in order for an argument to be good, it emanates an excellent train of thought that is represented in a logical manner which draws the attention of the reader. Secondly, in any argument, a claim must be backed up by substantial evidence. Thirdly, when arguing, the ultimate aim is to convince the reader to the writer's point of view. Ramage et al. (2007) reinforced that when writing argumentatively, justification of claims is essential. The problem lies when deciding on the correct order to layout the argument that has been made. Even when well-planned, language plays an important role in structuring one's arguments in an organized manner.

2.2 Needs Analysis and ESP course design

The concept of needs analysis (NA) first appeared in the 1920s to refer to the needs of learners who learn English as a general language. The term gained a wide popularity after the spread of ESP programs in the mid 1970s and beginning of 1980s, to be, thereafter, considered as one of the fundamental stages in ESP course design (Munby, 1978).The overview of needs analysis in language teaching has depicted its history, theoretical foundation, and approaches. Needs analysis is also regarded as demand or requirement needs, which has become a necessary and important stage of course design for either general English course or English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course (West, 1994). Learner's needs has been the principle of the curriculum development of ESP. As defined by Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991), it can be regarded as what field the learners will practice English in the future. Studies on learner needs focused on the "needs analysis" and "needs assessment," including the survey about students' backgrounds and goals, as well as interviewing the faculty (Johns, 1981; Howorwittz, 1986). The more learner needs are clear, the more the objectives are expressed and the ESP course easily becomes successful (Theeb, H., & Albakrawi, M, 2013).

Since needs analysis has become a prerequisite and necessary condition, it is also expounded as a guidance of course design or an evaluation of the students' existing perceptions of needs. Although experienced teachers may ask students directly to understand what they expect of the class in the very beginning, a well-aligned needs analysis involve just much more than that. Needs analysis can help teacher gather information to find out how much the students already know and what they still need to learn (Lee, 2016). Giridharan & Robson (2012) claim that it is a given that academic writing is crucial skill at the undergraduate level. Even though, students are often guided when learning how to write academically through formal instructional settings, proficiency is often still an issue among ESL learners. So, this is a double burden upon the ESL learner as students are not proficient enough in the language as well as lack skills in writing argumentatively. Writing involves "composing, developing and analysing ideas, implying the ability to rephrase information in the form of narratives, or transforming information into new texts as in argumentative writing" (Giridharan & Robson, 2012). As previously established, this is evidently a huge obstacle for students to write appropriately in academic reports. Research has shown that the academic success of students embarking on tertiary studies heavily relies on their ability to write academically.
A big discrepancy has still remained relatively high between general English level at university level and the requirements of ESP for real workplaces. Materials provided are not authentic content of the workplace texts. These materials might fail to integrate the academic English into the required specific English tasks needed in the international business world. Therefore, it would be the first step to implement a simple needs assessment for the ESP course design (Lee, 2016).

3.Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of students' needs in argumentative writing. The quantitative approach was used to collect and analyze data from the questionnaire, to have an overall understanding of students' perceptions of their argumentative writing abilities. In contrast, the qualitative approach involved analysing samples of students' writing to gain insights into their proficiency levels. Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with English for Academic Writing (EAW) instructors to acquire further information on students' overall proficiency and academic writing skills.

This study adhered to ethical guidelines and received full internal ethical clearance from the Dean of the Faculty, and this approval was formally submitted to and recorded by the department where the research was conducted. All participants, students and teachers, provided informed consent prior to participation, affirming their voluntary participation based on their availability and understanding of the study's purpose. Findings were analyzed and reported in aggregate form to maintain participants' privacy and confidentiality. The interpretation of results were carried out objectively without bias with the sole aim of contributing meaningful, evidence-based insights to the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), curriculum design and writing skill development.

3.2 Research Objective

To investigate the writing skills needs of undergraduate students in argumentative writing.

3.3 Research Questions

1. What is the argumentative writing proficiency level of undergraduates in English for Academic Writing?

2. What are the argumentative writing needs of undergraduate students ?

3. What are the argumentative writing needs of undergraduate students as perceived by teachers?
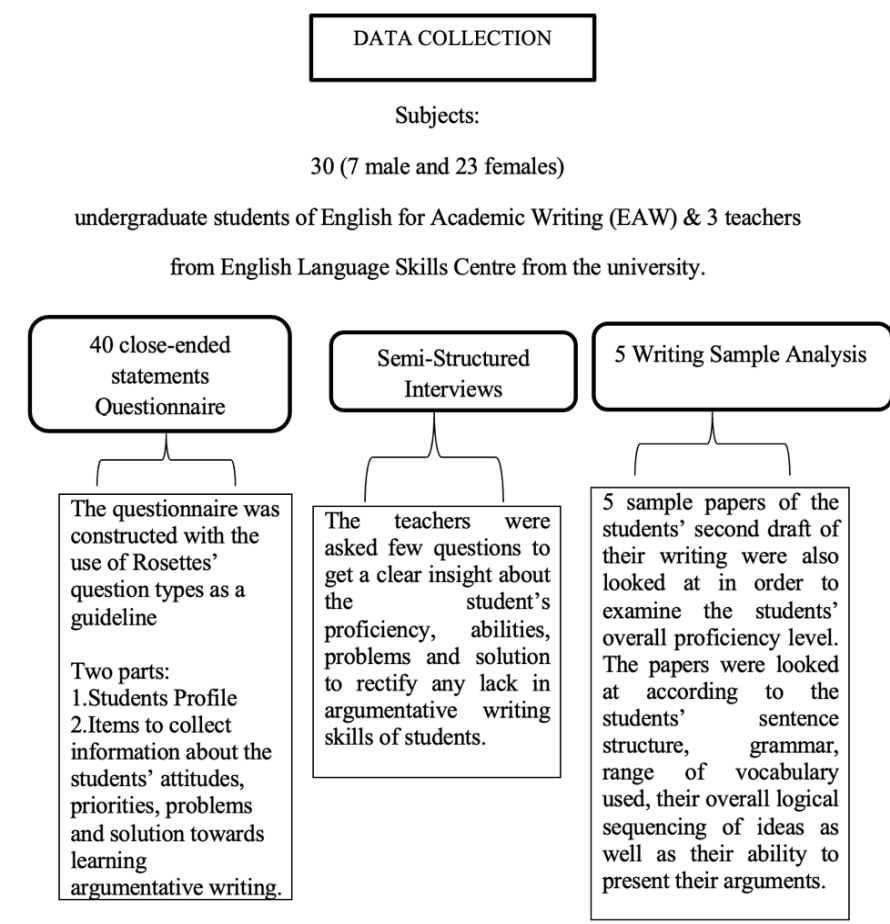
3.4 Data Collection

Figure 1: Data collection (Sampling and procedure)

Results

4.1 Evaluation of Writing Samples

The writing sample of the final year undergraduate students were taken in order to hold out a needs analysis to design a course for argumentative writing. The samples were their group assignments for English for Academic writing (EAW). There were 5 different samples with five different topics which included health effects of fast food, tragedy on MH17, online shopping. Each sample was analysed according to their grammatical errors, organizational patterns and body of the matter, inclusion of refutations and arguments and range of vocabulary. The details of each sample are as follows: -

4.1.1 Sample 1

This sample did not have a proper or a defined topic. The research is done on a very vague idea which is not so clear in the sample. The main drawback is that this sample do not have any proper division of the essay like the introduction, matter and the conclusion due to which the information is scattered under discussion. Along the lines there are also bad sentence structure which distort the meaning of the sentences. This sample have a limited range of vocabulary which do not actually fit in some sentences. For example, they use the word "next" to explain the number of reasons they have rather than using firstly, secondly, lastly. This sample clearly do not have any argumentation

and refutations for their topic. Also, they have inserted lot of unnecessary information which are not relevant to their study.

4.1.2 Sample 2

The research in this sample is done on the tragedy of MH17 on the perceptions of the students in this regard. Along the essay they have not given any information much related to the incident but only the student's opinion which also do not clarify any new reader to understand about what they are talking about. They have tried to explain their study through graphs in which they fail because they are not able to describe the graphs properly. Their data is very vaguely explained because of the less range of vocabulary. They have repeated the word in explaining two different graphs which talk about entire two different issues. Their sentence is also very poor. For example: - One of the topic of the graph was "Do you aware of MH17 tragedy?". There are too many repetitive sentences. Along the lines it has also been analysed that there is no use of connecting words in describing the graphs.

4.1.3 Sample 3

This sample has done a study on health issues of eating fast food among students. In this sample discussion, the words are not written and have been excluded. For example: - The factors contributing to fast include time and so on. Here, they missed the word "food". Because of this reason the sentence structure of the sentences is distorted. There is a bad organization of the sentences. Also, along the line there is too much basic vocabulary included which indicated the less variety of the vocabulary used. In this sample, they have tried to give references which are not clearly indicated that whether they are references or quotations. For example: - Reasons behind consumption of fast food are lack of cooking skills, price etc. which is also a case study of Van Zyl Mk. This clearly shows that they are unable to make a difference of both of them. Also, arguments and refutations are not at all included in this sample.

4.1.4 Sample 4

This sample do not have a defined topic. As a reader we will not understand the topic they are working on. This sample because if the undefined topic did not have any clear objectives. This has led to bad organization of the study like graphs, ideas, data etc. Along the essay there is too much of unnecessary information which is not relevant to the topic at all. This sample because of undefined topic have abrupt beginnings and conclusion which distort the whole pattern and the meaning of the sample. For example: -The sample directly starts from methodology with insertion of analysis in the same paragraph and ends with and abrupt conclusion which actually does not conclude anything. The graphs present in this sample are poorly described which actually do not compliment the study. There no arguments for this study at all as they do not have any concrete idea, problem or an issue to base their study on.

4.1.5 Sample 5

This sample is based on broader idea which has confused the students and the readers also to understand the area they are focusing on. Their topic is Peer influences but described and studied very vaguely. The ideas they have extracted from the students are scattered throughout the paper. The methodology and the findings of their paper is mixed. For example: - They mentioned in the findings that the respondents are from various kulliyyahs in which 17 of them are female and 3 are males. The vocabulary used in this sample is also very repetitive and basic which do not fulfil the requirements and the idea of their study. They have ideas which unsupportive to their study. They

have bad sentence structures especially in describing the graphs and figures. For example, they described the figure as the "Figure above shows social factors that have the ability to influence students.". They are poorly trained in forming and making the graphs and have less knowledge about how to key in the data.

4.2 Questionnaire Findings

This section shall analyze the findings that were obtained from the responses given in the questionnaires by the students. The first part of the questionnaire aimed to find out information on students' perceptions of their own ability in argumentative writing according to the IELTS argumentative writing rubric. The statements involved were based on four main areas that students need to master in argumentative writing which are: task achievement, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, as well as grammatical range and accuracy. Another item was included in this part in which the researchers wanted to find out whether students had prior knowledge on argumentative writing. Students were asked to respond to a series of statements based on a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The results of the findings are as follows:

Table 1: *Results on Students' Perceptions of agreement on task achievement*

	Write my arguments well (%)	Support my arguments well (%)	Capture audience attention with good introduction (%)
Strongly agree and agree	56.6%	60.0%	43.3%
Neutral	20.0%	30.0%	40.0%
Strongly disagree and disagree	23.3%	10.0%	13.3%

Table 2: *Results on Students' Perceptions of agreement on coherence and cohesion*

	Write a clear thesis statement (%)	Write clear topic sentences (%)	Sequence my ideas logically (%)	Organize my paragraphs effectively (%)	Use cohesive devices effectively (%)
Strongly agree and agree	50%	76.6%	60%	63.3%	90%
Neutral	36.6%	20%	26.3%	23.3%	6.6%
Strongly disagree and disagree	10.3%	3.3%	10.3%	10.3%	10.3%

Table 3: *Results on Students' Perceptions of agreement on lexical resource*

	Use good range of Vocabulary (%)	Use the correct words in the correct context (%)
Strongly agree and agree	40%	56.6%
Neutral	36.6%	30%
Strongly disagree and disagree	23.3%	13.3%

Table 4: *Results on Students' Perceptions of agreement on grammatical range and accuracy*

	Use good sentence structure (%)	Use correct spelling, punctuation, and capitalization (%)	Minimize grammatical errors (%)
Strongly agree and agree	43.3%	73.3%	63.3%
Neutral	33.3%	16.67%	23.3%
Strongly disagree and disagree	23.3%	10%	13.3%

Table 5: *Results on Students' Perceptions of agreement on background knowledge in argumentative writing*

	I have learnt how to write argumentative essays (%)
Strongly agree and agree	63.1%
Neutral	20.0%
Strongly disagree and disagree	6.6%

Table 6: *Results on Students Perceptions of agreement on perceived problems in argumentative writing*

	I can easily come up with a topic (%)	I am proficient enough in English to write argumentatively (%)	I find it easy to come up with logical ideas (%)	I find it easy to support my ideas (%)	I find it easy to organize my paragraphs (%)	I know how to write a clear thesis statement (%)	I know how to write clear topic sentence (%)
Strongly agree and agree	46.6%	23.3%	56.6%	53.3%	46.6%	46.6%	60.0%
Neutral	30.0%	56.6%	30.0%	36.6%	43.3%	40.0%	30.0%
Strongly disagree and disagree	23.3%	20.0%	13.3%	10.0%	10.0%	13.3%	10.0%

Table 7: *Results on Students Perceptions on perceived priorities in argumentative writing*

	Techniques in grabbing audience attention (%)	Techniques coming up with ideas (%)	Have better skills in supporting my ideas (%)	How to organize my ideas properly (%)	Have better knowledge on organizing my paragraphs (%)	Connect my ideas properly (%)	wide good range of vocabulary (%)	Better grammatical knowledge (%)
Strongly agree and agree	8 0.0%	83.3%	83.3%	93.3%	93.3%	86.6%	76.6%	96.6%
Neutral	13.3%	10.0%	10.0%	3.3%	3.3%	10.0%	3.3%	10.0%
Strongly disagree and disagree	6.6%	6.6%	6.6%	3.3%	3.3%	3.3%	10.0%	0.0%

Table 8: *Results on Students Perceptions of agreement on attitudes towards argumentative writing*

	I like argumentative writing (%)	Argumentative writing is easy (%)	As long as I am proficient in English, I can write argumentatively (%)	Argumentative writing is beneficial for me (%)
Strongly agree and agree	40.0%	20.0%	53.3%	23.3%
Neutral	33.3%	43.0%	20.0%	60.0%
Strongly disagree and disagree	23.3%	36.6%	0.0%	3.3%

Table 9: *Results of Students Perceptions of agreement on solutions for argumentative writing*

	Taught how to write argumentatively in my first year (%)	Focus more on vocabulary and grammatical enhancement (%)	Learn the skills to argue and support ideas properly (%)	Read more so that I have more ideas	Learn techniques to attract my audience/read
Strongly agree and agree	83.3%	96.6%	86.6%	86.6%	93.3%
Neutral	13.3%	3.3%	13.3%	6.6%	6.6%
Strongly disagree and disagree	3.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

4.3 Interview Findings

This section presents the findings obtained from interviews with teachers regarding students' argumentative writing skills in EAW course. The interviews focused on seven key areas: the main problems students encounter while learning to write argumentative essays, students' proficiency levels, familiarity with argumentative writing, ability to generate ideas logically, capacity to engage readers, essential skills for argumentative writing, and opinions on whether argumentative writing should be

reintroduced in the curriculum. Responses were analysed to identify common patterns, recurring challenges, and suggested improvements. The overview of the findings are represented with teachers responses below:

Key Areas	Summary of Findings
Problems students encounter while learning to write argumentative essays	The first teacher believed that their main problem was the fact that students do not know how to paraphrase. This is in relation to the reviewing of the literature phase where students need know how to quote the opinions of other scholars or authors. She also said that such a problem could be attributed to the fact that students lack the vocabulary as well as problems with grammaticality. The second teacher claims that it involves everything that was posed in the question. She asserted that students do not have the ability to argue well. She says that this is due to the fact that students are "*one-track minded*". This implies that students do not read enough and this causes their inability to come up with logical ideas when arguing. On the other hand, the third teacher states that most students do have the foundations of grammar but lack knowledge on the skills of argumentation. She says that "*if you want to know how to write in an argumentative way, there is a certain language expression used in order to persuade and convince people. It's not simply just like writing any descriptive kinds of essays*".
Students' proficiency levels	As seen in the questionnaire, students generally thought they had a good proficiency level. The teachers however all concurred that the student could not be categorized under advanced proficiency. Instead, teacher one believed them to be lower intermediate while the other teacher number generally categorized them to be in the range of intermediate. "*They don't care whether their ideas are organized in a paragraph, things like topic sentence, supporting details are gone. They put everything you know, it's like a salad bowl…. It's all over the place.*"
Familiarity with argumentative writing	In relation to this key area, both the first teacher and the second teacher argued that students are still considerably weak in writing which implied that they might not be entirely familiar with argumentative writing. Teacher, one believed that students did not know how to use the right linking words in writing and suggested that students need more practice to improve on this. Teacher two on the other hand believed that students tend to write based on hearsay. When asked where they get such information, students are unable to quote the source of their ideas.

Ability to generate ideas logically	This area determined whether students are able to generate and organize their ideas properly. This is in relation with the ability of being coherent in writing. Based on the responses given by the teachers, it is obvious that students lack the skills in writing coherently and are unable to present good ideas in their writing. The first teacher said that "*what they tend to do is put a lot of quotations… they would rather have that then try their best to paraphrase*". She goes on to say that this may be attributed to their language problems. She also points out that students tend to "*plagiarize without realizing it*". The second teacher points out that because students do not read, they tend to lack in coherence as well as have a limited range of vocabulary. She says that students are not as critical and therefore only give superficial ideas. The third teacher however points out that students lack logical order which implies that students cannot use transitional phrases effectively.
Capacity to engage readers	This area aimed to find out whether teachers were impressed with students' writing on first reading. The first two teachers believed that only some were able to do so while the majority falls in the category of blandness. The second teacher asserted that such problems are due to two reasons, vocabulary, and lack of organization of ideas. She says students' "chunk" everything together. The third teacher finds that it is very rare to find students that are able to come up with an attention-grabbing style of writing. She says that students very often produce straightforward style of writing.
Essential skills for argumentative writing	The first teacher stated that students are unable to support their thesis statement with strong evidence and she believes the main cause of this inability is their language barrier. Other than that, not being well-read contributes to this problem. The second teacher somewhat agrees with this as she says that vocabulary, grammar and cohesion are the main problems with students.
Opinions on whether argumentative writing should be reintroduced in the curriculum.	Teachers strongly agreed to this stating that such a genre of writing will help students to be more critical when writing as well as assist them in their faculty subjects as they would most probably need to produce different kinds of research papers. The third teacher emphasized that argumentative writing should in fact be introduced to students in their first year of study. Interestingly, the second teacher suggested that such a course should be done concurrently so that students are constantly improving in their writing skills.

Discussion

Language needs are examined from the point view of students; teachers and evaluation of students writing samples. Overall, responses from the questionnaire are predominantly are in agreement with the suggestions/ problems identified by the teachers and the writing samples. However, the statement which received the most support was on the fact that vocabulary and grammatical enhancement was one of the most important factors in improving argumentative writing. This was followed by the suggestion to learn techniques to attract readers' attention. Other than that,

suggestions on skills needed to argue and support ideas properly as well as the suggestion to read more were also positively received with scores of 86.6% each. This signifies that students feel language is more important in giving an effective argumentative piece.

This study was aligned with the previous studies on needs analysis usually focus on collecting data on the perspectives of learners' wants, needs and expectation in terms of attitudes, beliefs and viewpoints. Furthermore, detailed information about all contextual factors like learning materials, aids, and environment are included into a more comprehensive needs analysis (Boroujeni & Fard, 2013) which is also aligned with the study as all these elements are highlighted in the course design. Allen et al. (2018) observed that associations between linguistic features and writing quality can vary across a range of contextual factors, resulting in multiple linguistic profiles of high-quality writing.

Based on the results, it is clear that a simple majority of them which is 56.6% believed that they are able to write their arguments well. However, there is a fair few of about 23.3% who disagreed with the statement. On the other hand, a large majority of 60% agreed to the statement that they were able to support their arguments. In contrast, not as many agreed to the statement that they were able to capture their audience attention (43.3%). An interesting 40% felt neutral towards that statement, signifying that many still are unsure if they are able to grab their readers' attention. This finding has resulted in the hypothesis that skilled writing results from the flexible use of linguistic style rather than a fixed set of linguistic features (Allen et al., 2016). Interestingly, the perception of students predominantly assumed positively about their ability of writing argumentative essay. 50% of the respondents believed that they are able to write clear thesis statements. In addition to that, a large majority of 76.6% believed that they are able to give clear topic sentences. Correspondingly, 60% believed that they can sequence their ideas logically. Furthermore 63.3% are certain that they are able to organize their paragraphs properly. Surprisingly, a landslide of 90% thought they are able to use cohesive devices effectively.

MacArthur et al. (2018) analyzed the argumentative essays of basic college writers to determine the linguistic features that predicted their writing development. They found that essay length, referential cohesion, and lexical complexity were positively associated with writing quality. Furthermore, changes in writing in response to instruction were linked to improvements in referential cohesion and lexical complexity. 43.3% believed that they can use good sentence structure in their writing. However, when it came to the statement on whether they had good spelling, punctuation and capitalization, a significant 73.3% agreed with the statement believing that they had no problem in the area. 40% of the students believed they had a good range of vocabulary while 36.6% were not sure on that point. A significant few disagreed that they had a variety of vocabulary that they could utilize. On the other hand, a simple majority of 56.6% believed that they were able to use the right word contextually while 30% were unsure of their ability in this area and about 4 students (13.3%) disagreed with such statement. Moreover, 63.3% agreed that they could write with minimal grammatical errors These findings suggest that the text's linguistic features are sensitive to instruction which also aligns with the results of this study.

Students are expected to integrate and evaluate information from diverse sources when writing, identify arguments and evaluate specific claims in a text, and assess the adequacy of the evidence offered in support of those claims of the Common Core State Standards Initiative. These are formidable tasks for native language (L1) speakers, and even more challenging for second language (L2) students (Ferretti & Graham, 2019). From the results, a high percentage of 63.1% apparently agreed that they have learnt how to write in the argumentative format while 20% were unaware on whether they have done so while a mere 6.6% (2 students) admit to not having been exposed to such kind of

writing which clearly shows that the students come from unorganized background and exposure to argumentative writing. L2 students may have limited reading and writing proficiency, lack L2 fluency for academic communication, possess minimal background knowledge in L2, and have difficulty making inferences in L2, especially when those inferences rely of genre-specific cultural conventions (Grabe & Zhang, 2013).

It is clear from the findings that most of the students believe that the biggest problem is attributed to their uncertainty on their proficiency in the English language. Significantly on the item that was designed to find out if they had good proficiency in English, a 56.6% of the respondents responded with neutral signifying that they were unsure if they were proficient enough in the language. Other than that, overall, a fair majority of the students believe that they do not have a great issue in argumentative writing as a whole which is positive. It seems apparent that on average, most of them are confident that they are able to write argumentatively. 46.6% said they can easily come up with a topic but a fair percentage of 23.3% disagreed. Other than that, a simple majority of 56.6% agreed to the fact that they could easily come up with logical ideas and 53.3% said they can easily support their ideas they pose. A good percentage of 46.6% on the other hand agreed on organizing their paragraphs appropriately and ability to write clear thesis statements with 60% agreeing that they can write clear topic sentences. Based on the results that showed disagreement however, it can be seen that the biggest problem could be attributed to some students' inability to come up with a suitable topic when approached with an argumentative style of writing which amounts to a 23.3%.

Results show that having better grammatical knowledge seems to be most important for the majority of students. A very high percentage of 96.6% believed that having better grammatical knowledge was a main priority to produce a good argumentative piece. Correspondingly, organization of paragraphs was also important for the students as well as organization of ideas which shared the same percentage of 93.3%. This implies that students are firstly most concerned about their grammaticality when writing argumentatively as well as how coherent they are in their writing. Bashir (2023) asserts that at the sentence level, the writer is responsible for maintaining consistency in the content, format, language, and punctuation. The writer must be able to show the coherence of paragraphs above the level of the sentence. Connecting one's ideas properly was the next priority in the list with 86.6% agreeing to this statement. Other than that, techniques to grab audience attention and techniques to come up with ideas as well as skills to support one's ideas also had a high percentage with 80% for techniques in grabbing readers' attention whereas one of the teachers mentioned that students very often produce straightforward style of writing which is contrary to what students think. 83.3% of agreed that they are able to use techniques in generating ideas and skills to support one's ideas. Although having a percentage of 76.6% on the need to have a good range of vocabulary, this seemed to be less important than the other items of the questionnaire which significantly highlights the need and importance of vocabulary in writing. According to Norish (1983), good writing should include acceptable and diversified vocabularies, correct syntax, and various sentence patterns (as cited in Bashir, 2023). Reid (1983) asserts that when a learner uses appropriate terminology that reflects the purpose of the writing, the material they produce may come across to the reader as logical which aligns with one of the major focuses of the study.

Finding out the attitudes of students on the argumentative writing genre was important so that we can understand whether their attitudes correlate with their ability to write argumentatively. If one has a good attitude towards writing argumentatively it can be assumed that fairly easier to write better in the argumentative style. However, the results show that students generally have an undecided attitude toward argumentative writing. Approximately one third of the students agreed that they liked argumentative writing while 33.3% felt indifferent towards the statement. A

significant finding of the students' attitude towards argumentative writing on whether they believed that argumentative writing was beneficial for them. A considerable percentage of 60% were unsure of their own feelings. This signifies that students are not aware of the importance argumentative writing has in their academic setting. 83.3% students' responses clustered around 'agree' on the suggestion of whether argumentative writing should be taught in the first year of undergraduate studies. To clarify, 25 students (83.3%) agreed with the statement that they have to learn how to write on argumentative writing, 3 students (13.3%) remained neutral on the statement and only one student (3.3%) disagreed with the statement. However, 29 students (96.6%) agreed to focus more on vocabulary and grammatical enhancement, whereas one student (3.3%) students remained neutral. However, the statement which received the most support was on the fact that vocabulary and grammatical enhancement was one of the most important factors in improving argumentative writing. This was followed by the suggestion to learn techniques to attract readers' attention. Therefore, emphasizing on topics and themes which are related to students' needs and interests and compatible with their background, experience, abilities, priorities help to motivate students to learn and encourages them to build self-confidence and positive attitudes learning to increase English proficiency.

Conclusion

6.1 Course Recommendations

As established from the findings, argumentative writing is an important writing genre for university students in order to provide quality academic work in their written assignments. Course designers and curriculum developers can make use of the results of this study in order to develop materials, for students through ascertaining the English language writing skills and functions that students may need for their education or for their future jobs and emphasizing the use of English language, especially for university students to help master the language. ENGL 1001 Argumentative Writing Skills for Undergraduate Students is designed based on the findings of the needs analysis. The needs analysis conducted suggest that the students lack of linguistic competence to write, lack of cognitive ability to argue critically and analytically; and lack of organization of ideas. Therefore, the course initiates a comprehensive and valuable written English course for tertiary level students to be proficient and productive writers.

6.2 Course Approach

The course uses a Communicative Language Teaching approach throughout the semester. The main focus as outlined features areas of problematic concern:

1.Linguistic competency

2.Critical and analytical thinking skills

3. Argumentative writing skills

6.3 Course Syllabus

Syllabuses employed in this approach are the combination of both situational and functional as issues, content and style in argumentative writing is varied. Both Situational Syllabus and Notional Syllabus are types of semantic syllabus. Linguistic underpinning of this syllabus is that language is always used in context, never in isolation. (Yalden, 1983, p.35, as cited in Sabah Salman, 2019). Several theories such as the Toulmin Model, the Rogerian Model as well as the logician's Deduction, Induction, Fallacies Model are judiciously used in the syllabus. In the L2 academic

settings, several studies have already shown that Toulmin model can be used as a heuristic tool to teach argumentative writing in both L1 and L2 contexts (Qin, 2016). Critical and analytical thinking skills are crucial in voicing out opinions in argumentative writing. The course also probes into linguistic incompetence among students and aims to rectify the problem. A set of argumentative writing template is given in order to help students to organize their thoughts and eventually put into writing.

6.4 Course Outline

The course outline spans 14 weeks and is designed to enhance students' overall language proficiency, cognitive skills, and writing performance. The course sequence is organized to ensure both chronological progression and coherence (see Appendix A).

6.5 Sample Lesson Plan

The lesson plan consists of detailed use of materials, types of lessons and stages of lessons in Week 1. The lesson aims to expose the students to the basic structure of argumentative writing, terminology of arguments, differences between premises and conclusions as well as arguments and explanation. (see Appendix B).

Limitations of the study

There are a number of limitations of this study Firstly, the sampling method, which relied on available participants, was based on a non-purposive sampling approach. This had to be done due to the limited time that was allocated to conduct the study. Only five sample papers were analyzed which most probably did not represent the proficiency level of all EAW students. Therefore, it was assumed that the students in this study fell in the category of intermediate proficiency level. Furthermore, the number of teachers that participated in the study were also limited due to their availability because of busy teaching schedules and limited amount of time.

8. Future Recommendations

In accordance with the limitations of this study that was aforementioned, a few recommendations are outlined here for future research. Firstly, it would be recommended to include a written test of argumentative writing to the respondents. This would give an easier alternative to examine students' proficiency level as the researchers will be able to take a closer look into each respondents writing proficiency and thus, it would be easier to quantify and give a general overview of the students' proficiency level.

Other than that, purposive sampling method should be employed in future research to make sure that students are of the same proficiency level. This would help give a more thorough analysis and understanding of the problems faced by particular types of students. Also, more teachers need to be included in the study to have a better comprehension of the problems students have as well as the problems teachers' face when teaching English for Academic Writing (EAW).

Lastly and most importantly, the questionnaire that was constructed must encompass all skills needed in argumentative writing in future research. For example, issues like plagiarism, citation, and referencing should be included as mentioned by the teachers in the semi-structured interview.

9. STATEMENTS

9. 1. Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest in this study.

9. 2. Contributions

There is only one author who contributed all the study.

9. 3. Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants who agreed to take part in the study.

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APPENDIX A: Course Outline

Department	English Language Skills Centre
Program	Discursive Writing
Course Title	Argumentative Writing Skills for Undergraduate Students
Course Code	ENGL 1001
Status	Active
Level	First Year Undergraduate Students
Credit hours	2 credit hours
Contact hours	2
Prerequisites (if any)	Nil
Co-requisites (if any)	Nil
Instructors	Lectures from English Language Skills Centre
Semester offered	Every semester
Course synopsis	ENGL 1001 is designed to provide the first-year undergraduate students with content on current theory, research and best practice in assessing, diagnosing and writing argumentatively. Emphasis is placed on writing and editing of paragraphs and essays based on readings.

Course objectives	The objectives of this course are to enable students to: 1. explore the genre of argumentative writing 2. discover the strategies in writing argumentatively 3. exposed to theoretical and research issues relevant to argumentative writing.
Learning Outcomes	Upon completion of this course, the students will be able to: 1.identify the structure of the genre of the argumentative writing. 2.identify the basic terminology of arguments. 3.distinguish between premises and conclusions. 4.differentiate between arguments and explanations. 5.produce a detailed cohesive and coherent argumentative essay. 6.express his/her opinion and give reasons to support that opinion and specific details to support the reasons. 7.use an appropriate introduction with thesis statement, topic sentences, supporting details and conclusion. 8.draft each paragraph of an argumentative essay in stages, following an outline. 9.plan writing by listing, selecting and organizing ideas and putting them into an outline. 10. revise writing by understanding and implementing peer and instructor feedback, and by checking for transition signals, supporting details and a variety of sentence types. 11.scan an extended text to express opinions on the content. 12.use literal, idiomatic, separable, inseparable phrasal verbs. 13.use the tense markers to produce written sentences utilizing form. 14.use base and strong adjectives and produce written sentences utilizing form. 15.understand theories relevant to argumentative writing.

Instructional Strategies	Lecture, collaborative work, project-based, assignments.	
Weeks	**Topics**	**Task/Reading**
1 & 2	Course Overview An introduction to Argumentative Writing 1.The neglected "R": The need for a writing revolution (College Entrance Examination Board) 2. The importance of Argumentative Writing Skills 3.Building a better argument. 4. Argumentation (Critical thinking in written communication).	Barnet & Bedau. Chapters 5-7
3 & 4	Theories And Research Issues 1.A Philosopher's View: The Toulmin Model 2.A Logician's View: Deduction, Induction, Fallacies	Barnet & Bedau. Chapters 8-10

	3.A Psychologist's View: Rogerian Argument	
5 & 6	Differences Among Decsriptive, Persuasive And Argumentative Writing 1. Analysed different samples of writing.	Tompkins. Chapter 9-12
7 & 8	Critical Thinking And Critical Reading 1.Getting started 2.Getting deeper into arguments 3.VisuaL rhetoric: Images as arguments	Barnet & Bedau Chapters 1-4
9 & 10	Writing Strategies And Skills 1.Research the topic 2.Develop the thesis statement 3.Be clear about the focus 4.Consider the audience 5.Have a strong introduction 6. Make the argument 7.Check the paragraph transitions 8.Use extensive evidence 9. Cite the sources 10. Be able to refute to the other side 11. Have a convincing conclusion 12.Check for logical fallacies 13.Edit the paper.	Tompkins Chapters 3-5
11 & 12	Writing Strategies For Struggling Writers 1.Sentence combining 2.Pattern practice	Barnet and Bedau Chapters 5-7
13 & 14	Presentation Seminar Students present their own argumentative essays and defend why the essays are written as such.	

Required Texts

Barnet, S. & Bedau,H. (2008). From critical thinking to argument: A portable guide(2nd ed.). Boston MA: Bedford/St. Martin.

Tompkins, G.E. (2008). Teaching writing: Balancing process and product (5th ed). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Merrill Prentice-Hall.

APPENDIX B: Sample Lesson Plan

Class	As Required
Date	As Required
Week	1
Topics	Building a better argument
Time	120 minutes
Students' level	First-year undergraduate students
Course Objectives	1.Discover the basic terminology of arguments. 2.Learn strategies for reliably distinguishing between premises and conclusions. 3.Explore the differences between arguments and explanations.
Learning Outcomes	At the end of the lesson, students will be able to: 1. identify the structure of the genre of the argumentative writing. 2. Identify the basic terminology of arguments. 3. distinguish between premises and conclusions. 4. Differentiate between arguments and explanations.
Materials	1. Monty Python, "The Argument Clinic" 2. Student handout#1: Finding Premises and Conclusions 3. Student handout#2: Argument Examples

	4. Teacher handout #1: Argument Examples
Equipment	Laptop and projector
Types of lesson	CLT activities, lecture, discussion
Stages of lesson	
Part 1	**Set Induction (10 minutes)** Students talk about argumentative issues in general by giving support of their own opinions.
Part 2	**Identifying arguments (25 minutes)** 1.Students receive handouts #1: Finding Premises and Conclusions and #2 : Argument Examples. 2. Students begin with some basic technical vocabulary (premise, conclusion & argument). 3.Students take the oldest example in logic, one that Aristotle used in teaching at his Academy. 4.Students notice the lines taken constitute an argument. (Line 3 is the conclusion; lines 1 and 3 are premises.)
Part 3	**Features of arguments (25 minutes)** 1.Students watch the video from YouTube (Monty Python,"The Argument Clinic"). 2.Students identify the importance of different types of arguments used in critical thinking.
Part 4	**Analyze the arguments (30 minutes)** 1.Students identify the premises and the conclusions by examining the text for cues. (Premise indicators: since, because, for, as, given that; and Conclusion Indicators: Therefore, Hence, So, For this reason etc.) 2.Students use paraphrasing techniques and rewrite the text given to see what the claims really are. 3.Students look for an answer to the `why' question raised. (If the answer is `Yes', then the answer is the premise and the original claim the sentence about which one asked about is a conclusion).
Part 5	**Arguments and Explanations (30 minutes)** 1.Students are seated in a circle for this activity. They are given each a 3x5 index card. On one side of the card, students should write either an argument or an explanation. On the other side of the card, they should write "argument" or "explanation" (whichever is appropriate to their particular example). When everyone has finished writing, they pass their cards to the person to their right. Students should read the card and decide whether they are reading an argument or an explanation.
Part 6	**Assignments** Students need to write their own reflection and understanding of arguments, using the terms introduced in the class.