

Exploring Argumentation Performance in English Research Proposal Writing among Indonesian EFL University Students

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ABSTRACT

Research proposals (RPs) require clarity, logic, and persuasive arguments in presenting knowledge and justifying the research. However, few studies have examined EFL students' argumentation performance in RPs and the influential factors in argument development. To fill the gap, this mixed-methods research involved 31 EFL university students in Indonesia through a questionnaire, textual analysis of 23 RP Introductions, and semi-structured interviews with 8 students. This study reveals a diverse range of argumentation performances when constructing RPs. The questionnaire results showed that the students' perceived argumentation skills were generally strong across five dimensions, with cognitive and metacognitive processes obtaining the highest score (92%), followed by communicative competence and critical thinking (90%), enculturation practices (89%), scientific literacy (88%), and development reasoning (88%). Additionally, textual analysis confirms these findings: most students' RP demonstrated moderate argumentation, with clear claims and evidence categorized at the moderate level across the dimensions, but a smaller number struggled with in-depth analysis. Cognitive and metacognitive processes and communicative competence, with critical thinking, emerged as key strengths, but areas such as enculturation practices and reasoning require further development. Interview data further highlighted the interconnectedness of academic knowledge, cognitive abilities, and personal factors in shaping argumentation skills. These findings suggest that EFL students need more explicit support

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in developing deeper reasoning, integrating evidence, and engaging with alternative viewpoints when constructing arguments in research proposals.

Keywords: Academic Writing, Argumentation, EFL Context, Research Proposal, University Students

INTRODUCTION

In a tertiary education setting, university students are highly required to develop writing skills in academic discourses such as essays, research papers, plans/proposals, and summaries ([Adiyani et al., 2025](#); [Campbell, 2019](#); [Tsaqifa & Roselani, 2024](#)) to understand their discipline and to successfully navigate their learning ([Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002](#)). Moreover, to emphasize the role of academic writing in higher education, Hyland even wrote that “universities are about writing and that specialist forms of academic literacy are the heart of everything we do” ([Hyland, 2013, p.53](#)). As part of their academic journey at university, students learn about academic writing and how to write it well ([Campbell, 2019](#); [Nida, 2021](#)). In [Hyland’s illustration \(2013\)](#), students learn what counts as good writing through an understanding of their discipline, the conventions, and the genres to representing knowledge in that discipline. On the other hand, in knowledge construction and the development of understanding, argumentation can be regarded as both a key strategy and an educational tool ([Hefter et al., 2018](#)). As students are assigned to provide arguments about specific content, they engage in an activity to propose a claim and provide valid evidence to support it ([Bacha, 2010](#)), while at the same time enhancing their understanding of the topic. Both undergraduate and graduate students, as academic writers, learn to develop their ability to analyze, compose, and judge valid and strong arguments ([Abdollahzadeh et al., 2017](#)), thereby producing excellent, sound academic writing products ([Shooshtari et al., 2023](#)). Hence, academic genre of writing plays an essential part for student’s academic success ([Juliaty, 2019](#)), and argumentative writing and argumentation appear to be assessed in academic writing performance (Plakans & Gebril, 2017). To be precise, [Hirvela \(2017\)](#) argued that argumentation is at the heart of second language assessment.

In conceptualizing argumentation skills, argumentation is a form of discourse that helps build explanations, models, and theories by connecting evidence to claims through warrants and backing ([Erduran & Jimenez-Aleixandre, 2007](#)). It includes the practice of stating claims and providing supporting reasons to justify beliefs and convince others ([Liu & Stapleton, 2014](#)). In other words, such skill involves presenting personal opinions, analogies, facts, evidence, and documents ([Balliu, 2018](#)). In doing the claim statement and presenting evidence, argumentation can be viewed as a prominent way of operationalizing critical thinking in specific knowledge and

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creative thinking in the process of generating and justifying evidence to support the claim (Lubben et al., 2010). In the context of critical thinking, Hutasuhut et al. (2023) explained that argumentation practices can take the form of exploration, cross-examination, analysis, and evaluation of different perspectives to assess the validity of a claim. To be precise, Erduran and Jimenez-Aleixandre (2007) suggested five intertwined dimensions from introduction of argumentation: 1) the access to the cognitive and meta-cognitive processes, 2) the development of communicative competences and critical thinking, 3) the achievement of scientific literacy, 4) the enculturation into the practices of the scientific culture and the development of epistemic criteria for knowledge evaluation, and 5) the development of reasoning, the choice of theories, and rational criteria. From these sense, the argumentation can be functioned as a means of both discovering knowledge and justifying knowledge claims (Murungi & Hirschheim, 2021). Moreover, Hefter et al. (2018) stated that argumentative performances in the sense of argument evaluation can be divided into *skill* and *will*: *skill* refers to the competency to apply argumentative strategies; while *will* can be the disposition to apply these strategies.

Apart from the concept of argumentation, argument itself can be considered a mode of communication, enabling one to make an explicit claim and support it to persuade others and anticipate criticism (Murungi & Hirschheim, 2021). Looking at the objective, argument is an author's attempt to persuade the audience rationally, in either oral or written expression (Murtadho, 2021). Based on 'Toulmin' model, the basic element of an argument are claim, data/evidence, and warrant (Gleason, 1999; Rex et al., 2010; Sundari & Febriyanti, 2021; Toulmin, 2003). A claim or stance is well-supported by sufficient grounds (Gleason, 1999; Rex et al., 2010). Data or evidence refers to the factual foundation for the claim; meanwhile, warrant is explicit reasoning that links the claim and the evidence. In the development of an argumentative essay, the argument discusses the grounds for the thesis or claim the writer proposes to readers. To provide a conceptual understanding of how an argument is organized in academic writing, Hyland (1990) proposed the four-move cycle of argument: the marker, a restatement of the proposition, the claim, and the support move, as presented in Table 1.

Meanwhile, from a social perspective, argument constitutes the exploration and advancement of knowledge; it is about discovery, clarity, and persuasion of others (Newell et al., 2011). Thus, the study of arguments typically centers on the analysis of single claims from individual authors (Murungi & Hirschheim, 2021). Conversely, argumentation in both academic reading and writing involves identifying a thesis/claim, presenting supportive evidence, either experiential or empirical, and evaluating the warrants connecting the claim, the evidence, and the situation constituting the argument (Newell et al., 2011). In other words, argumentation refers to the process-oriented activity of constructing arguments, illustrating the reasoning, and providing evidence in argumentative writing (Fan & Chen,

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2021), while argument is likely a product-oriented activity that demonstrates the argumentation.

Table 1:
The Argument Stage (Hyland, 1990)

Stage	Description
1. The marker	The sequence that connects both the steps in the argument and to the proposition, such as listing signals and transitional signal. For example: <i>firstly</i> , <i>secondly</i>
2. A restatement of the proposition	Foregrounding the proposition to provide a reminder of the subject.
3. Claim as the central move	a. A statement to the potency of “shared” presupposition b. Generalization based on factual evidence c. Declaration of opinion
4. The support move/evidence	• Explicit reinforcement for the claim by presenting several sources of evidence • Accomplishment of the claim-evidence pair

For many years, writing tasks in the area of argumentative writing composition have led to great difficulty for students because of its challenges and complexity (Dornbrack & Dixon, 2014; Gleason, 1999; Hyland, 2013), so it is not so surprising that most students indicate poor performance in this text type (Schneer, 2014). From textual analysis of students’ argumentative essays, it appeared to be evidence that though their compositions were well-organized with a variety of cohesive devices, the students experienced problems in references and lexical devices (Liu & Braine, 2005) and transitional markers (Agustin & Ngadiman, 2013), presented insufficient supportive evidence (Sundari & Febriyanti, 2021; Zhang, 2018), and lacked a well-thought-out logical structure (Abdollahzadeh et al., 2017). Based on students’ perspectives, particularly in Indonesia, the majority of EFL university students, if not all of them, consider argumentative writing a highly demanding task. In composing argumentative essays, students face challenges and constraints in understanding the genre, knowledge of language use and writing mechanics, organization, idea generation, and cognitive processes (Juhana et al., 2023; Rahmatunisa, 2014; Saprina et al., 2020; Suhartoyo et al., 2020). Besides the barrier to composing argumentative essays, EFL university students also reported struggles in producing research proposals in English academic settings.

Research proposal (RP), as one of the genres of research, is a document that provides information about a research project proposed by students (Kivunja, 2016) and contains conciseness and logic in the development of an argument, as one of its specific features (Cadman, 2002).

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In the Indonesian context, an RP is submitted as part of the requirements to achieve a degree (e.g., graduate, postgraduate, and doctoral degrees). Furthermore, numerous studies have investigated research proposals situated either in Indonesia ([Mali, 2023](#); [Mirahayuni & Garnida, 2019](#); [Sahib & Mursyid, 2020](#); [Susanti & Mahaputri, 2022](#); [Yenti & Susanti, 2024](#)) or overseas ([Ghane et al., 2021](#); [Iqbal, 2007](#)).

Most of the previous studies have demonstrated that, in RP completion, students experienced significant constraints and challenges in both areas of research (i.e., formulating research problems, justification, gap statement, question, and objective) and areas of writing RP as a scientific genre (i.e. organization/structure, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics). Meanwhile, none of the studies reported the ways of argument development and influential factors in RP from EFL university students' perspectives. The analysis of their arguments in the proposal may lead to uncovering the strengths and weaknesses of students' framework of argumentation thinking on research and writing, and the understanding of contributing factors in argument development during the process of RP completion can benefit the stakeholders (students, teachers, supervisors and policy makers) at the university as considerations in creating a more effective RP course. Ultimately, to fill the gap, this current research was addressed to investigate the argumentation presented by EFL university students in their RP and to explore the influential factors in RP completion, guided by the following research questions: 1) What are the overall argumentation skills among EFL university students in developing their research proposals? And 2) What influential factors do EFL university students perceive in building effective arguments in their research proposals?

METHOD

The primary objective of the current research is to analyze the argumentation presented by EFL university students in their RPs as part of English for academic purposes and to identify the factors influencing argument development. The study was conducted at Universitas Terbuka (Open University) in Indonesia. Employing a combination of convenience and voluntary sampling, this study collected a voluntary sample of 31 teacher-students from the English Education department in the postgraduate program by administering the questionnaire. Of these participants, 23 students submitted their research proposals for textual analysis. In addition, eight students willingly agreed to participate in interviews. Thus, this study involved three sources of data.

To assess students' argumentative skills in crafting their research proposals in English, the researchers designed a [questionnaire](#) on argumentation skills and conducted content analyses of the proposals. The questionnaire was constructed using the dimensions of argumentation and linear reasoning proposed by [Erduran and Jimenez-Aleixandre \(2007\)](#),

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encompassing four dimensions outlined in Table 2. The reliability of the 29-item questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, resulting in a score of 0.96. This high reliability score indicates that the questionnaire is dependable and suitable for use in the study.

Table 2:
Dimensions of Argumentation (Erduran and Jimenez-Aleixandre, 2007)

Dimensions of argumentation	Description	Item statement
Supporting access to cognitive and meta-cognitive processes	Modelling expert performance	6 statements
Achieving scientific literacy	Assisting to talk or write the language of science	6 statements
Supporting the enculturation into the practices of science	Scientific knowledge evaluation	5 statements
Encouraging the development of reasoning	Particularly the choice of theories based on rational criteria	8 statements
Strengthening communicative competences	Particularly in critical thinking	4 statements

In the content analysis, the examination focused on the Introduction sections of 23 research proposals. This section was chosen for its significance in presenting well-defined, substantiated arguments that explain the rationale for the chosen research topic. To assess argumentation levels within the Introduction, a modified version of the criteria proposed by [Erduran et al. \(2004\)](#) and Scholtz et al. (2008) was employed. Detailed descriptions of the five argumentation levels are provided in Table 3. Prior to data collection, the questionnaire items were reviewed by the authors and the expert to ensure their relevance, clarity, and alignment with the dimensions of argumentation. This served as a content-validation and expert-validation procedure, examining whether the items adequately represented the intended constructs.

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Table 3:
Argument Level (Erduran et al. 2004; Scholtz et al. 2008)

Levels	Description
1	Arguments that are a simple claim versus a counterclaim or a claim versus a claim
2	Arguments consisting of a claim versus a claim with either data, warrants or backings but no rebuttals
3	Arguments with a series of a claim or counterclaims with either data, warrants or backings with the occasional weak rebuttal
4	Arguments with a claim with a clearly identifiable rebuttal, such an argument may have several claims and counterclaims
5	Displays an extended argument with supported by data and warrant, with more than one rebuttal

To ensure the reliability of the textual data in content analysis, inter-rater reliability with [three raters](#) was employed. Each raters/researcher independently assessed and assigned levels to the text at various times and locations. The Cronbach's alpha score was 0.864, signifying a commendable level of internal consistency. Concurrently, the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) fell within the range of 0.5 to 0.75, indicating moderate consistency among the three raters ([Koo & Li, 2016](#)). This implies that the findings are reliable, and the raters exhibit a reasonably consistent assessment. The combination of high internal consistency and moderate inter-rater reliability enhances the overall credibility of the results.

To gather insights into the factors shaping the development of effective arguments in research proposals, [semi-structured interviews](#) were undertaken with eight participants at two distinct locations. The total interview duration was 142 minutes, with 56 minutes for the first session in Bandung, West Java, and 86 minutes for the second session in Jember, East Java. The interview protocol comprised ten questions addressing general aspects of proposal writing, argument construction, evidence presentation, and factors contributing to argument development. Additionally, probing questions were incorporated to elicit more in-depth information from the participants in response to their answers. To facilitate meaningful communication and prevent misunderstandings, all interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia. Subsequently, the interview recordings were transcribed verbatim for further analysis.

In examining the qualitative data gathered from these interviews, a thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2013), was employed through several stages: 1) becoming familiar with the data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) identifying categories and themes, 4) reviewing the identified

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categories and themes, 5) defining and labelling the themes, and 6) composing the final report.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The objectives of this study are two-fold: 1) to assess the argumentation skills among EFL university students in crafting research proposals in English, and 2) to investigate the factors perceived by them as impactful in constructing arguments. This section provides the research findings in response to the two research questions.

The overall argumentation among EFL university students

Regarding argumentation skills among EFL university students, Table 4 examines argumentation skills by ranking and assigning percentages to different skill dimensions. These dimensions range from 88% to 92% in terms of proficiency, indicating that students generally reported strong perceived argumentation skills. Cognitive and metacognitive processes emerged as the strongest skill (92%; $M = 4.6$; $SD = 0.42$), ranking highest among all dimensions. This suggests that students perceived themselves as relatively able to plan, monitor, and evaluate their thinking when constructing arguments in research proposals. Moreover, the dimensions of communicative competence and critical thinking, along with enculturation practices, ranked second (91%; $M = 4.5$; $SD = 0.43$) and third (89%; $M = 4.4$; $SD = 0.42$) in terms of their importance for argumentation skills. In addition, Scientific literacy (88%; $M = 4.3$; $SD = 0.49$) and the development of reasoning (88%; $M = 4.36$; $SD = 0.45$) obtained comparatively lower scores, indicating that students still needed further support in using scientific evidence and developing more rigorous reasoning in their research proposals.

Dimensions	%	Mean	SD	Rank
Cognitive & Metacognitive	92	4.6	0.42	1
Communicative Competence & Critical Thinking	91	4.5	0.43	2
Enculturation Practice	89	4.4	0.42	3
Scientific Literacy	88	4.3	0.49	4
Development of Reasoning	88	4.3	0.45	5

Table 4:

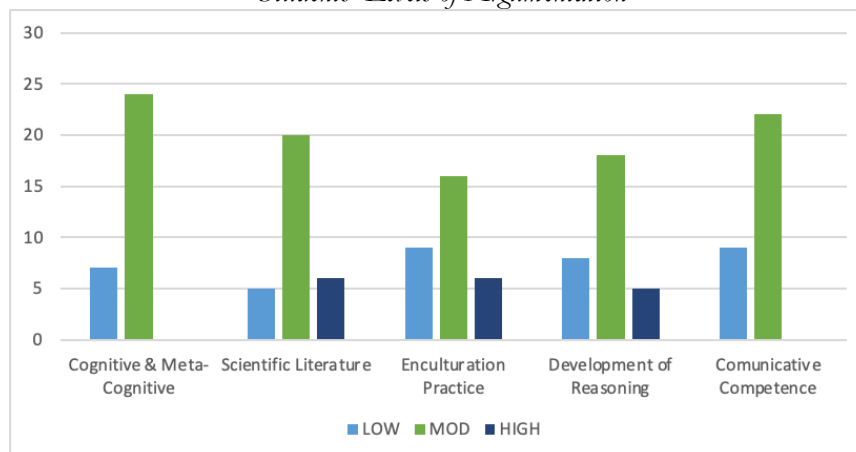
The Results of Argumentation Skill

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To assess argumentation level, students' scores were categorized into three levels: low, moderate, and high. Figure 1 illustrates these levels across different skill dimensions. Most students demonstrated moderate skills across all areas, with a small group demonstrating low-level proficiency. Notably, the dimension of cognitive and meta-cognitive processes reached the highest overall percentage in the questionnaire results (92%), but none of the students reached a high level in this dimension; instead, 24 students were categorized at the moderate level, while the remaining students were at the low level. A similar pattern emerged in communicative competence, with 22 students categorized at the moderate level and none at the high level. This finding indicates that, although students perceived these two dimensions as strong and relatively important in constructing arguments, their performance had not yet reached an advanced level. In other words, students were able to use cognitive strategies, organize ideas, and consider communication aspects in academic argumentation; however, they still need further development in several areas, including deep analysis, stronger reasoning, and the provision of evidence and alternative viewpoints.

Figure 1:
Students' Levels of Argumentation



From the textual analysis of 23 RP Introductions guided by [Erduran et al. \(2004\)](#) and [Scholtz et al. \(2008\)](#), as shown in Table 5, in general, it was found that nearly half of the students' Introduction sections in their RPs exhibited a moderate level of argumentation (12 RPs; 52.17%), indicating that most students were able to present clear claims supported by at least one form of evidence, such as expert opinion, empirical studies, or relevant data.

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Eight RPs (34.78%) reached a high level, as they demonstrated more sophisticated argumentation through the integration of claims, supporting evidence, counterclaims, and rebuttals. Meanwhile, three RPs (13.04%) were categorized as low-level because they consisted mainly of personal claims or assertions with limited supporting evidence. Thus, this finding suggests that students' RP introductions generally demonstrated developing argumentation skills, with most texts showing moderate argumentation and only a smaller proportion achieving advanced argumentative quality.

Table 5:

Category	N	Percentage
Low	3	13.04%
Moderate	12	52.17%
High	8	34.78%
Total	23	100%

Students' levels of Argumentation in RP Introductions

Three RP Introductions were categorized as demonstrating a low level of argumentation. These proposals primarily consisted of personal opinions and assertions without supporting evidence, as shown in the excerpt below. This lack of evidence significantly weakened the text's argumentative strength.

...there are still many class VII students who cannot write descriptive text on English learning. This can happen due to several factors. One of the main reasons is the lack of interest of students to learn English, which is due to the lack of variety of learning atmospheres, such as using media and technology in learning. (MD02-ASH)

In Purworejo, English competencies between schools are different. Students who attend a school around the central of city have better English competencies than students who attends in city side. (FD01-ASD)

Twelve out of the total research proposals (RPs) were classified as demonstrating a moderate level of argumentation. These RPs effectively presented a clear claim or thesis, supported by at least one piece of evidence. Examples include the works of FIN, BS, and DAA, which clearly articulated the authors' positions on their research topics and provided relevant scientific references to substantiate their claims.

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Textbooks are an essential part of the EFL classroom, and they have a significant impact on how students learn and understand language and culture. Roobani and Sharifi (2015) stressed the importance of textbooks in English language teaching (ELT). (FD05-FIN)

In Indonesian EFL setting, learner autonomy is not included into teaching learning objective and teachers are not quite familiar with the concept (Lengkanawati: 2017). This situation surely is not beneficial for students' learning development. (MD04-BS)

Singing a song made it simpler for them to remember how to pronounce these words. Furthermore, songs can be used to teach vocabulary and sentence structures as well as to help students with their pronunciation and listening abilities (Milington, 2011). The fact that songs are entertaining is arguably their biggest advantage when used in the classroom. (MD05-DAA)

Furthermore, AND and GMW's proposals demonstrated greater sophistication by incorporating multiple scientific references to support their arguments. Moreover, GMA focused on high-frequency and family words, while GMA explored the relationship between self-regulation and vocabulary acquisition. Both RPs effectively used two scholarly sources to support their respective claims, as shown in the excerpt below.

Thus, teachers should make this frequency as the goal for students because it is assumed as high-frequency words are the most realistic words family level to achieve. Moreover, Schmitt & Schmitt (2014) also stated that high-frequency words are the most valuable and worth for students to learn. Richard and Renandya (2002) expected that students should know 3,000 words family level to be a success in academic performance at the university stages. (FD02-GMW)

Research on the topic has emerged. For example, the ones that looked into the effectiveness of teaching concrete poetry to students with Asperger syndrome (Chia et al., 2009), the translation of concrete poetry into sign language for deaf children (Mertzani, 2020), and poetry teaching to adults with intellectual disabilities at the university (Kubiak, 2020). (FD03-AND)

Moiinvaziri (2018) has similar arguments. In the Iranian university, the participants from the university level used self-regulation strategies in vocabulary... On the contrary, Soleimani (2018) tested the EFL university students, but self-regulation had nothing to do with students' vocabulary acquisition. (FD02-GMW)

A high level of argumentation was evident in research proposals that effectively integrated comprehensive claims, counterclaims, and supporting

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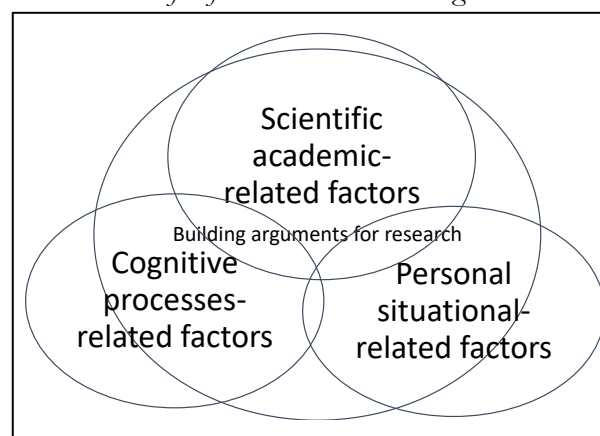
evidence. For example, AND's proposal showcased a strong command of argumentation by presenting a thorough discussion of empirical studies on poetry classes. This included citing three scholarly sources that offered potentially conflicting findings within the field. Such a critical analysis of diverse perspectives is indicative of sophisticated argumentative skills.

Some studies have revealed that a poetry class could raise students' environmental awareness (Dewi, 2018) and cultivate mindful learning (Piscayanti, 2021). However, more research shows that the local situation is almost identical to the global response in that the positive findings hardly uplift the dread of poetry. Widodo et al. (2016 in Fithriani 2021) attributed the difficulty in poetry implementation to teachers' misperceptions and the national curriculum. English teachers in Indonesia were dubbed "curriculum implementers," teaching by standards in which the learning needs of individual students are not the focus. Hence, it is unlikely that English teachers incorporate poetry writing into their practices. (FD03-AND)

The influential factors in building effective arguments in research proposal

From analyzing the interview data of eight students, it was found that EFL university students perceive the factors influencing the development of argumentation in their proposals to fall into three main categories: cognitive process-related factors, scientific and academic-related factors, and personal and situational-related factors. This thematic framework is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2:
The Thematic Framework of Influential Factors in Argument Development for RP



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The theme of cognitive processes-related factors included various cognitive activities mentioned by the students, such as thinking and re-thinking, synthesizing information, establishing cause-and-effect relationships and assumptions, and analyzing and comparing information from documents. In the interview transcripts, YN and FI narrated that they need to engage in a thinking, rethinking, and synthesizing process to build arguments for their research justification.

... then I think again, if it's only with pictures, they only have vocabulary, but they don't practice, we don't know in what levels their abilities are, ... (Int1-YN)
... Such an accumulation of conclusions, usually in the articles there is also a suggestion for the next researcher. (Int2-FI)

Additionally, several other students described engaging in cognitive processes by identifying cause-and-effect relationships within the phenomena they investigated. They further elaborated on the assumptions and predictions they used to justify their research. AN discussed how the use of concrete poetry could potentially help writing outcomes. NH explained the causal relationships between student engagement and reading comprehension. HS predicted that integrating technology would enhance students' motivation and performance. Then AEZ assumed that hybrid learning can facilitate better learning for students, as evidenced in the excerpts from interview transcripts below.

... the result will be more – the right poetry with the right approach will produce a different output, in short.... the visual stars and the poetry about stars, it already helps visually and verbally. (Int1-AN)
... this will make students interested first, by being interested, they will feel engaged, bound by learning. If they are engaged, automatically the impression on their brain will increase, Insya Allah, especially, I emphasize reading comprehension ... (Int1-NH)
... if you use technology, the students will be more "crazy", more enthusiastic, more passionate about learning ... (Int2-HS)
... Why do I take this? Because these two skills are the basis for students to enter [learn] a language... [then] the combination of face to face and online may really help student learning and empower students. So here, finally, I want to find out and maybe prove it ... (Int2-AEZ)

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In the cognitive process, the data also revealed categories, such as analyzing existing documents and comparing facts and information. For example, FI posited a preliminary analysis of several textbooks across different curricula, examining how colors or skin tones are presented in images. This portrayed differences in the representation of multicultural content in textbooks, as described in the following excerpt below.

... why dig into multicultural values [in textbook]; an easy example is representation for children in the textbook. I remember earlier, in my time, he [image] had white skin color [tone], whereas now, for K-13 [curriculum], there is quite a difference. The tone color is between olive, white, and there is also a dark skin tone color ... As for the Independent Curriculum, it is much better, the representation is much more diverse (Int2-FI)

In the second theme that emerged, the scientific academic-related factors, several students narrated engaging in various scientific activities. These categories included searching for and reading scientific sources and references, identifying gaps in the existing literature, citing experts to support their research, and stating opposing viewpoints. The majority of the students reported that they searched for and read scientific references in the literature related to their research topics, as narrated by AN, NH, YN, RSA, and AW in the excerpts below.

After the concrete poems were selected, I collected references about the concrete poems themselves combined with the GBA. (Int1-AN)

Finally, after I searched for ways to solve this main problem, it turned out that I came across literature on digital storytelling, which is part of the multimodal approach. (Int1-NH)

I'm looking for more references on how the children can do it not only in class (Int1-YN)

...After that I searched for theory, about the advantages of differentiation, [and] what are the weaknesses.... (Int2-RSA)

"Then I leafed through references from those in Indonesia as well, there have been some who have implemented it, then from abroad I like it the most, many from Iran, from Arabs it turns out they have been earlier to implement it ... I also took new references, which is library research, it hasn't been implemented directly in schools. (Int1-AW)

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Furthermore, within the theme of scientific academic-related factor, the category included identifying gap in the literature. HS, FI, and AEZ discussed in their interview how they identified research gaps through searching, reading, and analyzing numerous scientific references.

... I'm looking for [the use of Google Sites] in English doesn't exist at all. It's in science, in math, that's it... why isn't it in English (subject)? (Int2-HS)

... most of the articles I read, they examine it, usually only one grade, for example, grade 7 in high school class..." (Int2-FI)

... some of the research that I read focused on just one skill, be it listening or speaking or reading. So here I take two [skills]. (Int2-AEZ)

Additionally, within this theme, certain students mentioned that they could provide proper citations from experts and previous research to bolster their claims. YN, FI and AEZ shared insights on how they incorporated expert opinions and research findings in their work.

Finally, after looking at several references, I said that Telegram could be a tool for students, used by students to learn speaking, and some experts said it was indeed successful. When I read and read, ... maybe this could work. (Int1-YN)

... what is the urgency for us to know, the teacher's perspective on multicultural values. It turns out that some experts have also stated that when the teacher is aware of the cultural diversity of the target language ... (Int2-FI)

...take what the experts think... to support our arguments. So taking the result from the previous research, then the experts, ... (Int2-AEZ)

However, within the theme of scientific academic-related factors, a category highlighting opposite viewpoints also emerged. Among the eight interview participants, only three students (AN, NH, YN) briefly touched on engaging in critical discussion of the research topic and admitted that they had not actively sought out opposing perspectives, as indicated in the excerpt below.

If I specifically look for contradictions, [I had] not ... but some research references that I read about poetry in general, not concrete poetry, are concluded to be not helpful at all. (Int1-AN)

I did try to find those that didn't support it, but after I read and read everything supports it ... (Int1-NH)

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... when I read references about this method, and most of what I got was mostly applied at the high level, yes, ... in universities, institutes, and the like. So, I didn't specifically look for the opening, but in the research approach there were some suggestions or about the shortcomings of this method... (Int1-YN)

Moreover, a third theme emerged from the interview data, about personal situational factors influencing the development of research arguments. This theme encompassed several categories, including personal experience/impression/observation; situational issues at the research site; and discussion with colleagues. Here, AN, YN, RSA narrated how their personal experiences, impressions and observations upon the phenomena prompted them to conduct further investigation and develop valid arguments.

... in the process of preparing a thesis proposal, firstly, I departed from my experience writing and working on poetry. I got the impression that actually poetry is not as difficult as the teachers and students think... (Int1-AN)

This was the first time when I felt that the [speaking] class was something foreign to the students. then, for the teacher, also [speaking activities] were not prioritized too much, ... (Int1-YN)

... I compared it during the observation at SMP 4, using a cell phone was very useful ... (Int2-RSA)

Within this theme, personal situational-related factors included a category of situational problems at the research sites. Each student detailed the specific obstacles and drawbacks they encountered in their teaching and learning environments. These situational issues led them to explore the research topic further and to develop compelling, valid arguments for their research, as narrated by NH, HS, and YN below.

It started from the students' difficulties in comprehending the text many of the words were still unfamiliar to them ... (Int1-NH)

... this is my observation from the existing teachers, it turns out that they often use the old school model. (Int2-HS)

there's very little to practice speaking... incidentally at my school there is no language laboratory, then [I] also have to provide [my] own, bring [my] own, and so on... it is the difficulty of the tools for speaking... also the limitations of the teacher too because maybe it's rare to use English in the classroom as the language of instruction... (Int1-YN)

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Moreover, the theme of personal situational factors was also generated from the discussion category with colleagues, such as supervisors and fellow teachers in professional associations. Some students, like AW and RSA, expressed that the knowledge and information gained from sharing sessions within the teacher program and community helped them generate initial ideas and develop arguments for their research. Then FI and NH expressed that they were able to construct and refine their arguments through discussions with their supervisor, as highlighted in the excerpt below.

Starting from me getting to know Differentiated Instruction from the [teaching] program that I participated in, ... (Int1-AW)

...the first thing was .. I did .. the observation [for] the [proposal] thesis. A few weeks before that, there were MGMP lectures every week, we discussed it, it just so happened that at that time the discussion was about student's speaking difficulties... (Int2-RSA)

... then I shifted [the topic] to student's perspective when I met with [my] first supervisor ... (Int2-FI)

... from digital literature, there are many ideas especially from the supervisor ... (Int1-NH)

Additionally, several students disclosed that their research arguments were developed through multiple sources. They accumulated a set of academic procedures, such as site observation, document analysis, and literature reviews. RSA highlighted the integration of these activities into the argument development process.

... When I read from references about differentiated learning of how these researchers researched DI, most of them talked about the teacher's perspective, how to apply.... So, after that, from the research that I have read, it is very rare that it leads to learning English... ... And also, when I was observing at my preliminary research, I asked the teacher.....the first thing was .. I did .. the observation [for] the thesis. A few weeks before that, there were MGMP lectures every week, we discussed it, it just so happened that at that time the discussion was about student's speaking difficulties... (Int2-RSA)

This research investigates the argumentation skills of EFL university students and the influential factors in crafting their research proposals. The analysis of questionnaire data reveals a varied proficiency in argumentation

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among EFL students. While demonstrating moderate overall argumentation skills, students exhibit strengths in cognitive and metacognitive processes, as well as communicative competence and critical thinking. This confirms the view that argumentation is a strategy for operationalizing critical thinking in a specific domain by generating arguments and selecting evidence (Lubben et al., 2010). Furthermore, a subsequent evaluation of RPs confirms the findings from the questionnaire data below. The majority of RPs displays moderate-level argumentation, characterized by clear claims and some supporting evidence. A smaller number of them showcased strong argumentative skills, incorporating multiple pieces of evidence to support arguments. A small number of RPs lack sufficient evidence and critical analysis. The findings of this research support [Arsyad's \(2021\)](#) study, which investigated the rhetorical and argumentative styles of research article drafts by Indonesian authors. The study reported that, despite its comprehensive moves in the drafts, the argument styles and quality still need significant improvement due to an overreliance on problematic appeal.

Moreover, nearly half of the students in this study demonstrated a moderate level of argumentation, indicating a reasonable ability to support claims with evidence such as data, expert opinions, or empirical studies. The thematic analysis of data also reveals the cognitive-processes related factors that included various cognitive activities mentioned by the students, such as thinking and re-thinking, synthesizing information, identifying the cause-effect relationships within the phenomena they investigated, establishing cause-effect relationships, building assumptions and making predictions to justify their research, and analyzing and comparing information from documents. These findings suggest that these students have a foundational understanding of how to build an argument but may lack the depth or complexity seen at higher levels of argumentation. As a dichotomy of argumentation proposed by [Hirvela \(2017\)](#), they successfully state the claims and supporting evidence within the argument-as-reasoning approach. Additionally, as concluded by [Fan and Chen \(2021\)](#), argumentation and argumentative writing are difficult tasks for students, and they fail to perform effective argumentation because of insufficient knowledge of argumentation development and the disintegration of relevant claims and evidence. Meanwhile, the students in this current research may struggle with argument as inquiry moves, which uses the core element of argumentation to deepen understanding of a topic and places primary value on the inquiry as the locus of activity ([Hirvela, 2017](#)).

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In the second theme, the scientific academic-related factors, several students narrated engaging in various scientific activities. These categories included searching for and reading scientific sources and references, and identifying gaps in the existing literature. Similar findings are also reported in a study by [Sahib and Mursyid \(2020\)](#). They reported that, in composing research proposal, particularly in Introduction section, they have to address the research territory and establish the research gap. They also concluded that these elements are the most difficult to develop. Additionally, certain students in this research mentioned that they could provide proper citation from experts and previous research to bolster their claims as evidence in their RPs. In argumentative writing for academic contexts, such as proposals, the student's claim must be supported by data or valid evidence; otherwise, it can be considered a personal claim ([Liu & Stapleton, 2014](#); [Qin & Karabacak, 2010](#)). Despite the functions supporting the claims, evidence can also be used to give background on the topic, justify its relevance, define terms, apply concepts, and illustrate the author's position on a given topic ([Kibler & Hardigree, 2017](#)).

Within the theme of scientific, academic-related factors in data analysis, a category highlighting opposing viewpoints in argument development also emerged. Among the eight interview participants, only three students briefly touched upon engaging in critical discussion. These perhaps can be caused by two reasons. At first, it seems that only a limited number of students in this research are fully aware of the importance of counterarguments and alternative views in developing their arguments and justifying their research topics. Indeed, the valid supporting elements, alternative views, and counterevidence are the core competent argumentative reasoning ([Liu & Stapleton, 2014](#)). However, it is understandable and is called "myside bias": a tendency to support only one's preferred viewpoint and to ignore evidence against it ([Perkins, 1985](#), in [Liu & Stapleton, 2014](#)). Secondly, they probably knew the need for alternative views, but they could not find relevant, valid sources as scientific references.

Furthermore, a third theme emerged from the interview data, about personal situational factors influencing the development of research arguments. This theme encompassed several categories, including personal experience, impression, observation, situational issues found at the research site, and discussion with colleagues. This view is similar to what [Iqbal \(2007\)](#) said: the context, such as the researcher's background, cannot be neglected in selecting the research topic. Moreover, the theme of personal situational factors in this current research was also generated from discussions with

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colleagues, such as supervisors and fellow teachers in professional associations. As illustrated by [Iqbal \(2007\)](#), when facing difficulties in accessing the relevant materials and the guidance of the research project, many students contact the authors of the published materials (books or journal articles) for guidance. External factors may influence students' plans and frameworks for their research projects, as well as the arguments they construct ([Mali, 2023](#)).

Overall, this study indicates that EFL university students' argumentation in research proposals was generally developing but not yet fully advanced. Although the questionnaire results showed high perceived argumentation skills, the textual analysis revealed that most RP introductions remained at the moderate level. This contrast suggests a possible gap between students' perceived competence and their actual written performance. Students may understand the importance of claims, evidence, and academic justification, but translating this awareness into a more complex argumentative structure remains challenging. This finding extends previous studies on EFL academic writing by showing that argumentation difficulty is not limited to language accuracy or text organization, but also concerns students' ability to transform research problems into logically elaborated and critically supported claims.

CONCLUSION

The purposes of this research are: 1) to explore argumentation for research proposals among EFL university students, and 2) to investigate the influential factors in argument development in this context. The findings show that argumentation among EFL students is at varying levels of proficiency. Most students demonstrated moderate skills across all areas, with a small group demonstrating low-level proficiency. A subsequent examination of research proposals confirms these findings. The majority of proposals display competent argumentation with clear claims and supporting evidence. However, a significant proportion lack the depth of analysis and evidence required for strong argumentation. By addressing the varied levels of argumentation, teacher educators in RP courses may consider applying differentiated instruction (DI) to facilitate different proficiency, preferences, and needs of students through the division of specific content materials, process learning, and writing product expectations. Furthermore, quantitative data analysis reveals that cognitive/metacognitive processes, communicative competence, and critical thinking emerge as the strongest dimensions.

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Interview data analysis illustrates the interconnectedness of scientific, academic-related, cognitive process-related, and personal situational-related factors in shaping argumentation skills. Concerning these findings, teacher educators in academic writing, particularly in the RP course, can consider using some teaching strategies. At first, an explicit genre-based approach to teaching may build genre awareness of RP and guide students toward independence as writers, because the textual analysis showed that some students were able to state claims and provide evidence but still struggled to develop deeper analysis and more complete argumentative moves in RP introductions. Therefore, explicit teaching of the rhetorical structure and argumentative features of research proposals can help students understand how claims, evidence, warrants, counterclaims, and rebuttals function in academic writing. Secondly, peer review and regular feedback can help students identify weaknesses in their argumentation and improve their writing, as the interview data showed that discussion with supervisors, colleagues, and professional communities contributed to students' argument development. Structured feedback can help students recognize weaknesses in their arguments, evaluate the relevance of evidence, and refine their reasoning. Finally, implementing the modeling text approach by providing examples of high-quality argumentative RPs could help students understand the targeted knowledge and performance, as they need concrete examples of how strong argumentation is constructed. Since only a smaller proportion of RPs reached the high level, exposure to well-developed argumentative texts may help students notice how advanced proposals integrate multiple sources, opposing viewpoints, and critical justification.

CRedit AUTHOR STATEMENT

Hanna Sundari: Conceptualization, Methodology, Original Draft Preparation. **Juhana:** Data curation, Writing-reviewing and Editing. **Widya Rizky Pratiwi:** Data collection, data analysis, Writing-Reviewing and Editing.

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responsibility for the content of the manuscript, including its accuracy, integrity, and originality.

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