

Writing Argumentative Essays: Jambi EFL Students' Challenges and Strategies

Chairani Resti Ananda¹, Radiatan Mardiah², Nunung Fajaryani³

¹Universitas Jambi. e-mail: chairanirestiananda@gmail.com

²Universitas Jambi. e-mail: radiatan.mardiah@unja.ac.id

³Universitas Jambi. e-mail: nunung.fajaryani@unja.ac.id

Received 17 May 2024 | Received in revised form 02 August 2024 | Accepted 08 September 2024

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords: argumentative essay, EFL students, problems, strategies, writing</p> <p>DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.21093/ijeltal.v9i2.1722</p> <p>How to cite: Ananda, C.R., Mardiah, R., Fajaryani, N. (2024). Writing Argumentative Essays: Jambi EFL Students' Challenges and Strategies. <i>Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics</i>, 9(2), 339-357</p>	<p>Argumentative writing is a genre of writing that is considered difficult by EFL students at the university level. This study aimed to investigate problems faced by EFL students in writing an argumentative essay and to explain their strategies to overcome the problems. The participants of this study were ten fifth-semester students of the 2023-2024 academic year at the English Education Study Program of a public university in Jambi, Indonesia. A qualitative research design with a case study approach was applied. A semi-structured interview was conducted to collect the main data, and document analysis was carried out to support it. Furthermore, the data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that problems faced by EFL students in writing an argumentative essay include: 1) argument development problems, such as generating and developing arguments, organizing or structuring arguments, creating an argumentative thesis statement, and a lack of counterclaim and refutation knowledge, and 2) research or source integration problems, such as finding supporting evidence and a lack of writing citation knowledge. Meanwhile, strategies used by EFL students to overcome the problems include 1) information acquisition strategies by reading a lot of sources, watching videos, and looking at essay examples, 2) technology utilization strategies by using AI applications, and 3) review and improvement strategies by re-checking and revision and asking for feedback.</p>

1. Introduction

Writing is a means of communication aimed at conveying ideas or information in written form to readers (Saputra et al., 2021). However, in an academic setting, it is more than just a tool of communication (Fajaryani et al., 2021). Writing is one of the productive skills that is important for students' academic success, especially at the university level. This is because

EFL students are generally required to produce certain written texts or academic writing to complete tasks or exams (Setyowati et al., 2020). Therefore, they must master this skill in order to produce well-written texts so that they can get good grades or pass exams (Bulqiyah et al., 2021).

One of the academic writings that EFL students commonly write is an essay (Bulqiyah et al., 2021). It includes an argumentative essay, which is a type of essay that allows students to agree or disagree about a certain topic or issue and use reasons to support their opinions (Oshima & Hogue, 2006). However, writing an argumentative essay is considered difficult for some EFL students (Fajaryani et al., 2021; Ozfidan & Mitchell, 2020; Rahmatunisa, 2014; Setyowati et al., 2020). Argumentative writing requires students to think critically, organize ideas coherently, and provide evidence effectively when presenting arguments or reasons.

Therefore, some students may face problems that can hinder them from producing good argumentative essays (Le et al., 2022). According to Byrne (1988), problems in writing are divided into cognitive problems, linguistic problems, and psychological problems. On the other hand, some previous studies indicated that problems in argumentative writing can be related to its elements, such as grammar, vocabulary, organization or structure, thesis statements, counterclaims, refutations, evidence, and academic source integration (Ozfidan & Mitchell, 2020; Peloghitis, 2017). To overcome these problems, students usually use certain strategies, which refer to methods, techniques, or approaches employed to address obstacles, difficulties, or challenges encountered during the writing process.

Furthermore, a number of previous studies related to problems and strategies in argumentative writing were also conducted by researchers. Some of them focused on problems faced by EFL students in writing an argumentative essay based on the theory of Byrne (1988), which categorized problems in writing into cognitive, linguistic, and psychological aspects (Rahmatunisa, 2014; Setyowati et al., 2020; Saputra et al., 2021). Meanwhile, a quantitative study conducted by Ozfidan and Mitchell (2020) focused on differences between male and female students' difficulties in writing an argumentative essay. Additionally, Peloghitis (2017) and Fajaryani et al. (2021) did studies related to the writing strategies used by students to accomplish an argumentative writing task.

Different from these previous studies, this study focused on EFL students' problems in writing an argumentative essay and their strategies to overcome them by using Byrne (1988) and O'Malley and Chamot (1990) as lenses. In addition, this study is important to conduct because every student in every generation in every place may have different problems and strategies to overcome problems in writing an argumentative essay. Moreover, a study on investigating students' problems and strategies in writing an argumentative essay in Indonesia, especially in Jambi City, is still limited. Thus, to fill the research gaps in this field, the researcher is interested in investigating problems faced by EFL students in writing an argumentative essay and explaining their strategies to overcome the problems. Through this study, it is hoped that information from previous studies can be added and updated so that it can be useful for several parties, such as students, lecturers, and future researchers.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Writing

Writing refers to the activity of producing words or sentences in written form aimed at delivering ideas or information to readers. Nunan (2003) stated that writing can be defined as

a physical or mental act. It is the physical act of committing ideas in words to some medium, such as writing on paper or typing on a computer, and the mental work of inventing interesting ideas, expressing ideas in sentences, and organizing ideas in paragraphs. Meanwhile, Harmer (2004) defined writing as the process of planning, drafting, editing, reflecting, revising, and producing a final version. Similarly, Oshima and Hogue (2006) also defined writing as a process of creating, organizing, writing, and polishing.

Furthermore, writing is the most important English skill for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at the university level (Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Ozfidan & Mitchell, 2020). This is because they are commonly required to complete almost every task in the form of written text or academic writing, such as papers, articles, reports, essays, theses, and so on (Setyowati et al., 2020). However, writing is considered difficult for some EFL students (Fajaryani et al., 2021). In writing, they must develop and organize ideas coherently, and at the same time, they must use grammar and vocabulary correctly. It shows that there are many aspects that must be considered by students in order to produce a well-written text, such as purpose, organization, word choice, language use, and ideas (Setyowati et al., 2020). Some students may find it easy to write in their mother tongue or first language, but it becomes more difficult when they write in English, which is a foreign language (Zhu, 2001, as cited in Rahmatunisa, 2014).

2.2 Argumentative Essay

An argumentative essay, sometimes referred to as a persuasive essay, is a type of essay in academic writing where the writer takes a clear stance on a topic or issue, states a claim or opinion, and gives arguments or reasons supported by evidence or data. The purpose of this essay is to persuade the reader to accept the writer's point of view or convince the reader that the writer's point of view is correct. Dang et al. (2020) defined an argumentative essay as an essay that argues a controversial topic or issue aimed at persuading readers so that they agree with the writer's point of view. Meanwhile, Setyowati et al. (2020) defined an argumentative essay as an essay that requires students to provide strong arguments or logical reasons that can defend their opinions on a topic or issue. On the other hand, this essay is considered the most difficult type of essay for some EFL students at the university level (Ozfidan & Mitchell, 2020; Rahmatunisa, 2014; Setyowati et al., 2020). This is because it demands a high level of critical thinking. Students must analyze complex issues, evaluate evidence, and make persuasive arguments based on logic and reasoning.

In addition, there are several elements of an argumentative essay that differentiate this type of essay from other types of essays. They include an argumentative thesis statement, evidence or source integration, counterclaims or counterarguments, and refutations (Dang et al., 2020; Ozfidan & Mitchell, 2020). Besides, in general, the generic structure of an argumentative essay consists of an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Specifically, Hyland (1990) stated that the generic structure of an argumentative essay is divided into three stages that consist of a thesis, arguments, and conclusion. The thesis stage includes a hook or attention grabber, background information on the topic, and a thesis statement. Meanwhile, the argument stage includes arguments or reasons supported by relevant evidence or data. It also includes counterclaims and refutations to show that the opposing claim is wrong. Finally, the conclusion stage includes a restatement of the thesis statement in different words and an affirmation of the arguments that have been discussed.

2.3 Problems in Writing

Problems in writing can refer to obstacles, difficulties, or challenges encountered by students in the process of producing written texts. According to Byrne's (1988), problems in writing can be divided into several categories that consist of cognitive problems, linguistic problems, and psychological problems. Cognitive problems are problems related to cognitive processes. This cognitive process refers to the mental process or activities such as thinking, reasoning, understanding, or remembering involved in generating, organizing, and expressing ideas through written language. Besides, linguistic problems are problems related to language that involve grammar and vocabulary. These problems occur within structuring sentences, such as tenses, the use of articles, word class, word formation, and word error (Rahmatunisa, 2014). Meanwhile, psychological problems are problems related to mental states, such as emotions, beliefs, or desires, that influence an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. These problems occur as the result of the students' states that relate to their emotions in writing (Setyowati et al., 2020).

Furthermore, Bulqiyah et al. (2021) indicated that students faced difficulties in essay writing, which involved cognitive and linguistic aspects. Besides, Le et al. (2022) revealed that there are some common problems faced by students in writing essays, which are related to grammar, vocabulary, writing styles, and idea arrangement. Additionally, Dang et al. (2020) pointed out some common difficulties faced by students in writing an argumentative essay, which include linguistic competence, organization, and critical thinking. Meanwhile, some studies have highlighted that problems in writing an argumentative essay are related to its elements, such as grammar, vocabulary, organization or structure, thesis statements, counterclaims, refutations, evidence, and academic source integration (Ozfidan & Mitchell, 2020; Peloghitis, 2017). The problems can hinder students from producing a well-written essay and affect students' writing abilities (Le et al., 2022).

2.4 Strategies to Overcome Problems in Writing

Strategies to overcome problems in writing refer to systematic approaches and techniques employed by writers to address obstacles, difficulties, or challenges encountered during the writing process. These strategies are designed to help writers improve their writing skills, enhance their ability to communicate effectively, and overcome obstacles to producing clear, coherent, and engaging written text. By identifying and understanding the specific problems they face, writers can implement targeted strategies to overcome obstacles, such as brainstorming techniques for idea generation, outlining for organization, or revision strategies for refining and improving written text (Fajaryani et al., 2021).

Furthermore, there were several previous studies related to strategies to overcome writing problems (Fajaryani et al., 2021; Peloghitis, 2017). They adapted the O'Malley and Chamot (1990) theory, which divided strategies to overcome problems in writing into cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and social strategies. Cognitive strategies are strategies that involve cognitive processes aimed at acquiring, manipulating, transforming, and creating information to solve problems, such as organizing, outlining, analyzing, summarizing, note-taking, synthesizing, and reading out loud (Díaz Larenas et al., 2017; Goctu, 2017). Metacognitive strategies are strategies that involve mental skills to manage or regulate cognitive activities and ensure cognitive goals are achieved (Goctu, 2017). They include planning before writing, monitoring while writing, and evaluating after writing.

Meanwhile, social strategies are strategies that involve social interactions in the writing process, such as cooperating with others, empathizing with others, asking questions of others, or asking for help from others (Goctu, 2017).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In this study, a qualitative research design with a case study approach was applied in order to get a better understanding of the problems faced by EFL students and their strategies to overcome the problems in writing an argumentative essay. A qualitative research design is a type of design used to explore and understand a social phenomenon or human problem from the perspectives or experiences of participants in natural settings (Creswell, 2009). It means that the problems and strategies of students were examined in their natural setting, or the site where they experienced the problems. Meanwhile, a case study is a qualitative approach in which the researcher investigates a contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information such as observations, interviews, or documents (Creswell, 2013). The case in this study was a phenomenon that refers to problems faced by EFL students and their strategies to overcome the problems in writing an argumentative essay. It was limited to EFL students at the English Education Study Program at a public university in Jambi, Indonesia in the 2023–2024 academic year. Meanwhile, multiple data collection techniques were used, including interview and document analysis.

3.2 Participants

The participants of this study were fifth-semester students of the 2023-2024 academic year at the English Education Study Program of a public University in Jambi, Indonesia, who were selected through purposive sampling. Besides, there are several criteria for the participants: 1) fifth-semester students who have passed the writing course in the fourth semester; 2) students who experience quite a lot of problems in argumentative writing and have strategies to overcome them; 3) students are willing to participate voluntarily in this research; and 4) students are easy to contact and give responses well. Based on the criteria, ten fifth-semester students were selected as participants. Their names used pseudonyms in the form of initials (S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S9, S10) to protect their privacy, especially in situations where personal information is being shared. By using pseudonyms, they can freely express themselves without fear of being identified or having their personal information revealed to others.

3.3 Instruments

A semi-structured interview and a document analysis were employed as the instruments in this study. Before doing the interview, a document analysis was conducted. The documents used were students' argumentative essays they have written on the Advanced Reading and Writing course (ENG 447) in the fourth semester to fulfill the task or to complete the final exams. These essays are analyzed to identify students' problems based on some aspects. These aspects are developed by the researchers based on several references that include Setyowati et al., (2020), Ozfidan and Mitchell (2020), and Peloghitis (2017). The following are aspects of the document analysis.

Table 1 Aspects used in Document Analysis

No.	Aspects
1.	Grammar and vocabulary
2.	Organization/structure
3.	Thesis statement or claim
4.	Counterclaim and refutation
5.	Evidence or academic source integration

Then, the results of the document analysis can be used as a reference during interviews to see the suitability of the data between document analysis and interviews and to support the main data obtained from interviews.

Meanwhile, the interviews were conducted individually face-to-face at the time and place that had been determined and agreed upon by the researcher and participants. Besides, there were interviews conducted online with the participants who could not meet face-to-face. During the interview, an interview protocol was used as a guide to ask the questions. In asking the questions, the researcher used both English and Indonesian. The interviews were approximately 8–15 minutes long and recorded using a smartphone. Then, the recordings were transcribed for data analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

To analyze the data in this study, thematic analysis from Braun and Clarke (2006) and document analysis were used. It is a method for analyzing qualitative data that involves reading through a set of data and looking for patterns in the meaning of the data to find themes. It means that it is a technique used to analyze the data obtained and categorize it into themes. In other words, problems faced by EFL students and their strategies to overcome them in writing an argumentative essay were categorized into several themes. There were six phases of thematic analysis conducted in this study. They consisted of familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and producing the report.



Figure 1 Six Phases of Thematic Analysis from Braun and Clarke (2006)

4. Findings

4.1. Problems in Writing an Argumentative Essay

One of the research objectives is to investigate problems faced by EFL students at the English Education Study Program of Jambi University in writing an argumentative essay. Hence, this section focused on the findings about the problems faced by the participants when writing an argumentative essay. The findings revealed that the participants faced problems that can be divided into two major themes and several sub-themes.

Table 2 Problems in Writing an Argumentative Essay

Themes		Sub-themes
1.	Argument Development Problems	Generating and Developing Arguments
		Organizing or structuring Arguments
		Creating an Argumentative Thesis Statement
		Lack of Counterclaim and Refutation Knowledge
2.	Research and Source Integration Problems	Finding Supporting Evidence
		Lack of Writing Citation Knowledge

4.1.1 Argument Development Problems

Argument development problems refer to obstacles or difficulties faced by EFL students in constructing, presenting, or refining their ideas or arguments in an argumentative essay. These problems can arise at various stages of argumentation, from identifying a clear thesis or main claim and providing reasoning to support that claim to organizing arguments logically and coherently. Meanwhile, the participants in this study faced problems, as follows:

1.) Generating and Developing Arguments

The findings indicated that participants faced problems in generating and developing arguments, as revealed by some of them:

"The problem is that I have difficulty developing ideas and finding reasons that strengthen my opinion in the essay." (S7)

"The problem that hinders me is in the body paragraphs when I develop my ideas. I already know the main points, but I still find it difficult to develop them." (S1)

This is also reflected in their argumentative essays, which indicated that there were arguments or statements that were not developed more in detail, for example:

Over the past five years, the building has a roof. Renovation of stone house will invite tourist to visit. It could also be an alternative educational visit, become an educational tour and adding insight. The most interesting of this building is combined from several cultures. On the fences and archers there are statues of lions, dragon ornaments, clouds, and flowers. We need a more up-to-date reference repair. (S7)

The context is that S7 argued that the stone house should be renovated rather than rebuilt. In the text above, the argument that renovating the stone house will attract tourists and provide educational opportunities is mentioned briefly, but it is not fully developed. Besides, there is no elaboration on how the renovation contributes to its appeal as a tourist attraction. Moreover, the argument transitions abruptly from discussing the building's architectural features to the need for repairs without establishing a clear connection between the two points. The relevance of mentioning the cultural elements and the need for repairs in the context of attracting tourists and providing educational opportunities is not clearly explained.

2.) Organizing or Structuring Arguments

Furthermore, some of the participants reported that they faced problems in organizing or structuring arguments. One of them revealed that she found it difficult to organize arguments coherently, for example:

"Then, I feel like the paragraphs or sentences don't connect. So, it doesn't seem to be sustainable between one and the other" (S1).

It shows that she was not able to organize the paragraphs in her argumentative essay effectively so that they were not connected to each other. However, instead of paragraphs, her writing indicated that some sentences were not connected to each other. For example:

With the development of AI, of course there are many positive things that can be obtained, but there are still negative impacts. The more sophisticated the technology, the more sophisticated the student's ability to manipulate assignments. If asked to make assignments related to audio, students can use the AI audio feature and the ChatGPT feature earlier can also be used to write a scientific article with accurate and satisfying content. (S1)

The underlined sentences above are not connected logically. It is because in the first underlined sentence, she stated that sophisticated technology can make students manipulate assignments. However, in the second underlined sentence, she mentioned the use of AI rather than the examples of how students manipulate assignments by using sophisticated technology or AI. Moreover, these sentences appear in weak transitions for connecting sentences to each other. Meanwhile, the other one stated that she had difficulty in organizing arguments based on the generic structure of an argumentative essay, for example:

"My problem is that I have difficulty in developing and organizing ideas according to the structure of the essay. Then, I also find it difficult to put ideas into writing" (S5).

This is in line with the analysis, where her argumentative essay was not organized based on the structure properly. She did not include an argumentative thesis statement in the introduction paragraph and a conclusion of her arguments in the last paragraph.

3.) Creating an Argumentative Thesis Statement

In addition, some participants reported that they had problems in creating an argumentative thesis statement. They expressed that they found it difficult to make a specific thesis statement in their argumentative essays, for example:

"The problem is when I want to make a thesis statement. At that time, I wanted to make a thesis statement, but it turned out that the thesis statement was too broad, so I had to narrow it down. Well, I think narrowing it down is quite difficult." (S2)

"Because when making a thesis statement, you can't make it too general but not too specific either. So, sometimes I'm confused about whether this is too general or too specific. When I wrote a specific thesis statement, it turned out to be general." (S1)

This is supported by the analysis results, which indicated that their thesis statements were not specific or clear enough. They did not state the main claim or position clearly and provide examples or reasons to support the main claim. In addition, they did not provide clear details that will be discussed in the body paragraphs.

This is also shown by S2 writing, where the thesis statement was not clear and specific enough. For example:

Although this artificial intelligence is very helpful for humans, it also has a negative impact on humans, especially in the world of education. Why do you say that? Since the existence of artificial intelligence, it feels very easy to access all information and this helps students to get information more easily, especially for their learning process. (S2)

Based on the thesis statement above, she stated that AI has a negative impact on humans in the first sentence. However, she mentioned the benefits of AI rather than the negative impact of AI in the next sentence. Moreover, she did not mention the negative impact of AI specifically or provide the details that will be discussed in the body paragraphs. It indicates that her thesis statement was not clear and specific enough. On the other hand, S₃, S₅, and S₁₀ also had the same problem as S₁ and S₂. Thus, it is clear that difficulty in making a thesis statement is one of the problems faced by EFL students at the English Education Study Program of Jambi University in writing an argumentative essay.

4.) Lack of counterclaim and refutation knowledge

Finally, some of the participants indicated that they did not have enough knowledge or understanding about counterclaims and refutations, which led to their absence in an argumentative essay, for example:

"My lecturer told me about counterclaims or counterarguments and refutation but I'm not really understand about that so I also didn't know like is there refutation in my essay." (S₉)

"I am not familiar with the terms of counterclaim or refutation, and they have never been explained by the lecturer." (S₄)

The thesis statement (The main claim or argument):

Definitely, AI will have a very bad effect on the critical thinking and integrity of future students. Hence, there will be some effects caused by this AI in the future which will affect the world of education.

Pro argument 1: The first, students will rely mostly on AI in educational life ...

Pro argument 2: Second, ... this will make students more focused on Artificial Intelligence technology and will have difficulty solving educational problems critically.

Pro argument 3: Third, AI is able to replace the teacher's position in the future ...

The analysis results also indicated that their argumentative essay lacked counterclaims and refutations. They only provided pro-arguments and did not provide the counterclaim or counterargument that opposes the main claim or argument and its refutation. Without

acknowledging and addressing opposing perspectives, an argument may appear one-sided, biased, or incomplete.

4.1.2 Research or Source Integration Problems

Research or source integration problems refer to obstacles or difficulties faced by EFL students in incorporating relevant evidence from credible sources to support the writer's arguments effectively. It also involves understanding and applying proper citation practices to give credit to the original sources used in the essay. The findings indicate that the participants faced problems, as follows:

1.) Finding Supporting Evidence

Most of the participants reported that they had difficulty in finding evidence related to the topic that could support their statements or arguments, as stated by some of them:

"Because I only know Google Scholar, it is so hard to find resources. After I ask my lecturer, she gives so many websites to find articles or books. But I still have difficulty to find the evidence related my topic." (S3)

"Several times there are problems in finding evidence because there is little and limited information on the internet that can support my arguments." (S2)

This is in line with the analysis results, which indicated that their argumentative essays lacked evidence from credible sources. For example:

The demand for TV presenters remains high, particularly in media-centric societies, where the industry requires charismatic individuals with exceptional communication skills to engage audiences. The salary potential for TV presenters varies greatly depending on factors such as experience, network, and popularity. However, it is worth noting that starting salaries for entry-level TV presenters tend to be relatively low compared to other professions. FKIP English Education graduates may find it challenging to meet their financial expectations, considering the competitive nature of the industry. (S3)

The first underlined sentence above lacks evidence, such as statistics or data, indicating the high demand for TV presenters in media-centric societies. In addition, there is no explanation or citation provided to support the claim that the industry requires charismatic individuals with exceptional communication skills. Meanwhile, the second underlined sentence also lacks specific evidence or data that can support the accuracy of this assertion. Additionally, there was no reference to studies or expert opinions that support the statements made in the text. As a result, the arguments lacked credibility and persuasiveness.

2.) Lack of Writing Citation Knowledge

Furthermore, the findings showed that some participants did not have enough knowledge or understanding about writing citations, which led to their absence in the text, for example:

"In addition, I never write citation in my argument and I did not include it in my essay. I don't know how write it and my lecturer did not ask." (S3)

This is also reflected in his argumentative essay, which indicated that there were no citations or even references provided to support statements that require evidence or data from other sources. For example:

However, it is worth noting that starting salaries for entry-level TV presenters tend to be relatively low compared to other professions. FKIP English Education graduates may find it challenging to meet their financial expectations, considering the competitive nature of the industry. (S₃)

Similarly, S₄ also stated that:

"I don't think I have problems with evidence. But to write citations, I still do not understand." (S₄)

Besides, one of them did not provide any citations in the text, even though she included references at the end of the essay. It means that she only had knowledge or understanding about writing references rather than citations. Without citations in the text, readers cannot access references that are used as evidence to support statements in the text.

4.2. Strategies Used to Overcome the Problems

The findings revealed that the participants used strategies that can be divided into three major themes and several sub-themes.

Table 3 Strategies to Overcome Problems in Writing an Argumentative Essay

Themes	Sub-themes
1. Information Acquisition Strategies	Reading a lot of Sources Watching Videos Looking at Essay Examples
2. Technology Utilization Strategies	Using AI Applications
3. Review and improvement strategies	Re-checking and Revision Asking for Feedback

4.2.1 Information Acquisition Strategies

Information acquisition strategies refer to the methods, techniques, or approaches employed by students to gather and obtain information, which can help them solve problems in writing an argumentative essay. The findings show that the participants used strategies, as follows:

1.) Reading a lot of Sources

Most of the participants reported that reading a lot of sources was one of their strategies to overcome problems in writing an argumentative essay, for example:

"Because I don't know the topic, so the first strategy I do is I have to find the definition of "Labor Market" and "The Skill Gap". Then, I have to read so many articles again. And I have to read books given by my lecturer first." (S₃)

"So, I read a lot of journals and articles on Google or look at people's essays that relate to my topic." (S₄)

"The strategy I use when writing argumentative essays is of course that I have to read more reading material, whether from Google or newspapers, and watching videos." (S₇)

It shows that they read a lot of sources, such as books, journals, articles, Google, or even newspapers, in order to gain knowledge, information, or understanding that could help them solve their problems.

2.) Watching Videos

Watching videos was one of the strategies reported by some participants to overcome problems in writing an argumentative essay, for example:

"So, my strategy is that I read a lot from Google or I watch videos on YouTube." (S5)

"The first strategy I used was to find out on YouTube or websites how to write an argumentative essay." (S6)

"The strategy I use when writing argumentative essays is of course that I have to read more reading material, whether from Google or newspapers, and watching videos." (S7)

It indicates that they watched videos on online platforms, especially YouTube, in order to gain information that could help them overcome their problems.

3.) Looking at Essay Examples

Some participants revealed that looking at essay examples was one of the strategies used to overcome their problems in writing an argumentative essay, for example:

"To overcome the problems, I looked at examples of argumentative essays, whether on YouTube or Google, and asked my friends." (S2)

"So, I read a lot of journals and articles on Google or look at people's essays that relate to my topic." (S4)

"My strategy is to read other examples of argumentative essays on the internet related to the topics of the argumentative essay that I am writing." (S10)

It means that they looked at existing argumentative essays on online platforms or the internet to help them solve their problems. By looking at other examples of argumentative essays, they can get better ideas related to their topics. Besides, it can also help them become familiar with the elements of an argumentative essay itself.

4.2.2 Technology Utilization Strategies

Technology utilization strategies refer to the methods, techniques, or approaches employed by students to leverage technological tools and resources to solve problems and enhance the writing process. The findings indicate that the participants used AI applications that can help them overcome problems in writing an argumentative essay, for example:

"My problem is to find my ideas. Because I cannot just write by my own words in my mind, I have to use so many tools like ChatGPT, Quilbot, Google Translate, and so on. I used so many AI to write my argumentative essay so I did not really check my argument one by one because I used so many tools." (S3)

"When I do revision to my essay, it's quite helpful because I use tools like grammarly. So, I can check and fix the errors." (S8)

It shows that one of them used ChatGPT to find or generate ideas or arguments, supported by Quillbot and Google Translate, which help the writing process. Meanwhile, the other one used Grammarly to check and correct grammatical errors in the arguments.

4.2.3 Review and Improvement Strategies

Review and improvement strategies refer to the methods, techniques, or approaches employed by students to assess, refine, and enhance written content to ensure accuracy, clarity, coherence, and effectiveness. The findings show that the participants used strategies, as follows:

1.) Re-checking and Revision

Some of the participants revealed that they did re-checking and revision to help them overcome their problems, for example:

"So, I always do revisions on my essay. When I finish my essay, I look it back whether the grammar is wrong or correct. So, I can know the errors in my essay." (S8)

"At the end, I read it again many times, asked friends, cross-checked it again, then collected it." (S1)

"Then, I evaluate the main idea, the introduction, and then the statements. Are the sentences correct or not, and are they connected? So, I rechecked it first and then submitted it to the lecturer." (S6)

It indicates that they re-checked to identify errors or areas that needed improvement and then revised the essays before submitting them to the lecturers.

2.) Asking for Feedback

Asking for feedback was one of the strategies reported by some participants to overcome problems in writing an argumentative essay, for example:

"Then, I ask my friends for their opinion about my argumentative essay, whether they think the structure is correct or not, or sometimes I also ask the lecturer, whether there is something that needs to be revised or not, something like that." (S1)

"Then, the third step is that I asked a friend for help in evaluating my essay. So, I asked my friend for their opinion, whether it was correct or not, whether it was appropriate or not." (S6)

It shows that they sought feedback by asking their friends or lecturers to give opinions about the content of their argumentative essays so that they could find errors, incoherence, or areas that needed improvement.

5. Discussion

The findings revealed that problems faced by EFL students in writing an argumentative essay include argument development problems and research or source integration problems. Argument development problems refer to obstacles, difficulties, or challenges encountered in the process of constructing, presenting, or refining arguments in an argumentative essay. In this case, generating and developing arguments was one of the problems reported by participants. They admitted that it was difficult to develop arguments and find supporting ideas when writing an argumentative essay. This is also proven by the existence of arguments

that are not developed more in detail and a lack of supporting ideas in their argumentative essays. It shows that the ability to construct, expand, or elaborate logical and persuasive statements in an argumentative essay was not easy for some students. This finding supports the study of Fajaryani et al. (2021) and Budjalemba et al., (2020), who stated that developing ideas becomes one of the most difficult parts experienced by EFL students when composing an argumentative essay. Furthermore, participants also reported that they faced problems in organizing or structuring arguments. One of them found it difficult to organize arguments coherently, which was also indicated by incoherent sentences or paragraphs in the essay. The other one had difficulty in organizing arguments based on its generic structure, which led to improper essay structure. As stated by Ozfidan and Mitchell (2020), organization or structure is one of the common difficulties of writing argumentative essays. The findings of this study confirms that the ability to compose an argumentative writing related to students' knowledge about rhetorical features of English argumentative writing (Ghanbari and Salari 2020; Srinawati and Alwi 2020; Rubiaee et al., 2020; Toan et al., 2020; and Dang et al., 2020). These problems also refer to cognitive problems, which are problems related to ideas in the writing process (Levine, 1998, as cited in Setyowati et al., 2020). Students' difficulties in composing an argumentative writing might be influenced by their lack of linguistics mastery including grammar, vocabulary and academic writing aspects (Abrar et al., 2023; Alghazo and Alshraideh, 2020). Moreover, psychological factors for examples, writing apprehension, judgment and negative review from lecturers and peers can hinder students to write well.

Besides, some participants revealed that they had problems in creating an argumentative thesis statement. Suhartoyo et al. (2020) emphasized that an argumentative essay must have a detailed or specific thesis statement followed by a reasonable explanation. Otherwise, the participants had difficulty in making a clear and specific thesis statement. This is shown by their thesis statements, which were not clear or specific enough because they did not state the main claim or position clearly and provide examples, reasons, or details that support the main claim. This finding is consistent with Dang et al. (2020), who stated that one of the core problems students have with writing is that they are not able to write a clear, understandable, and strong thesis statement. They also found that some students spent a lot of time thinking and writing the thesis statement. It shows that problems in creating a thesis statement can hinder the writing process. Meanwhile, other participants indicated that they lacked counterclaim and refutation knowledge. Graff and Birkenstein (2018) argued that understanding and engaging with counterarguments is essential in argumentative writing because acknowledging opposing viewpoints and effectively refuting them contributes to the overall persuasiveness of an argument. Conversely, some participants did not have enough knowledge or understanding about counterclaims and refutations, which led to the absence of these elements in their argumentative essays. When students lack knowledge of counterclaims and refutations, they may struggle to acknowledge opposing perspectives, anticipate objections, and effectively respond to them in their arguments. This is in line with Dang et al. (2020), who revealed that counterarguments become the most difficult obstacles that students face when writing an argumentative essay. Therefore, most of the students do not provide opposing arguments and even ignore them.

On the other hand, the findings also show that EFL students faced evidence or source integration problems. These problems refer to obstacles, difficulties, or challenges encountered in incorporating evidence or external sources to support arguments. As reported

by most of the participants, they had difficulty in finding evidence related to the topic that supported the arguments. This was also reflected in their argumentative essays because there were statements or arguments that were not supported by examples, expert opinions, or evidence from credible sources. This finding is consistent with Peloghitis (2017), who stated that finding evidence is a problem that frustrates students in argumentative writing. He found that some students still did not have good evidence related to the topic, even though they had spent a long time to find it. Additionally, other participants indicated that they lacked writing citation knowledge. This refers to the absence or insufficient acknowledgment of external sources used to support arguments within the text, as found in their argumentative essays. This omission can occur when writers fail to provide citations for quotes, paraphrases, or ideas borrowed from other sources, resulting in a lack of attribution and documentation of the information's origin. It may also involve neglecting to include citations for statistical data, research findings, or expert opinions referenced in the argument. The lack of citations can raise concerns about plagiarism and academic misconduct, highlighting the importance of proper citation practices in upholding scholarly standards and ethics. This is supported by Ozfidan and Mitchell (2020), who indicated that integrating academic sources is one of the common difficulties of argumentative writing. Moreover, Setyowati et al. (2020) found that some students faced problems related to academic source integration when writing an argumentative essay. However, instead of citations in text, they still do not know how to write references correctly. They already stated the references, but they could not write the references properly.

To overcome these problems, EFL students employed several strategies, including information acquisition strategies, technology utilization strategies, and review and improvement strategies. Information acquisition strategies refer to methods, techniques, or approaches used by students to gather and obtain information, knowledge, or understanding from various sources aimed at addressing and resolving problems. One of the strategies is reading a lot of sources, which were reported by most of the participants. They read books, journals, articles, websites on Google, or even newspapers aimed at enriching ideas, increasing knowledge, and deepening understanding. By reading a lot of sources, students can gain multiple perspectives, gather different viewpoints, and access a wide range of information to support their writing. It is also suggested to combine and vary strategies based on needs and to have more practice in reading digital academic sources (Abrar et al., 2023; Mardiah et al., 2021). Furthermore, one of the strategies reported by participants was watching videos on YouTube. This strategy aimed to gain knowledge or understanding that helped them solve problems. It shows that the use of YouTube videos can assist students in both online and in-person learning because they are relevant to the content course, offering convenience, affordability, and accessibility while effectively aiding in understanding the lesson material (Jailani, 2022). Additionally, some students revealed that they looked at existing argumentative essays that serve as models or samples for understanding the structure, organization, content, and other elements. By using a writing model or example of an argumentative essay, students can get better ideas and become familiar with the writing style, sentence structure, writing mechanics, and so on (Nawangsih, 2022). When students are familiar with the elements of writing itself, they may be able to write a persuasive and well-organized essay.

In addition, EFL students employed technology utilization strategies. They refer to methods, techniques, or approaches used to leverage technological tools, such as software applications, online platforms, digital resources, and so on, to overcome problems and enhance the writing process. The participants admitted that they used AI applications, such as ChatGPT, Quillbot, Google Translate, and Grammarly, to help them overcome problems. This is in line with Mukminin et al. (2015), who stated that the advancement of technology can help students when they have problems with academic writing. Meanwhile, some EFL students indicated that they employed review and improvement strategies, which refer to methods, techniques, or approaches used to assess and enhance the quality, coherence, and effectiveness of a written work. These strategies aim to identify areas for improvement or address weaknesses in a written work. They involve systematically reviewing and revising drafts to refine content, organization, structure, clarity, and mechanics. One of these strategies is re-checking or revision, which was reported by participants. They re-checked their essays to identify errors or areas that required improvement and revised or corrected them (Kerman et al., 2024; Latifi et al., 2023). As stated by Fajaryani et al. (2021), argumentative writing requires students to check again and again what they have written in the argumentative essay before doing revision, and the revision suggests the students had awareness to correct their mistakes in writing. With re-checking and revision, students can overcome problems and ensure the quality of their essay (Fajaryani et al., 2021).

These findings indicate that problems faced by students are related to the elements of an argumentative essay, such as arguments, thesis statements, counterclaims and refutations, and evidence or source integration. This is supported by Ozfidan and Mitchell (2020), who indicated that problems in writing an argumentative essay are related to its elements. Besides, there were problems that referred to cognitive problems, such as generating and developing arguments and organizing or structuring arguments. It shows that they are consistent with Byrne's (1988) theory, which divided problems in writing into cognitive problems, linguistic problems, and psychological problems. On the other hand, some previous studies related to argumentative writing also used the theory of Byrne (1988) (Rahmatunisa, 2014; Saputra et al., 2021; Setyowati et al., 2020). In addition, other previous studies indicated that students had difficulties in argumentative writing related to the elements of an argumentative essay (Dang et al., 2020; Ozfidan & Mitchell, 2020). Different from previous studies, this study found problems that were not found or discussed in these previous studies, including a lack of counterclaim and refutation knowledge and a lack of knowledge in writing citations. Moreover, these previous studies only focused on problems and did not provide strategies, as found in this study. Furthermore, the findings indicate that there were strategies used by students to overcome the problems that referred to cognitive strategies, which include reading a lot of sources and watching videos, and social strategies, which include asking for feedback. These findings are consistent with O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) theory and Fajaryani et al.'s (2021) study, which divided strategies to overcome challenges in argumentative writing into cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and social strategies. This study also found strategies to overcome problems in argumentative writing that were not found or discussed in the previous studies, including watching videos.

6. Conclusion

The objectives of this study were to investigate problems faced by EFL students in writing an argumentative essay and explain their strategies to overcome the problems. Thus, the

findings clearly show that students encountered problems that hindered them from producing good argumentative essays, such as generating and developing arguments, organizing or structuring arguments, creating an argumentative thesis statement, a lack of counterclaim and refutation knowledge, finding supporting evidence, and a lack of writing citation knowledge. One of the problems reported by most of the participants was finding supporting evidence. These problems were also proven by the analysis results of their argumentative essays, which confirmed their statements in the interview. On the other hand, students had strategies to overcome their problems when writing an argumentative essay. Reading a lot of sources was one of the strategies reported by most of the participants. Other strategies include watching videos, looking at essay examples, using AI applications, re-checking and revision, and asking for feedback. These strategies were also considered helpful for students to help them overcome the problems. From these findings, students must improve their abilities in argumentative writing and consult their problems with the lecturers. Meanwhile, lecturers should pay more attention to students who have problems and help them by providing effective strategies to overcome their problems.

References

- Abrar, M., Fajaryani, N., & Hutabarat, R. R. (2023). EFL Student Teachers' Experiences in Writing Their Undergraduate Theses in Jambi. *Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 7(2), 401-416.
- Alghazo, K. M., & Alshraideh, M. K. (2020). Grammatical Errors Found in English Writing: A Study from Al-Hussein Bin Talal University. *International Education Studies*, 13(9), 1-9.
- Budjalemba, A. S., & Listyani, L. (2020). Factors contributing to students difficulties in academic writing class: Students perceptions. *UC Journal: ELT, Linguistics and Literature Journal*, 1(2), 135-149.
- Bulqiyah, S., Mahbub, Moh. A., & Nugraheni, D. A. (2021). Investigating writing difficulties in essay writing: Tertiary students' perspectives. *English Language Teaching Educational Journal*, 4(1), 61. doi: <https://doi.org/10.12928/eltej.v4i1.2371>
- Byrne, D. (1988). *Teaching Writing Skills* (New Edition). Pearson Longman.
- Dang, T. H., Chau, T. H., & Tra, T. Q. (2020). A Study on the Difficulties in Writing Argumentative Essays of English-Majored Sophomores at Tay Do University, Vietnam. *European Journal of English Language Teaching*, 6(1). doi: <https://doi.org/10.46827/ejel.v6i1.3389>
- Díaz Larenas, C., Ramos Leiva, L., & Ortiz Navarrete, M. (2017). Rhetorical, Metacognitive, and Cognitive Strategies in Teacher Candidates' Essay Writing. *PROFILE Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 19(2), 87-100. doi: <https://doi.org/10.15446/profile.v19n2.60231>
- Fajaryani, N., Mukminin, A., Hidayat, M., Muhaimin, M., Haryanto, E., Nazurty, N., Marzulina, L., Harto, K., & Habibi, A. (2021). Cultural Capital and Argumentative Writing in English: Challenges and Strategies Used by EFL Student Teachers. *The Qualitative Report*. doi: <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.4784>
- Ghanbari, N., & Salari, M. (2022). Problematizing argumentative writing in an Iranian EFL undergraduate context. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 862400.
- Goctu, R. (2017). Metacognitive Strategies in Academic Writing. *Journal of Education in Black Sea Region*, 2(2). doi: <https://doi.org/10.31578/jeps.v2i2.44>

- Graff, G., & Birkenstein, C. (2018). *They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. (Fourth Edition). W.W. Norton & Company.
- Harmer, J. (2004). *How to Teach Writing*. Pearson Longman.
- Hyland, K. (1990). A Genre Description of the Argumentative Essay. *RELJ Journal*, 21(1), 66–78. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003368829002100105>
- Jailani, A. (2022). The Use of YouTube Videos in English Language Teaching: A Perspective of Indonesian Undergraduate Students Majoring in English Language Education. *J-SHMIC : Journal of English for Academic*, 9(2), 13–24. doi: [https://doi.org/10.25299/jshmic.2022.vol9\(2\).9949](https://doi.org/10.25299/jshmic.2022.vol9(2).9949)
- Kerman, N. T., Noroozi, O., Banihashem, S. K., Karami, M., & Biemans, H. J. (2024). Online peer feedback patterns of success and failure in argumentative essay writing. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 32(2), 614-626.
- Latifi, S., Noroozi, O., & Talaee, E. (2023). Worked example or scripting? Fostering students' online argumentative peer feedback, essay writing and learning. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 31(2), 655-669.
- Le, V. L., Dang, T. B. D., & Nguyen, K. (2022). Some Common Problems in Writing Essays of English Majored Sophomores at a University in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. *European Journal of English Language Teaching*, 7(3). doi: <https://doi.org/10.46827/ejel.v7i3.4323>
- Mardiah, R., Melati, & Safitri, N. T. (2021). *Academic Purposes Digital Reading: EFL Students' Practices and Challenges*. Fifth International Conference on Language, Literature, Culture, and Education (ICOLLITE 2021), Bandung, Indonesia. doi: <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.211119.087>
- Mukminin, A., Ali, R., & Ashari, M. (2015). Voices from Within: Student Teachers' Experiences in English Academic Writing Socialization at One Indonesian Teacher Training Program. *The Qualitative Report*. doi: <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2015.2280>
- Nawangsih. (2022). *Challenges in Academic Writing and Potential Strategies from the Perspective of EFL Students Teachers*. Unpublished Thesis. Bachelor Program. Jambi University.
- Nunan, D. (2003). *Practical English Language Teaching* (First Edition). Mc Graw Hill.
- Oshima, A., & Hogue, A. (2006). *Writing Academic English 4th Edition* (4th Edition). Pearson Longman.
- Ozfidan, B., & Mitchell, C. (2020). Detected Difficulties in Argumentative Writing: The Case of Culturally and Linguistically Saudi Backgrounded Students. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, 15–29. doi: <https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/382>
- Peloghitis, J. (2017). Difficulties and Strategies in Argumentative Writing: A Qualitative Analysis. *JALT*, 8. <https://jalt-publications.org/sites/default/files/pdf-article/jalt2016-pcp-052.pdf>
- Rahmatunisa, W. (2014). Problems Faced by EFL Learners in Writing Argumentative Essay. *English Review: Journal of English Education*, Vol. 3 (1), 41-49. <http://journal.uniku.ac.id/index.php/ERJEE>
- Mohamed Rubiaee, A. A., Darus, S., & Abu Bakar, N. (2020). The effect of writing knowledge on EFL students' ability in composing argumentative essays. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Volume*, 10.
- Saputra, A. B. B., Jumariati, & Febriyanti, E. R. (2021). *EFL Students' Problems in Writing Argumentative Essays*: 2nd International Conference on Education, Language, Literature, and Arts (ICELLA 2021), Banjarmasin, Indonesia.

doi: <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.211021.002>

Setyowati, L., Agustina, F., Sukmawan, S., El-Sulukiyyah, A. A., & Mabaroh, B. (2020). The Students' Problems and Solutions in Writing an Argumentative Essay on Gender Issue. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics*, 5(3), 279.

doi: <https://doi.org/10.21462/jeltl.v5i3.424>

Srinawati, W., & Alwi, R. (2020). Critical thinking ability in EFL students' argumentative essay writing: The difficulties and the strategies. *Jurnal Serambi Ilmu*, 21(2), 200-210.

Suhartoyo, E., Ni'mah, D., & Ismiatun, F. (2020). *The Common Mistakes of Undergraduate EFL Students in Writing Argumentative Essays. Proceedings of English Linguistics and Literature*, Vol. 2.