

Mapping the Schematic Structure of Argumentative Essays: A Contextualized Genre-Based Approach in EFL Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to map the schematic structure of discussion-type argumentative essay produced by Indonesian EFL learners within a contextualized genre-based framework. Drawing on systemic functional linguistics and the principles of genre-based pedagogy (GBP), this research investigates how students organize information across genre stages- Issue, Arguments (argument for and argument against) and Conclusion to fulfill the social purpose of argumentative writing. Data were collected from 12 learners' discussion genre essay and analyzed qualitatively using Gerot and Wignel's (1995) schematic structure model. This research result revealed that while most students demonstrated awareness of basic genre stages, there was significant variation in their realization of argumentative development and coherence. Contextual factors such as linguistics proficiency, topic familiarity and classroom instruction influenced students' ability to construct well-formed arguments. This research highlights the pedagogical importance of integrating schematic structure awareness into EFL writing instruction to promote contextualized and meaningful academic literacy. These results contribute to the ongoing discussion on contextual ELT by strengthening the role of learners' awareness on genre-based approaches in bridging linguistics forms, cognitive processes, and communicative purposes in EFL academic writing.

Keywords: Schematic structure; *Argumentative essay*; *Genre-based approach*; *EFL writing*.

INTRODUCTION

Argumentative writing is a critical skill in academic communication, particularly for English as a Foreign Language (EFL). These learners must demonstrate their ability to construct logical and cohesive arguments while maintaining cultural and contextual relevance. In global higher education, several studies have shown that learners often face difficulties in organizing information and realizing genre stages effectively (Martin & Rose, 2008; Hyland, 2007).

Within the Indonesian EFL context, these challenges are even more noticeable. Observations and interviews with lecturers of academic writing courses at major Universities in Medan reveal that many learners produce essays with weak schematic organization, unclear thesis development, and limited coherence between argument stages. This phenomenon indicates that despite explicit instruction, learners still struggle to internalize how schematic structures contribute to meaning making within argumentative genres (C. Zhang & Li, 2025). Therefore, there is a pedagogical and linguistics need to explore how schematic

structures function as cognitive and cultural scaffolds that support academic writing in EFL classrooms (Jwa, 2020)

The main research problem addressed in this study concerns how Indonesian EFL learners construct schematic structures in their argumentative essays and the extent to which contextual factors influence these structures. This research is guided by hypothesis that learners' schematic structure realization reflects not only linguistics competence but also their cognitive engagement and awareness of genre stages. It is assumed that variations in schematics organization stems for differences in learners' understanding of the social purpose of argumentative writing and the pedagogical models used in their instruction. To solve this problem, the study used a contextualized genre-based approach (GBA) based on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Gerot & Wignell, 1995; Matthiessen & Halliday, 2014). The goal was to find out how schematic structures develop and work with contextual learning environments. This method combines form, meaning, and context in linguistics to help us better understand how EFL students learn to argue.

The specific objectives of this study are (1) to identify and describe the schematic structure stages in Indonesian EFL learners' argumentative essays and (2) to analyze contextual factors influencing these schematic realizations. Despite the widespread use of SFL and GBA frameworks in previous research, most studies have focused on lexicogrammatically features (Ilyas & Arifin, 2025) or rhetorical moves (Nurkholidah et al., 2025) while limited attention has been given to the relationship between schematic organization and the contextualization of writing instruction. This literature gap underscores the need for qualitative studies that explore how schematic structures are cognitively and culturally in localized EFL contexts. This novelty of this study lies in its integration of cognitive, contextual, and schematic dimensions within a genre-based framework - an approach that expands current understandings of contextualized English Language Teaching (ELT) by linking linguistics form, social purpose and cognitive engagement in academic writing (Hyland, 2019).

This research focuses on undergraduate EFL learners enrolled in academic writing courses at Universities in Medan such as University of Sumatera Utara, Private State University of Medan, State Islamic University of Sumatera Utara, and Muhammadiyah University of Sumatera Utara. Data were collected from students' argumentative essays and analyzed qualitatively using the schematic structure model of Gerot and Wignel (1995). The scope of the research is limited to the schematic organization (Thesis, Argument (argument for and argument against) and Conclusion stages). Recent literature confirms this research, as (Ningsih & Gunawan, 2019) demonstrated that genre awareness promotes cross-context adaptation and highlighted schematic comprehension in reading and writing tasks.

Furthermore, Gay et al., (2025) discovered that GBA improves coherence and argument quality in EFL writing. These prior studies collectively validate that schematic structure analysis is an essential yet inadequately examined domain in the progression of contextualized EFL pedagogy, especially within the Southeast Asian context where genre and culture significantly influence academic discourse (Juliana, 2018).

METHODS

Subjects of Research

This research employed a qualitative case study design grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes meaning construction and contextual understanding (Denzin, 2017; Creswell, J. W., & Poth, 2007). The case study approach was selected because it enables an in-depth exploration of how EFL learners construct schematic structures in discussion-type argumentative essay within specific sociocultural and pedagogical contexts. Yin (2020) suggests that a case study is especially appropriate when the research aims to seek to clarify "how and why of processes and context-specific behaviours". This study integrated phenomenological elements to clarify learners lived experiences in the production and comprehension of argumentative texts, thereby ensuring the exploration of both structural and experiential dimensions. This combination of case study and phenomenological perspective aligns with the study's goal of mapping schematic structures as contextually situated meaning making practices rather than isolated linguistics products (Yin, 2023).

The research was conducted from May to October 2025 at four Universities in Medan Indonesia where English is taught as a foreign language in academic writing courses. The participants consisted of 120 students enrolled in academic writing classes. Participants then were selected using purposive sampling to choose. There were only 12 students which allows the researcher to choose individuals who can provide rich and relevant information about the phenomenon under investigation Palinkas et al., (2015) states that Inclusion criteria for student participants included (a) completion of at least one academic writing course, (b) experience in producing argumentative essays which suitable with well-organized schematic structures in English based on Gerot and Wignel of schematic structure. (c). pass the post test of writing argumentative essay. Ethical clearance was obtained from the respective institutions and all participants provided informed consent (Martin & Rose, 2008; Gerot & Wignell, 1995).

Instruments

The primary materials analyzed were students' argumentative essays. The argumentative essays in the form of two kinds writing tests-Pretest and Post test

writing essay tests. Prompts were IELTS-standardized, validated through pilot testing, and designed to elicit discussion type argumentative essays. Scoring rubrics were adapted from IELTS writing Band Descriptors (2020) and academic writing frameworks (O’Sullivan, 2023; Hyland, 2019). These argumentative essay tests served as the main data for identifying schematic stages-Issue, argument, and conclusion following Gerot and Wignell (2002) model of schematic structure. Supplementary materials included lesson plans, teaching syllabus, and scoring rubrics were collected to provide contextual insight into instructional design. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with 12 selected students. The interviews focused on participants' perceptions of schematic organization, challenges in developing argumentation, and contextual influences such as classroom support and topic familiarity (Chong & Ye, 2020; Yadi, 2020).

Data Collection

Multiple data collection technique was employed to ensure data triangulation and depth of understanding (Denzin, 2017). The primary data consisted of students' argumentative essays tests, which were analyzed for schematic structure based on Gerot and Wignel's (1995) framework - comprising Issue (Thesis and Preview), Argument (Argument for and Argument Against), and Conclusion stages. To complement this textual data, semi structured interviews were conducted with both students and lecturers to explore their perceptions of writing practices and contextual influences on genre realization. Document analysis such as course syllabus, lesson plans, and writing rubrics was used to contextualize the pedagogical environment. Triangulation was accomplished through the integration of argumentative essay written test analysis, interviews, and observational data (Denzin, 2017). The collection of data followed ethical guidelines, protecting the privacy and anonymity of participants (Lipman, 2003; Denzin, 2017).

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles Hubberman and Saldana (2014) which consists of three interconnected stages: data condensation: selecting, simplifying and coding textual segments based on schematic structure relevance. Data display: Organizing codes and subthemes into visual matrices for pattern identification. Conclusion Drawing and Verification: Interpreting emergent themes through iterative comparison with theoretical constructs from SFL and genre pedagogy. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional Review Board of Medan state University. Participants' identities were anonym, and all collected data were stored securely

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Realization of Schematic Structure Stages in the Argumentative Essays

This section presents and discusses the realization of schematic structure stages in

discussion-type argumentative essay written by EFL (English as a foreign language) learners. The primary aim was to examine how students organize their essays to achieve their communicative goals, specifically within the framework of argumentative essays discussing the topic *"The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Education: Enhancing Efficiency or Diminishing Creativity?"*. The analysis of schematic structure stages of the argumentative essays is based on the schematic structure outlined by Gerrot and Wignell (1995), which included four main steps: Issue (Statement and Preview), Arguments for (Point and Elaboration), Argument against (Point and Elaboration), and Conclusion or Recommendation. This Structure was used to categorize and analyse the essays. The stages of Students' Schematics Structure in Argumentative Essay are presented below:

Table 1. Stages of Students' Schematics Structure in Argumentative Essay

No	Stages	Essays' Number	Total	Percentage
1	Pros First, Cons Second	1, 2, 6, 8, 9, 11 and 12	7	58,33 %
2	Cons First, Pros Second	3, 4, 5, 7, and 10	5	41,67%
	Total		12	100%

Tabel 1 shows stages of students' schematics structure in argumentative essay were analyzed in this study. The data consists of 12 argumentative essays written by EFL students, all of which focus on the Issue of Artificial intelligence (AI) in education. The essays were categorized into main schematic patterns based on the presentation of arguments: the "Arguments for" section appearing first, followed by "Argument against" (Pattern 1), and the opposite order where "Arguments against" precede "Arguments for" (Pattern 2). The issue discussed in these essays was "the Impact of AI on Education, specifically whether AI enhances efficiency or diminishes creativity in the educational process. The essays were organized in the following general order:

1. Issue (Statement and Preview): The introduction paragraph of each essay talked about the problem of AI in education and gave a preview of the arguments that would follow. This was a common element in the first paragraph of an essay.
2. Arguments for (Point and Elaboration): In this section, the essays presented arguments in favor of the positive impact of AI on education, such as increased efficiency, personalized learning, technological advancement, etc.
3. Arguments against (Point and Elaboration): Counterarguments were introduced in the next section of the essays, presenting concerns about AI reducing creativity, human interaction, the role of educators, etc
4. Conclusion or Recommendation: Each essay concluded by summarizing the key arguments and offering a final stance on the issue, often suggesting ways

to balance the use of AI with the preservation of creativity in education (Martin & Rose, 2008; Gerot & Wignell, 1995).

Based on this structure, the essays were categorized into two main types of argumentation patterns":

Pattern 1: Pros First, Cons Second ("Arguments for" followed by "Arguments against"). In seven of the essays (Number: 1, 2, 6, 8, 9, 11 and 12), the students first presented arguments supporting the positive impact of AI on education, emphasizing efficiency, personalization learning, technological advancement, etc. Following these "Arguments for". The students then introduce counterarguments regarding the potential negative effects of AI such as the loss of creativity, over reliance on technology, and the depersonalization of learning. This structure follows the common argumentative practice of first presenting the benefits before the drawbacks.

Pattern 2: Cons First, Pros Second ("Arguments against " followed by "Arguments for"). In contrast, five essays (Number: 3, 4, 5, 7, and 10) began by discussing the potential negative impacts of AI on creativity and human interaction in education. After presenting the concerns, these essays then introduced the counterpoint arguments, highlighting the benefits of AI such as its ability to enhance learning outcomes, improve efficiency, and provide individualized educational experiences. This pattern although unconventional still effectively engaged with both sides of the argument.

The analysis of the essays revealed key insight into the schematic structure of argumentative writing among EFL students:

1. Adherence to argumentative structure: All essays included the essential components of an argumentative essay. The issue statement, supporting arguments, counterarguments, and conclusion. This suggest that students generally understand the fundamental structure required for effective argumentative writing
2. Variations in argument organization: The differences in the order of arguments such as "Argument for versus Argument against" reveal that students have varying approaches to structuring their arguments. While some students chose to present the advantages of AI in education first, others opted to address concerns about I before discussing its benefits. This suggests a flexible understanding of how to approach argumentative writing depending on the rhetorical strategies they choose.
3. Development of counterarguments: While most students included counterarguments in their essays, the depth and development of these counterarguments varied. Some students presented counterarguments

briefly, while others elaborated on them in greater detail showing a higher level of critical thinking. The ability to engage deeply with opposing viewpoints was generally associated with higher quality essays.

4. Conclusion: The conclusion in the essays was generally well-formed, summarizing the main points discusses and offering a final stance on the issue. However, some conclusions were more generic and has strong recommendation and insights on how to balance the benefits of AI with the need to foster creativity in education

Contextual Factors Influencing Schematic Realizations

Several contextual factors were found to influence the students’ schematic realizations in their argumentative essays:

1. Linguistics proficiency: Students’ level of English proficiency played a significant role in the clarity and coherence of their essays. Those students with higher linguistics competence were able to present more structured and logically developed arguments, while students with lower proficiency struggled to express their ideas coherently.
2. Topic familiarity: Students familiarity with the topic also affected the depth and development of their arguments. Students who were more familiar with the issue of AI in education were able to generate more nuanced arguments, both for and against, while those less familiar with the topic tended to rely on surface level arguments.
3. Classroom instruction: the type of construction that students received significantly impacted their ability to organize their essays effectively. Students who have received explicit genre-based instruction, including the importance of schematic structures were generally able to produce more cohesive and coherent essays. Conversely, students who had less exposure to structured writing frameworks struggled more with organizing their arguments and developing counterarguments (Nagao, 2022).

The influence of classroom instruction was particularly evident as students who received targeted teaching on the schematic structures of argumentative essays (such as the Gerot and Wignell's model) were more likely to produce well organized essays. Those who had not received such focused instruction often demonstrated less awareness of how to organize their ideas in a coherent manner (Mochizuki, 2025).

Table 2. Factors in Developing English Writing Skills by Student Participants

No	Contextual Factors	Influence on Schematic Realization
1	Linguistics Proficiency	High proficiency led to clearer, more structured arguments, lower proficiency caused difficulties in organizing and elaborating ideas

2	Topic Familiarity	Familiarity with the topic led to deeper, more detailed arguments and lack of familiarity resulted in superficial response
3	Classroom Instruction	Explicit genre-based instruction resulted in better essay structure and argumentation; less structured instruction led to weaker coherence

Discussion

The results of this study provide valuable insight into the schematic organization of argumentative essays in EFL Contexts (Y. Zhang, 2025). These insights contribute to a better understanding of how students structure their essays and the challenges they face in developing coherent and persuasive arguments, This section will discuss the implications of these results in relation to theoretical frameworks and provide recommendations for improving argumentative writing instruction (Nagao, 2022).

The results of this study align with the theoretical framework provided by Gerot and Wignell (1995) which emphasizes a four-step structure for argumentative essays: “Issue, Arguments for, Arguments against, and Conclusion or recommendation”. The variation in how students structure their essays- either presenting "arguments for" first or “arguments against” first suggests that students may have different conceptualizations of the logical flow of argumentation. This flexibility in structure may also reflect different rhetorical strategies or cultural factors in how arguments are presented(Alhammad, 2025; Denzin, 2017; Mochizuki, 2025). The results also support Lipman's (2003) assertion that a well-rounded argumentative essay must consider multiple perspectives, which the students achieved despite the variations in structural organization. This highlights the importance of teaching students not only the technical aspects of essay writing but also the need to engage critically with different viewpoints (Gerot & Wignell, 1995).

The study underscores several important for pedagogical implications for EFL writing instruction. First, it suggests that while students generally follow the basic structure of an argumentative essay, there is room for improvement in their ability to integrate counterarguments more effectively. Teachers can help students strengthen this aspect of their writing by emphasizing the importance of presenting opposing viewpoints clearly and developing thoughtful rebuttals(AlGhamdi, 2025). Additionally, the variation in the presentation of “arguments for” and “arguments against” suggest that students would benefit from explicit instruction on the strategies use of argument ordering. In some cases, introducing counterarguments before the main arguments may be a more effective approach depending on the context and the rhetorical goals of the (Hyland, 2007, 2019; Matthiessen & Halliday, 2014).

The results of this study also have broader implications for the teaching of argumentative writing in EFL classrooms worldwide. As academic writing continues to be a critical skill in global education, understanding how students organize and structure their arguments is essential for developing effective writing instruction strategies. Future research could further explore the role of cultural factors in argumentative writing and investigate how students in different contexts with similar issues (Hart et al., 2025). Additionally, it would be valuable to explore how the integration of counterarguments affects the overall quality of argumentative essays and to examine the role of feedback and revision in helping students refine their argumentative skills (Nurkholidah & Muhria, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the schematic structure of argumentative essays in EFL classrooms, specifically focusing on the topic of "The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Education". The results indicate that while students demonstrate a basic understanding of the argumentative essay structure, there is a significant variation in how they organize and develop their arguments. The study has important implications for both theoretical and practical in EFL writing instruction, particularly in the areas of counterargument integration and argument ordering. Contextual factors such as linguistics proficiency, topic familiarity and classroom instruction play a critical role in shaping students' ability to construct well organized arguments. These findings emphasize the need for genre-based pedagogy in EFL instruction highlighting the importance of helping students develop a deeper understanding of argumentative structures and strategies to improve their academic writing. Further research is needed to explore how these findings can inform teaching practices in diverse educational settings and contribute to the global discourse on academic writing in second language.

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