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CHALLENGES IN ARGUMENT CONSTRUCTION IN ACADEMIC ESSAYS WRITTEN BY AZERBAIJANI EFL LEARNERS

Açar sözlər: *argument quruculuğu, akademik yazı, azərbaycanlı EFL öyrənmələri, Toulmin modeli, ikinci dildə yazı.*

Ключевые слова: *построение аргументации, академическое письмо, азербайджанские EFL-студенты, модель Тулмина, письмо на втором языке.*

Keywords: *argument construction, academic writing, Azerbaijani EFL learners, Toulmin model, L2 writing.*

Introduction

Academic writing occupies a central place in higher education because it enables students to present ideas, develop knowledge, and demonstrate critical thinking in a structured written form. In second language learning contexts, academic writing is not limited to grammar and vocabulary alone; it also requires the ability to organize ideas logically, engage with readers, and support arguments with appropriate evidence. Among the many dimensions of academic writing, argumentation remains one of the most essential and most complex. As reflected in your chapter draft, academic writing functions not only as a means of assessment but also as an indicator of intellectual development, while argumentation is treated as a key component that demands careful reasoning, reliable evidence, and meaningful interaction with the reader.

A considerable body of research has shown that second language writers often encounter difficulties not only at the lexical or grammatical level but also in the construction of argument itself. These difficulties may appear in the form of weak claims, insufficient evidence, limited justification, and poor engagement with alternative viewpoints. The problem becomes more visible in contexts where students are trained to prioritize formal structure over analytical development. Your uploaded chapters emphasize that Azerbaijani learners are also affected by such issues and that rhetorical differences between Azerbaijani discourse traditions and Anglo-American academic expectations may result in underdeveloped arguments, limited counterargumentation, and less convincing essays.

Although research on L2 argumentation has expanded considerably, much of it has focused on learners from broader international contexts, while Azerbaijani EFL learners have received comparatively limited attention. This creates an important local gap in the literature, since Azerbaijani students write within a particular educational, linguistic, and cultural environment that may shape how they present opinions, justify ideas, and negotiate opposing views. The chapters you shared also make clear that this gap is not only theoretical but pedagogical: without closer analysis of how Azerbaijani students actually construct arguments, teachers may find it difficult to identify recurring problems and provide effective guidance.

For this reason, the present article focuses on the challenges of argument construction in academic essays written by Azerbaijani EFL learners. More specifically, it considers how students formulate claims, organize supporting data, provide warrants and backing, and whether they use such important argumentative features as qualifiers and rebuttals. This focus is closely aligned with the Toulmin model, which is presented in your chapters as one of the most useful frameworks for examining the structure and strength of arguments in L2 academic writing. The same chapters also note that many Azerbaijani student essays tend to contain clearer claims and basic support, but weaker use of rebuttal, qualifier, and deeper logical justification.

The significance of this article lies in both its academic and pedagogical contribution. Academically, it contributes to the still limited body of research on Azerbaijani L2 writing and offers a more focused discussion of argument construction in student essays. Pedagogically, it may help writing instructors better understand the typical weaknesses Azerbaijani EFL learners face and encourage more explicit teaching of argumentative structure, paragraph development, counterargumentation, and evidence-based reasoning. In this sense, the article aims not only to identify problems but also to support the improvement of academic writing instruction in the local EFL context.

Theoretical Background of Argument Construction in L2 Academic Writing

Argument construction in academic writing refers to the process of presenting a claim, supporting it with evidence, and developing it through logical reasoning. In academic essays, argumentation is not limited to expressing a personal opinion; rather, it requires the writer to justify a position, connect ideas coherently, and respond to possible opposing views. In this sense, argumentation should be understood as a rational and evidence-based practice rather than a simple exchange of opinions [1]. This understanding is especially important in academic discourse, where persuasiveness depends on the quality of reasoning as much as on language accuracy. For this reason, argument construction is one of the main indicators of

maturity in academic essay writing. It shows whether the writer can move from opinion to explanation and from explanation to persuasion.

In the context of second language writing, argument construction becomes more difficult because learners must manage several demands at the same time. They need to control grammar and vocabulary while also organizing ideas, selecting support, and maintaining logical progression. Previous research has shown that L2 writers often face difficulty not only in language form but also in building well-supported and analytically developed arguments [2], [3]. As a result, essays may appear structurally complete on the surface while remaining weak in justification and rhetorical effectiveness. This problem becomes more visible when writing instruction gives more importance to fixed essay structure than to the deeper logic of argument development. Consequently, students may learn how to produce an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion, yet still struggle to construct a genuinely convincing argument.

One of the most influential frameworks for analyzing argumentation is Toulmin's model, which explains argument through six major elements: claim, data, warrant, backing, qualifier, and rebuttal [1]. Unlike traditional formal logic, Toulmin's model is particularly useful for real academic texts because it shows that strong arguments depend not only on conclusions, but also on the reasoning and support that connect those conclusions to evidence. This model is highly relevant to L2 writing research because it helps reveal which argumentative elements students can use successfully and which elements remain weak or absent. It also makes visible the difference between a text that merely states an opinion and a text that actually defends that opinion in a reasoned way. For student writers, this distinction is essential because academic writing values justification more than assertion.

The Azerbaijani EFL context makes this issue even more significant. The chapter materials indicate that the study is based on a corpus of 50 academic essays written by Azerbaijani undergraduate students and analyzed according to Toulmin's model. The findings suggest that while claims and basic supporting data are generally present, more complex argumentative elements appear much less frequently. Most notably, counterarguments were found in only 3–4 essays out of 50, which means that only about 6–8% of the corpus demonstrated this feature. This statistical pattern suggests that students are relatively more comfortable taking a position than challenging, qualifying, or rebutting an opposing position. In other words, argumentation in these essays tends to remain one-sided and underdeveloped, especially at the higher levels of rhetorical complexity.

Table 1. Distribution of Selected Argumentative Features in the Essay Corpus

Argumentative feature	Reported occurrence in 50 essays	Approximate percentage
Total essays analyzed	50	100%
Essays containing counterarguments	3–4 essays	6–8%
Essays without clear counterarguments	46–47 essays	92–94%
Claims and basic data/support	present in most essays	high frequency
Qualifiers	very limited	low frequency
Rebuttals	absent in most essays	very low frequency
Limited transition words / list effect	observed in almost all essays	very high frequency

Source: Compiled by the author based on the analysis of 50 academic essays written by Azerbaijani EFL learners.

The table shows that the main weakness in the corpus is not the complete absence of opinion, but the limited development of advanced argumentative features. Students generally appear able to state whether they agree or disagree, yet much fewer essays demonstrate balance, qualification, or rebuttal. This means that the issue is not simply one of participation in argument, but of argumentative depth. A text can sound clear at first reading and still remain academically weak if it does not address alternatives or justify its claims fully. Therefore, the challenge in this context lies in moving students from position-taking to structured reasoning.

Another important point is that these weaknesses should not be interpreted only as language problems. They are also shaped by educational habits, rhetorical expectations, and local writing culture. The chapter materials indicate that Azerbaijani learners often rely heavily on formulaic essay structure and limited transition devices, which can produce a “list effect” instead of a smoothly connected argument. In addition, open counterargumentation is not yet common in many of the essays, which may reflect both instructional practice and cultural caution in expressing opposition. For this reason, argument construction in Azerbaijani EFL writing should be understood as both a linguistic and a rhetorical issue. Improving it requires not only more vocabulary or grammar practice, but also more explicit teaching of evidence use, qualification, rebuttal, and paragraph-to-paragraph logical flow.

Challenges in Argument Construction among Azerbaijani EFL Learners

The analysis of academic essays written by Azerbaijani EFL learners shows that argument construction is affected by several recurring difficulties. Although students are generally able to express a position in a direct way, the overall

development of the argument often remains limited. In many essays, the claim is present, but the support does not move beyond general explanation or personal opinion. This means that the argument is visible at the surface level, yet its internal structure is not strong enough to produce a fully persuasive academic text [4]. Such a pattern suggests that students tend to understand argument as position-taking rather than as a process of justification, qualification, and rebuttal. As a result, their essays often appear complete in form but limited in analytical depth.

One of the main challenges is the lack of effective evidence and source-based reasoning. The chapter materials clearly indicate that in most essays the lack of sources is one of the most visible weaknesses and that *logos* remains comparatively weak in the corpus [4]. Instead of integrating outside support, many students rely on personal observation, common-sense statements, or broad generalizations. This reduces the academic force of the essay because evidence in argumentative writing should not merely illustrate opinion; it should strengthen and legitimize it. When factual support is missing, the reader may understand the writer's position, but may not be convinced by it. Therefore, the problem is not the absence of ideas, but the weak transformation of ideas into academically defensible claims.

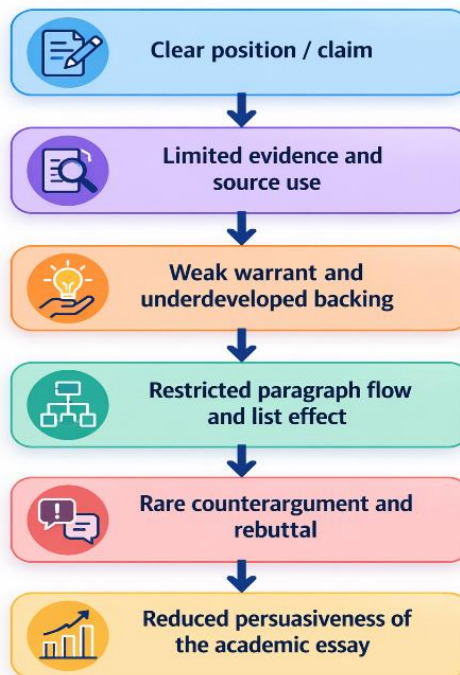
A second major issue is the limited use of counterarguments and rebuttals. As the chapter states, counterarguments were found in only 3–4 essays out of a total of 50, which means that only about 6–8% of the corpus contained an identifiable opposing view followed by response [4]. This is an important weakness because the presence of counterargumentation often gives an essay a more balanced and intellectually mature structure [5]. In academic discourse, a writer is expected not only to defend a personal stance but also to recognize that alternative interpretations exist. When the opposing side is ignored completely, the text becomes one-dimensional and the argument loses complexity. For this reason, the absence of rebuttal should be seen as one of the most significant challenges in the argumentative writing of Azerbaijani EFL learners.

Another problem concerns paragraph connection and logical flow. The uploaded chapters note that almost all of the essays use limited transition words and often create what is described as a “list effect,” where arguments are presented as separate numbered points rather than as parts of a continuous chain [4]. This weakens the relationship between paragraphs and makes the essay sound mechanical rather than analytical. In strong academic writing, transitions should not simply announce the next point; they should also show how that point develops, extends, or qualifies the previous one [6]. When this does not happen, the reader may follow the structure of the essay but still fail to see the logical progression of the argument. Thus, coherence in argumentative writing depends not only on paragraph order but also on meaningful rhetorical movement between ideas.

These difficulties are also connected to broader cultural and educational factors. The chapter materials emphasize that rhetoric is not universal and that students often bring culturally shaped writing habits into L2 academic discourse [7]. In the Azerbaijani context, open disagreement, overt self-positioning, and strong rebuttal may feel rhetorically unfamiliar or even uncomfortable. In addition, exam-oriented instruction may encourage students to focus on visible structure, time management, and formulaic organization rather than on deeper argument development [8]. This helps explain why many essays begin with clear phrases such as “I agree” or “I disagree,” but then fail to move toward more nuanced reasoning. The issue, therefore, is not only linguistic competence, but also the interaction of educational training, rhetorical expectations, and writing culture.

The overall pattern can be summarized through the following figure.

Figure 1. Main Challenges in Argument Construction among Azerbaijani EFL
Source: Prepared by the author based on the analysis of academic essays by



Azerbaijani EFL learners and the relevant literature on argumentation in L2 writing.

Figure 1 shows that the problem is cumulative rather than isolated. A student may begin with a clear claim, but once evidence is weak, justification becomes unstable. When justification is unstable, the essay is less able to sustain flow, respond to alternatives, or maintain persuasive force. In this sense, the final weakness

of the essay is produced by several connected gaps, not by one single error. This is why argument construction should be taught as an integrated skill involving claim, support, coherence, and response to opposition.

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings suggest that Azerbaijani EFL learners need more explicit support in developing argument beyond formulaic essay structure. Teaching students only how to organize introduction, body, and conclusion is not enough if they are not also trained to provide evidence, explain warrants, and include rebuttal. More focused instruction on argument patterns, citation culture, counterargument strategies, and paragraph linking may help students produce essays that are not only structurally correct but also intellectually convincing. In this way, improving argument construction can contribute directly to the broader goal of strengthening academic writing in the Azerbaijani EFL context.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of academic essays written by Azerbaijani EFL learners shows that argument construction remains one of the most challenging aspects of L2 academic writing. Although many students are able to state a clear opinion and follow a recognizable essay structure, the deeper components of argumentation are often underdeveloped. In particular, the essays reveal recurring weaknesses in evidence use, logical justification, paragraph flow, and engagement with opposing views. These findings indicate that successful essay writing depends not only on grammatical accuracy or structural correctness, but also on the writer's ability to build a coherent and persuasive line of reasoning.

Another major finding is that Azerbaijani EFL learners tend to rely on basic argumentative elements more confidently than on advanced ones. Claims are usually present, and some form of support is often provided, yet warrant, backing, qualifier, and especially rebuttal remain weak or absent in many essays. This suggests that students often understand argument as stating a position rather than defending it through layered reasoning. The limited use of counterarguments further confirms that argumentative writing in this context is frequently one-sided. As a result, essays may appear organized and understandable, but still lack the analytical depth expected in academic discourse.

The study also suggests that these weaknesses are shaped by more than language difficulty alone. Educational habits, formulaic writing instruction, cultural caution in expressing open disagreement, and limited citation practice all influence how students construct arguments in English. For this reason, the difficulties observed in the essays should be interpreted within a broader rhetorical and pedagogical context. Azerbaijani EFL learners are not simply making isolated writing mistakes; rather, they are working within a system where structure is often

taught more explicitly than reasoning. This explains why many students can produce formally correct essays while still struggling to develop persuasive arguments.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings highlight the need for more focused instruction in argumentation. Students should be taught not only how to write introductions, body paragraphs, and conclusions, but also how to justify claims, integrate evidence, use counterarguments, and create logical flow between ideas. Greater attention to Toulmin's model, citation culture, and reader-oriented academic discourse may help learners move from formulaic writing toward more mature and convincing argumentation. In this way, improving argument construction can make a direct contribution to the overall quality of academic writing among Azerbaijani EFL learners.

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AZƏRBAYCANLI EFL ÖYRƏNƏNLƏRİNİN AKADEMİK ESSELƏRİNDƏ ARQUMENT QURUCULUĞU ÇƏTİNLİKLƏRİ

Xülasə

Arqument quruculuğu ikinci dildə akademik yazının ən mühüm və eyni zamanda ən çətin komponentlərindən biridir. Bu məqalə azərbaycanlı EFL öyrənənlərinin akademik esselərində arqument quruculuğu çətinliklərini araşdırır. Tədqiqat öyrənənlərin iddiaları necə formalaşdırdığını, sübutları necə təşkil etdiyini, əsaslandırmanı necə inkişaf etdirdiyini, eləcə də dəstək, kvalifikator və təkzib kimi arqumentativ elementlərdən necə istifadə etdiyini təhlil edir. Xüsusi diqqət Azərbaycan L2 yazı kontekstində arqumentasiyanın keyfiyyətinə təsir göstərən

ritorik və tədris amillərinə yönəldilir. Toulminin arqument modelinə əsaslanan bu məqalə tələbələrin akademik esselərdə məntiqi cəhətdən inkişaf etmiş və inandırıcı arqumentlər qurmaq bacarığını müzakirə edir. Müzakirə göstərir ki, bir çox azərbaycanlı EFL öyrənənləri öz mövqelərini aydın şəkildə ifadə edə bilsələr də, iddialarını kifayət qədər sübutla dəstəkləməkdə, əks-arqumentlər inkişaf etdirməkdə və abzaslar arasında məntiqi ardıcılıq qorumaqda çətinlik çəkirlər. Məqalə həmçinin struktur, mədəni və pedaqoji amillərin tələbələrin yazı təcrübələrinə təsirini vurğulayır. Ümumilikdə, tədqiqat ingilis dilində yazı dərslərində arqumentasiya, tənqidi düşünmə və akademik diskurs qaydalarının daha açıq şəkildə tədris edilməsinə ehtiyac olduğunu ön plana çıxarır.

CHALLENGES IN ARGUMENT CONSTRUCTION IN ACADEMIC ESSAYS WRITTEN BY AZERBAIJANI EFL LEARNERS

Abstract

Argument construction is one of the most important yet most demanding components of academic writing in a second language. This article examines the challenges of argument construction in academic essays written by Azerbaijani EFL learners. The study focuses on how learners formulate claims, organize evidence, develop justification, and use such argumentative elements as backing, qualifiers, and rebuttals. Particular attention is given to the rhetorical and educational factors that influence the quality of argumentation in the Azerbaijani L2 writing context. Drawing on Toulmin's model of argument, the article discusses the extent to which students are able to build logically developed and persuasive arguments in academic essays. The discussion suggests that while many Azerbaijani EFL learners are able to express a position clearly, they often experience difficulty in supporting claims with sufficient evidence, developing counterarguments, and maintaining logical progression across paragraphs. The article also highlights the impact of structural, cultural, and pedagogical factors on students' writing practices. Overall, the study underlines the need for more explicit instruction in argumentation, critical reasoning, and academic discourse conventions in English language writing classrooms.

Rəyçi: filologiya üzrə fəlsəfə doktoru Muhammad Imran Muhammad