

Analyzing the Use of Evidence in Grade 11 Learners' Position Papers

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Abstract. The study analyzed the use of evidence-based statements by Grade 11 learners in their position papers. Employing a quantitative content analysis method, the study assessed the proficiency of 133 participants in terms of evidence use using an adapted rubric. Hemberger's (2017) classification of functional evidence-based statements was used for analysis. Findings revealed that the majority of the grade 11 learners were still Developing in terms of their evidence-use proficiency. Moreover, "Support My Own (M+)" evidence-based statements were used most frequently, while "Weaken My Own (M-)" statements were used least commonly. Lastly, there is a statistically significant difference in the use of Support My Own, Weaken Other, and Support Other evidence-based statements across proficiency levels. The study concluded that as writers' proficiency increases, they improve in incorporating and articulating evidence to support their assertions. It recommends developing instructional materials that focus on scaffolding, such as graphic organizers to help students outline their text, peer review sessions to practice providing constructive feedback, which can be applied to their evidence interpretation when writing, and writing tasks that require critical analysis, such as literature review projects. Future research should explore intervention strategies to address identified challenges.

Keywords: Interactional metadiscourse; Evidence-based statements; Argumentative writing; Grade 11 learners; Proficiency levels.

1.0 Introduction

Argumentative texts symbolize critical thinking, a core competency in the 21st century (Convertini, 2021; Giri & Paily, 2020; Marni et al., 2019; McNaughton et al., 2019; Kuhn, 2019; Hong & Talib, 2018). Ozfidan and Mitchell (2022) define argumentative writing as "a specific writing genre that highlights a position on an issue or topic and describes and supports this position with reliable pieces of evidence" (p.123). A well-developed argumentation skill is beneficial to one's academic, professional, and civic life. This genre is prominent in international standardized language tests (Lee, 2020, as cited in Shi et al., 2022; Plakansa & Gebril, 2017, as cited in Pavavijarn, 2022), which are beneficial for individuals seeking to study and work abroad. It also plays a role in producing informed citizens who are critical and considerate in evaluating information, especially in the digital world, where there is easy access to false information and increased vulnerability to the exclusiveness of perspectives (McGrew et al., 2017, as cited in McNaughton et al., 2019).

Furthermore, success in the workplace is influenced by argumentative writing skills, as professionals are expected to create project proposals and cover letters for job applications and promotions. Although research on argumentative texts has been conducted, several facets of this genre remain underexplored. Researchers have studied topics such as the types and appropriateness of the evidence used (Yilmaz-Na & Sonmez, 2023), the type

and frequency of evidence usage in a text (Zhang, 2018), and how learners use evidence in oral argumentation (Jin et al., 2019). However, there is a dearth of studies on how evidence is interpreted or talked about to produce a well-developed argument. This area of research is substantial, for scholars have found that a common challenge among argumentative text writers is dealing with conflicting credible information or evidence (Banda et al., 2019; Du & List, 2020). Therefore, this study aims to investigate how research participants respond to and write about evidence that supports and conflicts with their claims.

In the K to 12 English Curriculum Guide for Grades 1 to 10 in the Philippines, one of the listed principles of a practical language arts and multiliteracies curriculum emphasizes argumentative writing. In Senior High School, specifically in the course Reading and Writing Skills, the expected writing outputs include a type of academic text called position paper, which falls under the umbrella of argumentative writing. Currently, senior high school students in the Philippines are demonstrating significant areas of improvement in argumentative writing. Previous studies revealed that learners do not have enough schema about linguistics and writing strategies that can improve their overall writing skills (Urbano et al., 2021); their ability to support their claims with objective evidence should also be improved (Samosa, 2021); the student's ability in distinguishing biases in their texts must also be developed (Dizon, 2021). Totto and Ramos (2021) concluded that senior high school students, as ESL learners, still lack expertise in argumentative methods. These data suggest the need for explicit instruction in the argumentative writing genre in schools (Rivera, 2022; Malibiran, 2022).

This research fills a niche in previous studies by focusing on evidence-based statements, an underexplored facet in argumentative texts. The paper aims to analyze how the interpretation of evidence impacts the perceived quality and evaluative outcomes of academic writing. Additionally, further investigation is necessary, particularly in the context of ESL senior high school students in the Philippines, to gain a deeper understanding of their current argumentative writing proficiency level and the potential factors that contribute to their success in writing.

The framework of this study is based on Hemberger et al.'s (2017) categorization of the functions that evidence-based statements serve. This categorization is based on the dialogical theory of argumentation by Kuhn (2010), which posits that argument quality is grounded in two principles: acknowledging opposing views and utilizing evidence. Hemberger et al. (2017) classified evidence-based segments into two categories: functional and non-functional uses of evidence. Nonfunctional pieces of evidence are those that the writer cites in the text but do not adequately connect to any claim or argument; on the other hand, functional evidence is that which is interpreted by the writer. The study focuses on the functional evidence and the four specific functions that evidence-based statements serve: (1) support my own - a statement serving to support one's position; (2) weaken other - a statement serving to critique and thereby weaken the opposing position; (3) support other - statement serving to acknowledge the strengths of the opposing position, and (4) weaken my own - a statement serving to acknowledge weaknesses of one's position. The findings in this study can contribute to the fields of discourse analysis and applied linguistics, providing ESL educators with valuable insights into the writing development and proficiency of students in interpreting evidence. The data can serve as a basis for developing pedagogical practices in teaching writing and composition at various levels of proficiency.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study employed the quantitative content analysis method and a comparative research design to investigate the significant differences in respondents' levels of competence in terms of evidence use. The content analysis method is a research technique that aims to produce objective and valid analyses of texts and other meaningful data (Krippendorff, 2004, as cited in Bengtsson, 2016). This method was applied in the study, as its aim was to quantify the evidence-based statements used in the respondents' texts to analyze patterns and trends from the data. Additionally, comparative analysis is used to assess the variations between groups by identifying patterns, trends, and relationships within the data (Bryman, 2016). This design was employed in the research to determine whether the use of evidence-based statements differs significantly among beginning, developing, and accomplished writers.

2.2 Research Participants

All participants in the study were enrolled in the academic year 2022-2023, taking one of the core subjects in the senior high school curriculum, explicitly Reading and Writing Skills, with the researcher serving as their instructor. In the course, one of the requirements was to write a position paper of at least 300 words. By the time the research was conducted, the respondents had already been taught the basics of writing an argumentative text, including the presence of a claim, acknowledgment of counterarguments or counterclaims, use of evidence to support a claim, and making a connection between the claim and the evidence provided.

2.3 Research Instrument

The following instruments were used to gather the data needed for the study: the rated argumentative compositions of the Grade 11 students and the adopted rubric from the module instructional material used in the Schools Division of Mandaluyong for the position paper. Only the “Use of Examples and Evidence” criterion in the rubric was applied in the research, as the study focused on how respondents interpreted and discussed their evidence. The scoring scale of the rubric ranged from Beginning to Accomplished.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

The data collection procedure of this study had four stages:

First, the researcher asked permission from the relevant institutions and individuals to conduct the study. In this step, research ethics clearance was secured by the researcher from the Polytechnic University of the Philippines’ University Research Ethics Center; then, the researcher requested the school head’s approval to conduct the research in the school, the participants of the study were also given consent and assent forms to confirm their willingness to participate in the research.

Second, 201 senior high school students were tasked with writing two argumentative texts, also known as position papers, to be included in their writing portfolios. As part of the Reading and Writing Skills curriculum guide, discussions in writing a position paper were conducted with all the participants. Prior to the day of data collection, the students were tasked with printing three articles on the topic of Jeepney Modernization in the Philippines and three articles on the topic of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Schools from the opinion column of a newspaper (either printed or online) of their choice. The essays they composed addressed the following topics: (1) Should Jeepneys be modernized? Moreover, (2) Should AI be banned from school assignments? The topics were timely and relevant issues at the time of data gathering. Respondents were also asked to write topic outlines for their position papers before the writing day. Mobile phones were not allowed during the writing process, so the evidence used by the participants was from printed articles. This was to ensure that the data collected was valid, that is, free from technological and artificial intelligence assistance. It took the students two one-and-a-half-hour sessions to complete writing their position papers.

The third stage was data selection. All the submitted argumentative essays were rated using the position paper rubric; however, only the “Use of Examples and Evidence” criterion was used to classify the papers into beginning, developing, and accomplished proficiency levels. Two other raters evaluated the essays of the students, both of whom have master’s degrees in English language teaching. The average of the three ratings was used as the final score for the evidence-use criterion. Then, the researcher extracted the functional evidence-based statements used in the compositions.

The fourth stage was the coding process. The functional evidence-based statements were identified, analyzed, and coded manually following Hemberger et al.’s (2017) coding scheme: (a) Support my own. A statement serving to support one’s position (M+) or (b) to weaken the position of others. A statement serving to critique and thereby weaken the opponent’s position (O-), (c) Support other. A statement serving to acknowledge the strengths of the opponent’s position (O+), (d) Weaken my own. A statement serving to acknowledge weaknesses of one’s position (M-) (p.9)

2.5 Ethical Considerations

The researcher declares no competing interest in the conduct of this study. The methodology for this study was approved by the Research Ethics Panel of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines - University Research

Ethics Center. Voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all participants after they were fully informed of the aims of the task and that their written texts would be used solely for research purposes.

3.0 Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the frequency distribution of the respondents' proficiency levels. A little more than half of the grade 11 writers fall under the Developing level of proficiency. With a percentage of 50.38, the data indicate that the majority of respondents in the study possess foundational skills in developing arguments, and their argumentative abilities can still be improved to become accomplished writers. Moreover, 49 (36.84%) of 133 respondents were rated Accomplished in the criterion of evidence interpretation. These writers were able to logically and effectively make connections between their claims and the different pieces of evidence presented. Meanwhile, only 17 out of the 133 (12.78%) participants were rated as beginning writers in terms of their evidence interpretation.

Table 1. *Profile of Respondents Based on Evidence-Use Proficiency Levels*

Proficiency Level	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Beginning	17	12.78
Developing	67	50.38
Accomplished	49	36.84

This distribution of proficiency levels aligns with Saricaoğlu and Ata (2022) and Samosa (2021), who, in their research, found that many students are still developing their critical thinking skills and the strategic use of evidence. This finding also aligns with a study by Compe (2017), which examined the English proficiency level of secondary students in the Philippines. The researcher concluded that, overall, Filipino ESL writers have moderate proficiency. Furthermore, Hemberger et al.'s study in 2015 stated that beginning writers often face the challenge of reasoning the connection between the claim and the evidence to form coherent and persuasive arguments, a challenge also observed in the present study's data.

Table 2 provides a frequency distribution and percentage of evidence-based statements used in position papers across three proficiency levels: Beginning, Developing, and Accomplished. The evidence-based statements are classified into four types: Support My Own (M+) are statements that support the author's position; Weaken Other (O-) are statements that weaken opposing positions; Support Other (O+) are statements that support other positions; finally, Weaken My Own (M-) are statements that weaken the author's position. The table shows that "Support My Own" (M+) is the most frequently used evidence-based statement, with the highest percentage for the Beginning proficiency level at 80.85%. It is also predominantly used among Developing and Accomplished writers, with 73.39% and 75.54%, respectively.

Table 2. *Frequency Distribution of the Evidence-Based Statements Used*

Statements	Beginning	Percent	Developing	Percent	Accomplished	Percentage
Support My Own (M+)	38	80.85	251	73.39	383	75.5
Weaken Other (O-)	7	14.89	47	13.74	56	11.0
Support Other (O+)	2	4.26	40	11.70	55	10.8
Weaken My Own (M-)	0	0.00	4	1.17	13	2.56
TOTAL	47	100	342	100	507	100

This outcome aligns with Iordanou and Constantinou's (2014) pre-intervention findings in their experimental design research on the use of evidence-based statements regarding socio-scientific issues, where they found that participants focused more on supporting their positions, indicating a firm stance on their claims. Additionally, the same results were reported by Kuhn et al. (2015), who tracked the development of middle-school students in terms of how they discuss evidence in argumentative texts over a two-year intervention. The study's findings show that the Support My Own (M+) evidence-based statement is the most prevalent in both the initial and final essays of the learners.

These similar results suggest that students are assertive in the claims they put forward and have confidence in the evidence they use to support them. However, the less frequent use of other evidence-based statements suggests that students need to acknowledge counterarguments more often.

Across proficiency levels, Beginning writers are the ones who predominantly use Support My Own (M+) statements to discuss their evidence. Table 3 shows that respondent number 13 used a total of 4 (M+) statements in both position papers and did not use any other type of evidence-based statement, relying heavily on discussing all the advantages or positive effects of one's arguments rather than handling the issue with a more nuanced approach. This finding is consistent with the work of Felton and Kuhn (2001), as cited in Hemberger et al. (2017), which documented that young adolescent writers typically concentrate on elaborating their claims without attention to the opponent's position.

Table 3. *Sample Evidence-Based Statements of Respondent 13 on the Essay Jeepney Modernization*

Evidence	Interpretation	Type of Evidence-Based Statement
One aspect of the ongoing debate surrounding jeepney modernization is the need for improved passenger safety and well-being. According to the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB), the outdated design of traditional jeepneys poses a significant risk to passengers in terms of physical safety and overall comfort.	These are highly evident, as traditional jeepneys often have cramped seating arrangements and lack essential safety features, such as seatbelts and proper air ventilation systems.	Support My Own (M+)
With that said, the implementation of the jeepney modernization program is beneficial as it introduces safer and more efficient jeepney models with features such as air conditioning, GPS tracking, and automated shut.	Equipping jeepneys with these facilities will help improve the overall travel experience by making commuting safer, more comfortable, and more convenient for passengers.	Support My Own (M+)
The president of Global Electric Transport (GET), Freddie Tinga, estimates that a single jeepney emits approximately 40 kilograms of carbon dioxide per day. A staggering 6,320,000 kilograms of carbon dioxide is released daily from the estimated 158,000 traditional jeepneys in the Philippines, having a substantial negative impact on the environment and air quality.	The emissions of carbon can significantly be reduced through the implementation of modernized jeepneys, thus encouraging a greener means of transportation for the public.	Support My Own (M+)
	For instance, electric Japanese have 0 emissions, which means utilizing these vehicles instead of traditional Japanese will lower air pollution and raise the level of general quality in urban areas.	Support My Own (M+)

This pattern of Beginning writers relying heavily on supporting evidence-based statements could imply that they are still developing the critical thinking skills needed to approach issues in an integrative manner, which is crucial in argumentative writing.

Table 4 presents the evidence-based statements used by respondent 103, who was marked as Accomplished and utilized the greatest number of (M+) statements among all respondents, totaling 26 (M+) statements across both position papers. It should also be noted that respondent 103 did not use any other type of evidence-based statement, suggesting that Accomplished writers also prefer to assert their arguments rather than engage in counterclaims.

This finding is supported by Du and List's (2020) study on how evidence is used in argumentative writing, wherein they concluded that students may have purposefully ignored data that are contradictory to their own, or perhaps they were reluctant or unable to settle conflicting information in the text even after becoming aware of their existence. Additionally, Hendramoko's (2023) research on improving students' argumentation skills, which found that students still require improvement in writing counterclaims and rebuttals, is also parallel to the present study's findings.

For further analysis, a comparison of how respondents 13 and 103 interpreted their evidence reveals that respondent 13, categorized as a Beginning writer, primarily provided a single-statement interpretation through simple paraphrasing or shallow elaboration of the evidence provided. Meanwhile, respondent 103, classified as an Accomplished writer, provided a more comprehensive interpretation of the evidence by not simply rephrasing the evidence but also claiming multiple probable positive and negative effects of the evidence cited.

Table 4. *Sample Evidence-Based Statements of Respondent 103 on the Essays Jeepney Modernization and Artificial Intelligence*

Evidence	Interpretation	Type of Evidence-Based Statement
As highlighted by the aforementioned Rappler journalist, Ralf Rivas, the LTRFB has announced a subsidy of 160,000 pesos, which accounts for only 5.7% of the total cost of a modern jeepney.	This significant disparity leaves traditional jeepney drivers in a precarious position, as they would be required to bridge the substantial financial gap on their own.	Support My Own (M+)
	Despite the subsidies, these drivers would still bear considerable financial burdens, posing a threat to their economic stability.	Support My Own (M+)
	It is crucial to remember that many traditional jeepney drivers come from low-income backgrounds and heavily rely on these vehicles as their primary source of income.	Support My Own (M+)
	Expecting them to shoulder such hefty financial obligations is unrealistic and may undermine their livelihoods.	Support My Own (M+)
	The cost of modern jeepneys may be too high for these drivers, making the transition incredibly challenging.	Support My Own (M+)
	Moreover, relying solely on uncertain subsidies as a solution presents additional risks that could further burden traditional drivers.	Support My Own (M+)
	By seamlessly integrating AI-driven tools and education, students gain access to invaluable resources that significantly support their academic pursuits.	Support My Own (M+)
	These tools facilitate streamlined research, writing, and problem-solving, effectively saving time while fostering critical thinking and nurturing creativity.	Support My Own (M+)
	Leveraging the power of AI, students can efficiently gather and process information, delve into complex concepts, and present their ideas coherently.	Support My Own (M+)
	Additionally, the immediate feedback provided by AI tools helps students identify areas for improvement and refine their work.	Support My Own (M+)
As doctor Roberto Galang, Dean of the John Gokongwei School of Management at Ateneo de Manila University emphasized in an interview with Rappler, students should be exposed to AI and its tools in academic settings.	This seamless integration of AI and education enhances learning outcomes, empowering students to excel in their academic pursuits and achieve exceptional results.	Support My Own (M+)

Table 5 above shows excerpts from the essay of respondent 48, classified as a Developing writer, on artificial intelligence. Facing evidence that is not supportive of his or her thesis statement (AI should not be banned from school), the writer opted to discredit the evidence by writing 5 Weaken Other (O-) statements. Although the writer provided logical points in the interpretation, pointing out historical references and positive outcomes of integrating AI in school, it could have been better if the writer acknowledged the validity and logic of the opposing data presented and provided rebuttals that are directly related to the decline of the research skills of learners if AI is not banned from school.

The frequent usage of Weaken Other evidence-based statements among Developing writers is consistent with the overall trend observed in this study, that is, low and moderately proficient writers are more disposed to focus on disputing opposing information while more developed writers (Accomplished) are more likely to use an integrative approach in writing by acknowledging opposing views. This result is supported by what Iordanou et al. (2019) found in a study centered on the examination of my-side bias of young adults in reading and writing, where they discussed that when students are faced with information that contradicts their position, they tend to perform low-level cognitive processing and simply disagree to or rebut the information. While this may imply the writers' confidence in their positions, it also emphasizes the lack of a well-rounded discussion of the topic at hand.

Table 5. Sample Evidence-Based Statements of Respondent 48 on the Essay Artificial Intelligence

Evidence	Interpretation	Type of Evidence-Based Statement
Some educators warn that if artificial intelligence spoon-feeds the information to the students, they will lack research skills (Jimenez, 2023).	However, if we look at other things, such as the use of calculators, we started with sticks, then we had writing materials and paper, and then we had abacuses before we even had calculators.	Weaken Other (O-)
	The invention of calculators and our reliance on them does not necessarily mean that people will become less skilled in math; instead, they make things much more efficient.	Weaken Other (O-)
	If we spend less time on little things, imagine how much more humanity can achieve.	Weaken Other (O-)
	Additionally, the immediate feedback provided by AI tools helps students identify areas for improvement and refine their work.	Weaken Other (O-)
	This seamless integration of AI and education enhances learning outcomes, empowering students to excel in their academic pursuits and achieve exceptional results.	Weaken Other (O-)

Table 6 presents excerpts from the position papers of respondent 112, categorized as Accomplished in levels of proficiency, who utilized the most Support Other (O+) evidence-based statements among all respondents. Analysis shows that, despite being opposed to jeepney modernization, the writer still acknowledged the potential benefits, including reduced carbon emissions and economic advantages. This shows a balanced analysis of the issue being discussed where the writer does not dismiss conflicting perspectives outright but instead incorporates them into their analysis. The increasing use of Support Other (O+) statements among Developing and Accomplished writers solidifies the trend that more proficient writers can recognize the value of looking at different perspectives, adding depth and credibility to their arguments. This aligns with the study by Du and List (2020), which emphasizes the importance of dialogic argumentation. Dialogic argumentation posits that writers should engage with opposing viewpoints to strengthen their arguments rather than merely refuting them.

Table 6. Sample Evidence-Based Statements of Respondent 112 on the Essays Artificial Intelligence and Jeepney Modernization

Evidence	Interpretation	Type of Evidence-Based Statement
One of the primary objectives of the jeepney modernization campaign is to reduce the amount of pollution generated by jeepneys. Modernized jeepneys are equipped with Euro-4 engines, which produce fewer emissions than older jeepney models (trndy.ph, 2023).	Older jeepney models produce much carbon and are frequently recognized as Clean Air Act violators.	Support Other (O+)
	Carbon emissions are expected to decrease significantly with the introduction of newer machines.	Support Other (O+)
As supported by Business Mirror (2023), one of the most significant advantages of jeepney upgrading is the potential for increased employment creation in the country.	The upgrading of jeepneys may increase the demand for skilled drivers and operators.	Support Other (O+)
	With the need for newer models, there is also a growing demand for workers and laborers in the automobile production industry.	Support Other (O+)
Teachers are concerned that students might utilize AI for cheating, as a generator, automated homework assistance, harassment of procrastination, and plagiarism (Teacher PH, 2023).	These concerns can lead to a lack of understanding of their lessons and even poor academic performance if not properly managed.	Support Other (O+)

Table 7 presents excerpts from the works of respondent number 128, an accomplished writer who utilized the most Weaken My Own (M-) evidence-based statements. The writer believes that AI should not be banned in schools, as it can enhance learning outcomes and facilitate personalized education. The evidence presented supports the writer's argument. However, the respondent chose to weaken the evidence by acknowledging loopholes such as over-dependence on AI and superficial learning. Additionally, in the student's position paper on Jeepney Modernization, the respondent argues that Jeepney modernization should not be implemented yet. In

the same case, the writer's evidence supports their main claim, but the writer also recognized the probable long-term benefits of jeepney modernization toward a safer environment. In both cases, the writer's argument could have been improved if solutions were suggested, such as how to mitigate the problems of over-reliance on AI and recommendations of feasible financial support that can aid the operators and drivers in transitioning to modernized jeepneys.

Table 7. *Sample Evidence-Based Statements of Respondent 128 on the Essays Artificial Intelligence and Jeepney Modernization*

Evidence	Interpretation	Type of Evidence-Based Statement
AI can be accessed at any time and helps students at their own pace. According to Capuno et al., mathematics is considered one of the most challenging subjects among Filipino learners.	However, overreliance on AI for assistance at all times can lead to a dependency on technology, potentially hindering students' ability to think critically and solve problems independently without technological aid.	Weaken Own (M-)
	It will be a disadvantage for students who heavily rely on AI, as they may copy what it says, and it will not provide long-term information if they do not fully grasp what they see.	Weaken Own (M-)
Also stated in the report by Ralf Rivas, the modernized jeepney is 1,766.7% more expensive than traditional jeepneys, as the latter costs only around P150,000 to P250,000.	Although the long-term benefits of modernization, such as being safer and eco-friendly, outweigh the initial challenges for traditional jeepney operators.	Weaken Own (M-)
	By keeping up with modern technology, older traditional jeepneys will not face the issue of sudden engine failures due to their age.	Weaken Own (M-)

Data analysis reveals that Accomplished writers employ the most advanced argumentative writing strategies by being critical enough to identify the flaws in their arguments. However, Weaken My Own (M-) evidence-based statement is still the least used among others, suggesting that few learners are willing to acknowledge limitations in their arguments. This aligns with Villaroel et al. (2016), who warned that actively seeking evidence that confirms one's own beliefs can lead to the misinterpretation of data and a failure to give fair acknowledgment to information that challenges those beliefs.

Table 8. Kruskal-Wallis: Comparison of the Respondents' Evidence Usage Proficiency and the Evidence-Based Statements Used

Evidence-Based Statements	Level of Proficiency	Mean Rank	Kruskal-Wallis H	p-value	Decision	Remark
Support My Own	Beginning	38.65	34.604	.000	Reject Ho	Significant
	Developing	56.24				
	Accomplished	91.55				
Weaken Other	Beginning	56.06	8.106	.017	Reject Ho	Significant
	Developing	61.84				
	Accomplished	77.85				
Support Other	Beginning	47.79	12.819	.002	Reject Ho	Significant
	Developing	63.06				
	Accomplished	79.05				
Weaken My Own	Beginning	63.50	1.929	.381	Failed to Reject Ho	Not Significant
	Developing	66.42				
	Accomplished	69.01				

Note: "If the p-value is less than or equal to the level of significance (0.05), reject Ho; otherwise, failed to reject Ho."

A Kruskal-Wallis H test yielded a p-value of 0.000, indicating a significant difference in the use of evidence-based statements among the proficiency levels. That is, compared to beginning and developing writers, accomplished writers have a stronger ability to support their arguments. This parallels the study by Saricaoglu and Alta (2022) on the syntactic and lexical complexity of argumentative texts across proficiency levels. The findings of their research show that proficient writers exhibit a higher level of syntactic and lexical complexity in argumentative texts across proficiency levels, which are indicators of both logical processing and linguistic ability. This relates to how advanced writers are more adept at supporting their arguments effectively than beginning and developing writers are.

For Weaken Other evidence statements, the p-value of .017 indicates a significant difference among proficiency levels. Although the differences between the development and the accomplished levels are less prominent than in the first category, there are still noticeable improvements from beginning to accomplished writers. This result aligns with the findings of Crossley et al. (2022), who investigated the qualities that influence the perceived quality of argumentative essays. They noted that higher levels of proficiency are associated with more complex argument structures and a stronger ability to employ counterarguments. Based on this finding, it is evident that accomplished writers have significantly improved their ability to weaken the strength of other evidence statements when compared to beginning writers.

In the case of Support Other statements, the proficiency levels also differ significantly with a p-value of .002; that is, as with beginning and developing stages, accomplished writers display the highest mean rank, indicating a stronger ability to support others' arguments effectively. This finding is supported by the study of Lee et al. (2021), which highlighted the importance of coherence and logical development in argumentative writing. Writers of higher proficiency tend to organize their ideas logically and form coherent arguments more effectively than those of lower proficiency, allowing them to effectively support even the pieces of evidence that oppose their claims. This type of argumentative writing characteristic produces a more balanced and credible text.

Lastly, a p-value of .381 indicates that there are no significant differences in Weaken My Own evidence-based statements across proficiency levels. This finding is consistent with the conclusion of Hemberger et al. (2017) in their research, which suggests that evidence interpretation is a consistent challenge across different educational levels. Considering that Weaken My Own evidence-based statements do not differ significantly across proficiency levels, it might be equally difficult for all proficiency levels to acknowledge the weaknesses of their arguments.

4.0 Conclusion

The study yields pertinent data on how students develop their argumentative essays through the functional use of evidence-based statements. The findings in this study indicate that as proficiency level increases, writers become more dialogical in their approach to argumentation. This means that they can integrate different perspectives by acknowledging the strengths of opposing views, adding depth and credibility to their arguments. However, across all proficiency levels, students struggle to recognize and address weaknesses in their arguments. These results have implications for the instruction of argumentative writing among ESL learners. Beginning writers need more guidance in structuring their arguments, while advanced writers would benefit from more challenging writing tasks to further develop their analytical skills. Lastly, the overall difficulty in acknowledging weaknesses in one's arguments may be alleviated through self-assessment activities.

For teachers, teaching and assessment practices that focus on evidence interpretation in argumentative writing may be developed. Specifically, instructional materials that utilize scaffolding, such as graphic organizers, can help students outline their text according to the basic structure of argumentation. Classroom activities that focus on developing learners' critical thinking skills may be conducted, such as peer review sessions, which allow writers to practice providing constructive feedback that can be applied to their evidence interpretation when writing. For accomplished writers, advanced writing tasks that require critical analysis are recommended. This may be done through assignments such as literature reviews, concept papers, and research writing. Additionally, reading and writing instructors may develop detailed rubrics that emphasize to ESL learners the importance of incorporating evidence and interpreting it in various ways. They should also adopt a more dialogic approach when teaching argumentation; that is, the expectations should shift from focusing on one's position and continually undermining others to a more nuanced approach wherein diverse perspectives are considered and reasonably acknowledged to reach the best conclusion.

For further research, intervention studies could investigate how targeted instructional strategies, such as peer review, enhance students' ability to recognize and address opposing arguments and identify weaknesses in their arguments. In addition, experimental design research could test the effectiveness of scaffolding activities, such as structured debates and graphic organizers, in enhancing learners' interpretation skills. These research recommendations can contribute to more effective pedagogical approaches in developing the argumentative writing skills of ESL learners.

5.0 Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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