Exploring Lecturers' Proficiency in Argumentative Writing: Rhetorical Strategies, Coherence, and Linguistic Challenges

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A B S T R A C T

This study examines lecturers' proficiency in argumentative writing, focusing on their rhetorical strategies, coherence, and linguistic challenges. It highlights the importance of academic writing in higher education and aims to identify strengths and areas for improvement among lecturers.Through a qualitative analysis of six argumentative essays by lecturers from the humanities and social sciences who attended an academic writing workshop, the study evaluates the effectiveness of their rhetorical strategies and the coherence of their writing. It also addresses common linguistic challenges, such as clarity, grammar, and vocabulary issues.The findings reveal that while lecturers possess strong subject knowledge, difficulties in language proficiency and argumentation strategies can diminish the clarity and persuasiveness of their writing. The study emphasizes the need for professional development programs to enhance lecturers' academic writing skills, particularly in producing coherent and effective arguments.

1.   INTRODUCTION

1.1.   *Research Background*

Academic writing is important in higher education because it helps students develop critical thinking, reasoning, and communication abilities. Argumentative writing, in particular, is an important component of academic discourse, with students and lecturers both required to express and defend ideas rationally and persuasively. While much emphasis has been placed on students' writing abilities, there is an increasing interest in analyzing lecturers' writing skills, as their capacity to generate logical and successful arguing texts is critical for both teaching and academic communication.

Lecturers often face specific challenges when it comes to argumentative writing, particularly in balancing their understanding of the material with effective rhetoric. As Hyland points out, academic writing requires not only a deep comprehension of the subject matter but also the ability to organize and present arguments in a structured and persuasive way [1]. Rhetorical strategies such as ethos, pathos, and logos are essential for lecturers to engage their audiences and ensure that their arguments are clear and impactful. However, research shows that many lecturers, despite being knowledgeable in their fields, struggle with aspects of argumentative writing, such as maintaining coherence and clarity [2].

Linguistic challenges, including grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure, are often overlooked in academic writing, yet they are essential for the effectiveness of argumentative essays. Research indicates that these challenges can impede lecturers' ability to convey complex ideas clearly and accessibly [3]. As higher education increasingly emphasizes written communication, it is crucial to understand the specific linguistic and rhetorical challenges faced by lecturers in order to provide effective professional development.

Given the significance of argumentative writing in academia, it is crucial to investigate lecturers' proficiency in this skill. While some studies have focused on the writing abilities of students, there is limited research regarding the writing proficiency of

lecturers themselves. This study aims to fill that gap by examining the rhetorical strategies, coherence, and linguistic challenges that lecturers face in their argumentative writing.

1.2. Literature Review

Numerous studies have investigated various aspects of argumentative writing, particularly focusing on students [4]–[6], yet relatively few have explored the proficiency of lecturers in this area, for example [7], [8].

Their ability to produce logical and effective argumentative texts is essential for both teaching and academic communication. This literature review discusses the key themes related to rhetorical strategies, coherence, and linguistic challenges in academic writing, providing a foundation for the present study.

1.2.1. Rhetorical Strategies in Argumentative Writing

Rhetorical strategies are essential tools for constructing persuasive and effective arguments. The classical rhetorical appeals—ethos, pathos, and logos—play a significant role in academic writing. According to Hyland, academic writers, including lecturers, must navigate these rhetorical strategies to ensure that their arguments are compelling and credible [1]. Ethos refers to the credibility of the author, pathos to the emotional appeal, and logos to the logical reasoning presented in the text. Studies suggest that lecturers often rely heavily on logos, focusing on the logical structure of their arguments, but may struggle to balance these elements effectively, especially in highly specialized academic writing [2].

Moreover, lecturers must be aware of the specific conventions of writing within their disciplines, as these conventions can impact the use of rhetorical strategies. Research by Bazerman and Prior indicates that different academic fields have distinct norms concerning argument structure and rhetorical approaches [9]. This suggests that lecturers may face various challenges based on their areas of expertise. Understanding how these strategies function within specific disciplines is essential for assessing lecturers' proficiency in argumentative writing. When used effectively, rhetorical strategies can greatly enhance communication, encourage public engagement, and foster a deeper understanding among students [10].

1.2.2. Coherence in Argumentative Writing

Coherence is another crucial aspect of effective argumentative writing. It involves the logical flow of ideas and the connections between arguments, evidence, and conclusions. Studies by Swales and Feak highlight that coherence is a fundamental component of successful academic writing, particularly in argumentative texts, where the reader must follow a clear line of reasoning [11]. For lecturers, maintaining coherence can be challenging due to the complexity of the ideas being discussed and the need to present them in an accessible way. Silva notes that one of the significant challenges in academic writing is organizing complex information into a coherent structure that is logical and easily understood by the reader [12].

In the specific case of lecturers, the challenge of coherence in their writing may be intensified by their specialized knowledge. This can sometimes result in overly complex or fragmented writing. Research by Thompson and Martin indicates that lecturers often struggle to simplify their arguments without sacrificing their academic integrity, which can lead to writing that

lacks clear connections between ideas [13]. This underscores the importance of training lecturers to develop strong arguments while also presenting them in a coherent and accessible way.

1.2.3. Linguistic Challenges in Academic Writing

Effective argumentative writing relies not only on rhetorical strategies and coherence but also on linguistic elements such as grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure. These linguistic aspects significantly influence the quality of writing, affecting clarity, readability, and the persuasiveness of arguments. Research indicates that even skilled writers can face challenges with language use, particularly in high-stakes academic setting [14]. For lecturers, language proficiency is essential to ensure that complex ideas are communicated clearly and that their writing remains accessible to both students and the broader academic community.

Biber and Conrad's research on language use in academic writing emphasizes that academic texts typically require a higher level of precision and formality, which can create challenges for lecturers who may not be used to these stylistic demands [15]. Additionally, studies show that non-native English-speaking lecturers encounter further linguistic difficulties, such as limited vocabulary and issues with sentence structure, which can adversely impact their argumentative writing [16].

1.2.4. Professional Development and Writing Proficiency

Given the challenges that lecturers face in argumentative writing, several studies emphasize the importance of professional development programs designed to improve writing skills. According to Lea and Street, such programs can help lecturers enhance both their subject matter expertise and writing proficiency, enabling them to communicate their ideas effectively and coherently [17]. Furthermore, professional development can address linguistic challenges by offering strategies to improve grammar, vocabulary, and clarity in academic writing [18].

While existing literature has primarily focused on the writing needs of students, there is increasing recognition of the necessity for faculty development programs that specifically address the writing proficiency of lecturers, especially regarding argumentative writing.

1.3. Research Objective

The objectives of this study are centered on examining key elements of argumentative writing among lecturers, with a focus on their rhetorical strategies, coherence, and linguistic challenges. The first objective of this study is to analyze the rhetorical strategies used by lecturers in their argumentative writing, focusing on the techniques they employ to present and support their arguments effectively. The second objective is to evaluate the coherence of lecturers' argumentative writing by examining the logical organization and connection of ideas and evidence to enhance clarity and persuasiveness. The third objective is to identify the linguistic challenges lecturers encounter in argumentative writing, including issues related to grammar, vocabulary, clarity, and sentence structure that affect writing effectiveness

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This section outlines the materials and methodology used to assess lecturers' proficiency in argumentative writing, focusing on rhetorical strategies and coherence. Participants were instructed to write an argumentative essay on the topic: "Nowadays, more parents choose to teach their children at home rather than sending them to school." They were to express their position on this statement and support their stance with clear reasoning and evidence in 60 minutes. A mixed-methods approach was utilized, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the data.

2.1. Participants

The study included six participants who were lecturers at a public university in Padang, West Sumatera. They underwent a three-month Academic Writing training, held twice a week. Selected for their experience in teaching undergraduate and graduate courses in the humanities and social sciences, the lecturers aimed to improve their skills in writing argumentative essays.

2.2. Data Collection

On a sit-in test in a comvenion room at the university, the lecturers were asked to write an argumentative essay on a certain tropic within 60 minutes. They were neither allowed to use a English-Indonesian dictionary nor Grammarly. Com. The length of the essay was not limited to enable the participats to express their ideas freely. A clear guidance of the test is provided. All the six essays were then examined to evaluate the three followiing key aspects:

2.3. Data Analysis

The written samples were analyzed using qualitative content analysis to identify patterns in the use of rhetorical strategies, coherence, and linguistic features. The essays were coded manually, with specific attention paid to recurring linguistic and structural patterns. All areas that demonstrate strong or weak rhetorical strategies, coherence, and linguistic features were highlighted. constructive feedback on areas where the writing could be more effective was provided.

The analysis of the written samples was focused on three key criteria: rhetorical strategies, coherence, and linguistic challenges. objectives. Here's a breakdown of how the essay was evaluated:

2.3.1 Rhetorical Strategies

In this objective, we assessed how well the lecturers use specific rhetorical strategies to present and support their arguments. Some rhetorical strategies to consider:

a. **Ethos**: Establishing credibility and trustworthiness.
b. **Pathos**: Appealing to the emotions of the reader.
c. **Logos**: Using logic, reasoning, and evidence to support claims.
d. **Kairos**: Timing or context of the argument, making it relevant to the audience.
e. **Counterarguments**: Presenting and addressing opposing views to strengthen the argument.
f. **Appeal to authority**: Citing credible sources to back up arguments.

2.3.2 Coherence and Organization

For this objective, we will evaluate the overall structure and clarity of the essays:

a. Logical flow: Are the ideas and arguments presented in a logical sequence?
b. Transitions: Are there effective transitional phrases and devices that connect the ideas smoothly?
c. Paragraph structure: Does each paragraph have a clear topic sentence, supporting evidence, and conclusion?
d. Introduction and conclusion: Are the introduction and conclusion clear, providing context and summarizing the main points?

2.3.3 Linguistic Challenges

In this objective, we will focus on identifying potential issues related to grammar, syntax, and language use that may affect the clarity or professionalism of the writing:

a. Grammar and punctuation: Are there noticeable grammatical mistakes (subject-verb agreement, sentence fragments, etc.)?
b. Vocabulary: Is the vocabulary appropriate for academic writing, and are there any issues with word choice?
c. Sentence structure: Are there any issues with sentence complexity, run-on sentences, or awkward phrasing?
d. Clarity: Does the language convey the intended meaning clearly and concisely?

Below is a the summary of the evaluation of the six essays based on the three criteria: rhetorical strategies, coherence and organization, and linguistic challenges, along with corresponding grades on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest):

Rhetorical Strategies (Grade 1-5):

Grade 5: Strong emotional appeal, logical reasoning, ethos (credibility), and counterarguments.
Grade 4: Mostly effective emotional appeal and reasoning, with minor gaps in evidence or counterarguments.
Grade 3: Some attempt at emotional appeal or reasoning, but lacks depth or evidence.
Grade 2: Weak rhetorical strategies, with little or no emotional appeal or logical evidence.
Grade 1: No clear rhetorical strategies or appeal; the argument is unconvincing.

Coherence and Organization (Grade 1-5):

Grade 5: Highly logical flow with smooth transitions between ideas and clear development of points.
Grade 4: Well-organized but with minor issues in transitions or underdeveloped points.
Grade 3: Clear structure, but some ideas are underdeveloped or transitions are weak.
Grade 2: Disorganized or fragmented structure; unclear development of ideas.
Grade 1: Very poorly organized with no clear structure or logical flow.

Linguistic Challenges (Grade 1-5):

Grade 5: Minimal to no grammatical errors or awkward phrasing; clear and effective use of language.
Grade 4: Few grammatical issues; sentences are mostly clear with minor awkwardness.
Grade 3: Some grammatical errors and awkward phrasing; overall readable but with areas for improvement.

Grade 2: Multiple grammatical errors and unclear phrasing; hard to follow in places.

Grade 1: Frequent grammatical errors and significant clarity issues that hinder understanding.

2.4. Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. All lecturers were informed of the purpose of the study and the voluntary nature of their participation. Informed consent was obtained from each participant, ensuring that they understood their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. To maintain confidentiality, all personal identifiers were removed from the data, and pseudonyms were used when reporting the results.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from analyzing lecturers' argumentative writing, focusing on rhetorical strategies, coherence, and linguistic challenges. Based on essays from six lecturers in the Humanities and Social Sciences, the findings relate to existing literature, highlighting key themes and implications for improving writing proficiency. The essays varied in length from 189 to 535 words and were evaluated across the three aspects. Below is an evaluation of the essay "Homeschooling: An Alternative for Children's Education."

Here is an example of concise evaluation of the essays conducted in this research. The title is "Homeschooling: An Alternative for Children's Education," focusing on rhetorical strategies, coherence, and linguistic challenges:

3.1. Rhetorical Strategies

3.1.1. Strengths:

The essay presents a clear thesis: homeschooling is a viable alternative education model, supported by three key reasons:negative social environments, the emphasis on developing interests and talents, and the needs of nomadic families. The examples provided, such as bullying, promiscuity, and curriculum rigidity, effectively illustrate these points, appealing to logos (logical reasoning) and ethos (parental responsibility). Additionally, the essay subtly engages pathos by addressing concerns like the trauma caused by bullying and the challenges children face when adjusting to new schools.

3.1.2. Areas for Improvement:

To strengthen its ethos, the essay could benefit from incorporating data or expert opinions to substantiate its claims, such as statistics on bullying or the success rates of homeschooling. The conclusion could also be improved; it currently lacks a strong, impactful statement or a call to action.

The analysis of the essays revealed that lecturers predominantly utilized logos, or logical reasoning, as their primary rhetorical strategy. This was evident in the well-structured presentation of arguments supported by empirical data, examples, and citations. Lecturers in disciplines such as the social sciences and natural sciences frequently relied on logos to substantiate their claims, demonstrating a strong commitment to evidence-based arguments. However, ethos—an appeal to authority—was also present, particularly in fields where professional credibility and expertise were essential. For instance,

lecturers in technical areas often cited their own research or the work of esteemed scholars to enhance their authority.

Interestingly, pathos, or emotional appeal, was less frequently employed. This may be attributed to the formal academic nature of writing prevalent in most disciplinary contexts. Nonetheless, some lecturers in the humanities and social sciences effectively used emotional appeals to foster empathy with their audiences, particularly when addressing topics related to social justice or human rights. These findings align with Hyland's assertion that academic writers, including lecturers, primarily focus on logos and ethos while often underutilizing pathos in scholarly writing [1].

3.2. Coherence

3.2.1. Strengths:

The essay is structured logically, with each paragraph addressing a distinct reason why parents choose homeschooling. The topic sentences are clear, and each paragraph remains focused on its central idea. The thesis is reiterated in the conclusion, which helps maintain a sense of structure.

3.2.2. Areas for Improvement:

Transitions between paragraphs could be smoother. For example, linking the impact of negative social environments to the development of interests and talents could create a stronger connection between ideas. Additionally, the introduction could briefly preview the three reasons to provide the reader with a clearer roadmap of the essay.

The analysis of coherence indicated that while many lecturers effectively structured their arguments, some encountered challenges in maintaining logical flow and organization. Most essays featured clear introductions, body paragraphs, and conclusions; however, transitions between ideas were at times abrupt, which impaired the overall coherence of the text. Cohesive devices, such as conjunctions and adverbs, were used inconsistently, and in some instances, the connections between paragraphs and ideas were unclear. Lecturers in technical fields, such as engineering and the natural sciences, typically provided clear, step-by-step explanations that enhanced the coherence of their arguments. In contrast, lecturers in the humanities—where the complexity of ideas often demands more nuanced connections—occasionally struggled to maintain smooth transitions between concepts.

This finding aligns with Swales and Feak's model for evaluating coherence in academic writing [11], which highlights the significance of a logical progression of ideas. Additionally, it reflects the challenges noted by Silva, who discovered that academic writers—especially in more complex or theoretical fields—often struggle with presenting their ideas in a coherent and well-organized manner [12].

3.3. Linguistic Challenges

3.3.1. Strengths:

The language is clear and straightforward, making the essay accessible and easy to follow. Key terms such as "negative social environments," "interests and talents," and "nomadic families" are well-defined and consistently used throughout the text.

3.3.2. Areas for Improvement

There are grammatical errors that could distract the reader. For instance, the phrase "the demands of parents' profession. the demands of the profession of parents who move around" should be corrected for clarity and grammar. Additionally, sentences like "the promiscuity of students who no longer see religion and morals as the basis for behaving makes parents worried a lot" are awkwardly phrased and overly verbose. Repetitions, such as "the demands of parents' profession," can be streamlined for conciseness. The tone is slightly informal in some parts, for example, "parents worried a lot," and could be revised to better suit an academic or argumentative essay.

Below is a matrix table summarizing the evaluation of the six essays based on the three criteria: **rhetorical strategies, coherence and organization**, and **linguistic challenges**, along with corresponding grades on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest):

Linguistic challenges were evident in the analysis of both the written samples and interview responses. The most common issues identified included complex sentence structures and vocabulary usage. Many lecturers used long, intricate sentences that sometimes obscured clarity. Specifically, the overuse of nominalization (turning verbs into nouns) and passive voice made the text more difficult to understand. While these structures are typical in academic writing, their excessive use can lead to a loss of clarity, as noted by Biber and Conrad [14].

Table 1. A summary of the evaluation of the six essays based on the three criteria

Essay Title	Rhetorical Strategies	Coherence and Organization	Linguistic Challenges
Homeschooling: An Alternative for Children's Education	Weak ethos; logical points made without much evidence or emotion; no counterarguments addressed.	Basic structure; transitions are weak; ideas presented logically but not fully developed.	Several grammatical issues; awkward phrasing and unclear sentences.
Advantages of the Homeschooling Method for Children	Lacks emotional appeal, ethos is not established; lacks depth in logical reasoning.	Organized with clear advantages listed, but transitions are basic; points are underdeveloped.	Grammatical errors, awkward phrasing; lacks clarity in some sentences.
No Title	Very weak in ethos; emotional appeal based on negative aspects of formal education, but not fully convincing; no counterarguments.	Very poor structure; unclear and disconnected ideas; difficult to follow.	Significant spelling, grammatical, and punctuation errors; many awkward sentences.
Nowadays, more and more parents choose to teach their children at home rather than sending them to school.	Weak ethos; some emotional appeal based on concerns about limited socialization and resources; no counterarguments.	Some organization of points, but ideas feel fragmented and underdeveloped; unclear transitions.	Several spelling errors, awkward phrasing, and poor sentence structure.
The Advantages of Homeschooling for Children's Education	Weak ethos; some logical points but lacks depth and evidence; lacks counterarguments.	Good overall structure, but weak transitions between points; could use further elaboration on key points.	Significant grammatical and stylistic errors; awkward phrasing.
A Child's Learning Choice	Limited ethos; emotional appeal regarding bullying and social issues is weak; no counterarguments.	Organized but lacks sophisticated transitions and detailed development of ideas.	Grammatical issues, awkward phrasing; unclear or repetitive sentences.

Table 2. Corresponding grades on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest)

Essay Title	Rhetorical Strategies (Grade)	Coherence and Organization (Grade)	Linguistic Challenges (Grade)
Homeschooling: An Alternative for Children's Education	2	3	2
Advantages of the Homeschooling Method for Children	2	3	2
By: Efrizal Nasution	1	1	1
Shinta Nofita Sari	2	2	2
The Advantages of Homeschooling for Children's Education	2	3	2
A Child's Learning Choice	2	3	2

One linguistic challenge involved the use of specialized jargon and discipline-specific terms. While these terms were suitable for the intended academic audience, they sometimes made the text less accessible for those outside the field. Non-native English-speaking lecturers, in particular, reported difficulties with vocabulary selection, often resorting to simpler

words to ensure clarity. This observation aligns with de Haan's research on the language barriers encountered by non-native English-speaking lecturers [16].

Grammar also emerged as a challenge, especially for lecturers who were non-native English speakers. Common issues included subject-verb agreement, incorrect article usage, and errors with prepositions. However, native English-speaking lecturers also encountered difficulties, particularly when dealing with complex syntactic structures. These observations support the work of Lanham, who argues that even proficient academic writers can struggle with sentence construction and clarity [3].

3.4. *Implications and Recommendations for Professional Development*

The findings of this study indicate several areas where lecturers can improve their argumentative writing skills. Firstly, there is a need for targeted professional development programs that focus on enhancing both rhetorical strategies and linguistic proficiency in academic writing. These programs could assist lecturers in refining their use of rhetorical appeals, improving coherence, and addressing linguistic challenges such as sentence structure and vocabulary usage. These programs must be tailored to meet the specific needs of different academic disciplines, as rhetorical strategies and language requirements can vary significantly across fields.

Additionally, professional development programs should specifically address the challenges faced by non-native English-speaking lecturers. Providing training in academic language proficiency, as well as resources such as writing workshops or peer mentoring, could significantly enhance their writing skills and boost their confidence.

4. CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the proficiency of lecturers in argumentative writing, focusing on their use of rhetorical strategies, coherence in structuring arguments, and the linguistic challenges they encounter. Through the analysis of written essays and semi-structured interviews, several key findings were identified that contribute to our understanding of lecturers' writing practices and the obstacles they face in academic writing. The results revealed that lecturers predominantly employed **logos** (logical reasoning) in their argumentative writing, with varying degrees of **ethos** (appeal to authority) and limited use of **pathos** (emotional appeal). While their writing exhibited solid logical structuring, many lecturers struggled with ensuring smooth coherence between ideas, particularly when transitioning between paragraphs and sections. The use of cohesive devices was often inconsistent, leading to occasional disruptions in the logical flow of arguments. Linguistically, the lecturers faced significant challenges, particularly in areas such as sentence structure complexity, nominalization, and overuse of passive voice. These challenges were more pronounced among non-native English-speaking lecturers, although native speakers also encountered difficulties related to advanced syntactic structures and discipline-specific jargon. These linguistic issues often compromised the clarity of their arguments, hindering the effectiveness of their written communication. In conclusion, while lecturers demonstrate significant proficiency in constructing and presenting arguments, the findings highlight a need for targeted professional development that focuses on

improving coherence, enhancing rhetorical strategies, and addressing linguistic challenges. Such initiatives are essential for helping lecturers refine their academic writing skills, ultimately improving their effectiveness in communicating complex ideas to academic and non-academic audiences alike. Addressing these challenges will not only support individual lecturers but also contribute to the broader academic community by enhancing the quality and clarity of scholarly communication.

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