

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EFL STUDENTS' AWARENESS OF SOCIAL ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES ON ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING: A CASE AT TRA VINH UNIVERSITY, VIETNAM

Nguyen Khac Tieu Binh¹, Nguyen Thi Ngoc Van^{2*}, Truong Thi Thuy An³,
Duong Hoang Yen⁴

Abstract – *Society is changing rapidly in modern times, causing people to attempt to keep up with the latest information, while argumentative writing requires students who are learning English as a foreign language (EFL) to clearly state their ideas about a social problem using a wide range of knowledge and critical thinking. This study aims to find out these students' awareness of primary social issues, figure out their perspectives on argumentative writing, and examine the correlation between their awareness of primary social issues and perspectives on argumentative writing. Mixed approaches with questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data from 150 English majors at Tra Vinh University. The findings indicate that students' concern about social issues can diversify their viewpoints on argumentative writing through general input, lexical enrichment, and critical thinking processes. Based on the findings, the authors suggest several methods for students to absorb information about rising problems in society and recommend students how to apply them to their argumentative writing.*

Keywords: *argumentative writing, EFL, social issues.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing argumentative essays is an essential skill for English students as it is one of the fundamentals of academic writing that may be

employed in further education. Argumentative essays are also often used in international language competence examinations such as International English Language Testing System, Certificate in Advanced English, and Test of English as a Foreign Language. To compose a well-organized argumentative essay, students must evaluate several types of evidence, including experts, anecdotes, common sense, statistics, logical analysis, and comparison because the writer's unique perceptions cannot be compelling without genuine proof [1]. Hence, creating argumentative writing requires strong planning, writing, and critical thinking skills. Learners are supposed to engage in critical thinking and utilize real-world knowledge, transforming it into logical reasoning to support their ideas [2].

These studies demonstrate the significance of critical thinking in particular aspects, including healthcare, gender stereotypes, environment, and education, which frequently appear in academic writing courses as prompts for argumentative essays, particularly, the courses taught at Tra Vinh University (TVU). Ample articles have been poring over the correlation between critical thinking [3–12] and these topics and the relationship between critical thinking and argumentative writing [1, 2]. However, studies of how students' knowledge of these social issues and their capacity to write argumentative essays affect each other have been rarely undertaken [13–15]. Hence, the distinctiveness of this paper lies in its investigation of the relationship between TVU English majors' awareness of social problems and their viewpoint on writing argumentative essays.

Zhang [1] indicates that students' insufficient knowledge of argumentative writing may cause

^{1,3,4}Student, Tra Vinh University, Vietnam

²Tra Vinh University, Vietnam

*Corresponding author: ntnvan@tvu.edu.vn

Received date: 26th April 2024; Revised date: 05th July 2024; Accepted date: 25th July 2024

them difficulties in expressing what they want to convey. However, Beniche [2] argues that students are likely to encounter challenges from both the form and the content of argumentative writing. This study, in line with Albelihi [16] and Toba et al. [17], would claim that the problems EFL English majors currently face may include stating the main idea of the essay, making use of lexical resources, finding notions of the topic, giving a rationale or explanation to each perspective, and expressing the extent of generality in the supporting ideas. These problems can be solved if students have knowledge of social issues either by reading, listening to, or researching them. To investigate the relationship between EFL students' awareness of social issues, particularly education, environment, gender equality, as well as health-care, and their perspectives on argumentative writing, the researchers seek to find the answers to the following research questions:

- (1) What are the EFL students' perspectives on writing argument essays?
- (2) What is the EFL students' awareness of primary social issues?
- (3) What is the relationship between EFL students' awareness of primary social issues and their perspectives on writing argument essays?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Argumentative writing*

Definition

- Argumentative essays

Writing, in general, is an activity that is related to mentality whose purpose is regulated by social conventions, roles, connections, and status in a specific context in congruence with Hashemi et al. [18]. Argumentation serves as the conduit through which knowledge is generated [19], while argumentative writing is scrutinized as a concept of composing written words using supported rationales to prove a statement or an opinion of one particular issue.

Argumentative essays are mostly considered a type of writing that examines, discusses, expresses viewpoints, and asserts assertions. To assess if a certain point of view is accurate or

incorrect, as well as to establish or refute a thesis, the writer uses tactics such as presenting facts, reasoning, distinguishing what is right or wrong, and providing examples [1]. Argumentative essays are distinguished by distinct points of view, adequate justifications, succinct language, fair reasoning, and rigorous logic [2, 18, 19].

According to this study, an argumentative essay is supposed to have a clear thesis statement that indicates the writer's awareness of the problem, followed by paragraphs to support these notions and end with a counter-argument part before the conclusion.

- Perspectives vs awareness

An interdisciplinary research study emphasizes the value of comprehending various philosophical stances and how they might influence research design and results in ways that go beyond simple subject knowledge. In an educational context, awareness could entail, for example, knowing about different educational resources, whereas perspectives would comprise how these resources are viewed and valued by diverse stakeholders [20, 21].

Additionally, when examining educational resources, it is observed that although perspectives take into account the institutional, social, and individual contexts that affect the adoption and use of these resources, awareness refers to understanding what these resources include and how they differ from others [21].

These distinctions-which draw attention to the various levels of participation and understanding that teachers and students bring to their learning environments-are essential to educational research. More sophisticated and successful teaching methods can be created by acknowledging and addressing perspectives as well as awareness.

This study is in line with Meral et al. [22] and Songsil et al. [14], suggesting that there is a noteworthy correlation between students' opinions in argumentative writing and their awareness of social issues. In this context, awareness pertains to the comprehension and identification of diverse social situations, whereas perspectives are the interpretations and points of view that

students incorporate into their written work.

Research indicates that pupils who possess an understanding of social issues are more capable of putting forth well-rounded arguments, comprehending different points of view, and presenting more convincing justifications for their opinions. Their capacity to write more cogently and persuasively is improved by this insight. Students who are more aware of social concerns, for example, might engage in deeper study and give more nuanced views in their writings when teaching contentious themes [14, 22].

Furthermore, studies on argumentative writing in classroom contexts show that students' arguments get stronger as they have a deeper comprehension of the topics being discussed. According to Ahmady et al. [8], awareness gives students the underlying knowledge they need to build stronger, more logical, and evidence-based arguments—a critical component of good argumentative writing.

Incorporating social topics into the curriculum through reading, listening, and research can, therefore, greatly improve students' capacity to write persuasively by expanding their perspectives and sharpening their argumentation abilities [14, 22].

EFL students' argumentative writing

In the English writing courses that have been being taught in universities in general, and in Tra Vinh University, in particular, students who major in English are mostly provided knowledge of narrative essays, descriptive essays, and cause and effect essays before learning to compose their argumentative essays. The former types of essays prepare the students to write different kinds of supporting notions in the argumentative essay (e.g. narrative essays can help them to use anecdotes while cause and effect essays can assist them in utilizing analysis and examples to clarify the main ideas) [1, 2, 18, 19].

However, the problems that EFL students have while writing argumentative essays are identified. According to Salih [23], EFL students struggle to choose topics and write topic sentences for each paragraph, seek evidence, structure and organize

the essay, avoid rhetorical appeals, develop a clear stance, write an effective introduction, conclusion, counterargument, and rebuttal, choose a suitable voice and style to persuade readers, and use grammar and vocabulary correctly in the process of argumentative writing. Nimehchisalem et al. [24] found that the most problematic areas were grammar and mechanics by assessing 69 argumentative essays written by Iranian students. The research of Saprina et al. [7] also showed relatively similar results to the two former studies, which points out that the fourth-semester students of an essay writing class at Pakuan University in Indonesia have the most difficulty with making the writing coherent, followed by constructing a thesis statement, combining ideas into correct sentences, and organizing paragraphs. In accordance with Saprina et al. [7], it can be concluded that when students write argumentative essays, formulating a key concept remains a significant challenge for them.

However, some studies have rarely discussed the lack of students' approaching and absorbing information in English in general and social problems written in English in particular as one of the plausible explanations for the problems EFL students have been struggling with [1, 2, 7, 18, 19, 23, 24]. This insufficiency of exposure to information is likely to cause students not to have enough lexical resources, grammatical knowledge, or macrostructure and significant critical thinking. That might explain why students find it hard to develop their ideas when encountering an argumentative prompt. Accordingly, the present study aims to address the existing issues from a different angle that is the connection between EFL students' awareness of social issues and perspectives on argumentative writing.

B. Critical thinking and social awareness

Critical thinking

According to Lai [25], critical thinking entails assessing arguments, drawing conclusions, judging, and solving issues. Assessments should include open-ended questions, real-world situations, and unstructured challenges that require

students to give proof or logical reasoning. Moreover, critical thinking can be considered as seven ‘definitional strands’, which are judgment, skepticism, originality, sensitive readings, rationality, activism, and self-reflexivity [26]. These things make critical thinking a popular term when it comes to education.

Critical thinking and its application

Critical thinking is believed to improve argumentative essays [8–11, 27–29], for instance, the students at The State University of Surabaya (Indonesia) have a better performance in argumentative writing when they apply critical thinking [27]. Lu [28] outlined a process for integrating critical thinking into the process of writing argumentative essays. The initial steps involved six critical thinking processes: interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation. Once these steps are completed, students should be able to craft an argumentative essay that includes a claim, warrant, rebuttal, and conclusion. This research emphasizes the significance of both instructor feedback and student reflection in the development of compelling and well-structured argumentative essays. Similarly, by employing a critical thinking test and an argumentative prompt to assess students in their fourth (S4) and sixth (S6) semesters, Beniche [2] concluded that students were capable of utilizing higher-order thinking skills in critical thinking exams and crafting thoughtful arguments in their argumentative essays. Furthermore, S4 and S6 students, with proficient critical thinking abilities, demonstrated high performance in argumentative essay writing. Theoretically, abundant knowledge of social problems forms the foundation of qualified critical thinking skills. Specifically, the study of Ahmady et al. [8] emphasizes the essence of problem-solving skills, or in other words, knowledge to deal with social situations in nursing students’ critical thinking process. Furthermore, in other aspects, such as gender equality, critical thinking accounts for the behaviors of the audience towards information on the media that is related to gender topics, both in education and media [9, 10]. Critical thinking has

also been proven to provide individuals with the essential competencies to manage complicated environmental concerns in the study of Shutaleva [11]. In the education field, Starichkova et al. [29] highlight the contribution of critical thinking in teaching and learning foreign languages. Being aware of social issues to get prepare for argumentative writing, EFL students need to use their critical thinking skills to absorb the information and make it their own through the self-reflecting process.

C. Evaluation

Previous research has effectively pinpointed the main difficulties that EFL students encounter when composing argumentative essays [1, 2, 7, 18, 19, 23, 24]. Constructing cogent arguments, choosing relevant subjects, and employing supporting evidence skillfully are some of the main challenges. Additionally, studies show that teaching students to think critically during the writing process improves their ability to argue persuasively. Through adherence to prescribed integration protocols, students can craft more robust and convincing compositions.

These studies, however, frequently ignore the influence of social issues and exposure to English-language content [1, 2, 7, 18, 19, 23, 24]. Students may not have the lexical resources, cultural context, and critical views needed to completely develop their argumentative writing skills as a result of this inadequate attention to material exposure. In order to teach argumentative writing in EFL contexts more successfully and with a more thorough knowledge, these gaps should be filled.

By examining how social issue awareness affects EFL students’ argumentative writing, the present study offers a fresh viewpoint on how raising social consciousness might improve the effectiveness of writing and critical thinking. The study provides insightful contextual information that informs teaching practices and advances science in EFL instruction. By highlighting the significance of social issue awareness in the development of argumentative writing skills and

enhancing the worldwide discourse on EFL education, it builds a bridge between cultural and educational studies.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. *Research design*

This research was undertaken to find out EFL students' awareness of primary social issues, to figure out their perspectives on argumentative writing, and to examine the relationship between their awareness of primary social issues and perspectives on argumentative writing. In order to enable the researchers to explore this construct by posing factual or explanatory questions to a sample of the population with the goal of generalizing to the population, survey designs were employed. In particular, questionnaires and interviews were utilized to collect data. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed to ensure the complement of non- and numerical information [30–32].

B. *Participants*

The population for data collection consisted of English majors who enrolled in the second semester of the academic year 2023–2024 at Tra Vinh University in the South of Vietnam. The researchers were able to easily contact the available student volunteers who were asked to assist with data collecting for this study. Therefore, convenience sampling was used to choose these people. Based on Fraenkel et al. [31], convenience sampling is a type of nonrandom sampling in which participants meet practical needs including being nearby, easily accessible, available at a specific time, or wanting to take part. Specifically, 150 English majors at Tra Vinh University, comprising 51 first-year students, 45 second-year students, and 54 third-year students, joined this research from late February to early March 2024. Since they were working on their internships at the time, fourth-year students could not be recruited. These seniors were not included in the research plan from the beginning since their internship program was scheduled ahead of

time. 53 male students (35.3%) and 97 female ones (64.7%), ages 19 to 22, made up the total number of participants.

Majoring in English, these students have been studying English writing skills from Writing 1 to Writing 6. First-year students had learned how to write descriptive, narrative, and opinion paragraphs and were learning how to develop such paragraphs into complete essays. Second-year students had studied cause and effect essays, argumentative essays, and classification essays, and they were learning how to write comparison essays. Third-year students continued learning how to master their argumentative writing. While the sophomores and juniors seem to have more experience to share, the freshmen may possibly give some insights into this research topic.

C. *Research instruments*

Questionnaires and interviews were employed to get participants' thoughts on the connection between their social awareness and their perceptions of argumentative writing performance. While the questionnaire was adapted from Frihi [33], Lam et al. [34], Nguyen et al. [35], Blaique et al. [12], and Rubiaee et al. [36], each interview included five questions to help us get more understanding of the subject matter.

The questionnaire had 36 items that were organized into three sections. Each section had several supporting groups, including twenty-eight 5-point Likert scale questions, five multiple-choice questions, two open-ended questions, and one self-rated question.

The first section contained twelve 5-point Likert scale questions three multiple-choice questions, one self-rated question, and one open-ended question. It researched EFL students' perspectives on argumentative essays. This section helped us find the answer to the first research question: What are the EFL students' perspectives on writing argument essays?

The second section entailed nine 5-point Likert scale questions, two multiple-choice questions, and one open-ended question. It focused on EFL students' awareness of social issues, and its role

was to seek the answer to the second research question: What is the EFL students’ awareness of primary social issues?

The last section encompassed seven 5-point Likert scale questions. It investigated the relationship between EFL students’ awareness of social issues and perspectives on argumentative writing. Therefore, it aimed to address the last research question: What is the relationship between awareness of primary social issues and perspective on writing argument essays?

In addition, the researchers also used interviews as a secondary research instrument, which generated notions of six English majors from the first year to the third year (2 students/year) about how they cared about social issues and how this concern affected their writing. These findings complemented the questionnaire’s results.

D. Procedure

First, the questionnaire and interview questions were piloted with fifteen student volunteers. The piloting was conducted to help us test the readability of the questions. Some comments about the word choice helped the improvement of the questions’ quality. Second, the paper questionnaires were distributed to students who voluntarily gave their responses. Finally, two students per year were invited to attend the structured interview.

The information collected in the questionnaire was generated, processed, and analyzed by the software SPSS, and six single interviews together with responses to the open-ended questions were qualitatively interpreted. Following the information-gathering process utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the quantitative data from the questionnaire was analyzed using Microsoft Excel and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). For every closed-ended question in the survey, the mean, standard deviation, and percentage were computed.

Table 1 provides an assessment of the mean scores based on Oxford [37]. This scale serves as the basis for interpreting the study’s mean scores.

For the questionnaire, after assembling the information using the mixed-methods design, Microsoft Excel and SPSS software were used to analyze the quantitative data of the questionnaire. The mean and standard deviation or the percentage of each closed-ended item in the questionnaire were calculated.

The interpretation of the mean scores is presented in Table 1 [37]. The interpretation of the mean scores in this study is based on this scale.

Table 1: Interpretation of mean scores

Mean score	Response	Category
4.50 to 5.00	Strongly agree	High
3.50 to 4.49	Agree	
2.50 to 3.49	Neutral	Medium
1.50 to 2.49	Disagree	Low
1.00 to 1.49	Strongly disagree	

Furthermore, the information obtained from the questionnaire’s open-ended questions was translated and organized.

To answer the research questions and objectives, the students’ interview responses were translated, transcribed, and compared.

E. Reliability of the questionnaire

The 28 closed-ended items of the questionnaire were checked for their reliability. Three groups of English majors (n = 150), including 51 first-year students, 45 second-year students, and 54 third-year students, completed all the questions of the questionnaire. Table 2 shows the Cronbach’s Alpha coefficients of all the responses, (Cronbach’s Alpha = .897), first-year students’ (Cronbach’s Alpha = .836), second-year students’ (Cronbach’s Alpha = .74), and third-year students’ (Cronbach’s Alpha = .823). Both the overall and three specific coefficients indicate a high level of reliability based on DeVellis et al. [38].

Table 2: Reliability of the questionnaire

Cronbach’s Alpha				N of Items
All	1 st year	2 nd year	3 rd year	
.897	.836	.74	.823	28

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

EFL students' perspectives on writing argument essays

In order to find out students' notions of argumentative essays, the first section of the questionnaire, consisting of 17 questions, was divided into three small groups, namely understanding and perspectives, difficulties, and self-evaluation.

- Understanding and perspectives

The first seven questions in Table 3, adapted from Moon et al. [20], were designed to explore what students have acknowledged of argumentative writing. The overall mean score of this subsection of the three groups was 4.05 (SD = .816) with third-year students having the highest assertion (M = 4.23, SD = .707) followed by sophomores (M = 4.0, SD = .771) and freshmen (M = 3.8, SD = .89). This can indicate 'agreement' and be categorized as high consensus according to Oxford [37]. The result suggests the EFL students who filled out this questionnaire have largely understood proper argumentative writing. Specifically, third-year students (M = 4.09, SD = .976) and second-year students (M = 3.52, SD = .952) agreed each body paragraph should provide a single point that the topic sentence of the paragraph demonstrates, but first-year students (M = 3.04, SD = 1.076) found it hard to decide whether they should agree or disagree with the statement.

Critical thinking is important for improving the quality of argumentative essays in a variety of ways. It improves logical reasoning by allowing authors to develop well-organized arguments through information analysis, evidence identification, and logical conclusion formulation. In response to the ninth item that asked which steps a critical thinker has to take when writing an argumentative essay, Figure 1 demonstrates the majority of participants were aware that information analysis is a step in the critical thinking process. Moreover, two-thirds acknowledged that the conclusion should be evidence-based. However, less than two-thirds were aware of the remaining steps which consist of posing important questions

and obtaining information. Up to 43.3% of the surveyed did not consider interpreting pertinent facts as a step of critical thinking.

As learning to write argumentative essays in a university, for the most part, only revolves around a specific number of topics rather than including all social issues in a writing course, this may make students feel overwhelmed. Tra Vinh University's writing courses, in particular, often choose rising social issues as writing prompts for learners in terms of argumentative writing, such as education, environment, gender equality, and healthcare. Therefore, the next group of this section aims to investigate the frequency of the appearance of these common topics in students' argumentative essays and the topics students think they are good at. Figures 2 and 3 demonstrate the received results from 150 participants.

Environment and education's appearance as argumentative essay topics account for the most part, with over 70 percent of the participants choosing 'yes' as their answer to the question of whether they have met these topics. Moreover, in the constructed response question that asked students to write about the other topics that they have encountered, the response was mainly the subtopics of environment or education, for instance, global warming, greenhouse effects, pollution, college fees, scholarship, literature, etc. Healthcare ranks third out of these four topics and gender equality is the topic that appears least in argumentative essays, according to these participants.

The response to the question, 'What topics do you believe you excel at writing about?' is almost proportionate to the answer to the question, 'Which topics have you covered in your argumentative essays?'. These students believed that they could do their best in the topics related to the environment (Figure 3). Education also ranks second place, followed by gender equality and healthcare respectively.

- Difficulties in argumentative writing

In order to clarify EFL students' challenges in composing their argumentative essays, 150

Table 3: Understanding and perspective

Understanding and perspective	All			1 st year			2 nd year			3 rd year		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
1. I believe that an argumentative essay starts with an introduction, followed by body paragraphs, a counterargument, and a conclusion.	150	4.23	.770	51	4.02	.787	45	4.16	.767	54	4.48	.693
2. I think each body paragraph provides a single point that the topic sentence of the paragraph demonstrates.	149	3.56	1.092	51	3.04	1.076	44	3.52	.952	54	4.09	.976
3. I believe that the thesis statement should make the essay's direction and topic obvious to the reader.	150	4.18	.751	51	3.98	.860	45	4.24	.645	54	4.31	.696
4. I think counter ideas and rebuttals must be included in the counterargument section.	149	3.95	.820	51	3.76	.839	45	3.76	.857	53	4.28	.662
5. I believe the conclusion ought to provide a summary of all the essay's principle ideas.	150	4.21	.774	51	4.02	.836	45	4.16	.824	54	4.44	.604
6. I believe that a good argumentative essay should cover the topic, propose a debatable idea, use persuasive reasoning, and provide valid evidence	150	4.22	.674	51	4.00	.721	45	4.24	.609	54	4.41	.630
7. I believe that writing an argumentative essay requires writers to have a large amount of knowledge of a variety of aspects, especially rising social issues.	149	3.99	.834	51	3.80	1.000	44	4.23	.743	54	3.98	.687
		4.05	.816		3.8	.89		4.0	.771		4.3	.707

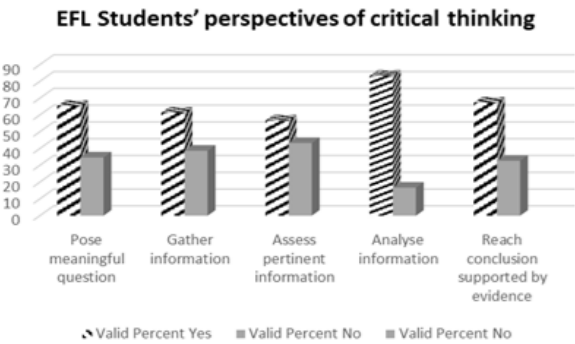


Fig. 1: EFL Students' perspectives of critical thinking

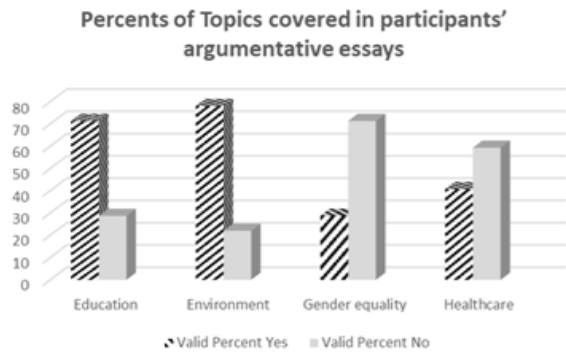


Fig. 2: Percent of topics covered in participants' argumentative essays

participants responded to the next group in this section, which was adapted from Lam et al. [34]. This group includes five questions using 5-point Likert scale, a question about critical thinking, and a constructed response answer allowing participants to express their own difficulties in

argumentative writing. Based on the statistics shown in Table 4, the difficulties, such as lack of lexical resources (M = 4.08, SD = .956; M = 3.89, SD = .910; M = 3.94, SD = .998), trouble coming up with ideas (M = 3.63, SD = .979; M = 3.71, SD = .815;

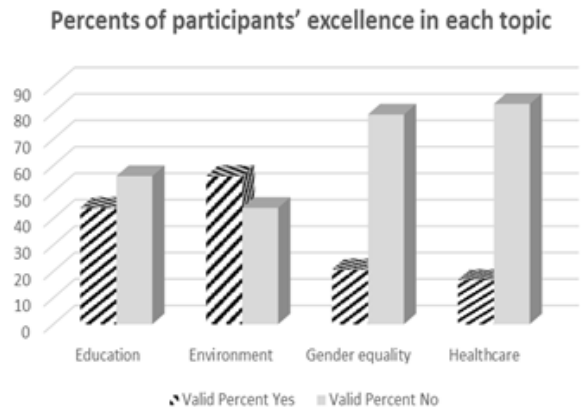


Fig. 3: Percent of participants' excellence in each topic

(M = 3.70, SD = .882), challenges in giving evidence and explanation process (M = 3.53, SD = 1.007; M = 3.64, SD = .857; M = 3.57, SD = 1.039), and challenges in expressing the extent of generality (M = 3.67, SD = .909; M = 3.78, SD = .704; M = 3.74, SD = .805), all have been relatively encountered by these students at all level respectively.

The last notion of composing the principal idea of the argumentative essay, however, has a lower mean and higher std. deviation compared to others, which indicates that students either encounter little difficulty in this section or encounter substantial challenges.

Moreover, the constructed response question, which allows these participants to share more about their challenges while composing an argumentative essay, received more than 50 answers which mainly revolved around the topics of lacking vocabulary and grammar. The answers are trouble when creating and developing ideas for required topics, short of confidence, or writing the essays in Vietnamese voice.

- Self-evaluation

The last question of this section asked students to rate their own writing in argumentative essays using 5-point Linkert scale, which ranges from very bad to very good. 58 percent of the participants chose three, which means ‘average’, while

the choices for ‘good’ accounted for approximately one-fifth and so did the choices for ‘bad’. Less than 10 percent of these students evaluated their argumentative writing abilities as ‘very bad’ or ‘very good’. Figure 4 shows the students' evaluation of their performance in argumentative writing.

For instance, one participant shared why they rated their writing competency as ‘average’.

‘I think my vocabulary is insufficient to fully convey what I want to express. My vocabulary, my grammar are not rich enough to explain my idea. Argumentative essays require a lot of knowledge. My knowledge is limited as I lack vocabulary and grammar. I have not provided accurate arguments and have quite a limited amount of vocabulary about the issues that were mentioned’. [39]

However, there are some students who rated their writing ‘good’ and also expressed their experiences and perspectives about argumentative writing as follows:

‘I’m quite good in finding out and brainstorming what I want to write in the essay. I strive to present coherent arguments. There is always room for improvement in refining my points and enhancing overall clarity. I have wide experience and constantly update new trending vocabulary which is also an advantage in helping me write essays. I’m experienced in composing argumentative essays as I usually come up with unique ideas’. [40]

While average-competence writers confronted difficulties with vocabulary and grammar, good writers' sharing indicates their mastering this kind of writing including generating original ideas. Students' knowledge of a few specific social topics, such as education, environment, gender equality, and healthcare, will be examined in the following section to see if students' social awareness and their perspectives on argumentative writing are related

EFL students' awareness of primary social issues

This section is divided into three groups with the goal of investigating the awareness of these English majors on social topics that are fre-

Table 4: Difficulties in argumentative writing

Difficulties	All			1 st year			2 nd year			3 rd year		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
11. I think my vocabulary is insufficient to fully convey what I want to express.	150	3.97	.955	51	4.08	.956	45	3.89	.910	54	3.94	.998
12. I have trouble finding my notions of the topic.	150	3.68	.892	51	3.63	.979	45	3.71	.815	54	3.70	.882
13. I think it is difficult for me to give each perspective a rationale or explanation.	150	3.58	.971	51	3.53	1.007	45	3.64	.857	54	3.57	1.039
14. Expressing the extent of generality in the supporting ideas proves to be a challenge for me.	150	3.73	.810	51	3.67	.909	45	3.78	.704	54	3.74	.805
15. I have trouble stating the main idea of my essay.	150	3.34	1.016	51	3.39	.981	45	3.22	.902	54	3.39	1.140
		3.66	.928		3.66	0.93		3.6	.838		4.3	.972

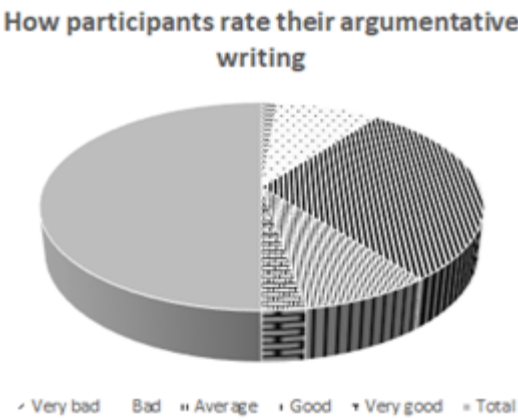


Fig. 4: How participants rate their argumentative writing

quently addressed in argumentative essays, such as education, the environment, gender equality, and healthcare. The first group allows these students to express their general interest in each topic, while the second group focuses on their level of interest in specific aspects of each topic, and the third group allows them to share the methods they have used to learn about these social issues.

Figure 5 shows that these students were most interested in the environment, followed by education, healthcare, and gender equality, in that order. In relation to the self-evaluation section, when they estimated their performance on each topic of argumentative essays, most students re-

garded the environment and education as the topics on which they could perform well, as opposed to the other two. Similarly, gender equality and healthcare received less emphasis, leading students to believe they do not perform well in these areas. Moreover, in order to clarify the reasons that led these students to care about a particular topic, this group also had a constructed-response question that let students share their rationales for liking a social issue. The results demonstrate that environment and education also received the most popular topics among these participants due to sharing several similar reasons. For instance, one student shared why they were interested in the environment and education.

‘Because I am always concerned about environmental problems and want to know more about the main factors that affect the environment; ... because education provides people with knowledge and skills to participate in social or organizational activities and build a civilized and happy life.’ [41]

- Degree of interest in social issues

The next sub-section aims to investigate students’ level of interest in specific aspects of each topic (Table 5). The results received have some similarities and differences from the general question. Regarding environmental subjects, both the overall and specific statistics across three groups of students show positive interests ($M = .377$, $SD = .806$). Regarding gender equality, aspects of men’s and women’s societal roles as

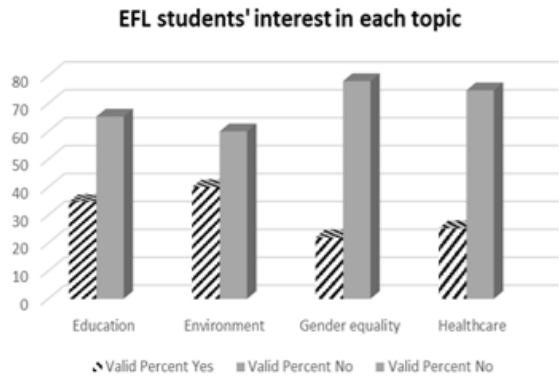


Fig. 5: EFL students’ interest in each topic

well as gender stereotypes received high consensus across the three groups ($M = 3.70$, $SD = .767$), third-year students tended to be more interested than freshmen and sophomores ($M = 3.93$, $SD = .640$). However, the other aspect of the same topic, gender equality, which is about the definitions of femininity and masculinity, did not receive the same level of interest from first-year students ($M = 3.29$, $SD = .807$) and second-year students ($M = 3.42$, $SD = .866$).

Regarding educational topics, while first-year students ($M = 3.53$, $SD = .833$) and third-year students ($M = 3.80$, $SD = .919$) showed a high level of interest, second-year students indicated low attention. Additionally, information on health got more interest from sophomores ($M = 3.73$, $SD = .889$) but less appeal from freshmen ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 1.002$) and juniors ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.023$). Moreover, topics related to patient concerns, consultation dynamics, and related aspects were not intrigued by first-year students ($M = 3.39$, $SD = .981$) and third-year students ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.071$) but were captivated by second-year students ($M = 3.78$, $SD = .823$).

- Methods of gaining knowledge of social issues

The next group of this section aims to investigate students’ methods of widening their knowledge of social issues (adapted from Nguyen et al. [35]). The percentage of students who chose to listen to sections in class or news related to

these topics is slightly higher than that of students who preferred reading authentic texts (Figure 6).

- Perspective and self-evaluation

Generally, the three groups highly asserted their agreement with the sub-section of perspective and self-evaluation with a relatively stable overall mean score ($M = 3.67$, $SD = .796$). While third-year students firmly thought that learning from university and researching by themselves could help them perceive the importance of basic social issues ($M = 4.04$, $SD = .776$), first-year students skeptically considered themselves as people who are aware of social problems ($M = 3.35$, $SD = .934$). This may indicate the freshmen’s lack of experience and confidence. However, with an overall mean score of 3.8 (with $SD = .803$), sophomores showed more familiarity with and responsibility for current social issues.

Relationship between awareness of primary social issues and perspectives on writing argument essays

The last section aims to find out the connection between how students know about social issues and how they think about argumentative writing.

- Overcome argumentative writing difficulties

Item 30 in Table 7 shows that all three groups expressed high agreement that understanding social issues broadens their vocabulary, particularly in terms of terms linked to writing subjects with the smallest mean score ($M = 4.04$, $SD = .692$) from freshmen. Moreover, with a lower mean score ($M = 3.92$, $M = 3.84$) and higher standard deviation ($SD = .717$, $SD = .784$) in items 31–32, respectively, freshmen seem to have more diverse answers than the other two groups. Generally, participants agreed that investigating social issues gives them proof for their claims and strengthens the argument in their argumentative essays. They showed high consensus that they can gather broad knowledge from reading, listening to, or researching social concerns, which will enable them to rationally order their ideas and thoughts before writing the essay.

- Improvement in critical thinking

Item 33 in Table 7 indicates that students’ familiarity with social concerns gives them a broad

Table 5: Degree of interest in social issues

Degree of interest in social issues	All			1 st year			2 nd year			3 rd year		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
18. I frequently pay attention to environmental subjects including pollution's consequences on health, weather forecasts, natural catastrophes, and the state of the air quality today.	150	3.77	.806	51	3.71	.832	45	3.78	.823	54	3.81	.779
19. I usually learn things regarding gender equality including the definitions of femininity and masculinity.	150	3.50	.817	51	3.29	.807	45	3.42	.866	54	3.76	.725
20. I am interested in getting to know about men's and women's roles in society, and societal stereotypes of women and men.	149	3.70	.767	50	3.58	.835	45	3.58	.783	54	3.93	.640
21. I usually conduct research on topics pertaining to education, such as costly postsecondary education, public school financing, teacher shortages, teacher wages, etc.	150	3.57	.893	51	3.53	.833	45	3.36	.883	54	3.80	.919
22. I regularly look for information on health, specifically regarding harmful conditions like musculoskeletal, circulatory, and psychological disorders.	150	3.52	.981	51	3.39	1.002	45	3.73	.889	54	3.46	1.023
23. Additionally, I like to explore topics such as patient expectations and concerns, doctor-patient consultation dynamics, and other related aspects.	150	3.23	1.004	51	3.39	.981	45	3.78	.823	54	3.20	1.071
		3.55	.878		3.66	.964		3.6	.845		3.66	.859

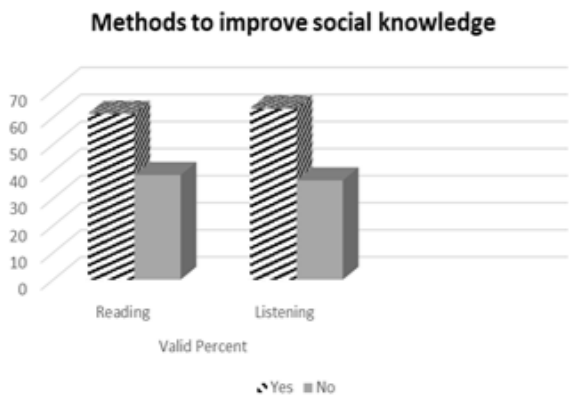


Fig. 6: Methods that students use to broaden their social knowledge

perspective on every topic. While juniors showed a higher level of agreement with this statement ($M = 4.04$, $SD = .699$), sophomores ($M = 3.98$, $SD = .723$) and freshmen ($M = 3.68$, $SD = .868$) expressed slightly lower consensus. In addition, second-year students ($M = 4.13$, $SD = .625$) agreed that they can create strong arguments

and rebuttals for an argumentative essay with ease by understanding, evaluating, and critiquing societal concerns. In a similar vein, third-year students ($M = 4.09$, $SD = .652$) and first-year students ($M = 3.88$, $SD = .840$) showed that they have no trouble coming up with rebuttals and counterarguments for an argumentative essay by understanding, evaluating, and critiquing social concerns although their level of agreement was slightly lower than third-year students.

- Self-evaluation

For item 35, both sophomores ($M = 4.07$, $SD = .751$) and juniors ($M = 4.07$, $SD = .773$) confirmed the positive relationship between their knowledge of social issues and their argumentative writing. Although freshmen expressed a lower level of agreement than the other two groups ($M = 3.71$, $SD = .832$), they demonstrated a strong correlation between their argumentative writing skills and their understanding of social concerns. Item 36 showed students' consensus with the statement indicating that their persuasive essay gets better, when they are more concerned with social concerns. While sophomores ($M =$

Table 6: Perspective and self-evaluation

Perspective and self-evaluation	All			1 st year			2 nd year			3 rd year		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
27. I think that learning from university and self-researching help me to become aware of the significance of primary issues in the society.	150	3.77	.806	51	3.75	.913	45	3.87	.944	54	4.04	.776
28. I usually inquiry myself about my role in being responsible for the current social issues.	150	3.50	.817	51	3.63	.848	45	3.82	.684	54	3.85	.684
29. I consider myself as a person who is really aware of problems occurring in society.	149	3.70	.767	51	3.35	.934	45	3.73	.780	54	3.78	.691
		3.67	.796		3.6	.898		3.8	.803		3.9	.717

Table 7: The relationship between EFL students’ awareness of social issues and perspectives on argumentative writing

Overcome argumentative writing difficulties	All			1 st year			2 nd year			3 rd year		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
30. Having knowledge of social issues enriches my lexical resource, especially the terminologies related to writing topics.	150	4.13	.682	51	4.04	.692	45	4.18	.684	54	4.19	.675
31. Researching social issues supplies me with evidence in my supporting ideas and makes my argumentative essays more persuasive.	150	4.08	.650	51	3.92	.717	45	4.11	.573	54	4.20	.626
32. Reading, listening to or researching social issues gives me general knowledge that can help me to arrange my thoughts and ideas logically before composing the essay.	150	4.07	.748	51	3.84	.784	45	4.18	.747	54	4.19	.675
Improvement in critical thinking												
33. Having knowledge of social issues provides me with an overview perspective on every topic.	50	3.68	.868	50	3.68	.868	45	3.98	.723	54	4.04	.699
34. Through apprehending, analyzing and criticizing social issues, I can easily write counterarguments and rebuttals in an argumentative essay.	51	3.88	.840	51	3.88	.840	45	4.13	.625	54	4.09	.652
Self-evaluation												
35. I think that I can write my argumentative essay more logically if I have knowledge of the social issues in the essay’s prompt.	50	3.68	.868	51	3.71	.832	45	4.00	.769	54	4.07	.773
36. My argumentative essay is improved when I care more about social issues.	51	3.88	.840	51	3.57	.831	45	4.07	.751	54	4.06	.878
		4.0	.747		3.8	.794		4.0	.696		4.12	.711

4.07, SD = .751) and juniors (M = 4.06, SD = .878) expressed better like-mindedness, freshmen (M = 3.57, SD = .831) lessened their degree of consensus.

- Interviews

In addition to the questionnaire, six students, who participated in the interview, also shared their opinions on the relationship between social knowledge and argumentative writing. A freshman expressed ‘When I understand those issues, they will help me develop the ideas for my essays better’ [42]. One sophomore said, ‘When I pursue argumentative writing courses, I expect

to write more fluently, express and analyze social issues better’ [43], while a junior confidently shared, ‘When I am more aware of social issues, my argumentative writing skills become better. . . Besides, I also know how other people opine, and I can express whether I agree with them or not.’ [44]

Overall, these interviewees shared that the most popular topic of social issues is the environment, which they mostly research by listening to and reading news on social media, especially things that are controversial and debatable topics. They mostly consider these social topics to have

improved their critical thinking and argumentative writing. Moreover, at the question of sharing their desires in the next writing course, for the most part, they hope for an improvement in critical thinking and essay structure, especially stronger counterarguments or rebuttals.

B. Discussion

This study has explored how EFL students' perspectives on argumentative writing and their awareness of social issues, in particular, education, the environment, gender equality, and healthcare, relate to each other.

The study investigated 150 English majors including first- to third-year students who were studying at Tra Vinh University, Vietnam in the second semester of the academic year of 2023–2024 by using a survey design with questionnaires and interviews as research instruments. The findings show a positive relation between these EFL students' awareness of the four primary social issues and their points of view on argumentative writing.

What are the EFL students' perspectives on writing argument essays?

The study indicated that most first-year to third-year English majors agreed on the macrostructure of an argumentative essay, which consists of an introduction, supporting paragraphs, a counterargument, and a conclusion. Furthermore, the key aspects of the essay, including the thesis statement, counterargument, and rebuttal, are usually reckoned by these participants as existing in the argumentative writing process and making the essay intelligible and cohesive. The thesis statement, in particular, is seen to clearly establish the essay's direction, whereas counterarguments are thought to be mostly found in the conclusion. Furthermore, most of these individuals agreed on controversial views, which, when supported by credible data, will form the basis of a well-organized argumentative essay. This finding is consistent with Yang [1] and Frihi [33]. Understanding this macrostructure may explain that these EFL students have been equipped with appropriate knowledge of argu-

mentative writing which can be a strong base for further learning and practice. However, first-year students seemed still confused about what a body paragraph should be about. This suggests these English majors may not scrutinize consistency in a paragraph which is vital in not only argumentative writing but also other genres. It can be understandable since using paragraph structure effectively in an argumentative essay may be considered a common difficulty [45], which causes students to face challenges with the format, arrangement, and structure of paragraphs in argumentative writing [46]. Hence, although these freshmen largely have a general knowledge of argumentative writing, they may find difficulties avoiding common mistakes.

Critical thinking is usually reckoned not only to improve people's, especially students' ability to acknowledge, analyze, and evaluate information but also to assist EFL learners in improving their vocabulary and grammar. Then, critical thinking abilities enable students to successfully assess evidence, ensuring that their argumentative writing is credible and relevant, which allows them to effectively persuade readers to follow their arguments [29]. Furthermore, some students may find that a lack of critical thinking abilities is considered as an obstacle to good essay structure [39]. Therefore, when writing essays about social issues, students may experience confusion if they do not adhere to the right procedures of critical thinking. The study found that EFL students were mostly aware of the basic steps that a critical thinker often takes in argumentative writing, including posing meaningful questions, gathering information, assessing pertinent information, analyzing information, and reaching conclusions supported by evidence [2, 18, 26, 27, 47]. However, while information analysis was predominantly acknowledged, interpreting pertinent facts was far less noticed. This is likely caused by EFL learners' overlooking the evaluation of related information, which means all the steps of critical thinking may not be strictly followed.

Of the four identified social issues, environment, and education are the topics that par-

ticipants covered most in their argumentative writing, and they thought that they excelled at writing about these two topics. This can be understandable since the intensity of writing practice is believed to have a positive relationship with students' proficiency in argumentative writing as shared by Yerni [48]. Hence, as a result of multiple times writing argumentative essays related to education and environment, they may find themselves performing better in these topics compared to the others. Regarding difficulties in argumentative writing, lack of lexical resources, trouble coming up with ideas, challenges in giving evidence and explanation process, and challenges in expressing the extent of generality are in line with findings reported by Lam et al. [34], Zhu [46], and Dang et al. [49]. However, participants from the first to third year of study expressed they did not know if they had trouble stating the main idea of their essay. Combined with the previous analysis of these students' perspectives on unanimous notions in essay writing, a plausible explanation for this can be the understanding of macro and microstructure in argumentative writing. In short, the challenges that these students encounter while composing argumentative essays can be summarised into two main sections: short of language's source and short of language competence.

Rating their argumentative writing, more than half of the participants thought they were average-competent writers. The explanation for this evaluation is somehow similar to the response to the question, which asked for students' unique difficulties. For the most part, students believed that the reason that leads them not to perform their best in argumentative writing is their lack of vocabulary and grammar, insufficient confidence, and shortage of knowledge of the topics covered in the essays, which is shown in some of their explanations [34, 46, 49].

In essence, the overall results may indicate that EFL learners who responded to this questionnaire have had quite a general knowledge of argumentative writing despite the difficulties that they have encountered.

What is the EFL students' awareness of primary social issues?

Regarding students' interests in social issues, overall, gender equality and healthcare once again received less attention from these participants, which is in line with Li [9], Ulfa et al. [10], and World Health Organization [51], as these articles and information have explained the importance of gender equality and healthcare in society, but also indicated that these two topics do not receive enough attention from the public. As a result, students often do not come up with a positive outcome in writing, which is stated in Ali et al. [50]. It can be explained that since these participants seemed not to follow the whole process of critical thinking but only focus on analyzing the point (Figure 1), the aspect of men's and women's roles in society and societal stereotypes of women and men may need a lot of explanations, and these explanations are dependent on each student's perspective, not on a solid framework. Although the definitions of femininity and masculinity may vary, they also require the process of posing questions and seeking and evaluating information, which students tend to ignore in the critical thinking process. The same goes for the topic of healthcare, where a lot of searching needs to be done before composing arguments, as to write about diseases or their effects, a large amount of specialized knowledge is required. Moreover, these students seemed to perform better in the macro structure of the whole essay rather than the microstructure in one single paragraph. This can be the reason for the differences between levels of interest in general topics and specific aspects, as students may tend to prefer the aspect that they can freely expand without focusing on the consistency of a paragraph [13–15]. In short, students' degree of interest in social issues and their performances in argumentative writing seem to have a relatively two-way relationship [12, 36].

Regarding methods of gaining knowledge of social issues, following the language input theory, listening and reading are defined as input skills, since they include receiving and processing information, while writing and speaking are consid-

ered output skills, which require generating language [35, 52]. Although listening often does not receive students' attention compared to reading [52], reading and listening, for the most part, have a strong and positive revelation, which can enhance students' language competence [53]. Social awareness, or social knowledge is mostly required in composing an argumentative essay, which can also be improved through reading and listening. Therefore, this group focuses on the methods that students then use to broaden their social knowledge, particularly by these two input skills. Contradict to other research in which participants often considered listening quite less interesting compared to reading as shown by Fischer et al. [54], the participants in this research tended to prefer listening. A plausible explanation for this as shared in the interviews is that students often watch news or videos on social networks, and they may combine this method into the listening category. In short, these participants seemed to have certain interests in social issues, in both general aspects and specialized aspects. Moreover, they also used the methods of reading, listening, or their own methods to enhance their knowledge of social issues. The researchers would argue that the degree of students' interests in each topic and their attention to specialized aspects of these issues, has certain effects on their perspective of argumentative performance.

Regarding perspective and self-evaluation, EFL students' awareness of social issues seemed to increase when they moved from their first to second and third years [12]. This is likely because they have been equipped with sufficient writing techniques and practice [1, 36, 45]. In general, the findings to the second research question reinforce the relationship between students' interests in specific social issues and their argumentative writing performance.

What is the relationship between awareness of primary social issues and perspectives on writing argument essays?

Overall, the study found that knowledge of social issues in students' perspectives has a positive effect on their argumentative writing. This

finding is in congruence with previous works of Beniche [2], Ahmady et al. [8], Blaique et al. [12], and Cahyadewi et al. [27], because according to these studies, social awareness can enhance students' critical thinking and decision-making skills in many majors and aspects, including argumentative writing. The difficulties that these students encountered while composing argumentative essays are believed to be tackled when these students have a wide range of knowledge of social issues, for instance, knowing about social concerns can expand lexical resources, particularly terms relevant to writing subjects, which is confirmed by Saprina et al. [7] and Fischer et al. [54].

Regarding ways to overcome argumentative writing difficulties, freshmen's lower mean score indicates the inconsistency among their own group. This is understandable because they have not had a chance to officially study thorough argumentative writing during their first year yet. However, both sophomores and juniors believed their proof for supporting ideas could be provided through researching social issues, which makes their argumentative essays more compelling. They also reckoned that the methods they used to broaden social knowledge like reading, and listening, which is in a similar vein as in Meral et al. [22], or searching social topics could allow them to organize their thoughts before composing essays. The challenges like lack of vocabulary, or consistency within paragraphs could be improved when they cared more about social issues [7, 48], according to these students.

Regarding improvement in critical thinking, the study found that critical thinking is also recognized to be improved when social knowledge is enhanced [3–6]. Because social knowledge is broad and information is often general, the process of understanding, evaluating, and critiquing social issues is required [26]. These steps can allow students to progressively follow the right orders of critical thinking [26] and eventually construct counterarguments and rebuttals in an argumentative essay, which can enhance their writing performance. According to these stu-

dents, their argumentative essays would be more logical as a result of having knowledge of social issues [29, 36].

Regarding self-evaluation, juniors and sophomores verified that there was a positive correlation between their argumentative writing and their understanding of social concerns [12, 29]. This is because they have been taught to do argumentative writing quite properly. Though freshmen have not officially studied English argumentative writing, they also felt optimistic about this connection. The results from interviews reinforced the findings from the questionnaire and the positive connection between student's awareness of social issues and their perspectives on argumentative writing [12, 29, 36]. In addition, interviewees also elaborated on the ways they enlarge their social knowledge [35, 52, 54] through social media. Moreover, through the interviews, students also expressed their anticipation for future writing courses in which they expect to have stronger rebuttals or counterarguments, as well as improvements in critical thinking and essay format. In brief, the findings of the third research question strengthen the definite connection between students' awareness of social issues and their interpretation of argumentative writing.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, this study explores if there is any relationship between EFL students' knowledge of social issues and their perspectives on argumentative writing based on the findings from the survey and interview. The results indicate such a positive connection. Specifically, these Tra Vinh University English majors seemed to have a general knowledge of argumentative essays including the essay's structure, and its components. They also had a certain interest in social issues, and the knowledge of these social issues would indeed have a positive effect on their argumentative writing. For instance, the topic that most of them care about, the environment, is also the topic that they rated their writing performance the best, which means the awareness

of and research on one topic can enhance the quality of their argumentative essays. Moreover, they were also aware of the useful methods that can help them improve social knowledge as well as argumentative writing. However, the degree of interest in a social topic can also be linked with students' difficulties. These participants seemed to be interested in certain aspects of gender equality. However, as shown in the difficulties of argumentative writing, because of short of capacity to unite ideas in one paragraph, students seemed not to perform well in this topic, as they might find it hard to organize their ideas about these aspects in just one paragraph. Therefore, gender equality ranked third or fourth among the four topics of social issues in terms of performance or interest in general.

Based on the findings, the researchers would suggest that argumentative courses can include some activities like quick debates, which focus on only a single aspect of a topic, so students' quick thinking and consistency in idea development can be improved. Moreover, a combination of videos and entertaining content from social media related to argumentative topics may help students both get aware of social issues to diversify their argumentation with general input as well as lexical enrichment and become more interested and active in class. The uniformity in the number of debate topics could possibly help students avoid deviating too much from one topic. More importantly, students need support to fully implement the process of critical thinking (e.g., posing meaningful questions, gathering information, assessing pertinent information, analyzing information, and reaching conclusions supported by evidence) to make the best use of it either to prepare for or to do argumentative writing. Students should read more, listen more, and watch more, but need to be critical when evaluating the information.

This research has made certain theoretical and practical contributions to the current literature. However, it did not attempt to differentiate EFL students' perceptions based on gender because of the study scope, which may be considered

a limitation but indicates directions for further studies. Future investigations may also focus on a specific learner group to explore in depth or conduct longitudinal research to understand more about how students are learning and how teachers can support them timelier and more effectively.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to express our gratitude to everyone who helped and supported us during this research process. First of all, we highly appreciate Dr. Nguyen Thi Phuong Nam and Dr. Huynh Ngoc Tai for creating favorable conditions for us to conduct the study, and Ms. Pham Nhu Loan for helping us distribute the questionnaires to participants. This research was completed with the support and co-operation of the 150 English majors in the Faculty of Foreign Languages. We convey our special thanks to each of them. Finally, we would like to thank Tra Vinh University Journal of Science, instructors at Tra Vinh University in general and in the Faculty of Foreign Languages in particular for giving us an opportunity to conduct this research.

REFERENCES

- [1] Zhang Y. An investigation into the development of structure and evidence use in argumentative writing. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*. 2018;8(11): 1441–1448.
- [2] Beniche M. The correlation between critical thinking skills and argumentative writing skills in moroccan higher education: the case of the Faculty of Languages, Letters and Arts Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*. 2023;5(1): 212–229.
- [3] Fadilah N, Suhartini S, Aloysius S. Fostering critical thinking: Designing problem-based learning student worksheet on environmental change topic. *Journal of Biological Education Indonesia [Jurnal Pendidikan Biologi Indonesia]*. 2014;10(1): 291–298.
- [4] Koç G, Özçırpan, ÇY, Terzioğlu F, Çetinkaya ŞŞ, Uslu-Şahan F, Işık RA, et al. The effect of a gender course on the gender attitudes, critical thinking dispositions, and media literacy skills of university students. *Journal of Higher Education [Yükseköğretim Dergisi]*. 2021;11(2 Pt 2): 387–400. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2399/yod.20.640377>.
- [5] Zulfqar A, Hayat A. Think how to think: studying the relationship between critical thinking skills and academic achievement of learners at higher education. *Journal of Social Sciences Review*. 2023;3(2): 640–650. <https://doi.org/10.54183/jssr.v3i2.305>.
- [6] Stretton T, Cochrane T, Seigny C, Rathner J. Exploring mobile mixed reality for critical thinking in nursing and healthcare education: A systematic review. *Nurse Education Today*. 2024;133: 106072. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2023.106072>.
- [7] Saprina CM, Rosyid A, Suryanti Y. Difficulties in developing idea encountered by students in writing argumentative essays. *Journal of English Language Studies (JET Li)*. 2020;5(1): 48–54. <http://dx.doi.org/10.55215/jetli.v3i1.3419>.
- [8] Ahmady S, Shahbazi S. Impact of social problem-solving training on critical thinking and decision making of nursing students. *BMC Nursing*. 2020;19(1): 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12912-020-00487-x>.
- [9] Li W. Gender Stereotyping in Media - Bias and Discrimination. *Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media Studies*. 2023;29(1): 237–241. <http://dx.doi.org/10.54254/2753-7048/29/20231518>.
- [10] Ulfa F, Mukaromah N, Puspitasari D. Gender bias analysis and right to fight for gender equality in education through the children's book "I am Kartini". *Berumpun: International of Social, Politics and Humanities*. 2023;6(2): 112–127. <https://doi.org/10.33019/berumpun.v6i2.114>.
- [11] Shutaleva A. Ecological culture and critical thinking: building of a sustainable future. *Sustainability*. 2023;15(18): 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su151813492>.
- [12] Blaique L, Nazmy P, Aldabbas H, Corbin T. Understanding social responsibility awareness among university students. *Journal of Law and Sustainable Development*. 2023;11(11): 1–17. <http://dx.doi.org/10.55908/sdgs.v11i11.1644>.
- [13] Kapshuk Y, Alt D. Using digital concept maps in conflict resolution studies: implications for students' argumentative skills, domain-specific knowledge, and academic efficacy. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 2022;13: 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.882370>.
- [14] Songsil W, Pongsophon P, Boonsoong B, Clarke A. Developing scientific argumentation strategies using revised argument-driven inquiry (rADI) in science classrooms in Thailand. *Asia-Pacific Science Education*. 2019;5: 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41029-019-0035-x>.
- [15] Liao M, Liao Y. Improving Chinese college students' argumentative writing: a presentation-assimilation-siscussion-exercise approach. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 2022;13: 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.874531>.
- [16] Albelihi HHM. Lexical and cohesive links in EFL learners' writing: exploring the use of task based language teaching. *Frontiers in Education*. 2022;7: 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.996171>.
- [17] Toba R, Noor WN, Sanu LO. The current

- issues of Indonesian EFL students' writing skills: ability, problems, and reason in writing comparison and contrast essay. *Dynamics of Science [Dinamika Ilmu]*. 2019;19(1): 57–73. <http://doi.org/10.21093/di.v19i1.1506>.
- [18] Hashemi MR, Behrooznia S, Mahjoobi FM. A critical look into Iranian EFL university students' critical thinking and argumentative writing. *Iranian Journal of Applied Linguistics*. 2024;17(1): 71–92.
- [19] Mayes GR. Argument-explanation complementarity and the structure of informal reasoning. *Informal Logic*. 2010;30(1): 92–111. <https://doi.org/10.22329/il.v30i1.419>.
- [20] Moon K, Blackman D. A guide to understanding social science research for natural scientists. *Conservation Biology*. 2014;28(5): 1167–1177. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.12326>.
- [21] Marín VI, Zawacki-Richter O, Aydin CH, Bedenlier S, Bon M, Bozkurt A, et al. Faculty perceptions, awareness and use of open educational resources for teaching and learning in higher education: a cross-comparative analysis. *Research and Practice in Technology Enhanced Learning*. 2022;17(11): 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41039-022-00185-z>.
- [22] Meral E, Kayaalp F, Namlı ZB. The role of argumentative writing in teaching controversial issues: a mixed methods research. *International Journal of Contemporary Educational Research*. 2022;9(1): 143–163.
- [23] Salih AA. Investigating rhetorical aspects of writing argumentative essays and persuasive posters: students' perspective. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*. 2021;11(12): 1571–1580. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1112.09>.
- [24] Nimehchisalem V, Abbasi MM, Ebrahimzadeh A, Kalajahi SAR. Iranian English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' argumentative writing performance in private language institutes. *Asian Social Science*. 2015;11(15): 96–103. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ass.v11n15p96>.
- [25] Lai ER. Critical thinking: a literature review. *Pearson's Research Reports*. 2011;6(1): 40–41.
- [26] Moore T. Critical thinking: seven definitions in search of a concept. *Studies in Higher Education*. 2013; 38(4): 506–522. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2011.586995>.
- [27] Cahyadewi A, Lolita Y. The analysis of university student's critical thinking in writing argumentative essays in the English Department of UNESA. *Indonesian Journal of Education [Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia]*. 2021;2(9): 1465–1476.
- [28] Lu C. A framework for infusing critical thinking into Chinese college EFL. *English Linguistics Research*. 2019;8(2): 16–20.
- [29] Starichkova VP, Moskovskaya NL, Kalinovskaya EA. Development of students' critical thinking skills via teaching English. *ARPHA Proceedings*. 2022;5: 1641–1653. <https://doi.org/10.3897/ap.5.e1641>.
- [30] Dörnyei Z. *Research methods in applied linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2007.
- [31] Fraenkel JR, Wallen NE, Hyun HH. *How to design and evaluate research in education*. 8th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill; 2012.
- [32] Yauch CA, Steudel HJ. Complementary use of qualitative and quantitative cultural assessment methods. *Organizational Research Methods*. 2003;6(4): 465–481 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428103257>.
- [33] Frihi A. *The importance of critical thinking in EFL essay writing (argumentative, problem-solution, critical analysis)*. Master's thesis. Guelma, Algeria: The University of Guelma; 2018. <https://dspace.univ-uelma.dz/jspui/bitstream/123456789/2784/1/M821.186.pdf> [Accessed 21st April 2024].
- [34] Lam AT, Thai CD, Thac CD, Phu THC, Chau TN, Mai BT, et al. A study about EFL English-major students' challenges in writing argumentative essays at Soc Trang Teachers' Training College, Vietnam. In: Wongwailkhit K (ed.) *Proceedings of the 9th RSU International Research Conference*. 1st May 2020; Rangsit University, Thailand. Mueang Pathum Thani: Rangsit University; 2020. p.1544–1558.
- [35] Nguyen HP, Huynh NT, Nguyen TPN. Effects of teacher's using authentic texts on cognitive reading engagement of Vietnamese EFL students. *English Language Teaching and Linguistics Studies*. 2021;5(3): 10–30.
- [36] Rubiaee MAA, Darus S, Bakar AN. The effect of writing knowledge on EFL students' ability in composing argumentative essays. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)*. 2019;10: 263–287. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3512623>.
- [37] Oxford RL. Language learning strategies and beyond: a look at strategies in the context of styles. In: Magnan S (ed.) *Shifting the instructional focus to the learner*. Middlebury, VT: Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages; 1990. p.35–55.
- [38] DeVellis RF, Thorpe CT. Scale development: theory and applications. 5th ed. New York: SAGE Publications; 2021.
- [39] ST122. Interviewed by: Nguyen Khac Tieu Binh. 6th March 2023.
- [40] ST147. Interviewed by: Nguyen Khac Tieu Binh. 9th March 2023.
- [41] ST62. Interviewed by: Nguyen Khac Tieu Binh. 6th March 2023.
- [42] ST24. Interviewed by: Nguyen Khac Tieu Binh. 6th March 2023.
- [43] ST88. Interviewed by: Nguyen Khac Tieu Binh. 5th March 2023.

- [44] ST17. Interviewed by: Nguyen Khac Tieu Binh. 9th March 2023.
- [45] Prananda YA. Students' ability in writing paragraphs using structure of the paragraph in argumentative essay by the sixth semester of English study program of Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu. *Journal of Linguistics and Language Teaching*. 2016;3(1): 1–20.
- [46] Zhu W. Performing argumentative writing in English: difficulties, processes, and strategies. *TESL Canada Journal*. 2001;19(1): 39–48. <https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v19i1.918>.
- [47] Prastya IS. The correlation between critical thinking skill and writing achievement. *BASTRA*. 2014;1(2): 192–200.
- [48] Yerni Y. How does intensity of writing practices correlate with argumentative writing ability among Indonesian freshmen students? *Pedagogy: Journal of English Language Teaching*. 2021;9(2): 135–148. <https://doi.org/10.32332/joelt.v9i2.3687>.
- [49] Dang T, Chau T, Tra T. A study on the difficulties in writing argumentative essays of English-majored sophomores at Tay Do University, Vietnam. *European Journal of English Language Teaching*. 2020;6(1): 201–240. <http://dx.doi.org/10.46827/ejel.v6i1.3389>.
- [50] Ali Z, Palpanadan ST, Asad MM, Churi P, Namaziandost E. Reading approaches practiced in EFL classrooms: a narrative review and research agenda. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*. 2022;7(1): 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-022-00155-4>.
- [51] World Health Organization. *Gender and health*. <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/gender-and-health> [Accessed 24th May 2024].
- [52] Hu S. Research and practice of teaching method on balanced development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing ability. In: Yang S, Xu Q (eds.). *Proceedings of the 2015 International Conference on Economy, Management and Education Technology*. 29–30 August 2015. Tianjin: Atlantis Press; 2015. p.135–138. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2991/icetem-15.2015.21>.
- [53] Mega S, Suharyadi ANW. The correlation between students' reading and listening score in a standardized test of TOEFL. *Journal of Research and Study of Educational Sciences: e-Saintika [Jurnal Penelitian dan Pengkajian Ilmu Pendidikan:e-Saintika]*. 2021;5(2): 127–138.
- [54] Fischer ID, Yang JC. Flipping the flipped class: using online collaboration to enhance EFL students' oral learning skills. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*. 2022;19(15): 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-022-00320-2>.

