



EFL students' deadlock in argumentative writing: Voices in gender perspective

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ABSTRACT

Writing difficulty and constraints have gained much attention nowadays, particularly in the EFL context. However, the writing difficulties of EFL male and female writers perceived in developing an argumentative essay were still under-researched. To fill the void, this concurrent mixed method study aimed to scrutinize the variation and frequency and explore the perceptions of being argumentative writers among 113 EFL university students in Jakarta, Indonesia. Online questionnaires were distributed through a survey and the framework of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), and the interviews were conducted concurrently. The findings illustrated that EFL male and female writers experienced almost similar major difficulties, including argumentative text genre, language use, difficulty in source/reference, problems in the cognitive process, and other technical difficulties. Further, to be argumentative writers, female writers tend to feel various combinations of feelings and apply more learning strategies. In contrast, male writers express more on the cognitive process of essay completion. However, either male or female writers become more aware of their weaknesses in the English language, such as reading skills.

Keywords: EFL writing difficulty, argumentative writing, university student, mixed-method research

Article history

Received:
15 February 2023

Revised:
09 March 2023

Accepted:
18 May 2023

Published:
10 Oktober 2023

Citation (APA Style): Juhana, J., Sundari, H., Pratiwi, W. R. (2023). EFL students' deadlock in argumentative writing: Voices in gender perspective. *Cakrawala Pendidikan: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan*, 42(3), 745-759. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21831/cp.v42i3.59407>

INTRODUCTION

Evidence suggests that writing is among the most difficult skills for students to master (Mohamed & Zouaoui, 2014; Widiati & Cahyono, 2006), but it is considered important for educational, business, and personal reasons (Weigle, 2002). Writing in an EFL (English as a foreign language) context comes with multi-dimensional efforts, for example, language elements, writing format and conventions, cultural assumptions, as well as the sentence and syntactical configuration while at the same time the FL students are often significantly less exposed to the target language (Reichelt et al., 2012). The students, therefore, may experience writing difficulties in diverse aspects, such as concepts, rhetoric, and linguistics (Mohamed & Zouaoui, 2014). Lack of reading and writing practice can cause inhibition during paragraph and/or essay development (Hammad, 2016). Besides, the cultural dimension may lead to barriers in writing as illustrated by Reichelt et al. (2012). Writing teachers mostly assign the students to develop a 5-paragraph essay with a dialectical style (thesis-argument-evidence) that is purely American style. In fact, the FL students may never write in this format in their native language, so they found some difficulties adapting to it.

In the past two decades, there has been a growing body of research on writing difficulty in EFL settings in various countries from Asia to Middle-east, such as Hongkong (Flowerdew, 1999), Taiwan (Chen, 2002), Jordania (Saleh & Ibnian, 2017), Oman (Al-Seyabi & Tuzlukova, 2014), Saudi Arabia (Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016), Iraq (Ahmed, 2019; Nasser, 2019), and Palestine (Hammad, 2016). The research reported that the most common difficulties in writing

are content and language use. To be precise, the FL students found constraints in the writing mechanics (Alharbi, 2019), text organization, grammar rules, and word selection (Ahmed, 2019; Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017). To the researchers' knowledge, almost similar findings were also found in the studies about writing difficulty in the Indonesian context. From research by Ariyanti and Fitriana (2017), Toba et al. (2019), and Muamaroh et al. (2020), Indonesian students encounter some major difficulties during writing in English, such as grammar conventions, structure and organization of the text, vocabulary, and discourse.

Writing at the university level requires the students to develop their writing ability in the most common academic genres, such as essays, summaries, proposals, reviews, exposition, and argument text type (Paltridge, 2004). The argumentative genre of writing is one of the essential academic competencies and indicators of proficient learners in higher education (Zhang, 2018). An argumentative essay involves an argument, which basically is the writer's effort to provide rational, logical persuasion to his or her audience either oral or written statements (Murtadho, 2021), to persuade someone to believe or do something (Newell et al., 2011) as its main goal by delivering reasons with valid and strong evidence (Oshima & Hogue, 2006). This type of essay is characterized by the structured principles of the genre: thesis, argument, and conclusion (Hyland, 1990), also named a three-stage essay (Schneer, 2014). A thesis statement is the writer's position or standpoint on the issue, and an argument consists of two or more paragraphs to support the thesis accompanied by evidence from multiple sources (Newell et al., 2011). Meanwhile, the conclusion is to reaffirm the writer's claim (Schneer, 2014). It is also called 'the five-paragraph essay' because the organization of the essay, as commonly taught, is the thesis stage in the first introductory paragraph, the argument stage in the body paragraphs, and the conclusion as the final paragraph (Schneer, 2014).

The key elements of an argumentative essay, as written by Oshima and Hogue (2006, p. 145), are 1) an explanation of the issue, 2) a clear and effective thesis statement, 3) the supporting arguments, 4) a summary of the opposing arguments, and 5) the rebuttals to the opposing arguments. The construction of an argumentative essay is, however, a dynamic process, as seen in Figure 1. In creating this essay, argumentative writers should be aware of both textual and linguistic elements of essay organization (introductory, body, and concluding paragraphs) as well as the topic issue and the writing process of drafting and re-drafting. At the same time, the writers of argumentative essays must be concerned with their claim and or standpoint to which the audience they try to convince, and the situated social context they belong to (Chala & Chapetón, 2012).

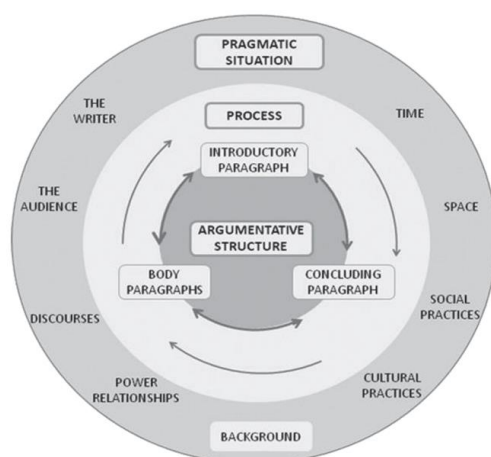


Figure 1. The Dynamic Process of Creating Argumentative Essay by Chala & Chapetón (2012)

Moreover, during the essay development, the writers engage in critical thinking in articulating the arguments to respond to the issue and to resolve conflict, and they collect and select the appropriate and inappropriate evidence to support the claim (McKinley, 2015). Writing

an argumentative essay is the process of problem-solving (Ferretti et al., 2009). Taking into consideration how difficult the process of developing an essay and its components might be, not surprisingly, student writers at all levels of education suffer in producing this type of essay because of insufficient knowledge of genre and lack of argumentative abilities which leads to their low performance (Fan & Chen, 2021; Schneer, 2014). The research study by Al-Haq and Ahmed (1994) in Saudi Arabia reported that the students performed at a low level at all components of argumentative essay-thesis statement, relevance, coherence, cohesion, argumentativeness, quantity, unity, wording, and grammaticality. Further, Zhu (2001) who examined Mexican graduate students wrote that the organization ideas, page limit, and writing mechanics were the major difficulties the students encountered.

Current research addressing some issues regarding writing an argumentative essay in Indonesian settings has come from research studies by Rahmatunisa (2014), Suhartoyo et al. (2020), and Saprina et al. (2020). Carried out by qualitative study design through textual analysis and interview, the research studies have demonstrated that Indonesian student writers at the university level found difficulties in linguistic problems, cognitive problems, and psychological problems, such as formulating thesis statements, creating coherent writing, and combining ideas within appropriate sentences. However, little was it known about the writers' perceptions and interpretation of being argumentative writers concerning the difficulty they encounter, particularly for students majoring in English education based on a gender perspective.

Indeed, as stated by Hirvela (2017), a classroom-based research agenda concerned with students' responses to argumentative writing instruction, including challenges and constraints, is needed to launch. Moreover, as enormous studies and analysis stated that female and male writers express their language differently in academic texts (Baklouti, 2011; Hu et al., 2019; Tankó, 2021). In other words, they assumingly face specific problems and constraints in writing argumentative essays. Therefore, this research study was imperative to explore the first-hand experience intensively and holistically and to get a better understanding of the issue from the perspectives of male and female writers. The contributions of the current research are placed at the considerations for EFL writing teachers, researchers, and the stakeholders at the university in designing writing classes for argumentative essays. The class is expected to cover the argumentative essay in the form of materials, examples, learning activities, tasks, and feedback that may be oriented to resolve the problems in writing essay. As the extension of the research by Rahmatunisa (2014), Suhartoyo et al. (2020), and Saprina et al. (2020), this present research, therefore, aimed at twofold namely scrutinizing the writing difficulty perceived by EFL university students during argumentative essay development on a gender perspective, and 2) exploring their perceptions of being argumentative male/female writers. The following research questions guided the entire research procedure from the EFL university students' perceptions, what are the variations and frequency of writing difficulty when they perform English argumentative essays based on gender perspective? And how do they make sense of being male or female writers in writing an English argumentative essay?

METHOD

Research design

The purpose of this study was to examine the EFL university students' perceptions on writing difficulty in developing English argumentative essays based on perspective of their gender. To deeply explore on the research problems and get a complete understanding on the phenomenon (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009; Gay et al., 2012; Migiro & Magangi, 2011), this research study employed a convergent mixed method research design, which is collecting both quantitative data and qualitative data concurrently (Creswell, 2012; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). However, they are separately analyzed, resulting in data comparison or relatedness for the interpretation (Bazeley, 2018). In quantitative research, the data taken from a survey is used to describe the characteristics of a population (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009), and it was also to indicate the variation and frequency of writing difficulty among the EFL students based on their gender perspective. At the same time, data from the interview were used to point to the students' perceptions, and

experiences, and making meaning of being argumentative writers under the framework of interpretative phenomenological analysis, that is to examine and understand how research participants make sense of their lived experiences (Alase, 2017; Smith et al., 2009).

Research setting and participants

This research took place in a private university in Jakarta, Indonesia during the odd semester of the 2022/2023 academic year. The participants were the students registered and attended the Academic Writing course at the English Education Program, Faculty of Postgraduate program 113 participants involved as the volunteers of this research study by approving their agreement on the consent form given prior to the data collection. The demographic information of the participants can be seen in the table below.

Table 1. Demographic information of participants

Category		Percentage
Sex/gender	Male	36 (31.9%)
	Female	77 (68.1%)
Age	20-25 yo	25 (22.1%)
	26-30 yo	26 (23%)
	31-35 yo	26 (23%)
	> 35 yo	36 (31.9%)
	Status	English language teacher
	Non-English language teacher	43 (38.1%)
Schools/ Institutions	Kindergarten	4 (3.5%)
	Elementary schools	22 (19.5%)
	Junior high schools	26 (23%)
	Senior high schools	18 (15.9)
	Higher education	4 (3.5%)
	Other institutions	39 (34.5%)
Total Participation		113 (100%)

During the Academic Writing course, one of the learning objectives is to enable the students to develop academic writing skills in an academic genre in the form of argumentative essay development. Through a modified Genre-based approach (Derewianka & Jones, 2016; Dirgeyasa, 2016; Emilia & Hamied, 2015), the lessons were divided into several stages within five meetings. At first, the students built the genre knowledge of argumentative essays as well as contextualized and modeled from given sample texts. Then, they collaboratively constructed the prepared essay in the joint-construction stage. At last, they were assigned to independently write one argumentative essay to respond to one current issue in ELT. Those steps and learning cycles were conducted through synchronous and asynchronous sessions.

Data collection and analysis

To collect the data, two instruments of quantitative and qualitative data were designed and concurrently distributed to the participants after they submitted the argumentative essays and received general feedback from the teacher. In quantitative data collection, a set of online survey questionnaires were developed into two sections: student profiles and perceptions of their writing difficulty. The survey items on writing difficulty displayed the level of difficulty and variation of difficulty modified from Rahmatunisa (2014) and the schematic structure of an argumentative essay by Oshima and Hogue (2006) and Chala and Chapetón (2012). There were 17 different options for difficulty variation and participants were allowed to select more than one item. Moreover, another option was also given to provide options of difficulty that may not be covered in the given options. To have a better understanding of the statements and get relevant responses, the survey item was delivered in the student's first language (Bahasa Indonesia). The survey was completed by 113 EFL students. For the analysis section, a descriptive statistic with percentages was applied to examine the variation and frequency of writing difficulty perceived by the

participants. Microsoft Excel helped in the process of data tabulation, data analysis, and data visualization.

For investigating a more comprehensive understanding of how participants make meaning of argumentative essay performance, the respondents were purposively selected to reach a relatively homogeneous sample of group participants with similar backgrounds, that is, having English educational background and teaching at school. Totalling 35 participants (24 female, 11 male) were voluntarily asked to fill the online interview of open-ended questions. The questions were guided the students to tell or narrate their experiences on writing an argumentative essay during the course, including feelings, thoughts, difficulties, challenges, solutions, and strategies. The textual data from the interview were then subject to analysis using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) framework within six phases, as informed by Smith et al. (2009), as follow reading and re-reading, initial noting, developing emergent themes, searching for connections across emergent themes, moving to the next case, looking for the patterns across cases. To maintain rigor and trustworthiness, cross-checking and comparison of the coding process was conducted. The second researcher did the initial round of coding process and analysis (case 1- case 35) to reach super-ordinate themes and master table of themes; and then the first researcher went to the second round of analysis for checking. For any difference and dispute on the emergent themes, re-checking the original textual data and discussion were conducted to achieve a final decision.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding

The variation and frequency of writing difficulty in performing argumentative essay

From the questionnaire, it was revealed the writing difficulties perceived by the EFL writers when performing argumentative essays. The difficulties were then categorized into two levels: major difficulty and minor difficulty. The major difficulties were finding ideas to respond to the given topic, stating the thesis statement on the essay, finding scientific references for evidence, finding, and formulating counterarguments, formulating pro-argument, reading references in English, the time limit for task submission, and writing activity and practice as a not daily routine.

Furthermore, some aspects, such as understanding the topic, thinking framework of the text genre, linguistic features, text structure, grammar, vocabulary, and task directions were considered minor difficulties in developing an argumentative essay. The percentages of all items on writing difficulty are displayed in Figure 2.

Concerning the participants' response to the question item, the statistical analysis descriptively shows that the participants provided a 4.6 mean score on the writing difficulty options. Based on gender, the mean score for female writers was 4.7, and it was 4.5 for male writers, as displayed in Figure 4. Meanwhile, median and modus scores for both writers were not too far from the mean score. It indicated that there were no significant outlier values in the data distribution. Additionally, the number of responses given by male writers seemed to be more spread out than to the female writers as evidenced by the larger standard deviation and variance values as well as the range between the numbers of responses given. This proved that, even though the number of male participants was double that of females, female writers are more consistent in their responses regarding writing difficulty.

Regarding the number of responses on options of writing difficulty among male and female writers, the descriptive statistical analysis reported that, in consensus, the difficulty in finding ideas gained the highest number of responses from both male and female writers, followed by the option of stating thesis statement on the argumentative essay (Figure 3). Nonetheless, compared to female writers, EFL male writers voted for different options with the second highest number. For male writers, the most difficult aspects of writing argumentative essays were finding ideas and finding scientific references. On the other hand, female writers preferred the options of finding ideas and stating thesis statements as the highest numbers.

In addition, the average value of participants' responses was 30.5 in total. To be more specific, male writers and female writers had a value of 9 and 21.5 respectively. The difference

in value among male and female writers resulted from the different number of male and female writers as participants, in which female participants were twice as large as the number of male participants. However, it was worth mentioning that the mean values of both participants in total and separately by gender did not appear much different from the mode and median values, indicating that there was no outlier data. Therefore, the data distribution was normal as evidenced by the p-values on the Jarque Bera test (p-value not less than 0.05).

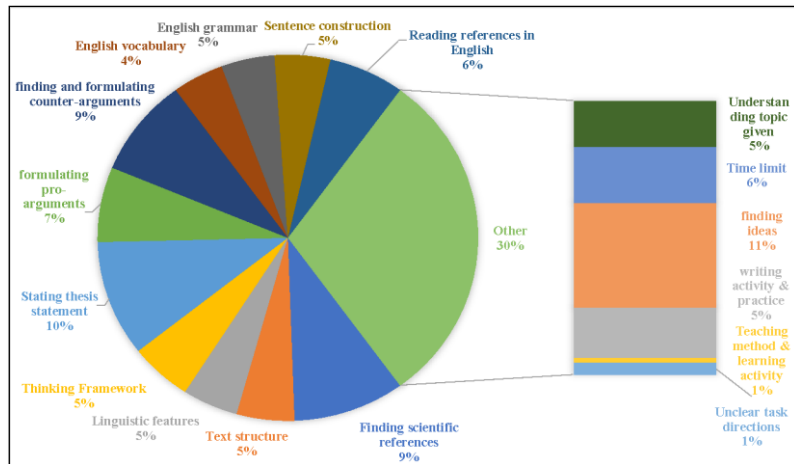


Figure 2. Variation and Percentage of Writing Difficulty perceived by the Students

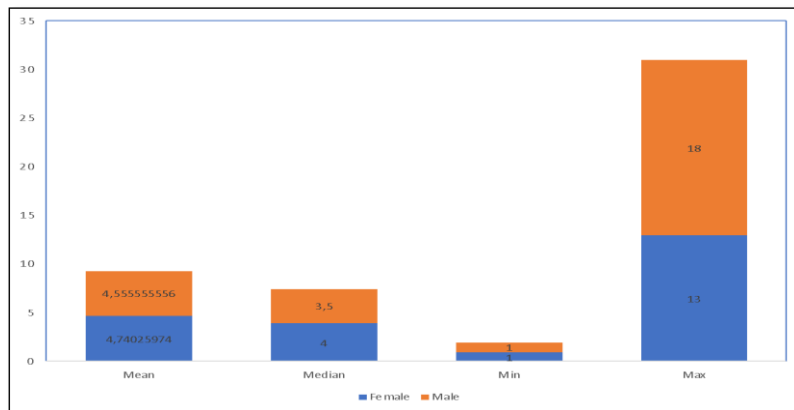


Figure 3. Data Distribution of Writing Difficulty among EFL Male and Female Writers

Writing English argumentative essay as perceived by male and female EFL writers

The analysis of textual data from the interview yielded six super-ordinate themes that present students' perceptions of being English argumentative writers. The overall difficulty, feelings, and strategy was evident in the data. The six main themes emerged namely writing difficulty – argumentative text genre, language use, source reference, cognitive process, and other technical constraints, variety of feelings, strategy in essay completion, process of essay completion, self-evaluation in writing, and reading as constraint and strategy.

Writing difficulty among male and female writers

From this super-ordinate theme, five themes and sub-themes have emerged in the subsumption process. The themes were argumentative text genre, language use, source reference, cognitive process, and other technical constraints. Both male and female students expressed their difficulty and problems in writing argumentative essays in all emergent sub-themes with diverse occurrences. The summary of writing difficulty perceived by male and female writers can be seen on Table 2 below.

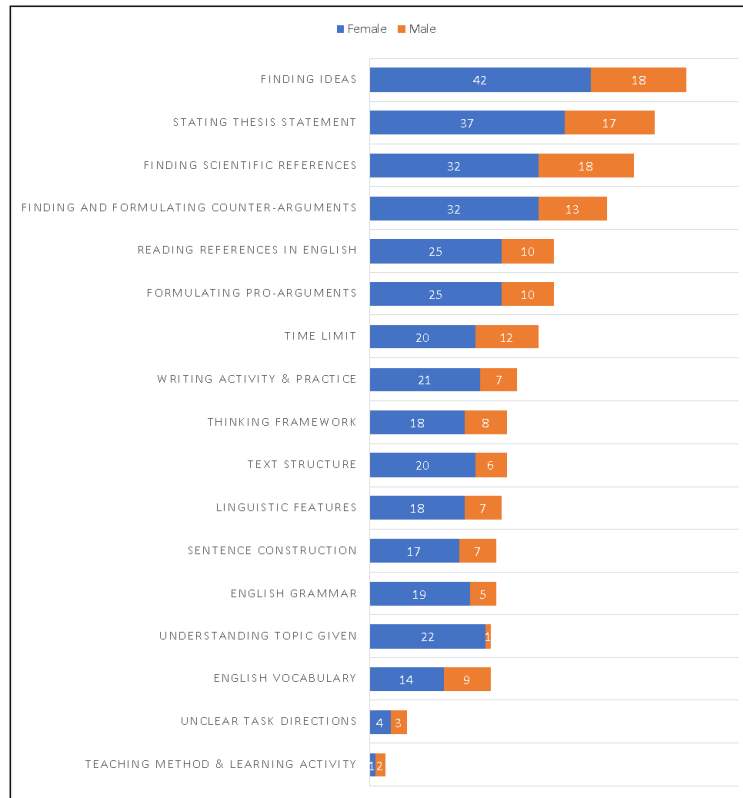


Figure 4. Variation and Frequency of Writing Difficulty among EFL Female and Male Writers

Table 2. Recurrent themes of writing difficulty among male and female writers

Themes	Sub-themes	Female writers	Male writers
Argumentative text genre	Understanding the text (structure/organization)	Yes	No
	Formulating thesis (claim/standpoint)	Yes	No
	Stating and uniting arguments (pro and counter)	Yes	Yes
	Understanding the topic	Yes	No
	Making connection to evidence	No	Yes
Language use	Paraphrasing source	Yes	No
	Sentence construction	Yes	Yes
	Paragraph development	No	Yes
	Constructing correct grammar	Yes	No
Source/reference	Finding references	Yes	Yes
	Comprehending the text reference	Yes	Yes
Cognitive process	Critical and creative thinking	No	Yes
	Logical thinking and reasoning	No	Yes
	Combining ideas/source together	Yes	Yes
	Thinking much harder	Yes	No
Other technical constraints	Synthesizing information	No	Yes
	Time limit (management)	Yes	Yes
	Health issues	Yes	Yes

Both male and female writers experienced problems dealing with finding and understanding references to support their essay, and they also struggled with other technical constraints (e.g., time management and health issues). At the same time, they found difficulty concerning argumentative text and language use, though in some items they were different.

As female writer (F4) and male writer (M10) commented below:

*When I was working on this argumentative essay, I faced several difficulties. First, I don't understand and don't really understand the argumentative material of this essay. (F4)
I also find it difficult to develop sentences/paragraphs in providing arguments to support statements. (M10)*

In the difficulty of a cognitive process during writing an argumentative essay, compared to female writers, male writers tend to express more comments about how difficult to respond to the given topic critically and creatively, logically, and to synthesize several information, as narrated by male writers below.

*My mind feels like I have been whipped up to think logically. (M1)
It is very challenging because you need to read lots of references, and it requires full concentration because you need to synthesize some information from many sources. (M9)*

It found that female writers did not reveal their difficulty in cognitive process during the completion of argumentative essays. It was seemingly not because they did not experience constraints on the process, as seen on the interview transcripts, female writers tend to narrate more about their emotional experiences and feelings in their comments, as we discuss on the next super-ordinate theme below.

Variety of feelings

On the script, female writers tend to narrate more affective and emotional words to express their experiences of writing argumentative essays than male writers did. Female writers wrote several adjectives and adjective phrases, such as anxious and dizzy (F3), confused (F6), and a little pessimistic (F7). They also used metaphors to describe this activity, like writing a S1 thesis (F1), like in S1 course (F14). This kind of expression was not found in male writer's comments. Moreover, some female writers experience mixed feelings during writing argumentative essays, as female writers (F7), (F18), and (F22) commented below.

When I first tried to write, I was very confused and had a hard time where to start, but after a few days of studying and reading several examples of argumentative essays, I finally began to understand and find common ground for what an argumentative essay looks like. (F7)

When I got the assignment to write an essay, I felt worried and insecure, even confused about where to start. (F18)

When I was assigned to write an essay, I felt doubts and worries, worried that the essay I wrote was not correct and, there would be a lot of mistakes, whether starting with wording, choosing opinions, or arguments. (F22)

When performing argumentative essays, both male and female writers felt similar feelings of being challenging, motivated as well as difficult and burdened. The occurrence of what they felt during essay completion can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Recurrent themes of a variety of feelings

Themes	Female writers	Male writer
Feeling challenging and motivated	Yes	Yes
Feeling difficult and burdened	Yes	No
Feeling happy and enjoyable	No	Yes
Mixed feelings	Yes	No

We see in the script that none of the female writers revealed feelings of happiness and enjoyment when developing this essay. Two male writers told us their feelings, as in the excerpt below.

I feel very happy when I write an essay... (M1)

My experience in writing argumentative essays is very enjoyable and feels like a challenge because I can express my opinion about a given topic... (M2)

Strategy for essay completion

Though both male and female writers admitted that they faced difficulty in writing argumentative essays, they tried to finish and submit the essay in the time given by applying several strategies. Table 4 shows the strategies employed by both essay completion.

Table 4. Recurrent themes of strategy in essay completion

Themes	Female writers	Male writers
Looking for previous task	Yes	No
Simplifying sentences	Yes	No
Reading a lot of references	Yes	Yes
Learning and reading samples	Yes	No
Making timeline/time management	Yes	No
Making frame and outline of essay	Yes	Yes
Watching tutorial on YouTube	Yes	No
Focusing on finding references	Yes	No
Selecting ideas	Yes	No
Selecting topic	No	Yes

From the table, we can see that, to complete the essay development, both writers read a lot of source references and made a framework and outline prior to the essay drafting, as narrated by male and female writers (F12, M6, and M7) below.

I read sources related to the topic and started making a framework. After that, I slowly developed the framework into an outline and essay. (F12)

When about to start writing, ideas emerge, and then they are bound in a writing framework/outline. (M6)

I need at least reading the passages 3 times or more to understand the passage comprehensively. (M7)

Further, it seems that male writers applied fewer strategies than female writers did. Male writers used common strategies in essay development, such as selecting a topic, creating a frame and outline, and reading sources as references. Meanwhile, female writers implemented various strategies, for example learning from samples and previous tasks, re-constructing sentences, and watching tutorials to gain more understanding of the text and to complete the essay.

Process of essay completion

Both female and male writers narrated the process of essay completion almost in a similar fashion.

It took me several days to finish even for one paragraph only. (M7)

I worked around this by writing at least 1-2 paragraphs in 1 day. So that my task is completed on time and still meets the task requirement. (F9)

Female writer (F18) below told us how she planned,

I had to manage the time to write the essay because time was also a challenge for me. I made a list for the next 1 week to complete my essay in 1 day that week, I had to be able to read and understand the journal I chose which I then framed. (F18)

Self-evaluation in writing

Male and female writers admitted that they had weaknesses and self-inhibition. In the comments, several female writers wrote that they were not quick learners (F4), had lack vocabulary mastery (F18), as written in the excerpt below.

... to be honest, I'm not someone who quickly grasps what has been explained, so it has to be explained in detail until I really understand. (F4)

it is rare to apply writing in everyday life. (F5)

The limited vocabulary that I have is also a challenge in understanding journals. (F18)

In almost a similar vein, two male writers revealed that writing argumentative essay is such a new experience, that he had limited language skill (M6) and a lack of reading comprehension (M7).

Reading as constraint and strategy

From the script, both male and female writers narrated the same difficulty in understanding and comprehending texts as references prior to writing the essay. They suffered in getting the information from published scientific articles written in English, as in the excerpt below.

I lack the time to read and understand the articles presented, plus the book and formal language which is difficult for me to understand. (F11)

it is very challenging since it requires reading lots of references with full concentration. (M9)

However, reading activity also came up as a strategy in completing the essay development. Either male or female writers wrote a similar voice, as we can see in the super-ordinate strategy in essay completion.

Discussion

This mixed method research was addressed to explore the EFL university students' perceptions, including participants' experiences and interpretation, of writing difficulty when performing argumentative essays in the context of writing instruction based on gender perspective. Overall, the research findings provided answers to the two major research questions and demonstrated that difficulties in foreign language writing cover not only the micro level of argumentative essay as a text genre but also the macro level that surrounds the process of essay completion.

The first question examined the variation and frequency of writing difficulty in developing argumentative essays based on gender. The qualitative finding revealed that the theme of writing difficulty is categorized into several sub-themes: difficulty in argumentative text genre, difficulty in language use, difficulty in finding sources and references, difficulty in the cognitive process, and other technical difficulties. The quantitative data of this present research indicated that both EFL male and female writers found writing difficulties in almost similar variations. The major difficulties were finding ideas to respond to the topic (female 42, male 18), stating the thesis statement (female 37, male 17), finding scientific references for evidence (female 32, male 18), finding and formulating counterarguments (female 32, male 13), reading references in English (female 25, male 10), formulating pro-argument (female 25, male 10) and time limit for task submission (female 20, male 12).

The second question investigated the perceptions of EFL male/female writers in performing English argumentative essays. The qualitative findings indicated that writing an English argumentative essay comes with several difficulties and constraints; therefore, the writers applied strategies during the process of essay completion. Moreover, both male and female writers feel diverse feelings EFL female writers tend to experience various combinations of feelings, but none of them expressed positive feelings about writing this essay. Both male and female writers come to a greater awareness of the shortcomings in their English writing growth and talent, including a restricted vocabulary, poor reading comprehension, and inadequate grasp of grammar. However, the latter seemingly has two roles. Reading for scientific references in English can be a constraint as well as a strategy to complete the essay.

Both quantitative and qualitative findings suggested that in developing English argumentative essays, EFL male and female writers faced writing difficulty in terms of text genre (e.g., structure, thesis statement, argumentativeness, linguistic features) and language use (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, sentence construction). At this micro level, these findings confirmed earlier studies about difficulty and problems during writing argumentative essays in Indonesian contexts (e.g., Rahmatunisa, 2014; Saprina et al., 2020; Suhartoyo et al., 2020). However, aspects, such as laziness, egoism, and bad mood, as psychological constraints as found in a study of writing argumentative essays by Rahmatunisa (2014) were not found in this current study. Moreover, both quantitative and qualitative data revealed that both female and male writers struggled in components of argumentative essays, such as thesis statement, and arguments (pro and counter). This finding supported what was found by Al-Haq and Ahmed (1994) who wrote that the Saudi students performed at low level in all components of argumentative essays. Further, both male and female writers in this study agreed that finding ideas to respond to the topic and time limit were two of several major difficulties in writing an argumentative essay. A similar finding was written in the investigation by Zhu (2001) who found that the organization of ideas, page limit, and writing mechanics were the major difficulty the students encountered. Either quantitative or qualitative data demonstrated that difficulty in writing English argumentative essays can be in several aspects, such as argumentative text genre, language use (grammar, vocabulary, sentence/paragraph construction), cognitive process, and other technical constraints. These results, in general, were consistent with the most prevalent and frequent writing difficulty in EFL contexts seen in studies conducted overseas, such as in Hongkong (Flowerdew, 1999), Taiwan (Chen, 2002), Jordania (Saleh & Ibnian, 2017), Oman (Al-Seyabi & Tuzlukova, 2014), Saudi Arabia (Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016), Iraq (Ahmed, 2019; Nasser, 2019), and Palestine (Hammad, 2016) and Indonesia (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Muamaroh et al., 2020; Toba et al., 2019). The writing difficulties were related to content, language use, and text organization.

From the descriptive statistical analysis, it was concluded female writers chose the options of finding ideas and stating thesis statements as the highest numbers of writing difficulty. Female writers in this current research are seemingly concerned more with the standpoint/claim they deliver in their essays. This finding, in general, supported the study by Noroozi et al. (2022) and Putro and Lee (2017) that implied female writers were more thoughtful than male students to clearly inform their point of view whether they agree or disagree on the issue. In addition, the qualitative data presented in this research suggested that female writers experienced a range of emotions, from negative to positive, throughout the process of completing the essay, but none of them was enjoyment and happiness. In contrast, male writers tended to express cognitive experiences while composing the essay. This may indicate that female writers seemingly felt more anxious and apprehended, so-called writing anxiety or apprehension (Horwitz et al., 1986; Sundari & Febriyanti, 2017; Wahyuni & Umam, 2017) than male writers did. Moreover, these findings imply that male and female writers respond differently to the writing task and its requirements. This may result from systematic differences between male and female personality (Weisberg et al., 2011); to be more specific of conscientiousness, females are somewhat better than males in terms of dutifulness, order, and discipline (Costa et al., 2001).

Qualitative data suggested some findings that both male and female participants revealed their weaknesses and self-inhibition. Several female writers admitted they are not high achievers and have limited vocabulary; at the same time, some male writers said they have limited language skills, such as low reading skills. In anticipating these self-inhibitions, qualitative findings illustrated that they both apply some strategy in completing the essay. Male writers tend to implement language learning strategies in essay development at micro level; meanwhile, female writers may select more various learning strategies, such as cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies (Putro & Lee, 2018; Rahimi & Katal, 2012; Ramadhanti, 2021; Ruan, 2014; White, 1995). These findings imply that writing tasks, developing argumentative essays, requires not only text knowledge and production but also regulation skills for managing interactions between reading activity and writing activity (Yang & Plakans, 2012).

Based on qualitative findings, it is also revealed that, at the macro level, both males and females found reading and comprehending text are the major difficulties, particularly in

understanding scientific references in English; surprisingly, reading references is selected to be one of strategy on essay completion. Either male or female writers tend to have no other choice but to provide valid and strong evidence for their arguments in the essay, but they could find, read, and understand scientific text references in English. Since an argumentative essay should provide arguments (pro and counter) (Hyland, 1990; Schneer, 2014) supported by evidence (Oshima & Hogue, 2006) from scientific references, reading activity is seemingly an unseparated part of the process of essay completion. By reading (text model, references on the topic, and others), writers gain knowledge of the text genre to frame the essay, get information to build and state the arguments, and collect and select appropriate evidence (McKinley, 2015).

CONCLUSION

This convergent mixed method study concludes the variation, frequency, and experiences of writing argumentative essays as perceived by male and female writers. The findings suggested that both male and female writers found difficulty in terms of argumentative text genre, language use, difficulty in source/reference, difficulty in cognitive process, and other technical difficulty. To be precise from gender perspective, male writers struggle more to find ideas, finding scientific references, and stating thesis statements. In almost similar fashion, female writers found difficulty in finding ideas, stating a thesis, and finding scientific references. For the perception of being argumentative essay writers, female writers feel various combinations of feelings, except enjoyment and happiness. Meanwhile, male writers expressed more on the cognitive process of essay completion. Both males and females become more aware of their weaknesses in the English language, such as reading skills (Putro & Lee, 2018). However, compared to males, female writers apply more diverse learning strategies to anticipate them.

This research study is restricted in two different ways. At initially, the research was limited to a single college, and the participants were all chosen to come from the same major. Therefore, the findings should be appropriately generalized into a variety of different settings. Further research could be in a more diverse group of the population to provide more insight. Secondly, the study used a questionnaire and interview concurrently after task submission. The quantitative and qualitative findings may not represent a broad general picture of writing difficulty during the process (before, while, after) of essay completion. It is suggested to apply a longitudinal study to get a deeper understanding.

This present research substantially adds to our understanding of the difficulty perceived by EFL male and female writers in foreign language writing contexts based on gender perspective. This study has two implications for writing teachers in higher education. Both quantitative and qualitative data have demonstrated EFL male and female writers' difficulty and perception of time limit for task submission. Writing teachers need to consider the requirements of tasks, including weight, clear direction, steps, and due so that the students have sufficient time to complete high-quality products. From quantitative and qualitative data, both male and female writers express the difficulty in finding and reading scientific references in English. Writing teachers also need to facilitate the students with proper and sufficient learning sources (links, sample text, websites) and provide integrated reading-writing tasks that promote reading comprehension as well as writing development.

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