Teaching Argumentation to Undergraduates: The Analysis of Toulmin Elements in ESL Argumentative Essays

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Introduction

Argumentation is one of the key skills that university students need to have in order to succeed in their studies. It is acknowledged by academics across disciplines that the ability to develop an argument is a characteristic of effective writing (Lea & Street, 1998). Through argumentation students can demonstrate their understanding of the knowledge they have acquired. But more crucially, as Andrews (2010) pointed out, argument contributes to the advancement of knowledge in higher education. Considering the importance of this skill, students need to be aware of how to construct an argument effectively. One way to raise awareness is by teaching students the structure of argumentative writing based on a model.

This chapter describes an approach taken by a language instructor to teach argumentative essays to first year undergraduate students at the Faculty of Law, University of Malaya. The Toulmin model of argumentation structure was used to teach the students, and to analyse the students' argumentative essays.