



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***STANCE AND STANCE-SUPPORT STRATEGIES IN ENGLISH
ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING BY MALAYSIAN UNDERGRADUATE
WRITERS***

LEE GEOK IMM

FBMK 2017 10



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By

LEE GEOK IMM

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

January 2017

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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January 2017

Chairman : Associate Professor Wong Bee Eng, PhD
Faculty : Modern Languages and Communication

This study investigated how Malaysian undergraduate writers (106 first and 129 final year undergraduates who were referred to as junior and senior undergraduate writers) expressed their stance and stance-support in their argumentative writing. IELTS writing band descriptors were used to examine the stance and stance-support statements (under the component of task response in IELTS) in their essay writing. A correlation using Pearson correlation coefficient analysis was also done to investigate the task response and writing performance.

The frequency of use for the stance-support strategies in their essays was counted and analyzed based on a checklist of stance-support strategies (Chandrasegaran & Kong, 2006). Furthermore, an awareness test was conducted to investigate their awareness of the stance-support strategies. A correlation was also done between their awareness of the stance-support strategies and use of these strategies. Their argumentative essays were further examined to determine the lexico-grammatical features used for expressing stance, based on Biber's (2006) framework.

The results showed that the senior undergraduate writers were able to express their stance more clearly and provide better stance support (as task response) in their argumentative writing, as indicated in their higher mean scores based on IELTS writing band descriptors. The analysis using Pearson correlation showed significant correlations between the task response and writing performance for both groups of writers. However, the component of task response had a greater influence on the writing performance of only the junior undergraduate writers.

In terms of the frequency of use of stance-support strategies, the senior undergraduate writers demonstrated more use of most of these strategies. The strategies most frequently used by both groups of writers were the writer's use of elaboration and examples. In contrast, the writer's use of analogy was the least used strategy.

Regarding the awareness test, the senior undergraduate writers showed a significantly greater awareness of stance-support strategies. Both groups of writers were aware of the writer's use of personal opinion, followed by the use of factual statement, observation of events and use of reference to source of authority. They were least aware of strategies like the writer's hypothesized situation based on a claim and the writer's appeal to the reader's emotions. Pearson correlation analysis revealed that there was a significant correlation between the writer's awareness and use of stance-support strategies for the junior undergraduate writers, but not for the senior undergraduate writers.

As for the use of lexico-grammatical features, the senior undergraduate writers showed more use of lexico-grammatical features for specific strategies. The most frequently used lexico-grammatical features by both groups of writers were modal verbs and prepositional phrases. Their least used lexico-grammatical feature was stance complement clause controlled by adjectives.

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that the undergraduate writers' abilities to state and support their stance can still have room for improvement. Therefore, writing instructors can use these findings as useful resources for developing suitable writing tasks for argumentative essays. The checklists of stance-support strategies and lexico-grammatical features based on this study can be used in ESL writing courses.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**STRATEGI PENDIRIAN DAN PENDIRIAN- SOKONGAN DALAM
PENULISAN HUJAH DALAM BAHASA INGGERIS OLEH PENULIS
PRASISWAZAH MALAYSIA**

Oleh

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Kajian ini ditujukan kepada 106 orang pelajar tahun satu dan 129 orang pelajar tahun akhir prasiswazah Malaysia dirujuk sebagai penulis junior dan senior yang menyatakan pendirian dan pendirian-sokongan mereka dalam penulisan berbentuk hujahan. Garis panduan penulisan IELTS digunakan untuk memeriksa penulisan ayat-ayat pendirian dan pendirian-sokongan (di bawah komponen tindakbalas tugas dalam IELTS) dalam penulisan karangan mereka. Analisis Pearson pekali korelasi digunakan untuk mengkaji tugas dan prestasi penulisan.

Frekuensi kegunaan bagi strategi pendirian-sokongan dalam karangan dikira dan dianalisis berdasarkan senarai semak strategi pendirian-sokongan (Chandrasegaran & Kong, 2006). Selain itu, ujian kesedaran juga dijalankan untuk mengkaji kesedaran penulis terhadap strategi pendirian-sokongan. Korelasi juga digunakan untuk melihat akan kesedaran antara strategi pendirian-sokongan dan kegunaan strategi. Karangan hujahan mereka terus dikaji untuk memastikan ciri tatabahasa yang digunakan untuk menyampaikan pendirian berdasarkan kerangka Biber (2006).

Keputusan menunjukkan penulis prasiswazah yang senior mampu untuk menyatakan pendirian mereka dengan lebih jelas dan mampu memberi pendirian-sokongan yang lebih baik (sebagai tugas tindakbalas) dalam penulisan hujahan seperti yang ditunjukkan pada skor min yang tinggi berdasarkan garis panduan penulisan IELTS. Analisis korelasi Pearson menunjukkan korelasi yang bererti antara tindakbalas tugas dan prestasi penulisan untuk kedua-dua kumpulan penulis. Walaubagaimanapun, komponen bagi tindakbalas tugas mempunyai pengaruh yang lebih kuat ke atas prestasi penulisan penulis prasiswazah muda.

Dari segi kadar frekuensi penggunaan, penulis prasiswazah senior menunjukkan penggunaan strategi pendirian-sokongan yang lebih banyak. Strategi yang paling banyak digunakan bagi kedua-dua kumpulan penulis adalah penggunaan penghuraian dan contoh. Secara kontranya, penggunaan analogi adalah strategi yang paling kurang.

Bagi penggunaan ciri tatabahasa, penulis prasiswazah senior menunjukkan penggunaan ciri tatabahasa yang khusus. Ciri tatabahasa yang paling banyak digunakan bagi kedua-dua kumpulan ialah kata kerja modal dan frasa kata sendi nama dan yang paling kurang kegunaannya ialah klausa pelengkap pendirian yang dikawal oleh kata sifat.

Untuk ujian kesedaran, penulis prasiswazah senior menunjukkan kesedaran yang sangat bererti terhadap strategi pendirian-sokongan. Kedua-dua kumpulan penulis sedar akan penggunaan pendapat sendiri, diikuti penggunaan ayat penyata, pemerhatian peristiwa dan penggunaan sumber rujukan. Mereka kurang sedar akan penggunaan strategi seperti situasi telahan penulis berdasarkan isu dan sentuhan rayuan penulis terhadap emosi pembaca. Analisis korelasi Pearson menunjukkan terdapat korelasi yang bererti antara kesedaran penulis dan penggunaan strategi pendirian-sokongan bagi penulis prasiswazah junior tetapi tidak pada penulis prasiswazah senior.

Kesimpulannya, kajian ini menunjukkan keupayaan penulis prasiswazah dalam menulis dan menyokong pendirian mereka masih boleh diperbaiki. Oleh itu, pemudahcara penulisan boleh menggunakan penemuan ini sebagai sumber yang berguna untuk membangunkan tugas penulisan hujahan yang sesuai untuk menulis karangan berbentuk hujahan. Borang senarai semak bagi strategi pendirian-sokongan dan ciri tatabahasa bagi kajian ini boleh digunakan untuk kursus-kursus penulisan ESL.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been completed if not for the help given by the following organizations and individuals:

Firstly, I am greatly indebted to the Ministry of Higher Education for awarding me the scholarship and University Putra Malaysia for granting me the study leave. This study could not be possible without the support of the Dean, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Che Ibrahim Salleh and the Head of the English Department, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Shameem Rafik-Galea of the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication. Their support has given me an opportunity to further my PhD study.

Secondly, I would like to express my gratitude to my three esteemed supervisors, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Wong Bee Eng, Prof. Dr. Han Swee Heng and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mardziah Hayati Abdullah, for their constructive comments and professional advice. Their encouragement, patience and understanding have also greatly helped me to improve and complete this dissertation. To each one of you, thank you very much!

My deepest thanks and gratitude also go to my dearest colleagues and friends who have given their help in collecting and analyzing the data. I would further like to thank the students who participated in this study. Their cooperation has helped me to better understand their writing process regarding stance and stance-support strategies.

Finally, my heartfelt thanks are due to my family, parents and sister for their love, sacrifice and continuous support throughout my PhD program.

I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 11 January 2017 to conduct the final examination of Lee Geok Imm on her thesis entitled "Stance and Stance-Support Strategies in English Argumentative Writing by Malaysian Undergraduate Writers" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins by providing information on the background of this study and the statement of the problem. The general objective and scope of the study form the next section, followed by the research questions, significance and limitations of the study. The theoretical underpinnings to situate the importance of stance and stance-support strategies in writing also are provided, followed by the conceptual framework of this study. This chapter then ends with the operational terms that are used in this study.

1.1 Background of the Study

The skill of argumentation in English has been recognized as important in academic studies at different levels of education (Nemeth & Kormos, 2001; Kanestion et al., 2016). At the tertiary level, much emphasis has been placed on the ability to read and write arguments (Varghese & Abraham, 1998). When reading arguments, learners should be able to judge, evaluate and respond to propositions presented in the written texts. When writing arguments, learners also develop their ability to assert their stance in their argumentative writing. Stance refers to the writer's point of view as a position that he or she takes regarding an issue (Chandrasegaran & Kong, 2006). In positioning their stance, they are expected to provide adequate support to increase the credibility of their claims or arguments in their written texts (Wu & Allison, 2003; Schleppegrell, 2004; Hyland, 2005a; Chandrasegaran & Kong, 2006; Qin & Karabacak, 2010). Many researchers thus believe that stance-taking and the use of stance-support strategies are the two key discourse acts in argumentative writing, a text type used to evaluate and critique propositions made in academic settings.

At the tertiary level of education, undergraduates are expected to be able to write arguments in most undergraduate courses across different disciplines. When language instructors assign academic essays, be it in the form of short or long written assignments, they expect well-argued responses to address the significant issue of a given topic (Lee, Wong, Chan & Mardziah Hayati Abdullah, 2014). Other academic writing tasks, such as term papers and theses also invite similar expectations. The undergraduates will have to amass adequate facts and make appropriate summaries to state their stance in order to be effectively 'heard'. In conveying their views, these undergraduates are also expected to apply the rhetorical structure of argumentative writing to organize their thoughts. In addition, they should apply the relevant linguistic manifestations and other language conventions so that the arguments are effectively conveyed.

The importance of mastering argumentative skills via the written form in English is especially relevant when the second language (L2) learners make the transition from the public schools (where English is studied as a subject) to the university (where the

medium of instruction is often in English). Being able to read and understand argumentative writing, and to write in a similar vein in English are certainly expected skills at the tertiary level of education regardless of the degree of prior exposure that learners have before they enter university. In a sense, learners are presumed to be able to accelerate the development of writing skills to perform at a level to show the targeted scholarly language ability.

For those who aim to enter foreign universities, learners would additionally need to prove their ability to write argumentatively when they sit for international qualifying language tests such as Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), or International English Language Testing Systems (IELTS). In both the tests, learners' writing ability is assessed through the writing of short argumentative essays (Jakeman & Mc Dowell, 2001). In other words, learners have to show a certain level of writing maturity in which they are able to take a stance and make concrete arguments through logical development and also provide support by giving relevant evidence or premises.

In light of its importance in the lives of scholars and tertiary level students, argumentative writing well deserves research attention in the continual search for better understanding and teaching of the communicative act. In doing literature review on argumentative writing for this intended research, several relevant studies (Gleason, 1999; Silver, 2003; Hyland, 2005a; Biber, 2006; Chandrasegaran, 2006; Chandrasegaran & Kong, 2006; Jamaluddin, Ho, & Chee, 2007; Wu, 2008) have been found to attest to the importance of stance-taking and the use of stance-support. These studies have examined how writers express their stance towards particular issues. For example, stance expressions can be manifested through the use of certain classes of verbs (Thompson & Ye, 1991; Hunston, 1995; Hyland, 2002), adverbials (Biber & Finegan, 1988; Biber et al., 1999; Conrad & Biber, 2000), hedges (Hyland, 1996, 1998a, 1998b), metadiscourse features (Crismore, Markkanen, & Steffensen, 1993; Hyland, 2004a; 2005b; Hyland & Tse, 2004) and lexico-grammatical features (Biber, 2006). In terms of stance-support strategies, several research studies can be identified that give such information (Chandrasegaran, 2006; Chandrasegaran & Kong, 2006; Chandrasegaran, 2008; Chandrasegaran, 2013) and in addition studies are also available to elucidate the impact of these strategies on argumentative writing (Ting & Tee, 2008; Chandrasegaran, 2013).

Despite the importance of argumentative writing, the problem faced by many ESL learners in the university is the lack of ability to frame and develop effective arguments. This lack of ability affected the learners' overall writing performance. The learner writers' continuous production of unsatisfactory argumentative essays could be related to the lack of instruction in argumentative skills, and insufficient exposure of instructional materials in stance and stance-support strategies. In fact, this study began with the researcher's observation and experience in teaching writing courses for 19 years. The prepared writing curriculum at the university appears to be skewed towards providing undergraduates with general writing guidelines for the writing of a variety of academic essays, among which is the argumentative essay.

As a result over a period of 14 weeks in a semester for a compulsory writing course, the language instructor has to teach different genres of academic writing with insufficient attention on the learning of argumentative writing. After the general writing course, students are not offered a course that is specifically on argumentative writing to further develop this important aspect of writing. With such limited exposure and resources, many undergraduate students are inadequately prepared to deliver effective written arguments that are well structured, strongly positioned in terms of stance, and supported by credible evidence to provide a firm scaffolding for the argument.

The learners' lack of ability in developing arguments could also be related to the selection of writing textbooks. The academic writing textbooks that are used to teach the compulsory writing course show emphasis basically on general academic writing skills. Most of these textbooks outline and teach the stages of the writing process which are prewriting, writing a first draft, revising, editing and writing the final copy. Apart from the writing process, the textbooks also present the steps in writing good paragraphs of an essay which include the introductory paragraphs, followed by the developmental and concluding paragraphs. Other aspects of the textbooks are sentence skills, the finer points of grammar, mechanics, word use and punctuation. These textbooks give focus on the different text types of writing. Therefore, the textbooks contain several patterns of essay development, such as process, cause and effect, comparison and contrast, division and classification, and lastly argumentation. Not a single textbook focuses mainly on argumentative writing. As a result, the explanations given on the use of stance and stance-support are limited. Exercises to practise both argumentative skills are also limited. Some of the textbooks used by the language instructors include those by Meyers (2005) "Gateways to Academic Writing", Oshima and Hogue (2007) "Writing Academic English", Langan (2008) "College Writing Skills" and Smalley, Ruetten and Kozyrev (2001) "Refining Composition Skills: Rhetoric and Grammar".

Based on the lack of writing exposure to argumentative skills, these L2 learner writers face problems to develop their arguments, in particular, stating and supporting stance in argumentative writing such as in essays, assignments, project papers, or theses. The lack of these two skills may in turn affect the learner writers' writing performance. Argumentative writing as a form of academic writing is particularly problematic for non-native writers (Ferris, 1994a; 1994b; Thompson, 2001; Cisotto, Longo, & Novello, 2012). Therefore, this study generally aimed to investigate the use of stance and stance-support in argumentative writing and also their relationship with writing performance.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

It is posited that many students lack adequate exposure to and practice of argumentative writing resulting in a myriad of problems that continue to affect their writing performance. Malaysian students have difficulties to write argumentative essays in English (Botley, 2014). According to Botley, these students face a set of problems when they are expected to use the rhetorical practices. In this research, the

focus is on stance-taking and stance-support strategies seen as two salient fundamental corner stones in argumentative writing. It is believed that through the investigation of stance-taking and stance-support strategies, writing instructors can benefit from the insights with possible improvement in pedagogical skills to address the problems associated with stance-taking and stance-support strategies in argumentative writing.

Furthermore, it has been found that research on the use of stance in writing has so far focused more on experienced writers (Hyland, 2001; Silver, 2003; White, 2003; Chang & Schleppegrell, 2011). Investigation on the use of stance by less experienced undergraduate writers is very much neglected. O'Brien (1995) attributed this to the lack of an authentic audience as such essays are written mainly for assessment by examiners. Furthermore, there is a lack of research in the use of stance-support strategies in ESL learners' writing. To the best knowledge of this writer, the most current research on stance-support moves was conducted by Chandrasegaran (2013) in Singapore who focused on whether instruction in the key genre practices of expository writing and thinking processes could facilitate positive changes in the number and type of stance-support moves. No such studies on stance-support strategies have been conducted in the Malaysian context to date.

Therefore, it is maintained that such research in the Malaysian context is lacking and would be helpful to instructors and especially undergraduates who need to overcome problems in argumentative writing especially in doing term papers. Obtaining a reasonable grade in their term paper is mandatory for students to graduate. Those who fail will need to repeat the course or worse still, may have to stay back for another semester to finish the job satisfactorily. In their writing, students inevitably are required to analyze and evaluate content knowledge, position themselves in disciplinary debate and articulate their stand in a congruent manner. In the context of the problems explained, it is important that more research should be conducted on undergraduate writing with the aim of unravelling the roots of identified problems, in particular those that pertain to stance and stance-support in argumentative writing. Furthermore, problems are compounded when mixed ability students are in the same class. The relationship between ability level and writing performance is an intriguing phenomenon that warrants study. It raises questions as to what are the differences between groups of writers and how the experienced writer may be able to exhibit model skills which could help the less experienced writers as they interact in the classroom. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the writing performance of the first and final year undergraduate writers (who were regarded to have different writing exposure and training in writing) in terms of their use of stance and stance-support in argumentative writing.

Earlier investigations have focused on a limited number of linguistic items that concern some aspects of evaluative meaning. For instance, Allison (1994) felt that the students' use of 'always' represented a preliminary effort towards understanding the writers' opinions in Hong Kong undergraduates' writing. Intaraprawat and Steffensen's (1995) study of linguistic items showed that good and poor writers made use of metadiscourse devices including validity markers such as hedges and

emphatics differently. They found that both types of writers used hedges frequently. However, good writers tended to use more modals and grammatically complex structures to hedge; whereas poor writers used appended structures such as 'I think' and 'I believe'. McEnery and Kifle (2002) used a corpus to compare the list of lexical items identified as conveying epistemic meanings in argumentative essays by native and non-native speakers. Their study showed that epistemic meanings were conveyed by word classes other than modal verbs, although the latter category was often the only one recommended by textbook writers as the important carrier of such meanings. Other studies on the importance of evaluating linguistic features in academic writing have been conducted by Hunston and Thompson (2000), Hyland (2005a) and Martin and White (2005). Similarly, this study was conducted to review the role of language in the interaction of writers and readers by investigating how writers constructed their stance in relation to the topic for discussion and how their messages were conveyed to the readers through the use of lexico-grammatical features focusing on both the lexical items and grammatical structures.

In view of the problems, there is a need for new verifications in updated studies. It is important to analyze the language use and knowledge that contribute to effective argumentative writing among ESL learners in terms of how Malaysian undergraduate writers, in particular, the experienced (senior undergraduates) and less experienced writers (junior undergraduates), use lexico-grammatical features to express stance and also how these writers use support strategies in their argumentative essays. Obtaining more evidence to the knowledge base on stance and stance-support in argumentative writing would be a necessary endeavour in the continual search for new solutions and insights to improve the writing situation.

1.3 General Objective and Scope of the Study

The general objective of this study was to investigate the types of stance-support strategies used by these undergraduate writers in their English argumentative essays. The results provided empirical evidence on the most commonly used to the least used stance-support strategies in the argumentative essays. The analysis also provided insightful evidence on the learners' stance-support behavior in their writing with possible conjectures to account for the behavior.

This study also aimed to examine English argumentative essays in terms of stance and stance-support written by selected Malaysian undergraduates, comprising both junior and senior undergraduate writers. Identifying the stance and stance-support expressed by the junior and senior undergraduate writers provided an appropriate authentic research context for the understanding of how the writers of different abilities manifest their stance in order to convey their messages to their readers, and how efficiently they were able to use stance-support to strengthen their stance in argumentative essays. Further correlation was also done to investigate whether there was a relationship between the use of stance and stance-support, and overall writing performance between the two groups of undergraduate writers. A comparison of writing performance by both groups of writers in this study can shed light on whether their extended writing experience over the years by being exposed to the

English language courses and also training in writing theses, projects and assignments throughout their program of study had any impact on their argumentative writing performance (based on the scores obtained in their argumentative essays). The results provided evidence for writing instructors to gauge writing growth of the learner writers which might have implications on curriculum planning on writing courses at the university.

Another objective of this study was to investigate the lexico-grammatical features used to express stance in the argumentative essays of the junior and senior undergraduate writers. Investigating the lexico-grammatical features used by these writers gave highlights on the learners' linguistic repertoire of these features. The less commonly used lexico-grammatical features could be emphasized to learner writers to widen their choice of expressions. The types and meanings of the less used lexico-grammatical features could be consciously taught to these writers so that they can use these features in stance-taking according to context. In other words, instructors can use the data analyzed in this study as a useful classroom resource.

This study further investigated the awareness of stance-support strategies of these undergraduate writers. Investigating the knowledge base of stance-support strategies of these undergraduates explained their awareness of such strategies in their own essays. The results provided evidence for writing instructors to moderate their pedagogical application on how to deal with the strategies that had been neglected by learner writers. Finally, correlation was also done between the awareness of stance-support strategies and the use of stance-support strategies for both groups of writers.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions anchored on the comparative responses and writing performance of two groups of undergraduate writers (labelled as junior and senior undergraduate writers according to the year of study). Specifically, they addressed the following:

1. What are the types of stance-support strategies used by the junior and senior undergraduate writers in their argumentative writing?
2. To what extent do the junior and senior undergraduate writers express their stance and stance-support in their argumentative writing?
3. To what extent does the use of stance and stance-support correlate with the writing performance of the junior and senior undergraduate writers in their argumentative writing?
4. What are the lexico-grammatical features used by the junior and senior undergraduate writers to express stance in their argumentative writing?
5. To what extent are the junior and senior undergraduate writers aware of stance-support strategies in their argumentative writing?
6. To what extent does the awareness of stance-support strategies correlate with the use of these strategies for the junior and senior undergraduate writers in their argumentative writing?

1.5 Theoretical Framework

To give direction to the study, this research draws on the social cognitive theory used by Flower (1994) to explain the act of writing and the model of argument by Toulmin et al. (1984) that elaborates on the rhetorics of an argument. The social cognitive theory draws on two other theoretical perspectives related to the cognitive model of writing and social perspective on writing. The cognitive and social processes that writers typically undergo to write effective arguments are accounted for in Toulmin's model of argument. The relevant information is further detailed below.

1.5.1 Social Cognitive Theory

The cognitive model of writing views writing as a problem-solving, goal-setting, and decision-making activity. The writer goes through the processes as he or she plans, translates the thoughts into print and subsequently revises the written text (Flower & Hayes, 1981). An important feature of the cognitive writing model is the mental process that embraces the writer during the composing process. This mental process is guided by the writer's own "growing network" of goals (Flower & Hayes, 1981, p. 366). The writer sets purposeful goals, both high-level goals and supporting sub-goals. These goals may be revised or reformulated into new goals during the act of writing.

It appears that good writers are more guided by high level rhetorical goals (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Hayes, 1996). A high level goal reveals the writer's intention for the whole text to produce a specific effect on the reader. To attain the high level goal, the writer uses this goal as the reference point for developing sub-goals to guide the selection and organization of meanings and language use during writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981).

A high level goal could lead to successful persuasion of the readers when the writers put forth the stance in their writing. The sub-goals can be effectively used in the form of appropriate stance-support strategies that lend support to the stance taken. In short, successful writing as explained by the cognitive model is the result of the writing being navigated by a hierarchy of high level and sub-goals set by the writer.

While writing is cognitive in orientation, it is also a socially-situated activity. As a social activity, writers become participants in a communicative event (Paltridge, 1997) for the purpose of accomplishing social goals. To accomplish the social goals, the writing of a certain type of text has to involve peculiar ways of thinking, organization of meanings and language use that are recognized as typical for that text-type. In short, this social perspective of writing sees writing as a social interaction to meet the rhetorical purpose and audience (Hyland, 2000).

Widdowson (1980) and Raimes (1983) had emphasized on the importance of the reader's role in the communicative act of writing. The manner of writing accommodates anticipated audience and the writer's purpose. In this study which focuses on argumentative writing, the undergraduate writers communicate with the readers via an adopted stance that is consistent throughout an argumentative text which is supported by evidence or logical reasoning. In the context of establishing a reader-writer communicative relationship, learning to write argumentative essays translates also into a process of socialization with attendance to cultural norms and practices of the writing community.

The integration of the cognitive and social perspectives to explain the act of writing produces a socio-cognitive theory which was advocated by Flower (1994), who became a leading proponent of the 'new' movement. Flower's socio-cognitive theory of writing shows that there is an interaction between the cognitive processes engaged by the writer and the social that combines cultural contexts of writing into the experience. In other words, the cognitive and the social are co-constructs which affect each other. On the one hand, social and cultural contexts can provide a link to the cognitive processes of the writer. On the other hand, cognition becomes the mediator as the writer learns how to interpret the writing situation, select performance criteria and use different writing strategies. To promote maximum writing efficiency, both the writer and reader must understand the interaction between these two forces.

This interaction between the cognitive processes and the social that include cultural contexts is illustrated in a revised model of the writing process (Figure 1.1). This revised model called a model of discourse construction illustrates how cognition is "embedded" in the context by using the collaborative nature of discourse between the writer and the reader for a rhetorical purpose (Flower et al., 1990, p. 12). In the main, the figure shows how both the writer and reader construct meanings through several forces represented by two circles. The outer circle of the figure embeds forces such as those from the social context, discourse conventions and language. The inner circle reveals the rhetorical purpose and goals as well as activated knowledge for the performance of a particular task. Operating within these forces, both the writer and reader interact with each other to construct mental representations of the meanings conveyed.

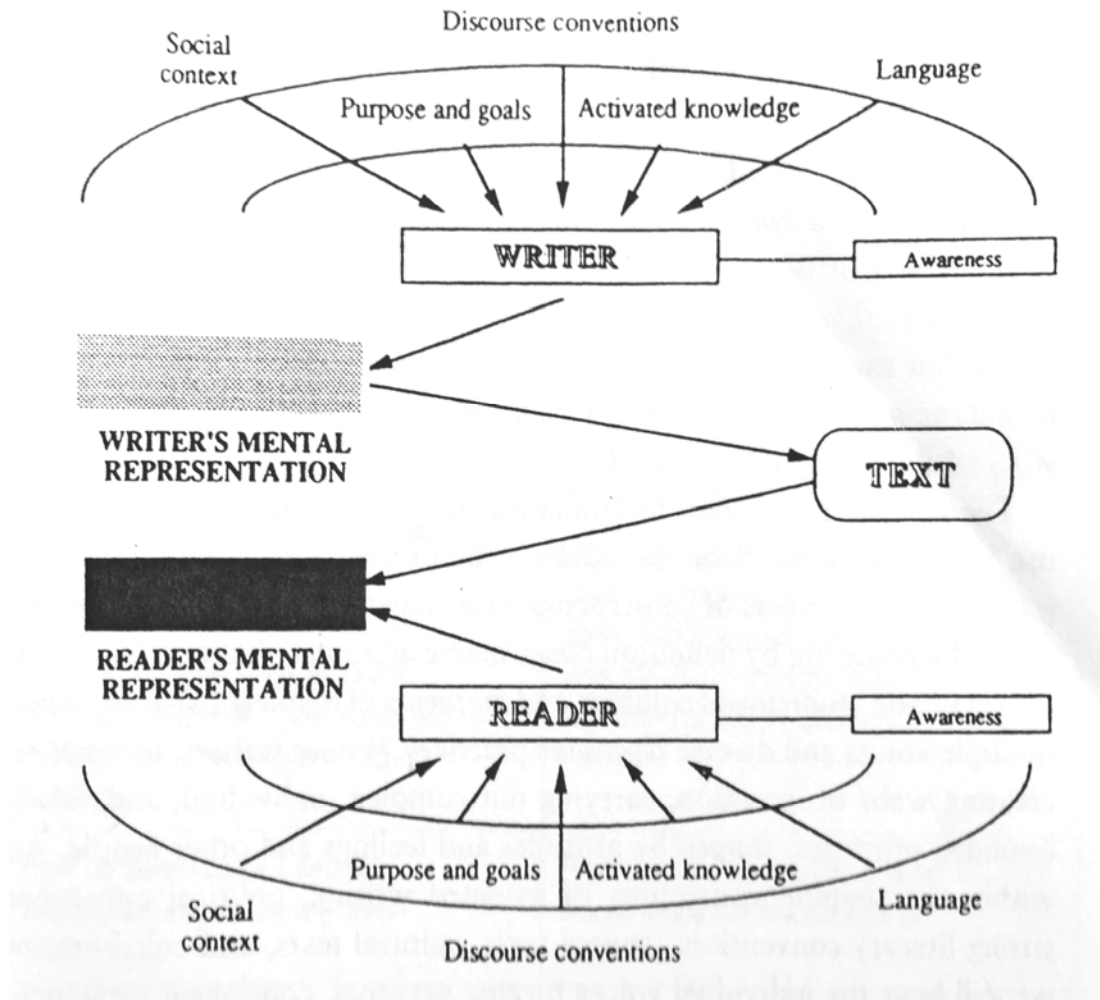


Figure 1.1 : A Model of Discourse Construction (Flower et al., 1990, p. 12)

Finally, the awareness of the writer's and reader's own constructive processes, the forces operating on the mental representation and within the representation are seen to be relative. Another important element is that of consciousness or awareness that impinges on the constructive processes experienced by the writer (Schmidt, 1994). When consciousness is heightened, it is associated with metacognition awareness that activates the conscious control of cognitive activity (Brown, 1980). As Flavell (1979) puts it, metacognition is the unique human ability to reflect upon one's knowledge and control one's thoughts. However, based on the model of discourse construction, awareness is not a uniform experience in the sense that some writers and readers may be highly conscious of their own constructive processes and the associated forces while some may not be.

Nonetheless, this model can serve as a conceptual map to account for the writing process although it does not explain how writers navigate their writing (Flower, 1994). Writing in fact is a complex process. It is multi-layered and recursive, besides being influenced by various forces as represented in the two circles in the model. Flower (1994) sees writing as a complex literate act that forces writers to make and

negotiate meanings towards achieving goals and expectations. The interaction of cognitive processes and social as well as cultural factors creates the structure for meanings that evolves during the process of writing. This literate act can be successful if writers possess: a) sufficient knowledge of the conventions and expectations of the discourse community, and b) a repertoire of problem-solving strategies to overcome writing difficulties during the writing task (Flower, 1994).

This understanding of the writing process based on the social cognitive theory of writing is used to underpin this study as it has relevance to stance taking and stance-support in argumentative writing. Asserting and justifying stance are tools used by writers in argumentative writing to communicate ideas, frame an argument and understand readers' expectations and needs (Flower, 1994). To write effective argumentative writing, cognitive processing is required as the writer processes the challenging communication task in terms of knowledge of topic, the ability to weigh both sides of an issue, perspective-taking, and the use of literate language, including complex syntax to express one's ideas effectively (Crowhurst, 1980, Knudson, 1992a; Riley & Reedy, 2005).

As persuasion is the crux of argumentative writing created in the symbiotic reader-writer relationship, writers avail tools that can help them to persuade their readers to accept their stance and stance-support. However, the writers need to exercise caution in how their stance is expressed and how stance-support is used to meet the purpose of argumentative writing. To conclude, stance-taking and stance-support in argumentative writing are intertwined with the social and rhetorical practices of academia. These interrelated practices reinforce the validity of Flower's (1994) model of discourse construction that situates firmly on how writers and readers construct knowledge and meanings together in the context of a writing discourse.

1.5.2 Toulmin's Model of Argument

Toulmin's model of argument (Toulmin, Rieke & Janik, 1984) is widely accepted as the most suitable model for coping with daily arguments (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1999). In addition, the model lucidly spells out the fundamental organizational structure of an argument across academic disciplines (Fulkerson, 1996; Ramage, Bean & Johnson, 2001; Lunsford, 2002). Further, it has been claimed to stand out for its practicality and accuracy in the description of an argument (Nimehchisalem & Mukundan, 2011). This model suitably acts as a tool for the analysis of argumentative writing which includes the features of writer's stance and stance support (Chandrasegaran & Kong, 2006). As such, this model was selected in this study for analyzing the structure of arguments, that is, identifying the manner propositions are forwarded to serve the stance taken and the ancillary stance-support. Figure 1.2 shows the structure of argument which includes claim, ground, warrant, backing, rebuttal and qualifier.

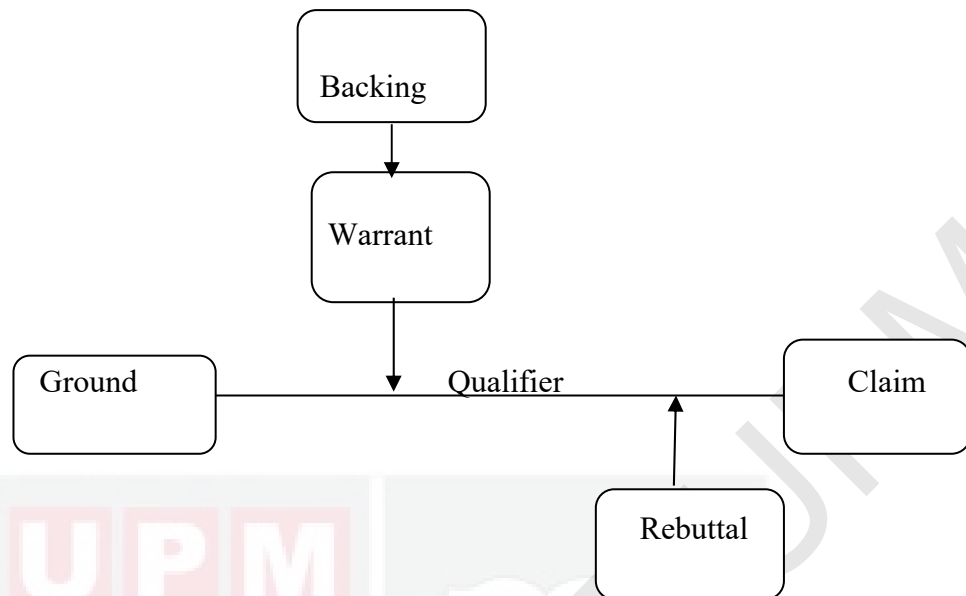


Figure 1.2 : Toulmin’s Model of Argument (Toulmin, Rieke & Janik, 1984, p. 83)

As shown in figure 1.2, a writer’s stance on the topic of argument is called a “claim”, asserted as the starting point of the argument. The claim addresses questions such as “What exactly are we discussing?” and “Where do we stand on this issue?” The claim is usually defended by statements serving various support roles such as the “ground”, “warrant” and “backing” (Toulmin, Rieke & Janik, 1984, p. 26). The ‘ground’ refers to the type of evidence required if a claim is to be accepted as solid and reliable. Examples of ground are facts, personal experience, analogy and anecdotes. The ‘warrant’ supports the link between the claim and ground. This link helps the reader to accept the ‘ground’ as a genuine support of a particular claim.

The ‘backing’ as presented in Toulmin’s model, is seen as additional evidence that supports a claim making it more acceptable to the reader. Another characteristic feature of argument, ‘rebuttal’, can be regarded as an additional strengthening support of the claim. By using a rebuttal, the writer is seen to demonstrate an awareness of the counter-arguments as he explores the issue with thoroughness and also being aware of the writing conventions of an academic argument. The ‘qualifier’ is used to modify the strength of the claim and ground. Examples of qualifiers include ‘necessarily’, ‘probably’ and ‘strongly’. In this study, support propositions in Toulmin’s model, which are, ‘ground’, ‘warrant’, ‘backing’, ‘rebuttal’ and ‘qualifier’ in relation to a writer’s claim (or stance) were identified by way of analyzing the clauses that indicated stance and stance-support in the argumentative essays of the undergraduate writers. This method of identification is further explained in chapter 3.

1.6 Conceptual Framework of the Study

The conceptual framework of this study was based on the social cognitive theory of writing (Flower, 1994), which had been explained in detail in Chapter 1. The

conceptual framework outlines how this study is conceptualized by first viewing writing as a cognitive activity which involves mental processing (Figure 1.3). As writing is cognitive in nature, it is also socially situated. As Kostouli (2005, p. 18) put it, cognition was “socially situated”. In practice, the theory motivates an ongoing interaction between the writers and readers.

This study is further based on the model of argument (Toulmin et al., 1984). This model of argument provides a guide for identifying propositions that serve the role of stance (or known as a ‘claim’) and those that serve as stance-support (also known as the ‘ground’, ‘warrant’, ‘backing’ and ‘rebuttal’).

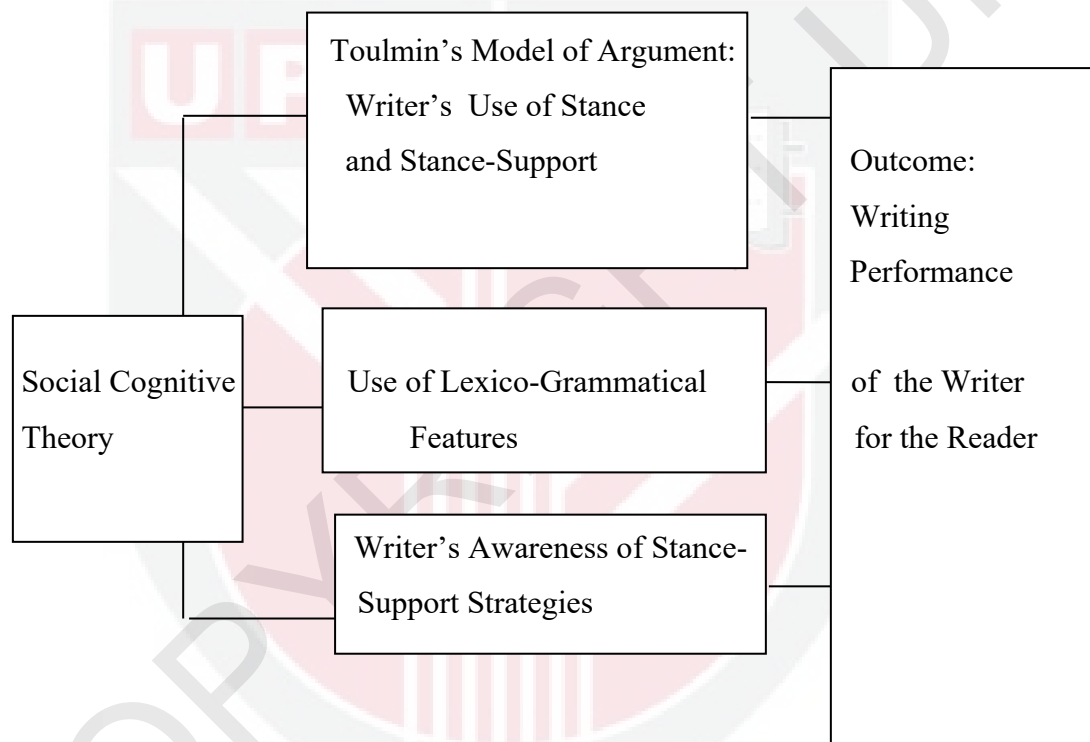


Figure 1.3 : Conceptual Framework

Both the social cognitive theory by Flower (1994) and model of argument by Toulmin et al. (1984) centre on the writer having a rhetorical purpose in mind and a goal of an essay (outcome). As persuasion is the main purpose of argumentative writing, the writer has to persuade the reader through the use of stance (or claim) and stance-support (or reasoning) for the topic of discussion (Inch & Warnick, 2010). The writer should know when and how to use stance and stance-support in the argumentative writing task as described in Toulmin's model of argument.

The writer should also have the ability to use appropriate language expressions to express the elements of arguments. These elements of an argument are usually expressed through lexico-grammatical features (Biber, 2006) and other linguistic expressions such as hedges and boosters (Holmes, 1982; ; Hyland, 1994, 1996,

1998a, 1998b; 1999; Salager-Meyer, 1997; Dafou-Miline, 2008; Shengming, 2009), reporting verbs (Thompson & Ye, 1991; Hunston, 1995; Hyland, 2002) and adverbials (Biber & Finegan, 1988; Biber et al., 1999; Conrad & Biber, 2000; Ai, 2012).

The awareness of the writer is also important in determining the types of stance-support strategies used. The writer can be influenced by individual differences such as the level of learning exposure. Therefore, two groups of junior and senior learner writers were investigated. Their writing performance can be affected by the years of study and exposure to the English language courses at the tertiary level. In this study, the final year undergraduates could have a different level of writing performance as compared to that of the first year learner writers who just enrolled for one English course during the investigation. Their knowledge of stance-taking and stance-support strategies in argumentative writing can also be influenced by the years of study and English language exposure.

As outlined in the conceptual framework, the outcome for argumentative writing is when the writer weighs both sides of an issue. He or she articulates a position (stance), uses appropriate language expressions to state stance, develops arguments (stance-support) by using different types of stance-support strategies and shows awareness of the stance-support strategies. This type of writing is also characterized by social interactions by persuading the reader to accept the writer's stance and stance-support as reasonable and valid.

1.7 Significance of the Study

It is hoped that the findings of this study which focus on academic writing, specifically argumentative writing, of undergraduate writers can provide insights into the field of applied linguistics related to the literature on writing. These insights can explain the use of stance and stance-support strategies in student writings. In addition, the data analysis can contribute to the knowledge of how undergraduate writers select linguistic resources to advocate their stance in their essays.

Identifying the stance-support strategies can reveal the support strategies commonly employed by the undergraduate writers. Instructions can then be based on the strategies the learners already know, leaving with more class time for refining the ways these known strategies are deployed in an argument. With the less commonly used strategies identified, the learners can be encouraged to practise using them to further empower them in making their arguments more convincing.

The findings of this study can serve as a platform for writing instructors to improve their writing instruction, plan instructional materials and design classroom activities for argumentative essay writing in English. Studying the way the undergraduate writers promote their stance and stance-support can help the instructors to understand how stance is expressed in an argumentative essay. Such evidence of

stance expressions can serve as informed input for guiding the learning of argumentative writing at the tertiary level. As stated by Chandrasegaran and Kong (2006), uncovering the learners' capabilities enables the teacher to build on their socially acquired stance-taking as a means of initiating them into the practices of written arguments.

Furthermore, the analysis of the lexico-grammatical features in relation to stance can alert the writing instructors to the vocabulary and grammar that they can emphasize to the undergraduate writers. Appropriate lexico-grammatical features are needed for the efficient expression of stance in their writing. Chandrasegaran and Kong (2006) suggest that written expressions can be improved when the instructions on stance-taking are given in tandem with the instructions on linguistic features. Then, future undergraduate writers can hone their skills in the use of the linguistic features to express their stance more effectively.

In this study, investigating the extent of awareness of the undergraduate writers regarding the stance-support strategies used can reveal their familiarity or otherwise with these stance-support strategies. In addition, investigating the relationship between the awareness of stance-support strategies and use of these strategies of both groups of writers can reveal whether the writers' knowledge of these strategies is put into use in their argumentative essays or otherwise. This awareness can help ESL instructors to understand the learners' behavior of using stance-support strategy in their argumentative essay writing.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations in this study. First, the genre under investigation in this study was limited to argumentative essay writing only. Other types of writing genres such as theses, academic textbooks and research articles were not investigated. Therefore, the analysis of stance and stance-support strategies was limited to argumentative essay writing only.

Second, the prompt or topic for the essay writing was controlled. The undergraduate writers did not have a choice in selecting the topic for the argumentative essay writing task. The given topic could affect the arguments used in defending their points of view as a different topic could result in the use of different types of stance-support strategies. As stated by Chandrasegaran and Kong (2006), more varied stance-support strategies were possible when a topic engaged the interest of the learners.

Third, this study focused on the undergraduate writers only. It is possible that a study on post-graduate writers may yield different results for stance and stance-support due to the latter's more advanced discourse knowledge and content. According to Chandrasegaran and Kong (2006), investigating the writing of learners on a range

topics can be affected by the learners' background, language proficiency level, topic interest, topic knowledge, socio-economic background and gender.

As a conclusion, the stance-support strategies investigated in this study based on the types of strategies used in Chandrasegaran and Kong's study (2006) may not be exhaustive. While they are deemed adequate to represent the main repertoire of stance-support strategies in argumentative writing in this study, there exists the possibility of further extension if there is a research focus on its explication.

1.9 Operational Terms

In research, it is important to operationally define terms that are considered central in the manner of design and data collection. These terms are:

Stance

According to Chandrasegaran and Kong (2006), stance is viewed from the writer's point of view as a position that he or she takes regarding an issue. The writer's position, in Toulmin's model of argumentation, is the writer's claim. This claim then becomes the initial stage of an argument (Toulmin, Rieke, & Janik, 1984). In this study, the terms 'stance', 'point of view', 'position' and 'claim' are similar in meaning and can be used interchangeably.

The term 'stance' in this study is also used to mean 'attitudinal stance' (Conrad & Biber, 2000). For Hunston and Thompson (2000), 'evaluation' is closely connected to the writer's attitude. He or she usually addresses his or her viewpoint or feelings about the propositions that he or she talks about. Hyland (2005a) postulates that 'stance' expresses a voice in the text which shows how the writer conveys his judgment on and commitment to an issue. These qualities are incorporated into the operationalization of 'stance'.

Stance-Support

Stance-support in this study refers to a proposition or a set of propositions used by the writer to convince the reader of his or her claim or stance (Chandrasegaran & Kong, 2006). Propositions are used as stance-support if they serve the function of reason or "ground" (Toulmin et al., 1984, p.26) to support the writer's claim. The reasons provided are usually broad base (Troyka & Hesse, 2009). Chandrasegaran (2008, p.244) uses the term "the support claim" that is considered as synonymous to the term stance-support. The main function of stance-support is to give commitment to the truth of the stance taken (Chandrasegaran & Kong, 2006).

Stance-Support Strategy

The term 'stance-support strategy' branches from the umbrella term of stance-support. Strategies refer to identifiable uses that operate to persuade the reader to accept the writer's stance or position as valid (Chandrasegaran & Kong, 2006; Chandrasegaran, 2013). Chandrasegaran and Kong (2006) operationalize eight stance-support strategies which are adopted in this study. These strategies involved are the use of :

1. the personal opinion
2. the factual statement
3. observation of events in the writer's life
4. hypothesized situations based on a claim
5. appeals to reader's emotions
6. anticipations of the reader's opposing view
7. analogies which show similarity to another situation
8. reference to source of authority.

One additional stance-support strategy, elaboration based on a claim, was also adopted from a later study conducted by Chandrasegaran (2013).

Awareness

Awareness plays an important role in second language acquisition, which is often associated with learning (Schmidt, 1994). Learning to write involves knowing how to construct knowledge to recognize the communicative and purposeful features of academic genres (Hyland, 2005a). In this sense, genre awareness suggests metacognitive awareness which refers to the ability to know when and how knowledge and strategies can be applied (Schraw & Dennison, 1994). For this study which investigates how undergraduate writers write their academic texts, in particular, argumentative writing, it is necessary to know to what extent these writers use awareness in their writing.

Argumentative Writing

Different terms are used to refer to this kind of writing which argues a case: exposition (Leonhard, 2002; Chandrasegaran & Kong, 2006); persuasive writing (Fawcett & Sandberg, 2000; Meyer, 2005); opinion essay (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1982; Oshima & Hogue, 2007). For this study, the term argumentative writing is used throughout this study.

Although the terminology differs, the central purpose of argumentative writing is to convince the readers to agree with the writers or to be open to the stance or position on a debatable topic (Chandrasegaran & Kong 2006; Troyka & Hesse, 2009, Liss & Davis, 2012) adopted by the writers. To make clear arguments, the writers have to demonstrate their stance clearly. In the event, the writers use sufficient and relevant

support to strengthen their stance for a more convincing piece of argumentative writing.

Junior Undergraduate Writers

The junior undergraduates were those who had just enrolled in their basic degree programs in a Malaysian public university selected as the research site. They were in either their first or second semester of their programs. They were just enrolled in a three credit English language course (3 contact hours per week). As a result, they were just beginning to experience one English course only which was a compulsory English speaking course as required by the university.

Senior Undergraduate Writers

The senior undergraduates were those who were in their third or fourth semester in the same Malaysian public university with the junior undergraduate writers. They were pursuing an elective English course, to be taken only after they had completed at least six credits hours of English language courses as stipulated by the university for graduation. The compulsory courses were oral interaction skills and academic writing.

1.10 Summary

In sum, this chapter has discussed the background, the statement of the problem, the significance of the study in relation to the research questions and the limitations of the study. The theoretical framework has also been explained to support the research paradigm relevant to the study. The conceptual framework of this study forms the next section. A list of definitions of terms is also given in this chapter to explicate the terms used meaningfully in the context of the study.

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