

A Formative Assessment Perspective: The impact of Targeted Instructional Teaching & Efficient feedback in Argumentative Essay Writing on ESL Learners

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Abstract

This research aims to highlight that ESL learner have gaps in their strategies of argumentative essay writing skills. It hampers their ability to communicate their claim of argument effectively. Different students stand at different points on the continuum of effective writing: organization, composing & literary devices, elaborating and using conventions (Freeman, 2000) . This research emphasizes that argumentative essay writing skills of ESL Learners can be improved with the help of explicit instructional teaching (Torgesen et al., 2007) and efficient and detailed feedback in formative assessment perspective based on constructivism theory of learning (Kim, 2005). It aims to document improvement in students' developing an argument out of the whole range of generic writing skills with the help of explicit Instructional and ongoing formative performance assessment with detailed feedback pro forma. For this reason, students are required to keep portfolio, to develop an insight with the help of direct, explicit model of instruction to judge their mistake and monitor their track of development. A sample population of 15 graduate females is selected out of 50 students after a level screening test; the progress of students is computed by using spearman's correlation between scaled scores on essay with the help of developed rubric. Moreover, correlation between every other two points in a row is also calculated to show the progress path of students.

Keywords: formative assessment, generic writing skills, portfolio, band descriptors

Introduction:

Writing, according to genre theory writing is "goal oriented social practice" (Martin & Rose, 2003; Martin & White, 2005). This feature proclaims the underpinning that how the writing practices has been institutionalized in social and political context (Martin & Rose, 2008). Likewise, argumentative essay display learner's "critical thinking and development of an argument". Which can be acquired with the help of three components: establish a stance by the development of an argument (Bacha, 2010), second is logical placement of proposition and the third is to select relevant information from different resources and use it in the establishment of the particular stance in an essay (Wu, 2006). Unfortunately, only general advice in the form of guideline, usually provided in course books and in succinct feedback on students' essay by teachers (Mutch, 2003) is available. These methods have limitations and it is found that students have problems in applying these general guidelines to their specific writing context. (Lea, 1998). As swales recommends that students need explicit coaching to build up suitable content and formal schemata to come up the expectations of this genre (argumentative essays). Whereas, the formal schemata include rhetorical elements such as style, register and appropriate presentation of author's position. It means that all students should be taught argument development explicitly by using their previous schemata (which they had used at school) after adjusted for the genre required at university. Students are required to get awareness about the appropriate usage of format of argumentative essay writing. For this purpose, this research is based on explicit Instructional teaching. It has used British philosopher Stephen Toulmin six steps model of developing argument and feedback in the perspective of formative detailed feed.

According to Toulmin (1958) development of argument usually based on six parts. He used these terms to describe the steps:

"Data: The facts or evidence used to prove the argument

Claim: The statement being argued (a thesis)

Warrants: The general, hypothetical (and often implicit) logical statements that serve as bridges between the claim and the data.

Qualifiers: Statements that limit the strength of the argument or statements that propose the conditions under which the argument is true.

Rebuttals: Counter-arguments or statements indicating circumstances when the general argument does not hold true.

Backing: Statements that serve to support the warrants (i.e., arguments that don't necessarily prove the main point being argued, but which do prove the warrants are true.)" (Toulmin, 1958)

Moreover, explicit instructional teaching was made more effective for students with the help of detailed feedback pro forma (appendix=1) of their performance and explicit marking scheme for their self-awareness to understand their level of performance, to work out their deficiencies and monitor their progress to achieve the goal of efficient and effective writer. Students wrote their essay within a stipulated time of 35 minutes with a required word limit of 250-300 words then they were provided with detailed feedback on their write ups. After getting feedback students wrote their essay again with new insight and add it in their portfolio. Teacher only made it sure that student has practically understood the misconception in the work. Likewise there were also open ended comments with two approaches: correction with reason and correction for suggestion for improvement (Kim, 2005)

Literature Review:

Knowledge has been a perpetual quest of domain of learning. Constructivist learning theory takes knowledge as to construct meaning with an active interaction of reasoning faculty and experience (Kim, 2005). It leads learner towards discovery, based on negotiation with outside world (culture wisdom) (Jonassen, 1991). Similarly, Behavioral and cognitive learning theories stretches acquisition of knowledge and problem solving only at the level of reproduction and becomes inefficient for new situation. Likewise, literature based approaches for developing reading skills, process and product approaches for improving writing skills (Moyles, 1988) and latest philosophy behind textbooks contents and presentation sequence (O'Dell, 1990) in 20th century advocate constructivism as the most efficient theory of learning (Archer & Hughes, 2011) at advance level (Jonassen, 1991).

It is in accordance with the teaching and learning perspective proposed by Dewey (motivation and efficient experience of learning), Piaget (acquisition of knowledge as a result of strive of learner while achieving mental equilibrium by resolving conflict between her existing knowledge and new knowledge), Vygotsky 1978 (supporting guidance of mentor to achieve some complex skill successively) and Jerome Bruner 1966 (discovery learning). Constructivism is not a self- exhaustive new concept in itself, it takes its roots from behaviorism and cognitivism. It means that our learning is a shared meaning and acquired through a process of social negotiation and mutual cognitive approach (Boud, 2000) and knowledge acquisition for a new genre: argumentative essays can be possible with the help of examination, questioning, analysis of task and experience. This research explored the impact of constructive approach on learning organizational skills in argumentative essays learning with the help of explicit teaching methodology in an ESL classroom.

- What is the impact of constructive approach in explicit teaching methodology on ESL students' learning of organizational skills in writing an argumentative essay?

A change can be brought in learning process by understanding the true nature of acquisition of knowledge. This process is not only storing of information (behaviorism) or transmission (cognitivism). It is a "situated cognition" of social, cultural and economic context of learning (Kim, 2005). Students are required to put in effort to construct their own meaning while going through new experience of information. Hence, most of the constructivist theorist proposes that learners are required to construct their learning with the help of their previous information, social interaction and authentic learning task. They recommend extensive cooperative task, peer tutoring for the sake of having dialogue with one another to interpret the new information or problem. For an efficient interpreter, one needs to have intellectual skills or generative learning strategies that may be taught with the help of top down or bottom up method of teaching or learners acquire through peer dialogue to develop a stance or claim against an argumentative prompt of a given essay writing.

History has many process-product researches comprised on observation, experimental methodologies (selection of varieties of instructional procedures, administrating pre-post achievements), even teachers were trained with specific procedure of teaching for correlational studies to find out significant gains on native speakers from 1973 to 1983 (Wittrock,1986). It was found that in most of the cases students had higher level of achievement than controlled group, who were taught with explicit instruction techniques (Rosenshine, 1997).

Similarly, Jere Brophy and Thomas Good concluded in their chapter entitled "Teacher Behavior and Student Achievement" in the book named "Hand book of Research on Teaching" (Archer & Hughes, 2011) after dozens of studies that "... students learn more efficiently when their teachers first, structure new information for them relate it to what they already know and then monitor their performance and provide corrective feedback" (1986, p.366). Likewise, it has been supported that a structured, explicit and scaffolding approach of teaching has positive impact on student academic achievement. (Gage&Needles,1989; Rosenshine&Stevens,1986). It helps them to use the technical remarks most of the time given by teacher while checking an assign. All these studies have put the responsibility of teaching and monitoring of learning process on teacher. Sometimes it happens that teacher is not getting the desired result even after efficient teaching techniques due to lack of student's motivation and self- monitoring awareness; which is equally important for successful learning (Crook.1990) This research is using explicit instruction (systematic, relentless, engaging and successful) for addressing the learning gaps in ESL Learners in addition to conceptual framework of

constructivist learning theory.

- How can learners be made self-aware of their progress for effective learning?

History recommends decisive role of feedback in formative assessment for diagnosis and development in the learning track of learners (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Crooks, 1988; Hattie and Timperley, 2007 and Hattie, 2009). Shute (2008) defines feedback as “information communicated to the learner that is intended to modify his or her thinking or behavior for the purpose of improving learning” (p. 154). But there are certain researches which have reported negative effect of feedback rather than positive (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). It means that feedback is not magical in nature. One should be careful in using feedback by considering personality traits of learners, because different learners interpret feedback in various different angles. (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) Feedback should not go beyond the effective filter of learner; otherwise it will have destructive rather than constructive role on developmental progress of learners.

Boud, (2000) investigated native learners’ attitude towards feedback (Sadler, 2010) and made it clear that “unless students are able to use the feedback to produce improved work, through for example, re-doing the same assignment, neither they, nor those giving the feedback, will know that it has been effective”. So, this research has tried to find out the view of the recipient of the feedback in order to make it more authentic and reliable.

- How do ESL learners react to feedback practice?

For this purpose, this research takes Hattie & Timperley model (2012) discussed in his book “Visible Learning for Teachers” and Helen Timperley contribution on “Feedback” chapter to the compendium “International Guide to Student Achievement, 2013” by Hattie and Anderman to enhance the effective teaching and to ensure the achievement of learners in classroom. This research used interactive session as a part of feedback purposely to motivate students “to talk and listen, read, write and reflect” on their deficiency and find their own way for improvement and teacher worked as a facilitator and guide to monitor writing skills. Moreover this activity helped those students who learn in different way. (Barren & Wolf, 1996). This interaction helps in “making connections” for mutual discussion despite “solitary, individual enterprise” (Lyons, 1998).

Feedback is an efficient source to report students what they have, have not done and to give idea to students what they can do to improve their performance over time (Wiggen, 1998). Moreover, effective feedback strategies develop self-assessment skills. Kramp and Humphrey (1995) define self-assessment as “a complex, multi-dimensional activity in which students observe and judge their own performance in a way that influence and inform future learning and performance.

Methodology:

This research is using performance measures and portfolio for assessment because students learn better when they are engaged in active tasks

Sampling: 50 students applied to get admission in writing skills classes. They were required to pass level test. Twenty students of graduate level got admission in writing skills development class.

Reliability: The most important issue in performance based assessment is reliability in scoring students performance. Delandshere and Petrosky (1993) rightly opined that “consistency” in profiling scoring through a detailed clear articulated scoring rubric in the light of expected improvement in different cognitive sub skills, (Williamson & Hout, 1993) brings reliability in measuring instrument to carry out any research.

Validity: According to Crowl performance test has validity if test has capacity for “appropriate inference to be made about a specific group of people for specific purposes” (1996, p. 102). Similarly, usefulness of feedback is further checked by comparing performance against a developed criterion for scoring and feedback. It ensures progress of students by comparing the obtained list against the given scoring list for a clearer idea not only of their assessment but also of their expected level of performance and target of learning.

Timeliness for validity: This research has carefully managed the available time of a session into teaching and feedback. As literature shows that the efficiency of formative assessment on the enhancement of students’ performance depends on immediate response on the previous work before next work. This research has carefully estimated time demand of developing, administrating and evaluating students’ performances. Every student read out her composition and rest of the students comment on it and then final comments were given by teacher in already prepared feedback pro forma.

Reason for Portfolio: Students made portfolio of their essays. Teachers as well as students can integrate what they have learnt during the period of a course. It gives an insight to the student to judge what is correct and incorrect and develop connection across within the class and outside class learning experience and came to know that learning is a cumulative process (Courts & McInerney, 1993). Likewise, after every month students report their experience of learning with an intention to get students’ voice as a firsthand knowledge about what they have learned and experienced in academic programs to judge whether the results obtained directly are consistent with the result obtained.

Similarly, portfolio provides an opportunity to collect longitudinal information about individual students. Rather looking only at the beginning or at the end of program. Portfolio gives information what

happens along the way, students' experience and about their knowledge and skills. (Schilling & Schilling, 1998)

Discussion:

This research has used portfolios of students' work comprised on argumentative essays for assessment in order to "gather a body of evidence of one's learning and competence" (Lyon, 1998). It has systematically recorded the evidences with respect to objectives selected as standard for assessment (appendix:1). It aimed on tracking the improvement on the performance of students under the influence of targeted instructional teaching on the students' performance change (Ewell, 1991) to find answers of the following questions:

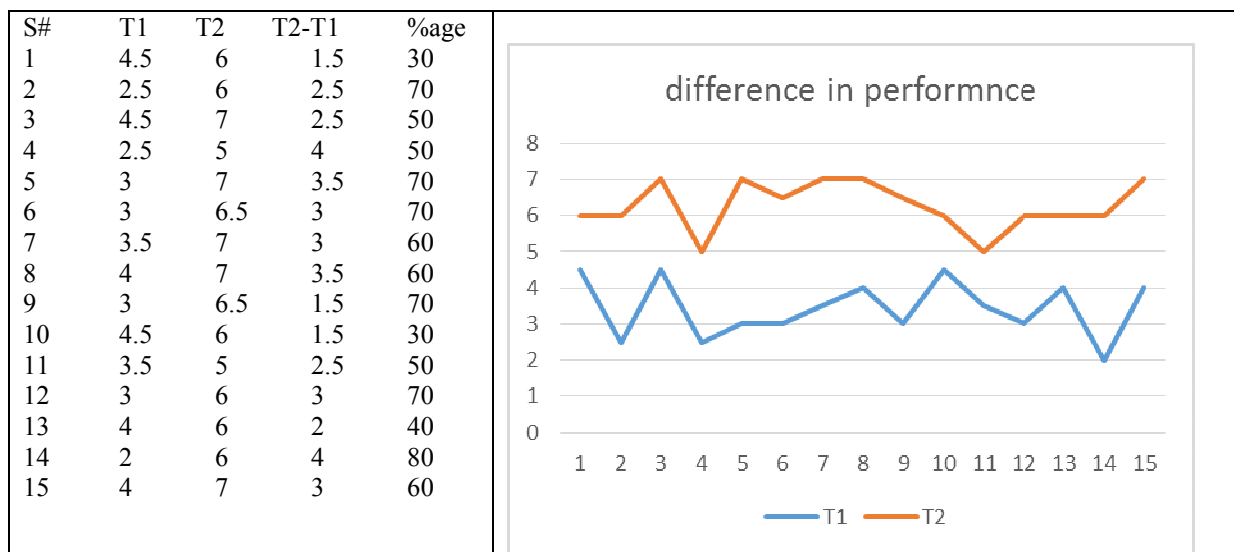
- What is the impact of constructive teaching approach on ESL students' learning of organizational skills in writing an essay?
- How can learners be made self-aware of their progress for effective learning?
- How do ESL learners react to feedback practice?

Performance based tasks involve multiple processes and integrated content faculty that cannot be fit precisely in traditional content process matrix. (Linn & Baker,1996). This research has used assessment instrument with great care keeping in mind learning gaps which came up after diagnostic assessment towards the target of developing writing skills. It includes assessment report based on three criteria A: Purpose and structure of text; B: Development of argument (meaning) across a paragraph, and C: Grammar and Expression(appendix:1) and analytical score rating scale (appendix:2). For instance, if a student gets highest score on an assignment than it means he has good arguments to develop her writing specimen, structure and use of language and vice versa. Likewise, those who got scores in between they have deficiencies at different level properly mentioned in feedback pro forma (appendix:1). It provided sufficient number of ways to offer diagnostic information for students and instructor (Ewell, 1991). It helped to inform Students in a comprehensive manner: across the students and across the course period. It also made it clear what the result mean in relation to the selection of contents of the course and standard of assessment. Similarly, it is planned carefully to keep the reasons behind judgments on students' performance clear for their understanding to meet the expected standard in accordance with constructive learning approach (Ewell, 1991). On the very first day the class was informed about the criterion of score rating of their generated works (appendix:1). So they can develop an insight of self-assessment, monitor the track of their develop and have better understanding of the teachers comments on their work for future planning of their performance. Five tests, besides the class work and take home assignments, were scheduled to monitor the track of performance within a time period of twelve sessions comprised on three months. It helped them to understand the strategic development of argument across the essay and across the paragraphs for an argumentative essay writing skills and prepare them to write on any topic effectively. There was 80% increase observed in organizational skills. In explicit teaching technique, sometimes scaffolding with the help of sample essay developed on Toulmin's suggested six steps was used. It helped students to understand the meaning and concept of the terms used by Toulmin model's (1958) recommended six step. Scaffolding made the term used by toulmin model as prerequisite for argumentation user friendly. It was consistently advocated throughout teaching session with suitable examples as important ingredients for a balanced argumentative essay. It helped the students to develop an argument with the idea of six steps concrete framework. It gave them mastery in developing a claim (a specific view point) after discussing in class and reading from different resources. They overcome the problem of sequencing the reasons to support the claim by excessive outline practice in rough draft to take decision for effective and systematic presentation of their logics before moving towards final draft. Likewise, detailed feedback encouraged them to consult other resources to make their opinion more authentic and relevant.

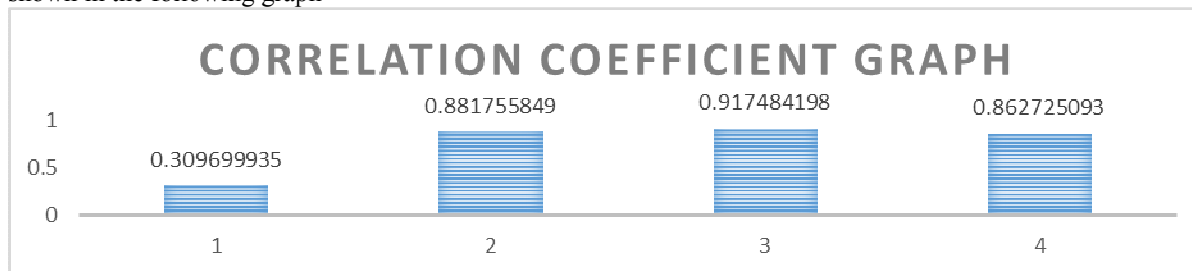
Only scaffolding was not used in this research. It has a hand-on activities with a specific purpose to provide detailed feedback and need based instructions to assist learners to overcome their deficiencies. The detailed feedback exposes the learning gap such as jumpy writing style, lack of contextualization of topic, lift up material used as their own, weak development of argument, scattered thoughts, absence of endorsement for their own view point from other resources, lack of basic organizational skills at paragraph and at whole text level, confusion of word classes (N, V, Adj) in lexical usage, careless use of punctuation marks (capitalization within a sentence without purpose). Sport checking, detailed feedback along with explicit targeted teaching with a central focus to develop an argument helped learners to become self-aware of their deficiencies and to become able to monitor their progress to get the target of the learning course (Lea, 1998). It made the teaching consistent and ensures tangible learning outcomes. For consistent teaching and learning of students, throughout the course, performance assessment techniques were kept in close relationship between the aforesaid criterions. It produced integration between teaching and assessment. (Palomba & Bania, 1999).

It is stated that performance assessment is labor intensive and needs careful consideration of designing appropriate task, specifying criterion for evaluating performance, reliable process for rating performance, training raters and evaluating results (Palomba & Bania, 1999) rubric for assessment. This research developed a reference criterion including different indicators to judge the performance for two purposes. Firstly, to ensure the reliability and secondly to enable students to develop self-assessment to track their progress for effective

improvement. The following table 1 effectively sum up the impact of explicit instructional teaching and detailed feedback in accordance with constructive theory of learning.



Similarly, the test marks of learners were taken as variables and find out the improvement in the performance of students with the help of Pearson correlation coefficient between test. It was found that there was weak correlation coefficient in the beginning of the research between test1 and test 2 ($r=0.031$) but the performance of learner kept on moving upwards ($r=0.88$, $r=0.917$, $r=0.862$) as the exposure of learner and interaction with teacher with the help of detailed feedback and explicated target instructions increased. It is shown in the following graph



Conclusion

This research on the basis of the results obtained(appendix:2) from the sample population of 15 ESL learners of graduate level endorsed with the statistical interpretation proposed that detailed feedback and explicit instructional teaching based on Toulmin model of argument with constructive learning strategy has potential to produce a tangible difference in the organizational skills and cognitive skills of learners in argumentative essay writing skills (Kim,2005). It helped the instructor to plan successive class to get the desired targets. It helped the learner to think constructively to develop communicative competence on the basis of prescribed framework (Toulmin model of argument) in his essay with a confidence to get detailed help for further development (Lyon, 1998). It enabled the learner to write logically on any given topic. This research recommends to repeat this research on large sample population before using it for future teaching in ESL learners’ classrooms.

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Appendix:1 Scoring scheme (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2014)

Name: _____

Feedback Pro- forma:

Key to Rating: E= Excellent control7-8; G= Good Control5-6; F=Fair Control 3-4 ; P=Poor Control1-2; N/A= Not Applicable: 0

Criteria A: Purpose and structure of whole text (Toulmin, 1958)	E → P	N/A
Data: The facts or evidence used to prove the argument		
Claim: The statement being argued (a thesis)		
Warrants: The general, hypothetical (and often implicit) logical statements that serve as bridges between the claim and the data.		
Qualifiers: Statements that limit the strength of the argument or statements that propose the conditions under which the argument is true.		
Rebuttals: Counter-arguments or statements indicating circumstances when the general argument does not hold true.		
Backing: Statements that serve to support the warrants (i.e., arguments that don't necessarily prove the main point being argued, but which do prove the warrants are true.)		

Criteria B: Development meaning across a paragraph (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2014)	E → P	N/A
Field is generalized and classified		
Point related logically		
Control of objectifying and indirect evaluative resources		
Interplay of student voice with authoritative evidence where appropriate		
Use of expanding and contracting resources to develop critical stance		
Cohesive resources create logical flow of information		
Overall rating for criterion B		

Criteria C: Grammar and Expression (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2014)	E → P	N/A		
Formal, specialized or technical vocabulary				
Expanded noun and verb group (adj & adv)				
Sentence structure and voice choices				
Correct subject verb agreement				
Correct use of articles				
Theme signal topic focus				
Spelling and punctuation				
Overall rating for criterion B				
Overall Grade of Essay	E	G	F	P

Appendix:2

Table 2: Score sheet:

Key: Criterion A: Purpose and structure of Text; Criterion B: Development meaning across a paragraph
 Criterion C: Grammar and Expression

	T1			T2			T3			T4			T5			T1-T5	% age
	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C		
Sidra	1	0	0	2	1.5	1	2	2	1	2.5	2	1	2.5	2	1.5		
	4.5			4.5			5			5.5			6			1.5	30
Iqra	1.5	1	0	3	2	1	3	2	0.5	3	2	0.5	3	2	1		
	2.5			6			5.5			5.5			6			3.5	70
Afra	1.5	1.5	1.5	2	2.5	2	2	2.5	2	3	2	2	3	2	2		
	4.5			6.5			6.5			7			7			2.5	50
Madiha	1	1	0.5	1.5	1	1.5	2	1	1	2.5	1	0	2	2	1		
	2.5			3			3			4.5			5			2.5	50
Rimsha	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2.5	2	2.5	2.5	2		
	3			6			6			6.5			7			4	70
Taiba	1	1	1	1	2	1	1.5	2	1	2.5	2	0.5	2	2.5	2		
	3			4			4.5			5			6.5			3.5	70
Madiha	1.5	1	0.5	2	1.5	1.5	2.5	2	1.5	3	2	1.5	3	2.5	1.5		
	3.5			5			5.5			6.5			7			3.5	70
Hina	1.5	1	0.5	2	1.5	0.5	2.5	3	0.5	3	2	1.5	3	3.5	1		
	4			4.5			6			6.5			7			3	60
Lubna	1	1	1	1.5	1.5	1	2	1.5	1.5	2	2	1.5	3	2	1.5		
	3			4			4.5			5			6.5			3.5	70
Samia	2	1.5	0.5	2	1.5	1.5	2	2	1	2.5	2.5	1	3	2	1		
	4.5			4.5			5			5.5			6			1.5	30
Arooj	1.5	1	1	1.5	1.5	0.5	2	1.5	0.5	2	1.5	1	2	2	1		
	3.5			3.5			4			4.5			5			1.5	30
Maria	1	1	1	1	2	2	1.5	2	1.5	2	2	1	2	2	2		
	3			5			5			5			6			3	60
Xuang Xin Rui	1.5	1.5	1	1.5	2	1.5	1.5	2	1.5	2.5	2	1	3	2	1		
	4			5			5			5.5			6			2	40
Guo Meng	0.5	1	0.5	1	1.5	1.5	2	2	1	2.5	2	1	3	2	1		
	2			4			5			5.5			6			4	80
Malin	1.5	1.5	1	2	2	2	2	2.5	2	2.5	2	2	2.5	2.5	2		
	4			6			6.5			6.5			7			3	60

Appendix (3)

Source:

<http://tipsforresearchpapersandessays.blogspot.com/2008/11/toulmin-argument-sampleexample.html>

Here is a sample Toulmin argumentation. The example provided will relatively help you get a clearer understanding of how this technique works.

"Smoking in Public Places Should be Banned"
Smoking in public places should be banned (claim) because it puts other people, especially children and pregnant women, at risk of breathing smoke from cigarettes (ground). Smoking in public places also endangers people who have respiratory ailments (ground). Recent studies show that almost (qualifier) 80% of those who ingest secondhand smoke from public smokers have a higher risk of getting respiratory problems than smokers themselves (data).

Banning an act that causes problems to innocent civilians is helpful in many ways (warrant). If smoking in public places is banned, we actually reduce or totally eradicate the danger of putting non-smokers at risk of developing lung and heart problems (backing statement). Moreover, if we ban smoking in public places, we also stop the smokers from further increasing their chances of acquiring health problems for themselves (backing statement).

While it can be said that not all people who smoke in public areas are always causing harm to others, it remains a fact that smoking per se is a cause of health problems (rebuttal). It is not enough to say that the size of affected people are relatively just a small fraction; plenty or few, one person put at risk is more than enough (rebuttal). It is only the case that smoking in public places, therefore, should be banned