

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the research background, research questions, and research purposes. It also describes the study's significance and scope and reviews relevant prior studies. Overall, this chapter provides an overview of how the study explores students' argumentation during speaking activities.

A. Research Background

Speaking is one of the essential language skills because it enables students to express ideas and interact effectively in various communicative situations. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, speaking ability is often regarded as an important indicator of language proficiency. Despite its importance, many students still experience difficulties in speaking English. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (Badan Pusat Statistika, 2022), the oral communication skills of Indonesian students are relatively low. A similar finding was reported by Elisathusilawani (2023), who found that EFL learners often have difficulty expressing their ideas orally because of limited vocabulary, lack of confidence, and lack of opportunities to practice speaking.

These challenges are related not only to language proficiency but also to students' abilities to organize and communicate ideas effectively. In speaking activities in the classroom, many students can speak, but their responses are often brief, unclear, and less logical. They often express opinions without enough explanations, making it difficult to understand their intended meaning. Speaking requires not only fluency but also the ability to organize and communicate ideas in a clear and logical manner (Brown, 2004). This problem is also reflected in the findings of Rahmawati (2021), who found that only students with high abilities were able to demonstrate a more complex element of argumentation during speaking activities, suggesting that many students still struggle to construct coherent and well-reasoned arguments when speaking.

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning is influenced not only

by students' mastery of vocabulary and grammar but also by their ability to think critically. Students with well-developed critical thinking skills are generally better able to analyze information, consider different perspectives, and use logical reasoning when expressing their ideas. Facione (1990) explains that critical thinking involves cognitive skills such as interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation. Through these cognitive skills, students are able to evaluate information, formulate reasoned judgments, and communicate their ideas more effectively. In addition, Paul and Elder (2008) argue that critical thinkers are able to express their ideas more clearly, logically, and coherently because they evaluate available information before reaching conclusions. The importance of critical thinking in speaking activities has also been supported by previous studies. Sriyanda & Priyana (2024) found that learning activities designed to foster critical thinking help students develop and communicate their ideas more effectively during speaking activities. The ability to think critically becomes particularly important in argumentation, as students are expected not only to express their opinions but also to justify them with logical reasons and relevant evidence.

One way that students demonstrate critical thinking during speaking activities is through argumentation. According to Kuhn (1991), argumentation involves coordinating claims with relevant evidence to justify a position while considering alternative viewpoints. To analyze how students construct arguments during speaking activities, this study adopts Toulmin's Argumentation Model (2003), which consists of six components: claim, data (grounds), warrant, backing, qualifier, and rebuttal. These components provide a framework for analyzing how students develop and communicate their arguments during classroom speaking activities.

The Critical Thinking in ELT course was chosen as the context of this study because argumentation is a crucial element in classroom learning. In the course, students often take part in presentations, discussions, and

problem-solving activities that require them to express opinions, justify their opinions, provide supporting reasons, and respond to alternative views. These classroom activities provide opportunities to observe how students construct arguments during classroom speaking interaction.

However, based on preliminary observations conducted in the Critical Thinking in ELT class, students' argumentation construction when doing speaking activities were still not optimal. Many students expressed their opinions without providing clear reasons or supporting evidence. Most of their responses were also short, less structured, and did not demonstrate a clear line of reasoning. These preliminary observations indicate that although students are familiar with the concept of critical thinking, difficulties in applying it in spontaneous speaking activities still exist. During classroom interaction, students were allowed to use both English and Indonesian in expressing their ideas and reasoning. This policy reflects the main objective of the course, which emphasizes the development of critical thinking and argumentation rather than language accuracy alone. For this reason, all utterances were included in the analysis regardless of the language used, provided that they reflected students' reasoning processes.

Several previous studies have pointed out the importance of critical thinking and argumentation for the improvement of speaking skills, yet each still leaves a gap relevant to this study. Ginting and L. Simanjuntak (2025) found that debate activities improved students' speaking skills, confidence, and critical thinking, but the study focused on debate as a technique rather than how students constructed arguments. Similarly, Maghfiroh and Hikmat (2023) found that argumentation-based speaking tasks helped students express their opinions more clearly, though the study centered on students' perceptions rather than the argumentation process itself.

In terms of Toulmin's model specifically, Sundari and Febriyanti (2021) analyzed the structure of students' argumentative essays and found

that only four elements claim, data, rebut, and rebuttal data were commonly present, while Muslim et al. (2024) found that a learning model supported by Toulmin's Argumentation Pattern significantly improved pre-service physics teachers' argumentation skills. However, both studies examined written or non-speaking contexts rather than naturally occurring classroom speaking interaction.

Although previous studies have demonstrated the importance of argumentation in language learning, limited research has examined how EFL students construct oral arguments in real classroom settings at the higher education level. In addition, only a few studies have employed Toulmin's Argumentation Model to analyze both the components students demonstrate and the way they construct arguments while speaking. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by examining students' oral argumentation in the Critical Thinking in ELT course using Toulmin's Argumentation Model as the analytical framework.

Based on the gap identified above, this study employs a qualitative case study approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of students' argumentation during speaking activities in the Critical Thinking in ELT course. It focuses on identifying the Toulmin argumentation components demonstrated by students and examining how they construct arguments during classroom speaking activities.

B. Research Questions

Based on the study's background, many students still have difficulties in expressing and developing their arguments during speaking activities. Therefore, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What Toulmin argumentation components (claim, data, warrant, backing, qualifier, and rebuttal) are demonstrated by students during speaking activities?
2. How do students construct arguments during speaking activities in the ELT classroom?

C. Research Purposes

Based on the research questions, this study has the following purposes:

1. To identify Toulmin argumentation components (claim, data, warrant, backing, qualifier, and rebuttal) demonstrated by students during speaking activities.
2. To explore how students construct arguments during speaking activities in the ELT classroom.

D. Research Significance

This study is expected to give both theoretical and practical contributions to English language teaching, especially in showing how students demonstrate Toulmin's argumentation components and construct arguments during speaking activities in higher education.

1. Theoretical Significance:

This research is expected to contribute to the development of knowledge about argumentation and critical thinking in EFL speaking. Furthermore, this study also shows how Toulmin's argumentation model can be applied as a framework to analyze how students construct arguments in classroom speaking activities.

2. Practical Significance:

a. For Students

This study can help students understand how to build logical, well-supported, and structured arguments when expressing their ideas in speaking activities.

b. For Teachers

This study can give teachers insight into how students construct arguments, which can be used as a reference in designing speaking activities that encourage argumentation and critical thinking in the classroom.

c. For Future Researchers

This study is also expected to be a reference for future research on

argumentation, speaking, and critical thinking, especially studies that apply Toulmin's Argumentation Model to analyze students' spoken arguments.

E. Research Scope

This study focuses on the Toulmin argumentation components demonstrated by students and how they construct arguments during classroom speaking activities, including discussions and presentations. The participants were sixth-semester students of the English Education Department at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung who were taking the Critical Thinking in ELT course during the 2025/2026 academic year. This study does not aim to measure students' speaking proficiency or compare their speaking performance. Instead, it uses Toulmin's Argumentation Model as the analytical framework to examine the components students demonstrate and how they build their arguments in spoken interaction.

F. Conceptual Framework

Speaking is an essential language skill that enables learners to express ideas and communicate with others. According to Brown (2004), speaking is a productive skill through which learners convey meaning in real-time communication. Similarly, Bygate (1987) explains that speaking involves planning, selecting, and producing language simultaneously. Therefore, speaking requires not only linguistic knowledge but also the ability to organize ideas clearly and logically.

The ability to organize ideas during speaking activities is closely related to critical thinking. Ennis (2011) defines critical thinking as reasonable and reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or what to do. Likewise, Facione (1990) explains that critical thinking involves interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation. These cognitive skills help students analyze information, evaluate evidence, and formulate reasoned judgments before expressing their ideas. In addition, Paul and Elder (2008) argue that critical thinkers communicate their ideas more clearly, logically, and coherently because

they carefully evaluate information before reaching conclusions.

One way that critical thinking can be observed during speaking activities is through argumentation. According to Kuhn (1991), argumentation is the process of coordinating claims with supporting evidence while considering alternative viewpoints. In classroom discussions, students are expected not only to express their opinions but also to support them with logical reasons and relevant evidence. Through argumentation, students demonstrate how they organize and justify their ideas during speaking activities.

To examine students' argumentation, this study adopts Toulmin's Argumentation Model (Toulmin, 2003), which consists of six components: claim, data (grounds), warrant, backing, qualifier, and rebuttal. These components provide a systematic framework for identifying the structure of students' arguments and explaining how their arguments are constructed during classroom speaking activities.

Previous studies have also shown the usefulness of Toulmin's Argumentation Model in analyzing students' argumentation. Yang (2022) found that the model helped improve the quality of students' argumentative elements by providing a clear framework for organizing arguments. In addition, Wisutama et al. (2024) reported that students most frequently produced arguments consisting of claim and data, whereas warrant, backing, and rebuttal appeared less often. These findings indicate that Toulmin's model is useful for examining both the argumentation components demonstrated by students and the way arguments are constructed.

Based on these concepts, this study investigates students' argumentation during speaking activities in the Critical Thinking in ELT course. Toulmin's Argumentation Model serves as the analytical framework for identifying the argumentation components demonstrated by students and examining how these components are used to construct arguments during classroom speaking activities.

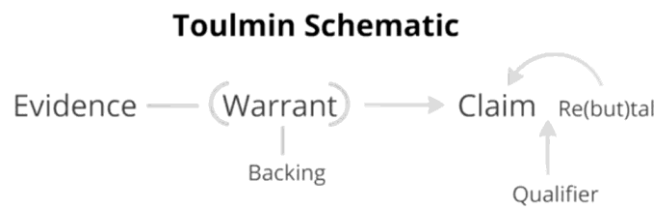


Figure 1. 1 Toulmin’s Argumentation Model

Based on this discussion, the conceptual framework of this research can be described in the following diagram:

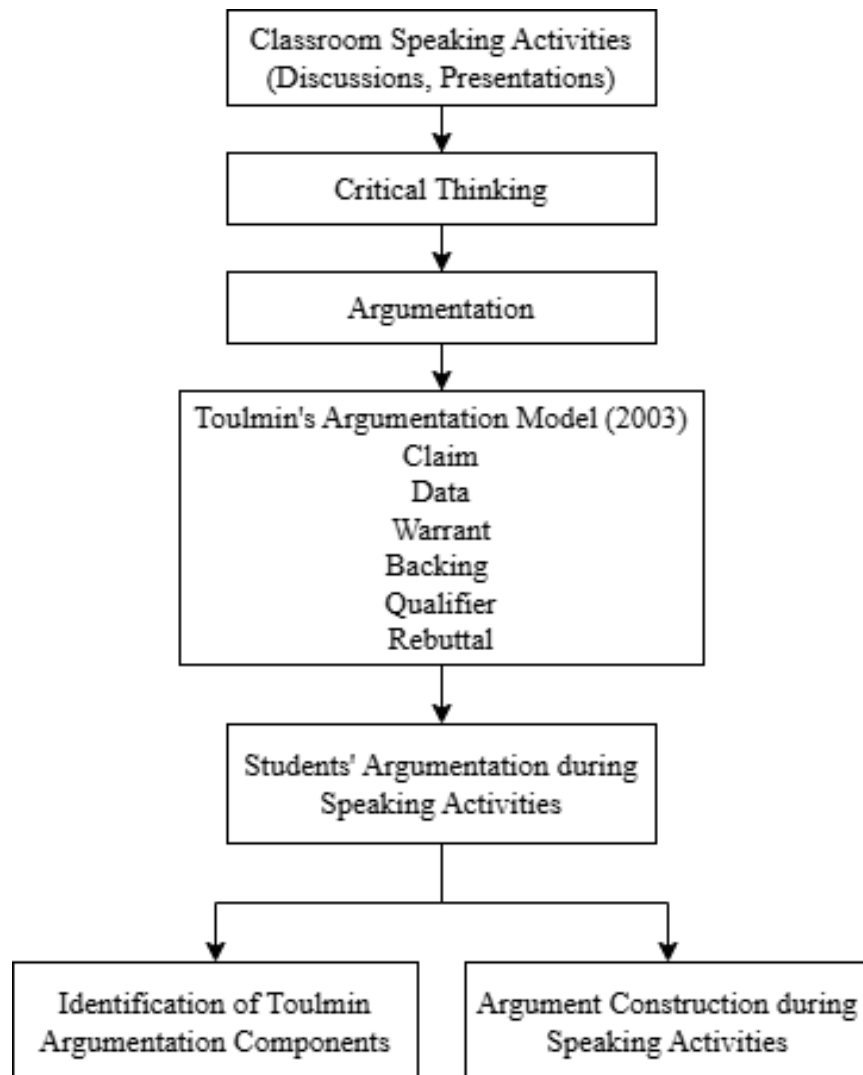


Figure 1. 2 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1.2 presents the conceptual framework of this study. The

framework shows that classroom speaking activities provide opportunities for students to express their ideas through discussions and presentations. During these activities, students are expected to demonstrate critical thinking, which is reflected in the way they develop and justify their arguments.

As shown in the figure, this study adopts Toulmin's Argumentation Model as the analytical framework for examining students' arguments during speaking activities.

Based on this framework, the study focuses on two aspects. The first is identifying the Toulmin argumentation components demonstrated by students during speaking activities. The second is examining how students construct their arguments through the use of those components. These two aspects are in line with the research questions and become the basis for the analysis in this study.

G. Previous Studies

Several previous studies have examined the relationship between speaking skills, critical thinking, and argumentation in English language learning. These studies cover different topics, from debate activities and argumentation-based instruction to students' perceptions and written argumentation. While they provide useful insight into how argumentation works in language learning, not many of them have actually investigated how students naturally construct arguments while speaking in class. This is the gap that the present study tries to fill, by focusing on students' oral argumentation during classroom interaction and using Toulmin's Argumentation Model as the analytical framework.

Ginting and L. Simanjuntak (2025) investigated how debate activities affected the speaking skill development of undergraduate students. Using a qualitative approach with seven English Literature students, they found that debate helped improve students' fluency, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, confidence, and critical thinking, and also encouraged students to develop their argumentation skills. However, this study was

mainly about students' experiences and views on debate, not about how their arguments were actually constructed while speaking.

A similar study was conducted by Najari (2025), who examined the strategies used by three senior high school debate winners in Cirebon to develop their speaking and critical thinking skills. The study found that structured practice, peer collaboration, participation in a learning community, and exposure to authentic English materials all contributed to improving students' speaking and their ability to reason with evidence. Even though this study touched on argumentation skills through debate, it focused more on learning strategies at the senior high school level, not on the structure of arguments produced during classroom speaking activities.

Maghfiroh and Hikmat (2023), meanwhile, explored students' perceptions of argumentative speaking tasks given to English education students. They found that students perceived these tasks as effective for building critical thinking and improving speaking skills. Still, this study only captured students' perceptions and did not examine how students actually organized or constructed their arguments while speaking.

Other studies have explored instructional approaches to develop students' argumentation skills, and some of them applied Toulmin's framework in the process. Aydın and Savran (2024), for example, implemented an argumentation-based learning model to improve seventh-grade students' persuasive speaking skills and motivation, using Toulmin's Argument Classification Scheme to assess the arguments students produced. The results showed a significant improvement in both the quantity and quality of students' arguments, along with more positive attitudes toward speaking. Even so, this study was conducted at the secondary school level and focused on testing an instructional model, not on how arguments naturally occur during classroom interaction in higher education.

Another related study is Rahmawati (2021), who examined critical thinking aspects reflected in the speaking of senior high school students

who were members of an English Conversation Club. The study found that students with higher speaking proficiency demonstrated more critical thinking elements, particularly in argument and open-mindedness, and suggested that critical thinking and speaking ability tend to influence each other. However, besides being conducted at the senior high school level, this study's primary focus was identifying critical thinking aspects, not analyzing how students actually constructed their arguments using a specific framework.

Along with Aydın and Savran's (2024) study mentioned earlier, a few other studies have also applied Toulmin's Argumentation Model, though in different learning contexts. Muslim et al. (2024) examined the effectiveness of the Argument-Generating learning model, supported by Toulmin's Argumentation Pattern, in improving university students' argumentation skills in physics. Their findings demonstrated a significant improvement in students' ability to construct arguments containing claims, data, warrants, and backing. Even so, this study focused more on testing the instructional model's effectiveness, not on how argumentation naturally emerges during classroom speaking activities.

Similarly, Muhsin et al. (2024) investigated critical thinking patterns in students' argumentative writing. They found that students who received instructional treatment constructed more coherent arguments, demonstrated stronger critical thinking, and organized their ideas more effectively than the control group. But because this study focused on written essays, it does not really explain how students construct arguments spontaneously when speaking.

Looking at all these previous studies together, a few gaps can be identified. First, most of them concentrate on instructional strategies, students' perceptions, or general learning outcomes, rather than on how students actually construct arguments during classroom speaking activities. Second, studies that apply Toulmin's Argumentation Model tend to focus on written argumentation or controlled experimental settings,

while research on oral argumentation in naturally occurring classroom interaction remains limited. Finally, only a few studies have closely examined how EFL students in higher education construct arguments by investigating the specific Toulmin components they demonstrate during authentic classroom speaking activities. This is the gap that this study seeks to address, by identifying the Toulmin argumentation components demonstrated by students and examining how they construct arguments during speaking activities in the Critical Thinking in ELT course.

