

**BỘ GIÁO DỤC VÀ ĐÀO TẠO  
TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC DÂN LẬP HẢI PHÒNG**

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**KHÓA LUẬN TỐT NGHIỆP**

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**HẢI PHÒNG – 2010**

**HAIPHONG PRIVATE UNIVERSITY  
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**GRADUATION PAPER**

**A STUDY ON THE LOGICAL ERRORS MADE BY  
THIRD-YEARS ENGLISH MAJORS AT HAIPHONG  
PRIVATE UNIVERSITY**

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**HAIPHONG - JUNE 2010**

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TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC DÂN LẬP HẢI PHÒNG**

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## **NHIỆM VỤ ĐỀ TÀI TỐT NGHIỆP**

Sinh viên: .....Mã số: .....

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# NHIỆM VỤ ĐỀ TÀI

1. Nội dung và các yêu cầu cần giải quyết trong nhiệm vụ đề tài tốt nghiệp  
(Về lý luận, thực tiễn, các số liệu cần tính toán và bản vẽ)

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2. Các số liệu cần thiết để thiết kế tính toán

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3. Địa điểm thực tập:

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# CÁN BỘ HƯỚNG DẪN ĐỀ TÀI TỐT NGHIỆP

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Họ và tên:.....

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Đề tài tốt nghiệp đọc giao ngày 12 tháng 4 năm 2010

Yêu cầu phải hoàn thành trước ngày 10 tháng 7 năm 2010

Đã nhận nhiệm vụ Đ.T.T.N

Đã giao nhiệm vụ: Đ.T.T.N

*Sinh viên*

*Ngời hóng dẫn*

*Hải Phòng, ngày..... tháng.....năm 2010*

**HIỆU TRƯỞNG**

**GS.TS.NGŨT. Trần Hữu Nghị**

## PHẦN NHẬN XÉT TÓM TẮT CỦA CÁN BỘ HƯỚNG DẪN

1. Tình thần thái độ của sinh viên trong quá trình làm đề tài tốt nghiệp:

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2. Đánh giá chất lượng Đ.T.T.N (So với nội dung yêu cầu đã đề ra trong nhiệm vụ Đ.T.T.N trên các mặt lý luận, thực tiễn, tính toán giá trị sử dụng, chất lượng các bản vẽ)

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Hải Phòng, ngày .....tháng.....năm 2010

**Cán bộ hướng dẫn**

*(Họ tên và chữ kí)*

## **NHẬN XÉT ĐÁNH GIÁ CỦA CÁN BỘ CHẤM PHẢN BIỆN ĐỀ TÀI TỐT NGHIỆP**

1. Đánh giá chất lượng đề tài tốt nghiệp về các mặt thu thập và phân tích số liệu ban đầu, cơ sở lý luận chọn phương án tối ưu, cách tính toán chất lượng thuyết minh và bản vẽ, giá trị lý luận và thực tiễn đề tài.

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2. Cho điểm của cán bộ phản biện  
(Điểm ghi bằng số và chữ)

Ngày.....tháng.....năm 2010

**Ngời chấm phản biện**

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Sincerely !

Hai Phong, April, 28<sup>th</sup> , 2010



## **ABSTRACT**

Arguing is a valuable competence that reveals a man's intellectuality; therefore, argumentative writing has been effectively applied into the syllabus of many language universities. However, in fact, how to make a good argumentative essay is really not easy to students. As a result, an investigation into errors seems to be extremely significant. This paper, conducted to partly improve the situation, is specifically aimed at figuring out the mistakes which third year English Majors at Hai Phong Private University often commit and their reasoning errors; thereby, the further step of proposing some ways to decrease students' errors can be done. To lay the theoretical foundation for the paper, I did exhaustive research into literature with a range of relevant works to provide readers with basics definitions of argument, logical errors and argumentative essay respectively. Moreover, the main methodology exploited by researcher is qualitative with the collection and in-depth analysis of argumentative writing pieces of 83 students, interviews conducted among 10 participants and questionnaires given to 33 students. Besides, the quantitative method was taken advantage of in a rational way to produce detailed statistics for the concrete demonstration of the findings. Results from this research showed that the student made 6 informal mistakes. With the findings, some suggestions were made; in particular, the facilitation of activities to develop logical thinking and arguing ability; the increased frequency of practice on argument in general and persuasive writing in particular; more assignments to enhance students' language competence .

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## **PART ONE : INTRODUCTION**

### **I. Rationale**

Since the early age, arguing competence was treasure by humans with the development of rhetoric into an art and has retained people's high appreciation especially in academic fields. For this reason, the ability to argue has always been regarded as invaluable reasoning tool (Barnwell & Dees, 1996) and argumentative writings have been integrated into the syllabus of educational institutions in general and institutions of language in particular as a way to practice and enhance students' language skill. The quality of such works can be identified through the absence of "errors" students make.

With personal experience, observation and discussion with some teachers as well as students from English Major – Hai Phong Private University (EM – HPU), the researcher has realized that logical errors are very common among learners and account for one of the leading factors weakening their arguments and hence decreasing the effectiveness of their writings. Moreover, there has been a big number of research papers on students' mistakes in writing skill; however, almost those papers have just focused on grammatical, collocation or wording mistakes. There have been few studies directly digging the topic of logical errors. For these reasons, the researcher decided to make an investigation into errors made by third- year English Majors at Hai Phong Private University in argumentative writings".

### **II. Aims and objectives**

Carrying out this research, the researcher aims at :

- Providing the background knowledge of essay writing competences, especially in argumentative essays for all students in general and English Major students in particular.

- Figuring out the most common errors students often make in their writings; concurrently, preliminarily analyzing the causes of those errors, which play an active role in helping students avoid reasoning errors making.
- Reinforcing and enhancing the students' argumentative competence seem to be a more far-reaching goal of the researcher.

Hopefully, this study can provide readers with overall comprehension about argumentative essay. The research results would be really helpful to different groups so they can base on the findings and suggestions to choose as well as design activities for the writing program in a direction.

### **III. Scope of the study**

Regarding to the the researching scope, essay writing is rather huge and complicated. Consequently, it requires to be taken into consideration carefully in a very long time by the researchers. However, due to my limitation of time and knowledge, the researcher could not cover all the aspect of this theme. This study only concentrates on the analysis of errors made by third-year English Majors and the reasoning errors are just restricted to the ones within an argument.

### **IV. Method of the study**

This paper is carried out with the significant support from some tools including the questionnaires, interviews and students' writing papers; and each of them is conducted with its own direction.

First of all, the interviews is going to be done among 10 third-year English Majors at Hai Phong Private University with the questions surrounding the thesis. Next, the researcher distributes questionnaires to 33 students belong to class namely NA1001 for their answers. The last study method is to analyze students' writing papers coming from 4 groups NA1001,

NA1002, NA1003, NA1004 with the aim of recognizing as well as classifying the errors exactly. From which, the third method is considered as the most effective ones.

## V. Design of the study

The study is divided into three main parts; in which the second, naturally, is the most important part.

- Part I is the **introduction** in which rationales, aims and objectives, scope of the study, method of the study and design of the study are presented respectively.
- Part II is the **development** that includes three small chapters:

Firstly is **literature review** chapter which focuses on presenting the argument with its definition, components and classification; concurrently, giving the theoretical background of an argumentative essay through the thesis statement and argumentation as well as the logical errors in essay writing.

Secondly is chapter of **methodology**. In which, the researcher is going to draw up very clearly procedures for a study starting from participants, data collection instrument to procedures of data collection and data analysis.

Lastly, in the **results and discussion** chapter, a list of errors and reasoning errors is identified by the researcher. From then, there will be suggested solutions to minimize these errors.

- Part III is the **conclusion** which include main findings, the limitations of the thesis and suggestions for further research.



## PART TWO : DEVELOPMENT

### CHAPTER 1 : LITERATURE REVIEW

#### I. Argument

Arguments are integral parts of rhetoric that is regarded as the art or technique of persuasion. However, they are definitely not something far-reaching; they are available in almost every circumstance of daily life with or without our attention (Jones, 2001). They can be encountered everywhere including a classroom, a studio, and a courtroom and every time such as when we talk with friends or discuss with colleagues.

##### I.1. Definition

In the view of literature, a variety of argument definitions have been proposed; nevertheless, in the researcher's opinion, they have appeared to go into two main directions which can be named *non-component-statement* and *component-statement*. As suggested by the name, in the former direction, scholars did not define argument through clarifying its elements. For example, Walton (1990, p.41) considered argument as "*a social and verbal means of trying to resolve or at least contend with a conflict or difference that has arisen between two or more parties. An argument necessarily involves a claim that is advanced by at least one of the parties*". Obviously, the definition excludes written arguments, a popular form in academic environment, which causes Walton's concept quite unsuitable to this thesis that centers on argumentative writing. Another concept of argument comes from Blair (1987) who construed *argument as reasons for something such as beliefs or believing, attitudes or emotions, or decisions about what to do* and a set of propositions is a reason for something if and only if they actually support it. In view of the second requirement of an argument, he ignored faulty arguments in which given reasons can hardly ground the conclusion.

The second direction of defining argument is component-statement that can be represented by Hong Kong University' researchers. According to them, an argument is "*a list of statement, one of which is the conclusion and the others are the premises or assumptions of the argument*" (Validity And Soundness). Their defining argument just by addressing its components causes confusion to readers as we can hardly imagine the role or the relationship between "*premises*" and "*conclusion*".

## **I.2. Components of an argument**

As can be seen from the definitions, there is an agreement that argument is comprised of premises and conclusions all of which are in the form of propositions that can be named slightly differently "*statement*" or "*claim*". In view of the quantity, Jones (2001) asserted there is often more than one premises while this number of conclusion is restricted to one. This reveals the consistency of an argument that is targeted at justifying one claim only.

The second thing in need of attention is the role of premises and conclusion in an argument which was clarified that premises lend support or provide evidences for the conclusion. For instance, in the following argument:

*Smoking is bad for our health. As a result, we should not smoke.*

(Jones, 2001)

The first sentence is the premise as it provides the reason for the second claim or the conclusion that "*we should not smoke*"; in turn, the conclusion is supported by the statement that "*smoking is bad for our health*".

To go further, some researchers have found out that these two concepts are just relative as their positions of being a premise or a conclusion are changeable (Jones, 2001). For example, a statement can be the premise in this argument but the conclusion in another and vice versa. To illustrate this, we

can look at the proposition of “*Most of parents pay special attention to their childent during the kids’ puberty period*” (Jones, 2001) in these two situations:

*Parents attent to special growth periods of their kids. Puberty is one of the most special development periods of childent. Therefore, most of parents pay much attention to their children’s puberty.*

In this case, the above statement is the conclusion and its preceding ones are premises; whereas, it is the premise in the following context:

*Most of parents pay much attention to their children’s puberty. Therefore, pubescent girls and boys’ privacy is sometimes violated by their parents.*

Another problem arises is to identify what statement are premises and what is conclusion as this is very important for analyzing an argument. To solve this, researcher like Epstein (2006) or Swoyer (2002) have suggested some signals but not many of them have gone in detail. Specifically, they only restrict their investigation to a small number of indicators of conclusions. Among those lists, Jones (2001) seems to be the most abundant when it provides readers with indicators of both premises and conclusions. In particular, the former ones covers a wide range of “*therefore, hences, accordingly, it follows that, it may be inferred that, so, thus, thus is it proved that, that we have no alternative but to conclude that...*”. The later consists of “*since, as, in as much as, because, for, for the reason that, having established that, in the light of this evidence, in view of the fact that, given that*”. Apart from the above mentioned signals, it mentions a great deal of devices introducing both premises and conclusions like “*from this it follows that, from this it can be inferred that, this implies that, this entails that, this strongly suggests that*”. Hence, such linking devices serve as signals to analyst when he/she works on an argument.

However, the realization of the components of an argument is not so easy since in reality, indicators of arguments are often omitted (Swoyer, 2002) and under many other circumstances does the matter seem to be more complicated as there is no explicit statement of premises or the missing of the conclusion in an argument. Furthermore, he specifies that the lack of premises occurs when they are widely known or easily figured out in the context; meanwhile, the conclusion is absent when it is believed to undoubtedly result from the premise (Swoyer, 2002). All these things strongly suggest that in many cases the signals fostering the realization and then the evaluation of an argument may be vague.

### **I.3. Types of argument**

In classifying argument, there is a wide range of viewpoints. The ancient Greek logician and philosopher Aristotle (350 BC) investigated argument in dialogue form which he divided into four classes including: didactic, dialectical, examination-arguments, and contentious argument. Didactic arguments are those that reason from the principles appropriate to each subject and not from the opinions held by the answerer. Dialectical arguments are those that reason from premises generally accepted, to the contradictory of a given thesis. Examination-arguments are those that reason from premises which are accepted by the answerer and anyone who pretends to possess knowledge of the subject is bound to know-in what manner. Contentious arguments are those that reason from premises that appear to be generally accepted but are not so. As represented, the criterion of this classification is the basis to determine the truth value of the premises in the stance of answerer and the public; as a consequence, the premises favored by the answerer are highly subjective and their arguments are faulty themselves.

A great number of scholars such as Jones (2001), Copi (1969) and Epstein (2006) put forward another way of categorization in which arguments

are divided into two types namely deductive and inductive argument. To distinguish these two “considered to be opposite in many aspects” types, some points are stated:

Firstly, an argument is deductive if its premises provide conclusive evidence (Epstein, 2006) or more clearly; premises propose a guarantee of the truth of the conclusion. Their support for the conclusion is “so strong that if the premises are true, it would be impossible for the conclusion to be false” (“Deductive And Inductive”, 2006). The following propositions can be taken as example for this:

*All men need food to survive.*

*John is a man.*

*John needs food to survive.*

(Epstein,2006)

As can be seen from the example, the premises are true; hence it is certain that the conclusion is also true.

Whereas, in an inductive argument; the premise “provide some evidence for it”, which means that its premises bring up reasons supporting the only “*probable* truth of the conclusion” (Copi, 1969). As a result, in an inductive argument, their relationship with the conclusion is restricted to an extent that “ if the premises are true, then it is unlikely that the conclusion is false” (“Deductive And Inductive”, 2006). An example for illustration:

*John needs food to survive.*

*John is a man.*

*All men need food to survive.*

(Copi, 1969)

As be shown by the statements, the premises are true; however, the conclusion may be false because there is the possibility that a man need other things like water or money rather than food to survive. To follow that, the “strengths made in inductive arguments can be arranged in a crude scale that runs from strong to weak” (Jones, 2001) and that scale is based on the level of probability of the conclusion being true.

Secondly, in deductive argument, Starkey (2004) contended that “a specific conclusion” derives from general premises. In contrast, in inductive argument, the reasoning process starts from the specific (particular facts or instances) to the general (principles theories, rules).

Thirdly, Starkey (2004) stated that the basis of deductive arguments are rules, laws, principles or generalization; whereas, that of inductive ones are observations or experiences.

In addition, in the literature, the possibility level to make reasoning error in each kind of argument has been covered. To be detailed, the level is higher with induction and lower with deduction. This can be easily explained by the fact that deduction goes from the general fact to a specific case meanwhile induction goes in the contradictory direction.

#### **I.4. A good argument**

With regard to the quality of an argument, scholars have come up with a list of criteria according to which, an argument is good if only if it satisfies three conditions: it comprises plausible claims (or in other word is suitable premises); the premises are more plausible than the conclusion, and it is valid or strong (Epstein, 2006).

However, besides the above criterias, two other factors are supplemented to make a good argument including “ the premises must be

true” and “relevant to the conclusion”. To express the issue, the researchers have elaborated these criteria as follows:

#### **I.4.1. Plausible claims**

In the word of Epstein (2006), a claim is plausible if a good reason to believe its being true is available and the level of plausibility of a claim decreases along with the number of reasons.

#### **I.4.2. Begging the question**

Epstein (2006) also stated that an argument begs the question if one of its premises is no more plausible than the conclusion. This plays an important role as some arguments may have true and plausible premises but they can still commit errors; for instance:

*Wearing helmets can prevent you from head injuries in traffic accident. Therefore, wearing helmets can help you avoid head injuries in traffic accident.*

(Epstein, 2006)

Obviously, this is a circular argument with the conclusion being equally plausible as the premise.

#### **I.4.3. Valid argument**

As for Epstein (2006), “An argument is valid if there is no possible way for its premises to be true and its conclusion false (at the same time).

Example:

*Vietnamese citizens being 15 upward must have an ID so 20 years old people must have an ID.*

(Epstein, 2006)

It is no doubt of the validity of the above argument as there is no way for the premises to be true and the conclusion to be false simultaneously. The term “validity” embodies the logical relation between the premises and the conclusion. Epstein helps prevent people from making wrong judgment and evaluation of the quality of an argument.

#### **I.4.4. Strong argument**

An argument, in Epstein’s (2006) point of view, is strong if it remains some possibility that the premises are true and its conclusion is false at the same time but such possibility is extremely small.

#### **I.4.5. The relevance between premises and conclusion.**

In view of relevance, Epstein (2006) pointed out that the subject matter or the premises is required to be related to that of the conclusion.

Another thing worth noticing is that when evaluating whether an argument is good or not, validity applied to deductive argument while strength is used for inductive ones, which can be explained with the above mentioned contents related to types of argument. Particularly, in a deductive argument, if the premises are true, the conclusion can not be false. Meanwhile, in an inductive argument, the premises just guarantee probable truth or the conclusion (Epstein, 2006).

## **II. Logical errors**

### **II.1. Definitions**

“Logical error” has been studied for a long time, but up to now coming to a consensus among researchers on its definition still seems to be impossible. A wide range of definitions have been brought up; for instance, some of them attach the term to an argument bearing deductive invalidity or little inductive strength (Starkey, 2004) but this misses covering the error of



begging the question. Meanwhile, other researchers are in favor of regarding error as a defiance of the norms “of good reasoning, the rules of critical discussion, dispute resolution, and adequate communication” (“Deductive And Inductive”, n.d). this approach can not be easily taken as there remain differences in the above norms identified by scholars. Another viewpoint held by Epstein (2006) is that a error is a “bad”, “typically unrepairable” argument. Whereas, arguments are “unrepairable” when: the argument is non-existent, lacks coherence, contains a false or dubious and unomitable premise, has two premise contradictory to each other and undeletable, is weakened if the obvious premise is added or is strengthened or validified with an obvious but false premise. This definition can cover many cases in which the arguer’s reasoning process holds flaws; yet, it seems to neglect the situation when the relevance of the premises to the conclusion is low and something can still be added to increase the validity and strength of the argument.

Among definitions of error, the one adopted probably by most of researchers is that a error is “a form of argument that seems to be correct but which proves, upon examination, not to be so” (Jones, 2001, p.34). It can be seen from this definition that “causes of errors” do not restrict themselves to the ones with bad reasoning; instead, they cover the ones with bad reasoning that “seems to be correct”. It follows that a error only occurs when that argument can deceive someone; this idea stems from Aristotle (350 BC) who, in *Sophistical Refutations*, mentions that sophistical meaning only mimics good reasoning, particularly; errors are a counterfeit of legitimate reasoning. Within the scope of this research, the definition by Jone (2001) is chosen as the foundation for other issues.

## **II.2. Classifications**

Studying “logical error”, researchers have coped with another dilemma of categorizing it. Various criterias have been employed to serve the process

of classifying; for example, the way people argue (inductive or deductive), the psychological factors causing people to commit them, or the epistemological or logical factors resulting in the errors. Primarily, basing on where errors appear Aristotle divided errors into two main types of language and non-language errors. Some scholars use more than one basis for their classification such as Epstein (2006); particularly, he puts errors into four groups of structural, “violating the principle of rational discussion” errors, content errors, and others. This proves some flaws due to the overlapping of these sorts; some “violating the principle of rational discussion” errors can be contained in content or structural ones. Despite the controversy in the classification of errors, Aristotle’s grouping them into two broad groups of language-dependent and language-independent mistakes can still grasp the agreement of many modern logicians. Nonetheless, they are called in different ways of formal or structural and informal or content ones; among these two kinds, the second quite outnumbers. As can be suggested by the names the classification can be inferred to be based on where the errors appear; specially, the form in the former types and the content and possibly the purpose of the reasoning in the later. This stance is utilized to lay the foundation for this research.

However, little concurrence has been achieved on specific error types as well as their concepts. In the primary systematic research of this issue named *De Sophisticis Elenchis* (Sophistical Refutations), Aristotle (350BC) numerates thirteen types of mistakes.

Up to now, errors catalogues with the continuously increasing quantity have been produced but none of them, in the words of Bruce Thomson (2007), has so far obtained the comprehensiveness; new reasoning errors arise so often. As a result, in the literature, most of the works have just incorporated the errors which are assumed to be “the most common and deceptive”. Within the scope of this research, the researchers are going to use

the lists composed by Copi (1969), Andrew MacDonald & Gina MacDonald (1996), Wikipedia and that of formal errors by Epstein (2006) because they present the issue very clearly by providing concepts and the explanation for each types. Besides, this research is targeted at helping point out the reasoning errors in students' argumentative essays; as a result, the book by Andrew MacDonald & Gina MacDonald (1996) and Epstein (2006) is of great suitability as this is compiled to improve students' writing skill. In addition, the concepts of each types may come from other authors depending on their reasonability. Specifically, Copi (1969) divides formal reasoning errors into two groups of relevance and ambiguity errors.

### **III. Argumentative essays**

“The ability to argue is an invaluable writing and reasoning tool” (Barnwell & Dees, 1996, p.245), writing argumentative essay is an integral part in the curriculum of both English class in particular and other courses in general as resolving controversy is considered as vital to intellectual development by the Western culture (Andrew MacDonald & Gina MacDonald, 1996). A heavy emphasis is put on how to succeed in this types of writing in the literature, which is exhibited through an abundance of tips.

#### **III.1. Thesis statement**

An argumentative essay deals with controversial issues and there is no “right” or “wrong” answer to it (Barnwell & Dees, 1995). The very first thing an arguer must do is to adopt a position and try to defend it with a system of reasons. With regard to this, most of scholars have been in agreement with each other that writers should show either “for” or “against” opinion and stick to it, which can prevent the burden of a sit-on-the-fence arguer. In addition, Barnwell & dees (1996) highlighted that the stance must be presented from the beginning of the writing piece as the thesis statement. The Writing Tutorial Service of Indian University (2006) lists and elaborated the qualities of a good

thesis statement by analyzing both good and bad examples. In particular, those qualities are:

- A strong thesis statement takes some sort of stand: **thesis needs to convey the writer's conclusions about the subject.**
- A strong thesis statement justifies discussion: **a thesis should indicate the point of the discussion.**
- A strong thesis statement expresses one main idea.
- A strong thesis statement is specific: **a thesis statement should show exactly what your paper will be about, and will help the writer keep his/ her paper to a manageable topic.**

(Hart, 2006)

This list of qualities can cover essential factors making an effective thesis statement. Taking the same issue into consideration, Baker & Brizee (2007) condensed the qualities of a good thesis statement into three words of “clear, concise, and defined” (2007). These can highlight both the content (defined) and language (concise, clear) characteristics of a thesis statement. This viewpoint is quite reasonable as a thesis statement is often restricted within one sentence and must exhibit explicitly where the writer stands in the focused topic; which, then, can keep the writer away from being off-track and enables readers to understand the argument flow more easily.

### **III.2. Argumentation**

The next step which is also the most important part is to defend our position and to perform this, a wide range of evidences are recommended including proof, facts, figures, statistics, quotations and names, etc. as well as methods of description, narration, examples, classification, and cause and effect (Barnwell & Dees, 1995). They clarified these methods with the

explanation of the way to use them (“*narration* is the method that refers to the story telling and even your own experience can play the role of an evidence”); what skill is needed when exploiting a certain measure (“*description*: skills in observing detail and listening to a dialogue is of big help and fine points and concrete details are highly useful”); and when a particular method should be used (“*cause and effect*: the cause of the focused problem can be shown when its remedy is argued; similarly, demonstrating the effect of something can best argue for the promotion or discontinuation of its cause”). As revealed above, a variety of methods have been recommended to justify a stance in an argumentative essay.

In conclusion, in the literature review, the researcher has covered a spectrum of issues related to “argument” with a view to partly visualize what a good argument is like and the common errors writers may commit when they produce persuasive writing pieces as well as some suggestions for writers to make sound and potent arguments in their works. Nevertheless, with the revision of the previous research, the researchers have figured out some limits in the literature on the topic of focus. To be specific; firstly, scholars have not investigated much the way to recover an argument which is of enormous importance in the process of argument analysis; secondly, along with the clarification of error types in persuasive papers, scholars have not pointed out their causes and this can make their lists of little help to students. Among these two shortcomings, the second one will be partly solved by the researchers in the next chapters. To deal with this task, we are going to focus on the matter of errors in the argumentative writing pieces by third year English Majors at Hai Phong Private University and then provide some suggestions to overcome reasoning errors to raise the quality of students’ works as well as their argument ability.

#### **IV. Summary**

To conclude in this chapter, the researcher has already reviewed the literature of argument with its definition, components of premises and conclusion, types of inductive and deductive argument; concurrently, the qualities of a good argument have been presented. After that, we have stated the definition and classification of errors as well as the most important things of argumentative essay including thesis statements and argumentation.

## **CHAPTER 2 : METHODOLOGY**

### **I. Participants**

To collect data for this research, the researcher approached and made an investigation with 83 students at the same time. The selection of study participants must be based on following criterias: Firstly, all of them were also third- year English Majors at Hai Phong Private University who belong to 4 groups of NA1001, NA1002, NA1003 and NA1004. Secondly, these students have been learning or at least having background knowledge of argumentative essay writing sothat they can provide researcher with the best information. However; in fact, in terms of argument competence, each student may have different strengths as well as weaknesses, different approaches of analyzing their own writing problems.

### **II. Data collection instruments**

To carry out this study, the three main instruments were employed comprising the interviews, questionnaires and students' writings.

The very first instrument was interviewing that was conducted among 10 participants who were randomly choosen. The time frame for each interview was not over 10 minutes. Additionally, the selection of the interviewees was based on two criterias: initially, each interviewee must be representative of one types of errors; secondly, in their works the error targeted was made more than one and the mistakes they made were serious and shown very clearly. Interviewing made it possible for the researcher to elicit the reasons or the factors as well as the procedure leading to the participants' inference in their faulty arguments.

A further instrument could be done by the researcher was questionnaires. 10 questions designed by the form of "multiple choice" distributed to 33 students from NA1001. By administering a questionnaire to

a group of student, the researcher can collect a huge amount of necessary information in less than an hour. In fact, processing the data could also be fast and relatively straight-forward. However, the data collection through questionnaires had some serious limitations, and there was no doubt that it was very easy to produce unreliable and invalid data by means of ill-constructed questionnaires. The accurate level of its was not really high; even, the number of investment papers drawn back were sometimes not enough due to participants' carelessness.

The last instrument was analyzing students' writings for errors. The researcher contacted to the lecturers who were responsible for third-year writing curriculum for their help. 83 students from 4 groups worked separately and seriously in the time frame of 45 minutes for the same topic. Then, the researcher had findings from the lecturers. The aim of the process was to exactly and fully systematize the common errors students made in their argumentative writing. So it was obvious that the data collection by students' writing analysis was the most effective instrument compared with the others.

### **III. Procedure of data collection**

The data collection procedure could be divided into three main stages :

In the first stage, the researcher had to choose a common argumentative topic for all the participant students to ensure the fairness for the participants and the unity of the study. With a view to satisfying a high standard, the researcher adopted a topic in IELTS Cambridge 4 that *"We live today in the electronic information age. It is easier to be connected by technology yet many people seem no closer to feeling happy in their life. Discuss"* (Fernando, 2000). This was utilized as with our beforehand experience, students are highly prone to reasoning errors when dealing with this task. After gaining the supervisor's approval for the topic, I had to seek for help



from the lecturers in English Major\_HPU to get writings from their students on the above topic. All the lecturers of the third year writing program were approached and three of them could support. These teachers then asked their class to do this as a normal assignment and finally, several weeks later the researcher directly contacted them to recover the students' papers on the topic.

Following the collection stage, the writing papers were analyzed to find out the errors students made and saw what was in need of further investigation. To guarantee the objectiveness and the preciseness, the researcher asked one classmate for cross-checking the students' mistakes. Two people worked separately and in the end we two gathered the results and came up with the final list of the students' errors.

The next step is to carry out interviews. To prepare this, the researcher asked the cross-checker for advice on the criteria to choose the interviewees. All the factors were taken into consideration even the possibility to approach the potential participants. After the thorough analysis by two people, we could adopt 10 students from 4 groups with the above mentioned criteria. Next, the form as well as the questions for interviews was pondered on. The first version of the question set was created; however, this was disapproved as they made the mistake of leading the interviewees, which is quite unacceptable for research. After thinking over and consulting the supervisor, we decided to choose unstructured interviews and the chosen participants were contacted for their agreement and the schedule for interviews. At the planned time, the researcher had face-to-face conversations with those students one by one. The required procedure of an interview was strictly followed and for the preciseness and convenience for deeper analysis, all the interviews were recorded.

Finally, as soon as all the data have been collected, the researcher synthesized and compiled them into a file to preserve. This could guarantee the security of the data, which would of great use for the researcher' referring back to double-check the result.

#### **IV. Procedure of data analysis**

The procedure of data analysis was conducted in three main steps.

In the first stage, along with another classmate, the researcher read to find out the errors in the students' writings. The reading to point out the errors was conducted twice for each member to increase the exactness of the data analysis. After independently working, we compared the result and discussed to be able to come to a final conclusion. Luckily, our findings were not much different from each other. Then, we made the statistics of each mistake, using Microsoft Exel and presented them with tables and chart. By these means, the inllustrated figures could be easily compared and analyzed to draw the significant tendencies. Besides, the inappropriateness in each of those faulty arguments as well as the way to improve them was suggested. On this basis, the researcher attempted to identify their causes and the issues which must be elaborated more in interviews as well as the survey questions.

In the next step, the researcher checked the results carefully he/she had after giving the survey questions to 33 students. In which, 4 survey papers were not conformable to regulations. The results from 29 in total of 33 papers showed that almost students made one of these 6 logical errors.

The last one is to analyze the data gained through interviews ; specially, the researcher refered to the mistakes made by the interviewees to match the causes of the errors proposed by themselves by listening to the recording again and again. The information found in those conversations was also taken advantage of generalizing the common and hidden roots of errors committed by the participants in particular and students in general.

In the end, the researcher could have a view over the errors made by the students, their reasons as well as directions to give suggestions.

## **V. Summary**

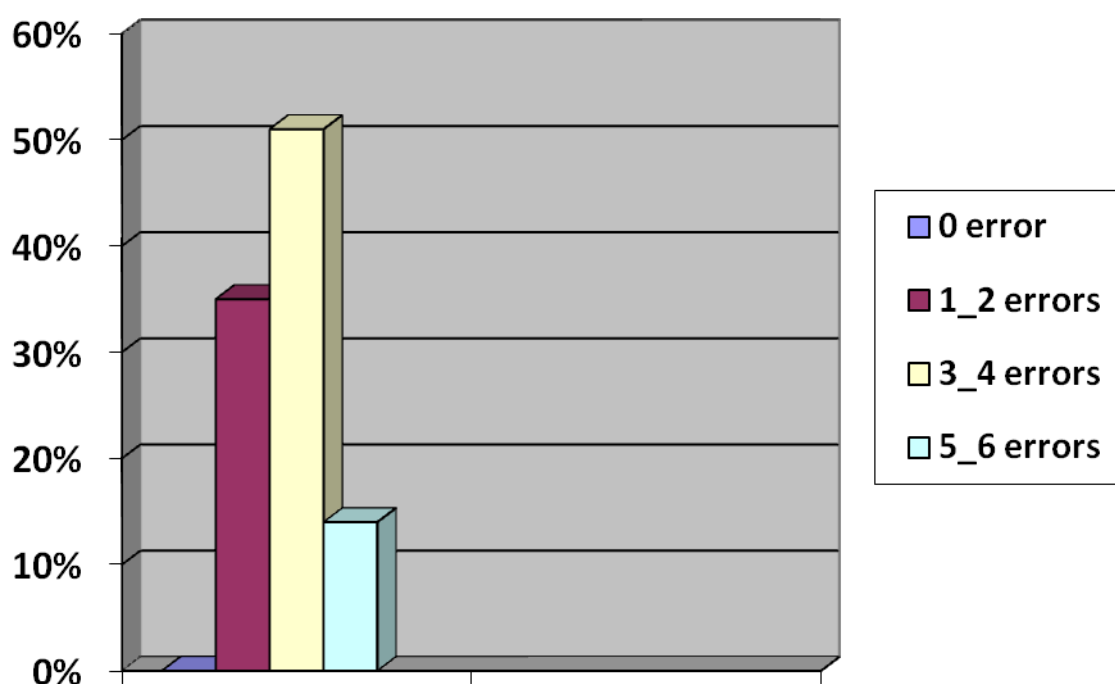
In a nutshell, 83 students from 4 groups of English Major\_Hai Phong Private University participated in the research for which three instruments of interviews, questionnaires and students' writing analysis were utilized. In the former method, the researcher asked another person to play the role of a cross-checker. The collection of the participants' works was conducted first, next was an investigation with questionnaires and followed by interviewing.

## CHAPTER 3 : RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Analyzing the writings of students coming from 4 groups, I have set up a list of 6 mistakes: *Irrelevant reasons*, *Wrong inference*, *Hasty generalization*, *Circular reasoning*, *Wrong premises*, *Wrong conclusion*. Among these mistakes, 4 categories of *Irrelevant reasons*, *Hasty generalization*, *Circular reasoning*, *Wrong conclusion* are the ones coinciding with the researcher's prediction whereas, the rest are even not dealt with in the literature. Now, the irrationality as well as the causes of all the errors are going to be elaborated on.

### I. Statistics of errors

*Chart : The number of errors the students in 4 groups made in one essay.*



As represented by the chart, all the participants committed errors in their writing pieces and the highest proportion (51% of the total number of the participants) fell in the group of from 3 to 4 errors, followed by the group of

from 1 to 2 errors (35%) and the group of from 5 to 6 errors kept the lowest proportion (only with 14% of the total number). Accordingly, it could be concluded that the number of students made reasoning errors was considerable and they seemed to commit some common errors. In addition, the number of mistakes in one writing was not small at all compared to their length (350 word at most). Consequently, argumentative works of these students could be said to be at low quality, which partially reflects a fact that argument writing is not their strength yet.

|                        |                                    | <b>Group 1</b><br><b>(%)</b> | <b>Group 2</b><br><b>(%)</b> | <b>Group 3</b><br><b>(%)</b> | <b>Group 4</b><br><b>(%)</b> | <b>4 groups</b><br><b>(%)</b> |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Informal errors</b> | <b><i>Irrelevant reasons</i></b>   | 52                           | 65                           | 57                           | 62                           | 59                            |
|                        | <b><i>Hasty generalization</i></b> | 45                           | 51                           | 47                           | 62                           | 51,25                         |
|                        | <b><i>Wrong inference</i></b>      | 28                           | 41                           | 32                           | 38                           | 34,75                         |
|                        | <b><i>Circular reasoning</i></b>   | 9                            | 0                            | 3                            | 0                            | 6                             |
|                        | <b><i>Wrong premises</i></b>       | 53                           | 48                           | 47                           | 34                           | 45,5                          |
|                        | <b><i>Wrong conclusion</i></b>     | 24                           | 22                           | 19                           | 17                           | 20,5                          |

***Table : Statistics of errors and the proportion of the students in each group and all 4 groups committed the errors.***

As can be seen in the above table:

- ✓ There were 6 informal errors the students made altogether in their argumentative essay.
- ✓ *Irrelevant premises* was the mistake the participants made the most with 59% of the total number of the students in 4 groups, the second

position belonged to *Hasty generalization* with 51,25%. At the other end of the spectrum were *Circular reasoning* with 6% and then *Wrong conclusion* with 20,5%. Therefore, it was obvious that there was a big gap in the proportion of the violators among various types of errors; for instance, the most enormous distance reached 53%. This could prove the popularity of the *Irrelevant reasons*, *Hasty generalization* among the students.

- ✓ With respect to each error, among 4 groups. For instance, in the case of *Circular reasoning*, 9% of the total number of the participants in Group 1 made this mistake whereas this figure was 0 with both Group 2 and 4 and only 3 with Group 3.

## **II. Error identification and the suggested solutions**

### **II.1. Irrelevant reasons**

As mentioned above, *Irrelevant premises* was the students' most frequently committed reasoning error. To clarify the mistake, the researcher would like to take one example as follows:

#### **Example :**

***The topic: “ The electronic information age brings a lot of benefits to human life. Discuss.”***

(Fernando, 2000)

*“The technical and scientific revolution marked an excessive development of human being. Our daily life is seem to be much easier with many modern electronic machines such as washing machine, air-conditioner, TV, refrigerator, etc. It is no doubt that the electronic information age always brings a lot of benefits to human life.*

*The multi-faces progress of the electronic information age partly has contributed to renew society's appearance; especially, in the human's living standard. First of them, we should recommend to the benefit through connecting people. People are no longer to spend hours on writing a letter or travelling. With the conviniences from its products including computers, mobiphones...the exchange of information among people becomes extremely easy and simple. Additionally, the development of the electronic information age does not only help people save more money and time but also make them closer.*

.....

*Student*

*Luong Minh Huyen\_NA1003''*

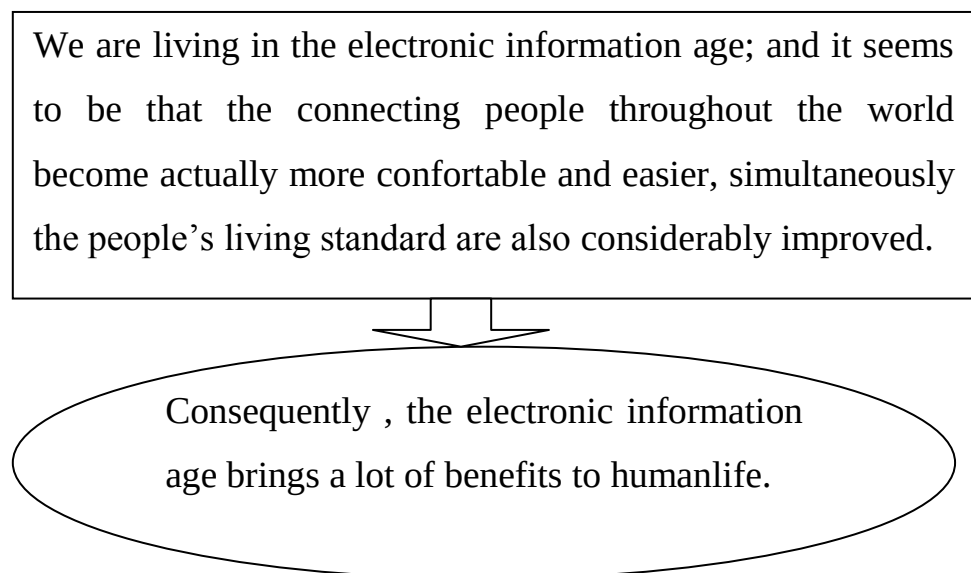
Our daily life is much easier with many modern electronic machines, for example: washing machine, air-conditioner, TV, refrigerator,etc.

It is no doubt that, the electronic information age always brings a lot of benefits to humanlife.

It is obvious that the premise of the above argument has no link to its conclusion. The advantages brought about man by modern electronic machines such as washing machine, air-conditioner has nothing to do with the elctronic information age. As a consequence, the premise has no support for the conclusion. In addition, if this premise is looked into more deeply another mistake can be recognized. The machine listed by the writer as the instances

of electronic machines including TV, refrigerator are, in deed, not electronic devices. In fact, the cause leading to the error of irrelevant reasons should be attached to students' logical thinking. As we all know that the ideas are created randomly in the students' mind when they approached the topic; however, it is not easy to make a chain of premises reasonably and logically which is considered as supporting ideas for the thesis statement. The limitation of logical and critical thinking lead to a trouble that many students, instead of giving the relevant and persuasive reasons, develop their ideas into an off-track direction. To overcome this error, the researcher give a effective solution is that the students should have a detail outline for the topic and then, arrange the ideas with a logical order in meaning before writing down the paper. If the students are able to do this well, the error of irrelevant reason is certainly restricted.

The argument should be corrected as follow:



## II.2. Hasty generalization

### Example 1:

Hasty generalization, ranking the second in the error table can be illustrated in the below examples:



**Example 1:**

*The topic: “ Nowadays, people especially relatives do not often go to each other’s house. Discuss”.*

*(Fernando, 2000)*

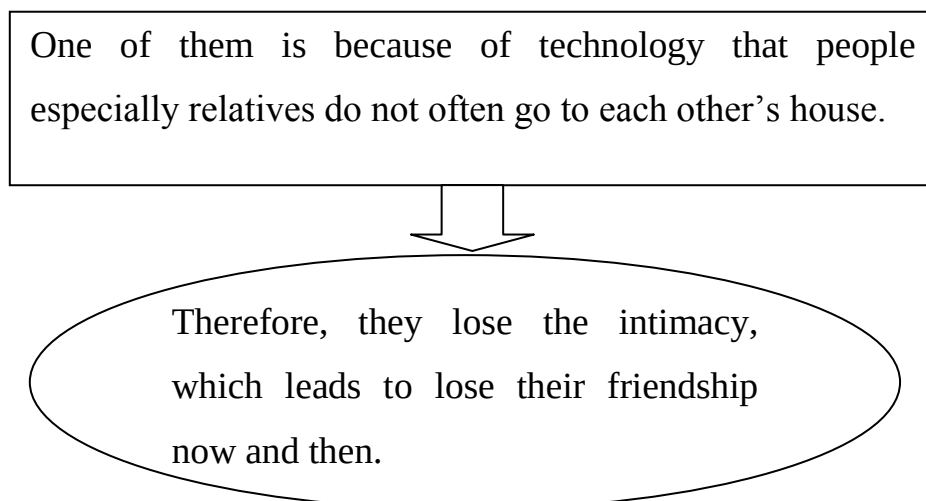
“ .....

*We are living in the technical-sciencetific age with its constant development. Many people consider that this is just time for the maximum improve in the living standard but the maximum decrease in emotional values. There are a number of reasons for great emotional gap among people. One of them is because of technology that people especially relatives do not often go to each other’s house. Therefore, they lose the intimacy, which leads to lose their friendship now and then.*

.....

*Student*

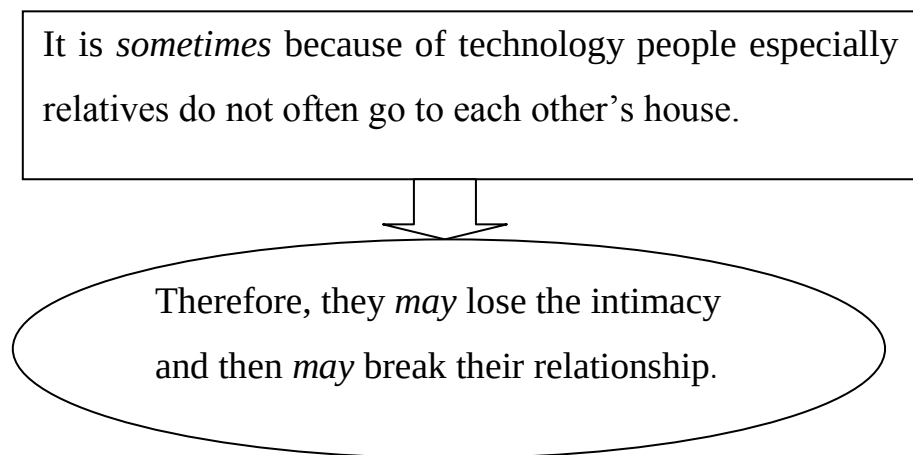
*Doan Thu Huong\_NA1003”*



In the above argument, the reason for the loss of intimacy and then the friendship among people is attached to technology causing them not to drop in others’ house regularly. This arguing process reveals the writer’s hastiness

as: firstly, very often people's busy life or indifference rather than technology should be blamed for people's rare visiting to each other; secondly, irregular visiting to each other does not always result in the dilution of the relationships among people. Moreover, an inconsistency in the argument flow can be witnessed; in detail, the premise mention human's relationship in general and focuses on the that among "relatives"; whereas, the conclusion goes into "friendship", which really confuses the readers.

To correct this argument, we can add some expressions of certainty and change some words; for instance:



### Example 2:

***The topic: “ It is a fact that some people often feel sad and lonely although they have lots of friends. Why?”***

*(Fernando, 2000)*

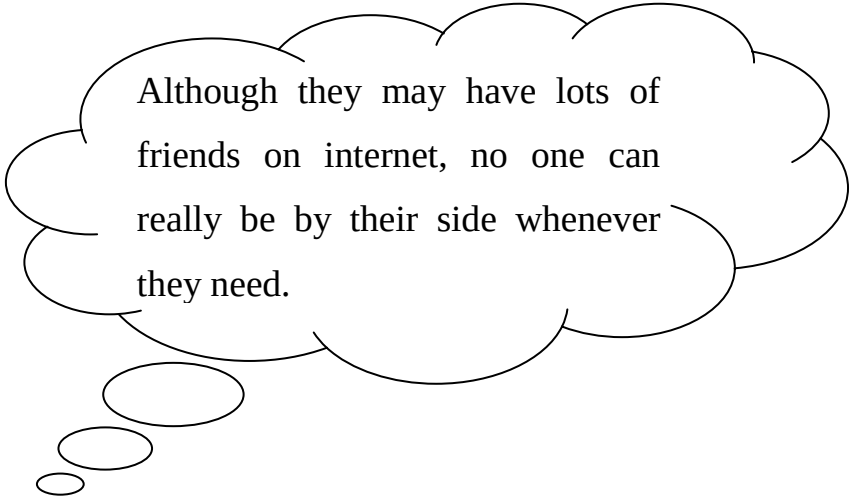
*“To each person, the friendship always plays an important role in the emotional life. Whoever also need friends to share his/her happiness as well as sorrowness. But, it is a fact that some people often feel sad and lonely although they have lots of friends. Why so ? We are going to find out the answer for this question.*

*In the past, the connection among people seemed to be more restricted due to the lack of communicational information means. However, people at present are easy to make new friends thanks to the mass media such as internet, TV, radio, newspaper, etc; in which the connection through internet is regarded as the most common and convenient way to everybody. Someone can sit by her computer hours and hours to talk someone they don't know passing over the limitation of language and territory. But, the largest restriction is that although they may have lots of friends on Internet, no one can really be by their side whenever they need. Thus, they always feel sad and lonely.*

.....

*Student*

*Nguyen Thi Mo\_NA1003"*

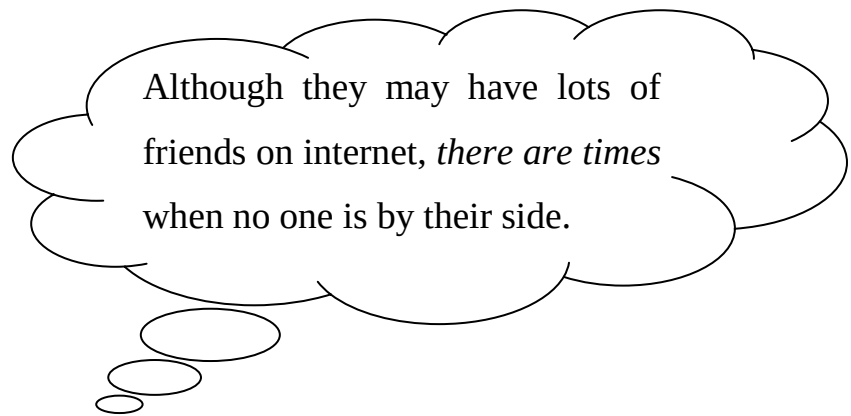


Although they may have lots of friends on internet, no one can really be by their side whenever they need.

Thus, they always feel sad and lonely.

In this argument, the students's generalization in the premise is obviously unreasonable as there is still a possibility that many of online friends and other friends can help "them" when "they" are in trouble; hence, the premise fails to give strong evidence to the conclusion. Furthermore, supposed that the premise is correct the argument remains the irrationality as "no one can really be by their side whenever they need" does not automatically result in their permanent sadness and loneliness; accordingly, the word "always" in " they always feel sad and lonely, also shows the writer's inappropriate generalization. The cause of this problem is firstly, due to the pressure of time that made the students so tense that they hardly found enough time even to read and then consider the topic carefully; as a consequence, they misunderstood the topic. Also, they found little time to think over each argument; which can explain why they produced wrong inferences. Secondly, starting from the lack of practice which restricted them come over the error making. For these causes, the researcher is going to propose a solution as follow: Whenever students have the topic, let's read and take it into consideration carefully for a start and then, you should make a reasonable distribution of time for each part as well as generate the link of ideas in your mind before giving the conclusion. In addition, the students should spend much time for the practice, so they will get used to writing under time pressure. Those suggestions are in needed to avoid the error of hasty generalization.

Like the first example, this can be reinforce with some adjustments:



Then, they may feel sad and lonely.

The addition of some expressions of certainty like this can terminate the extreme of the arguments, then the generalization in this case is acceptable.

### II.3. Wrong inference

#### Example 1:

*The topic: "We should or should not smoke. Why ?".*

*(Fernando, 2000)*

*"Over the last thirty years, thanks to the efforts of various branches of science and technology, a lot of the researches have proved that smoking damages health and shortens man's long-life, so we should not smoke.*

*According to a diagram released by the World Health Organization (WHO), the number of people who die of diseases connected to smoking is increasing more and more. Therefore, it seems that we can never put a final stop to the list of harm caused by smoking.*

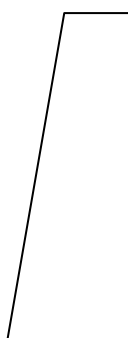
*First of all, smoking brings about the decline of our memory because each cigarette we smoke destroys 15,000 cerebral cells. The main offending agents are carbon monoxide and nicotine in the smoke, which have effected*

directly and seriously to smoker's lung. As a result, smoking is just the most serious and unique cause of lung cancer for all smokers.

.....

Student

Le Thi Hong\_NA1003”



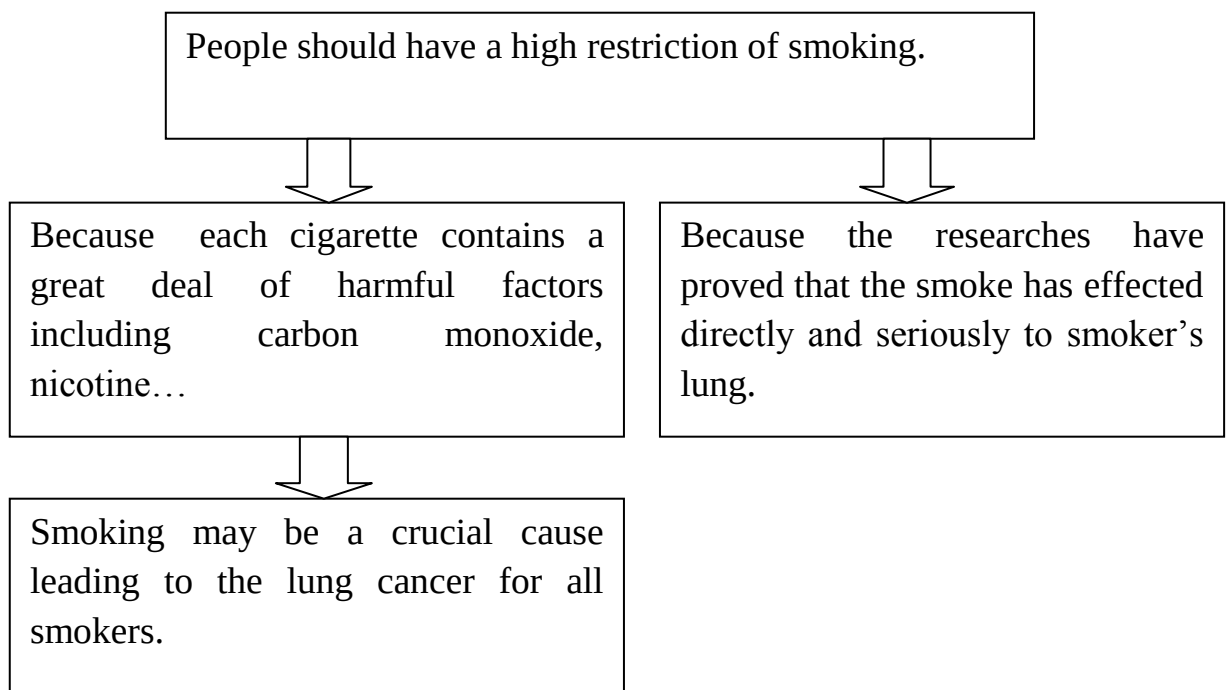
The main offending agents are carbon monoxide and nicotine in the smoke which have effected directly and seriously to smoker's lung.

As a result, smoking is just the most serious and unique cause of lung cancer for all smokers.

In this case, the conclusion hardly results from the premise. That “the main offending agents are carbon monoxide and nicotine in the smoke” and “these ingredients have effected directly and seriously to smoker's lung” do not “the most serious and unique” cause make all smokers to get “lung cancer”. Additionally, the sum of two clauses in the premise hardly manages to produce a single conclusion as there is little no closeness and consensus in their meaning. So, “wrong inferences” is considered as a logical mistake in argumentative essay. The interviews with the students helped the researchers discover that the exceeding attention to prove the topic can be also blamed for this error. With a view to justify their stance, the students tended to generate imposing arguments and to some extent this can be expression of “bias” in argument. Another reason attributed the roof of their production of unconvincing inferences is “the lack of aggressiveness”, or; in other word,

students are not drastic enough in debates. This can be explained by the fact that students do not have the habit of justifying an issue thoroughly or are not interested in debating. Accordingly, when coping with a controversial issue they are not capable of giving persuasive inferences. It is suggested that the writers should put more attention of the relevance between the premises and conclusion. It is necessary that the conclusion( inference) must be systematized as well as covered all its premises. The matter should be taken into consideration comprehensively in the bigger scope to minimize the wrong inferences.

The above argument can be adapted in many ways and one of them can be:



#### **II.4. Circular reasoning**

This error sometimes are made by students when there has a repetition in the meaning between the premises and conclusion.

**Example:**

***The topic: “ It is a fact that we have little connection with social life and we will have feeling sad and lonely. Discuss”.***

*(Fernando, 2000)*

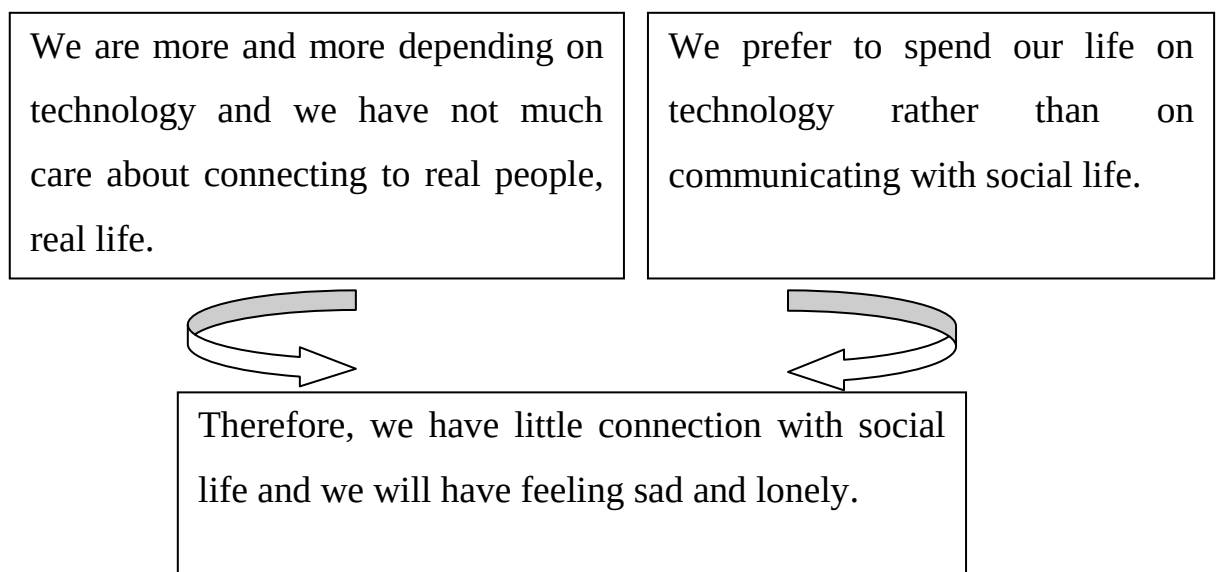
“ ..... ”

*We can not deny a fact that technology has remarkably contributed to improving our life in the active direction. However, people connection by the technological means also brings about some disadvantages instead of its conveniences. We are more and more depending on technology and we have not much care about connecting to real people, real life. On the other hand, we prefer to spend our life on technology rather than on communicating with social life. Therefore, we have little connection with social life and we will have feeling sad and lonely.*

.....

*Student*

*Nguyen Thi Hang\_NA1003”*

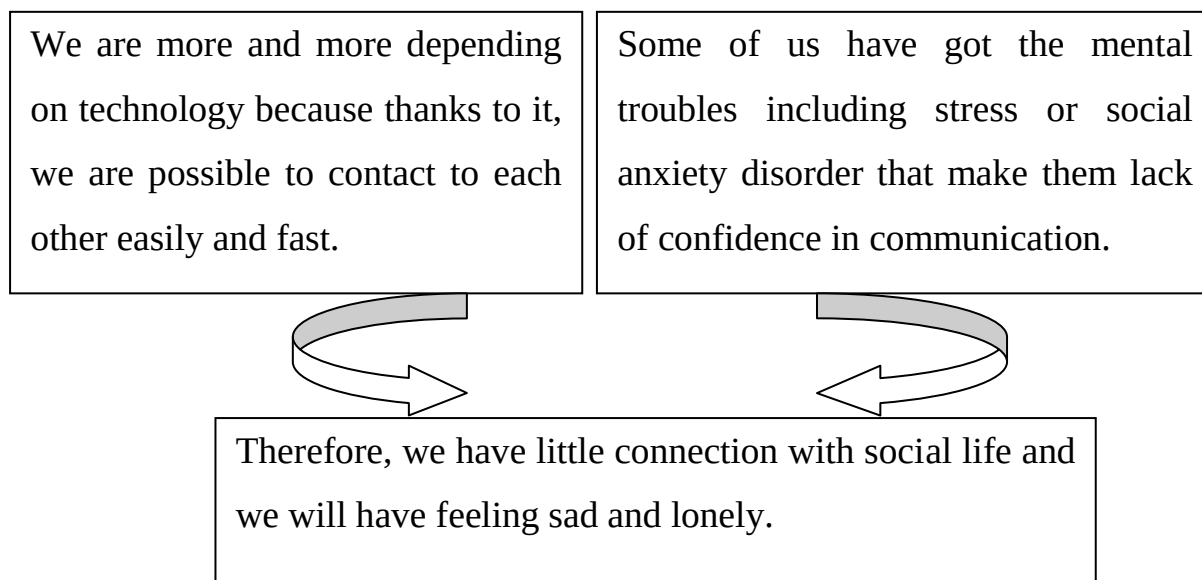




As can be seen above, in the argument, the writer uses two premises to come to the conclusion but the second one is just the paraphrase of the first one and hence no further information is generated to strengthen the argument. In addition, one half of the conclusion also repeats the idea mentioned in the premises (*we have little connection with social life*). These premises are so circular that the writer can not develop them into supporting ideas for their conclusion. Explaining for this, the researcher considers that one of the leading causes is the students' low language competent. A number of mistakes concerning to "circular reasoning" would not have been committed if the students had been more highly competent in English. As the interviewed students said that they could use only a limited range of familiar words, structures or ideas in their writing while the sophisticated ones were rarely taken advantage of; hence, often do they find hard to diversify their expression. As a consequence, their faulty arguments were formed due to the wrong word choice in paraphrasing. The solution is more attention must be paid to enhancing students' language competence. In particular, as can be realized from the examples of the participants' faulty arguments, if some changes in wording or more appropriate word choice in paraphrasing, fewer errors would have been committed. This is not easy at all and entails schools and teachers' attention as entering university, students are diversified in English level even at colleges of foreign languages as some of them come from specialized classes while many others were just educated at normal institutions. For all language classes, there must be a suitable syllabus that creates good conditions for learners to fill the language gaps in their knowledge from the primary period; for instance, lessons aimed at enriching vocabulary, structures, mastering paraphrasing, etc. Throughout the study process, this should be regularly revised in a way that students are responsible for collecting words or phrases of the focused theme or topic to prepare for lessons. Especially, it is advisable for teachers to highlight the use of certainty

expressions when at writing skill as this language item is very helpful in avoiding some errors like *circular reasoning*.

To correct the above argument, we can write as follow:



## II.5. Wrong premises

Another error stemming from the premise is Wrong Premise which was violated by 34,75% of the total students from 4 groups, ranking the fifth among 6 errors. This error comes from the writers' incorrect judgment stated in the premise. In order to have a deeper look into the issue, the underneath instance is analyze:

### Example 1:

***The topic: “ Technology makes a lot of benefits for human life; however, some people still feel stress and bore with their life. Discuss”.***

(Fernando, 2000)

*“The social-economic development has provided us wonderful recreation. However, people sometimes are seem to be not really satisfactory for that; even many of them feel stress and bore with their life. Starting from*

this, there have some proposals which are considered as the major causes of this problem.

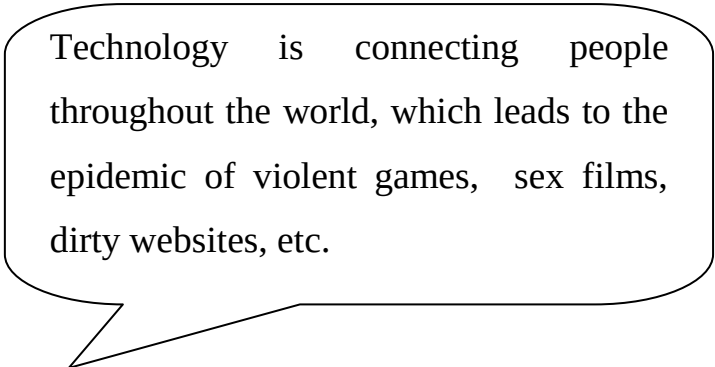
Firstly, it is obvious that technology is connecting people throughout the world, which leads to the epidemic of violent games, sex films, dirty websites, etc. It is a reason why people sometimes stressed and bored with the life.

Secondly, as we all know that the complexes in daily life including economic problem, time pressure, working pressure also may be the causes make people have little satisfaction for their life.

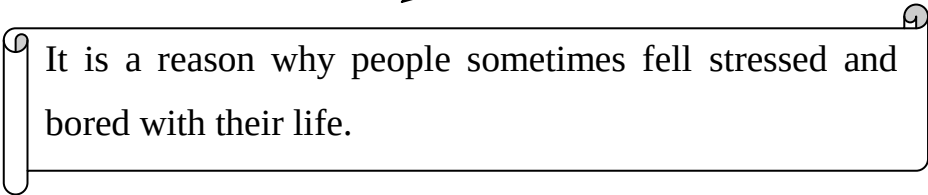
.....

Student

Nguyen Thi Lien\_NA1003”



Technology is connecting people throughout the world, which leads to the epidemic of violent games, sex films, dirty websites, etc.



It is a reason why people sometimes fell stressed and bored with their life.

In the argument drawn here, the writer proposes an incorrect premise; particularly, the connection of people in the globe with technology can not be blamed for the things she calls “the epidemic” including “violent games, sex films, dirty websites” as these two “parties” hold no cause and effect relation. Correspondingly, the argument is quite impotent.

We may write again as follow:

We live today in the technological information age. In addition to obvious advantages such as connecting people, technology also brings about some problems including the pressure of time and work.

It is a reason why people sometimes feel stressed and bored with their life.

### Example 2:

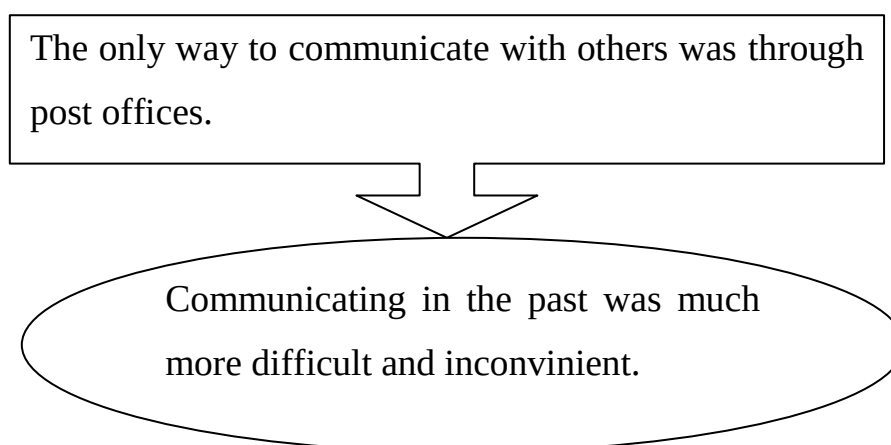
***The topic: “Communicating in the past was much more difficult and inconvenient. Discuss”.***

(Fernando, 2000)

“ .....

Over the past 10 years, thanks to the rapid development in the technical field, the communication as well as the informational exchange have become much more convenient and easier. A typical example for illustration is mobile phone. Mobile phone is now popularly used nearly replacing the letters. Also, it allows us saving time, money and energy for doing other things. On the contrary, there were very few types of service and mass media in the past. Perhaps, the only way to communicate with others was through post offices. Consequently, communicating was much more difficult and inconvenient.

.....



In this argument, the writer based his/her argument on a wrong judgment in the premise as in the past there were many ways for people to communicate with each other besides post offices. For example, a very long time ago, people living near to each other could see face-to-face whenever they wanted and the ones living away from each other could send letters by pigeons. For this reason, the argument with the conclusion which sounds quite rational and even “next to a matter of course” becomes less convincing.

In the two examples, it is obvious that both two students also made one mistake namely “Wrong premise”, and the cause of this error derives to the misunderstanding the topic as well as the lack of vigor in arguing competent. So, in terms of the meaning relation, the premises can not be supporting ideas for the thesis statement. From this, a necessary lesson should be applied to minimize the reasoning error is to read the topic carefully; then, underline the key words to understand exactly and fully the topic step by step. This process is very important and useful for giving relevant premises to the topic.

We can correct the premises as follow:

When there have not been development in technical information yet, people were used to communicating with each other through post office or sending letters by pigeons, even taking hours to see face-to-face.

Communicating in the past was much more difficult and inconvenient.

## II.6. Wrong conclusion

### Example:

*The topic: “ The speedy connection makes people seem no closer to feeling happy in their life. Discuss”.*

*(Fernando, 2000)*

*Since the second technological-scientific revolution was began, people have been entitled conveniences and benefits from its progress, hence they are no longer worried about how to spend time and money reasonably for the connection. Nevertheless, some opposite opinions show that the speedy connection makes people seem no closer to feeling happy in their life. And perhaps, this is still a controversial topic among people.*

*We should not deny the benefits which about the information technology has brought for our daily life. However, in this paper, this would be put aside and we would like to concentrate on the technology's effects to people's relationship. In the modern life, the more convenient communication among people thanks to technology reduces people's habit of visiting each*

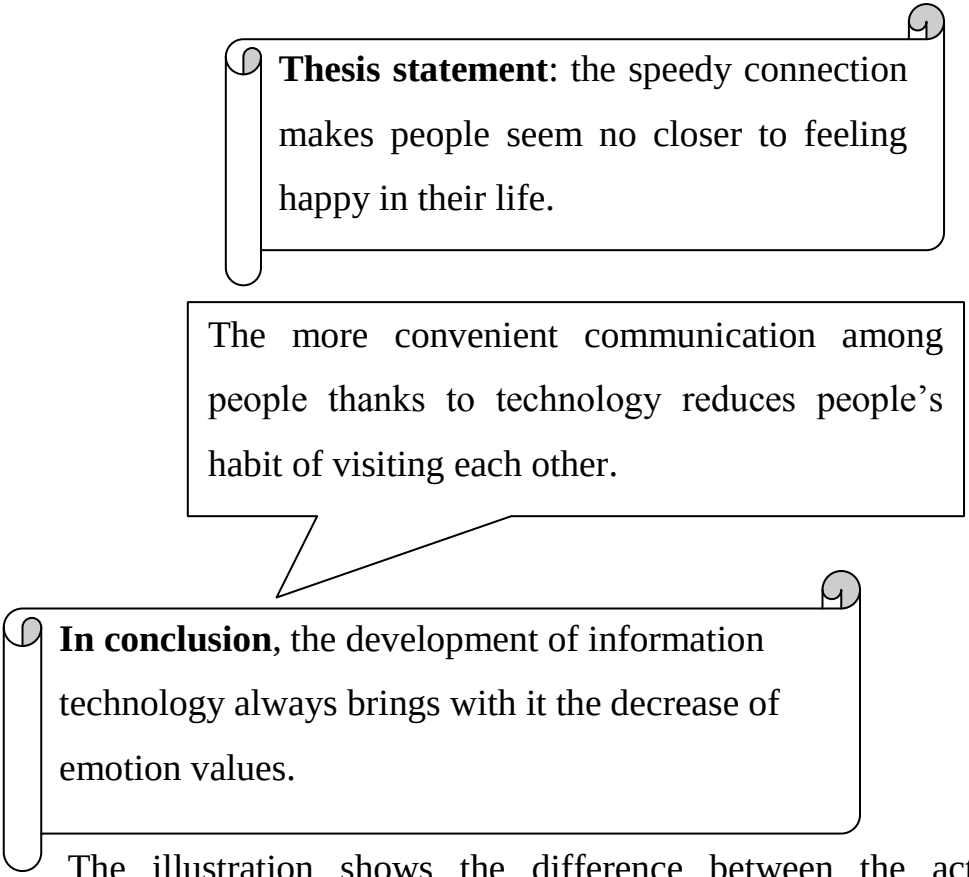
other. In stead of that, they often talk and exchange information to each other through mobiphone or on internet. As a result, they gradually lose the intimacy , which leads to lose their friendship in the future.

.....

In conclusion, the development of information technology always brings with it the decrease of emotion values.

Student

*Vu Thi Huyen Trang\_NA1003”*



**Thesis statement:** the speedy connection makes people seem no closer to feeling happy in their life.

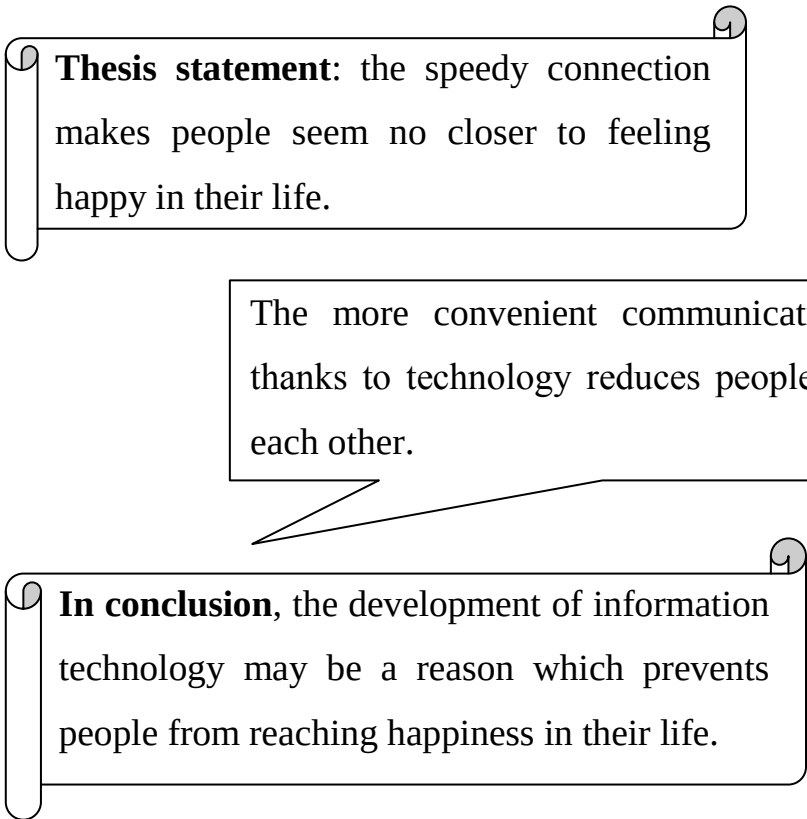
The more convenient communication among people thanks to technology reduces people's habit of visiting each other.

**In conclusion,** the development of information technology always brings with it the decrease of emotion values.

The illustration shows the difference between the actually-made conclusion and the originally-targeted one (*the thesis statement*). The “decrease of emotion values” can not stand for people’s no feeling closer to happiness. The roof of this error is caused by the limitation of the students’ background understanding of argumentative form. In the chapter one “literature review”, the researcher clarified the close relation in meaning between the thesis statement and its conclusion; however, not all students also

learned by heart this. The suggested solution for this is rather simple. Briefly speaking, the students only grasp fully the theory of argumentative essay, especially in the relation of meaning between two parties “thesis statement” and “conclusion” as Epstein (2006) pointed out in view of relevance that the subject matter or premises is required to be related to that of conclusion.

We can correct the mistake the student Vu Huyen Trang made as follow:



**Thesis statement:** the speedy connection makes people seem no closer to feeling happy in their life.

The more convenient communication among people thanks to technology reduces people’s habit of visiting each other.

**In conclusion,** the development of information technology may be a reason which prevents people from reaching happiness in their life.

### III. Summary

In conclusion, in this chapter we have presented our findings of 6 types of errors of the students namely *Irrelevant reasons, Wrong inference, Hasty generalization, Circular reasoning, Wrong premises, Wrong conclusion* and 6 types of reasoning errors originated from *Students’ thinking, time pressure, excessive attention to justify the topic, lack of practice, low language competence and lack of vigor in arguing*. On the basis of the findings, the



facilitation of activities to develop logical thinking, arguing ability, critical thinking for both students of foreign language and their counterparts in the whole Vietnam; the increased frequency of practice on argument in general and persuasive writing in particular; more assignments to enhance students' language competence are recommended as solutions.

## PART THREE : CONCLUSION

### I. Summary of findings

With careful study, the researcher has come up with a number of findings. The very first one is that the number of students studied made errors in their writing is huge (100%) and secondly, big proportion made more than one mistake in their essay (the popular figure is from 3 to 4 errors). Thirdly, they were prone to the same range of mistakes (6 informal mistakes called *Irrelevant reasons, Wrong inference, Hasty generalization, Circular reasoning, Wrong premises, Wrong conclusion*) and the mistake committed the most frequently by the participants was *Hasty generalization and Irrelevant reasons*. All the errors were analyzed and some of them were corrected to increase their effectiveness. Fourthly, there is a gap in the argument competence among 4 groups of participants.

In addition, through the analysis of the students' writings, questionnaires and interviews with them, the researcher has found out the reasons for those mistakes reaching 7 including : *students' thinking, time pressure, excessive attention to justify the topic, lack of practice, low language competence, lack of vigor in arguing, and light emphasis on students' argument ability of Vietnamese education*. All these factors have contributed to the errors commitment of the students.

### II. Limitations

Though researcher has carried out the study with full seriousness and carefulness, the research remains some certain limitations. The first shortcoming is the restricted number of reference materials the researcher approached. Despite great searching efforts, I could not access many reliable sources especially the ones listing types of errors; consequently, the literature review could not be done thoroughly and exhaustively. To overcome this

difficulty, I try to find out the common mistakes in the accessible sources. Moreover, the number of people checking the students' writings for mistakes was not really big enough (only 2 people were involved). In addition, due to the size of the study, I could not deal with all the logical mistakes in the analyzed works; for instance, the incoherence among arguments in the whole paper. Instead, I could only focus on the errors occurring within an argument. Due to these shortcomings, further studies on certain aspects should be developed in the future.

### **III. Suggestions for further research**

Although this research has had some findings, there is some space for further studies. In particular, they should investigate not only errors within an argument but also the ones in the linking between arguments and the whole essay. Secondly, the number of participants and references should be extended to increase the effectiveness for the study.

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## APPENDIX 1

### TOPIC FOR PARTICIPANTS' WRITING

Name :.....Class.....Date.....

*Write an argumentative essay on following topic :*

*“ We live today in the electronic information age. It is easier to be connected by technology yet many people seem no closer to feeling happy in their life. Discuss”. Word limit: 350 words.*

**Answer**

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**The end**

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **SURVEY QUESTIONS (QUESTIONNAIRES)**

1. Do you think that “argumentative” and “persuasive” essay writing are the same one ?  
  
a) Yes                                      b) No                                      c) No ideas
2. Which type of errors do the students often make in their essay ?  
  
a) Logical errors                      b) Structural errors                      c) Both a & b
3. According to you, how many informal mistakes are there in argumentative essay ?  
  
a) 5                                      b) 6                                      c) 7
4. The conclusion is just repeation of the thesis statement in an argument.  
  
a) True                                      b) False                                      c) No ideas
5. It may be more than one premise but ..... conclusion(s) in an argument.  
  
a) Only one                                      b) Two                                      c) Many
6. The premises are necessary to have ..... to its conclusion in an argument.  
  
a) Similarity                                      b) Difference                                      c) Link
7. In the case, the conclusion hardly resulting from the premise is the mistake of .....  
  
a) Hasty generalization      b) Wrong inference                      c) Wrong premise

8. In the argument, error of .....is recognized if the second premise is just the paraphrase of the first one.

a) Circular reasoning      b) Irrelevant reasons      c) Wrong conclusion

9. What should the writers give more in order to strengthen persuasion for their argumentative essay ?

a) Inferences      b) Reasonings      c) Evidences

10. Why do the students often make informal mistakes in their writings ?

a) Time pressure      b) Lack of practice      c) Both a & b



## FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH STUDENTS

### 2.1. Findings from the interview with student A:

Below is the interview with the student who made the error of “ *Hasty generalization*”.

#### 2.1.1. Background of the subject

- Date of interview: April 25<sup>th</sup> 2010
- Interview Duration: 10 minutes
- School: EM\_HPU
- Gender: Female

#### 2.1.2. Questions and answers

Q : In your essay, you wrote that “ It is because of technology that people especially relatives do not often go to each other’s house. Therefore, they lose the intimacy, which leads to lose their friendship now and then” Can you explain this?

A : yes, I think that with modern technology people do not need to visit each other so they may not have little face-to-face communication. Therefore, they may be not close.

Q : How high do you think that the probability of this tendency is?

A : Very high.

Q : Do you think it is necessary to add the word of frequency to the above sentence?

A : May be but I do not usually use this item of language.

Q : Can you tell me why?

A : As I do not have much practice with this and in fact, I did not have much time to care for that when I wrote this. I just thought a bout justifying my idea and I think the more certain my words appears the stronger my argument gets. As a result, I did not add the “may be” or “perhaps” there.

Q : When doing argumentative tasks, what difficulties do you often have?

A: I do not often many ideas and maybe if I practice more I would improve this, I want more class and home assignments.

## **2.2. Findings from the interview with student B:**

Below is the interview with the student who made the error of “ *Irrelevant reasons*”.

### **2.2.1. Background of the subject**

- Date of interview: April 25<sup>th</sup> 2010
- Interview Duration: 10 minutes
- School: EM\_HPU
- Gender: Female

### **2.2.2. Questions and answers**

Q : What did you want to prove when you wrote that “ Our daily life is much easier with many modern electronic machines, for example: washing machine, air-conditioner, TV, refrigerator, ect.”

A : Yes, to prove that the electronic information age brings a lot of benefits to human life. Wow, maybe I made a mistake here. It does not seem to be relevant. I had too little time to think, maybe , so I was rather careless. I felt too tense to consider all the supporting ideas.

Q : Is there any other reason?

A : Maybe I did not understand the topic well. For a while I thought it covered the advantages and disadvantages of the modern time in general so I mentioned those machines to prove the benefits human can get from technology without awareness of fact that this topic only emphasises on the information technology.

Q : For argumentative writing, do you find any difficulty?

A : Yes, I often have few reasons for my opinion. Maybe I need to practice more. Then, I will be able to generate ideas better.

Q : For your essays of this genre, what mistakes have been commended on by the teacher?

A : Grammatical or vocabulary mistakes and sometimes adherence and logical mistakes.

Q : Logical mistakes? Can you say more clearly?

A : Yes, sometimes my argument is not strong enough.

Q : What do you think is the reason for this?

A : I am not really sure. Maybe, the time allowed for the task was too short.

Q : So it is the matter of time again?

A : Yes.

Q : Logical mistakes? Do you know how many types of logical mistakes there are?

A : Not really.

### **2.3. Findings from the interview with student C:**

Below is the interview with the student who made the error of “*Wrong inference*”.

### **2.3.1. Background of the subject**

- Date of interview: April 25<sup>th</sup> 2010
- Interview Duration: 10 minutes
- School: EM\_HPU
- Gender: Female

### **2.3.2. Questions and answers**

Q : Your writing said that “The main offending agents are carbon monoxide and nicotine in the smoke, which have effected directly and seriously to smoker’s lung. As a result, smoking is just the leading and unique cause of lung cancer for all smokers”. Can you elaborate on this?

A : Yes, as we all know that smoking is very harmful to our health. Moreover, in accordance with recent surveys, the researchers reveal the number of people who die of diseases connected to smoking is increasing more and more. So smoking is just the leading and unique cause of lung cancer for all smokers.

Q : What do you think of the word “unique” used in the above sentence?

A : Uhm...Yes. Uhm...Maybe not really appropriate. However, at that time, I could not think much about this. I just wrote down any thing crossing my mind. Perhaps, I would have made some changes in the wording if I had had more time to check my work.

Q : Then time is a solution. Anything else?

A : I should have used words more properly. Sometimes, I want to express something but I found it too hard to get the correct word especially the key word like “unique” in the above case.

Q : When dealing with argumentative essays, what mistakes do you often make?

A : I usually receive the feedback that I generalize too hastily when arguing.

Q : Generalizes too hastily! This is one type of logical mistakes. Do you know many of them like “Red herring” or “Either/ or mistake”?

A : To be honest, not really. I know something about coherence and cohesion in writing but not much about the mistakes you called

Q : Ok, thank you much for spending time for me.

#### **2.4. Findings from the interview with student D:**

Below is the interview with the student who made the error of “*Circular reasoning*”.

##### **2.4.1. Background of the subject**

- Date of interview: April 25<sup>th</sup> 2010
- Interview Duration: 10 minutes
- School: EM\_HPU
- Gender: Female

##### **2.4.2. Questions and answers**

Q : You wrote that “We are more and more depending on technology and we have not much care about connecting to real people, real life. We prefer to spend our life on technology rather than communicating with social life. Therefore, we have little connection with social life and we will have feeling sad and lonely”. Now reading this again, can you give me any self-comment?

A : Wow, maybe a bit repetition, I could not check the writing again as I had too little time to do this. Time is often my difficulty. Most of the time, I can

not conclude my essay. I know it is my weakness but I have not been able to overcome.

Q : What solution can you think of?

A : Maybe more practice is needed.

Q : Do you ever hear of the names of logical mistakes in argumentative essays?

A : Not really.

Q : Do you think you should know about this?

A : Yes, of course. To make my writing better.

Q : Can you suggest some ways to teach this?

A : Maybe lessons or course on this should be organized or seminars can be a good idea.

Q : Is there any way to improve our argument?

A : I think contests are interesting as they are rather inspiring. Maybe big prize can encourage us much.

## **2.5. Findings from the interview with student E:**

Below is the interview with the student who made the error of “*Wrong premise*”.

### **2.5.1. Background of the subject**

- Date of interview: April 25<sup>th</sup> 2010
- Interview Duration: 10 minutes
- School: EM\_HPU

- Gender: Female

### **2.5.2. Questions and answers**

Q : You wrote that “Technology’s connecting people throughout the world, which leads to the epidemic of violent games, sex films, dirty websites, etc”. Can you elaborate on this?

A : As you can see now with computers, we can watch many sex films, play many violent games.

Q : So do you think that technology is the cause of this fact?

A : Yes. Without technology we can approach these things.

Q : For argumentative essays, what mistakes are you often commended on by the teacher?

A : Maybe word choice and sometimes my argument is not strong enough. For example, I once said that students’ wearing uniforms should be compulsory as it can bridge the gap between the poor and the rich as they have the same style. Meanwhile, the gap is there as they can be difference in materials. To comment on this, my teacher advised me to add the word “partly”.

Q : Do you have the habit of using this kind of vocabulary in your work?

A : Not really.

Q : Any other mistake? Do you know the names of any logical mistake?

A : Hasty generalization and Irrelevant reasons.

Q : Why do you know?

A : I have ever heard my teacher mention.

Q : Do you have any suggestions to improve students’ arguing?

A : Maybe much practice and more analysis of mistakes in our writing by the teacher both in written and spoken form.

## **2.6. Findings from the interview with student F:**

Below is the interview with the student who made the error of “ *Circular reasoning*”.

### **2.6.1. Background of the subject**

- Date of interview: April 25<sup>th</sup> 2010
- Interview Duration: 10 minutes
- School: EM\_HPU

### **2.6.2. Questions and answers**

Q : Your thesis statement is that “the speedy connection makes people seem not closer to feeling happy in their life”. And in the second main idea, you said the more convenient communication among people thanks to technology reduces people’s habit of visiting each other. In conclusion, the development of information technology always brings with it the decrease of emotion values’. Can you explain the relation between this main argument and the thesis?

A : I want to say about the disadvantages of electronic information age. Well, the second main idea does not seem to match the thesis statement. Maybe I was too hasty and did not refer back to the topic when I wrote this.

Q : So the reason is?

A : Time was too short. This argument is not good. In fact, it is my problem that my arguments are not strong in my writings

Q : Can you tell more clearly?



A : Yes. I think I am not good at arguing and this maybe as most of Vietnamese students are not aggressive enough in debate.

Q : Aggressive?

A : Yes, we are not enthusiasm and maybe that is why we are bad at arguing.