

## THE TOULMIN MODEL OF ARGUMENTATION IN TEACHING VIETNAMESE TO FOREIGN LEARNERS

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<i>Received:</i> 01/01/2026	This article reviews the theoretical foundations of the Toulmin model of argumentation and proposes a pedagogical framework for applying this model to the teaching of Vietnamese as a foreign language (VFL). The study aims to support the development of learners' argumentative discourse competence in alignment with the learning outcomes specified in the Vietnamese Language Proficiency Framework for Foreigners (six levels compatible with the CEFR). From the perspective of argumentation theory, the Toulmin model, comprising the components <i>claim</i> , <i>data/grounds</i> , <i>warrant</i> , <i>backing</i> , <i>qualifier</i> , and <i>rebuttal</i> , provides a practical structure for analyzing and organizing arguments in natural discourse. However, foreign learners of Vietnamese often rely on simplified argumentative structures with limited use of counterargument and rebuttal, despite the importance of these dialogic elements in predicting writing quality. This article proposes a structure-to-language-resources approach, in which Toulmin's components are mapped onto Vietnamese linguistic resources such as cohesion devices, modal expressions, stance markers, and politeness strategies. The proposed framework offers a structured pathway for designing instructional tasks that support the development of argumentative competence in Vietnamese language classrooms.
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### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of increasing international exchange and the growing demand for learning Vietnamese, the teaching of Vietnamese to foreign learners requires greater standardization in curricula, teaching materials, and assessment practices. In Vietnam, the promulgation of the Vietnamese Language Proficiency Framework for Foreigners has provided a foundation for curriculum development and assessment across six levels aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Importantly, proficiency descriptors at intermediate and advanced levels extend beyond grammatical accuracy to include the ability to express opinions, explain reasons, process complex texts, and participate in discussions or debates, communicative acts that inherently require structured argumentation and appropriate modal choices.

Within this context, the Toulmin model of argumentation emerges as a useful framework that enables foreign learners to develop argumentative reasoning more effectively in a second language.

Internationally, Toulmin's model is widely recognized as a significant contribution to the teaching of critical thinking, rhetoric, and argumentation studies. In Vietnam, the model has also

been introduced as a means of bridging the gap between real-life reasoning and the traditional syllogistic model, emphasizing contextual rationality and appropriateness rather than the pursuit of absolute logical truth.

## 2. RELATED WORKS

Since antiquity, argumentation has been regarded as a core component of rhetorical practice. In classical rhetorical works, particularly in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, argumentation was presented as a foundation for constructing and defending viewpoints. However, for a long period afterward, research on argumentation theory saw limited development and only regained attention in the twentieth century.

In the twentieth century, with the increasing need to enhance the effectiveness of debate in academic and social contexts, new approaches to argumentation theory emerged. Among the most notable are Rogerian argumentation, proposed by psychologist Carl Rogers, and The New Rhetoric developed by Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca. These works sought to clarify how individuals construct and develop arguments in different communicative contexts.

Among modern frameworks, two models have been widely applied: the Rogerian model and the Toulmin model. Rogerian argumentation is grounded in psychology and emphasizes empathy and mutual understanding between disputing parties as a pathway toward compromise. In contrast, the Toulmin model focuses on the practical rationality and contextual applicability of arguments. According to this approach, an argument is constructed by presenting a central claim and supporting it with various components that strengthen its credibility, thereby ensuring coherence in the reasoning process rather than focusing solely on the logical validity of the conclusion. Stephen Toulmin (1922–2009) was a British philosopher.

Since its introduction in “The Uses of Argument” (1958), the Toulmin model has attracted considerable scholarly attention due to its flexibility across disciplines. It has been applied not only in the social sciences and humanities but also in teaching and research within the natural sciences, demonstrating its broad practical value for analyzing and constructing arguments.

In this work, Toulmin proposed a framework consisting of six interrelated components used to analyze and construct arguments. In practical discourse, an argument typically begins with a claim, supported by data or grounds, and linked by a warrant. Additional components may include backing, which supports the warrant; qualifiers, which indicate the degree of certainty; and rebuttals, which anticipate possible counterarguments or exceptions. The minimal form of the model includes three components: Data, Warrant, and Claim (D-W-C), highlighting the role of the warrant as the logical bridge that allows data to lead to a conclusion within a particular argumentative context.

From the perspective of informal logic, Toulmin argued that argument evaluation should not rely solely on formal deductive validity but should instead focus on justification and contextual appropriateness within specific fields of knowledge and critical practice. In contemporary interpretations, qualifiers and rebuttals do not weaken an argument; rather, they enhance its academic rigor by acknowledging uncertainty, specifying conditions of applicability, and engaging with opposing viewpoints.

Pedagogically, the Toulmin model has been widely used as a tool for teaching writing and organizing arguments. In *Using Toulmin's Model of Argumentation* (1987), Joan Karbach emphasizes that claim, grounds, and warrant constitute the core elements of all arguments, while backing, qualifier, and rebuttal serve as extensions that make arguments more complete and sophisticated. Teaching learners to use transitional words and rhetorical strategies can help develop these elements in writing.

Research in second-language contexts consistently shows that learners can usually present claims and supporting data, but often struggle to develop counterarguments and rebuttals. Qin and Karabacak (2010), in their analysis of argumentative essays written by 133 EFL students, found that an average essay contained at least one claim supported by approximately four units of data. However, the use of counterarguments and rebuttals appeared far less frequently, even though these elements significantly predicted overall writing quality. This finding has direct implications for teaching Vietnamese to foreign learners. If classroom instruction focuses only on presenting opinions and reasons, learners may struggle to achieve academic argumentative competence, particularly at intermediate and advanced proficiency levels.

From a discourse perspective, Ken Hyland's stance-engagement model describes the linguistic resources writers use to express commitment, evaluation, and alignment with readers. In this framework, stance refers to linguistic devices that allow writers either to assert strong commitment to a proposition or to hedge their claims. Viewed in this way, the qualifier in Toulmin's model is not merely a logical marker but also involves the use of modal and hedging expressions to achieve persuasive effectiveness within a discourse community. This aspect is especially relevant in teaching Vietnamese to foreign learners at intermediate and advanced levels.

### 3. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

This study adopts theoretical analysis combined with pedagogical modeling. The aim is not to empirically test a specific hypothesis but rather to construct a pedagogical framework grounded in argumentation theory and applied linguistics. The research process consists of three main stages: Reviewing theoretical literature on the Toulmin model and studies on argumentative writing in second-language contexts; comparing these insights with the proficiency descriptors in the Vietnamese Language Proficiency Framework for Foreigners in order to identify correspondences between expected learning outcomes and argumentative components; developing a pedagogical framework that maps Toulmin components onto Vietnamese linguistic resources while proposing instructional sequences and classroom activities.

The analysis is conducted from a discourse-analytic perspective. Toulmin's argumentative components are treated as functional units within discourse, while Vietnamese linguistic resources, such as connectors, explanatory constructions, modal expressions, and concessive or contrastive structures are identified as linguistic means that realize these argumentative functions. This approach allows for the establishment of a systematic relationship between argument structure and linguistic form, thereby supporting the design of pedagogical activities.

The illustrative data used in this article include sample argumentative paragraphs in Vietnamese as well as speaking and writing tasks designed according to the Toulmin model. These examples are intended to demonstrate how the theoretical framework can be translated into concrete classroom practices.

### 4. RESEARCH RESULTS

The proposal presented in this article is based on the pedagogical assumption that the Toulmin model should be used as a guiding template rather than a rigid formula in Vietnamese language classrooms for foreign learners. Argumentation is inherently context-dependent, and not all components need to be explicitly expressed in every discourse instance. However, in second-language teaching, making these components explicit helps learners recognize and practice elements that are often missing, particularly qualifiers and rebuttals.

#### 4.1. Mapping Toulmin Components onto Vietnamese Linguistic Resources

The key difference between "teaching the Toulmin model" and "teaching Vietnamese through the Toulmin model" lies in linking each component of the model to specific linguistic resources in Vietnamese.

Claim is realized through stance-marking expressions such as: *Tôi cho rằng.../ Theo tôi.../ Tôi đồng ý rằng.../ Quan điểm của tôi là... (I believe that... / In my opinion... / I agree that... / My view is that...).*

Data/Grounds can be organized into different levels: personal experience; situational examples or observations; cited evidence or references.

Warrant functions as the reasoning that explains why the data support the claim. In Vietnamese, warrants are often expressed through explanatory constructions such as: *Điều này cho thấy..., bởi lẽ..., vì nhìn chung..., trong bối cảnh..., xét về..., vì... nên/ do... nên.... (This shows that... / because... / in general... / in this context... / therefore...).*

Backing involves supporting the warrant by referring to authoritative sources or established knowledge, such as expert opinions, regulations, or multiple independent sources.

Qualifier reflects the degree of certainty or scope of applicability. In Vietnamese, it can be expressed through modal and quantifying expressions such as: *Có thể, có lẽ, đa số, trong nhiều trường hợp, nhìn chung, khả năng cao, ... (perhaps, possibly, in most cases, generally, it is likely that...).*

Rebuttal introduces potential exceptions or counterarguments. In Vietnamese, rebuttals are often expressed through concessive or contrastive structures such as: *Tuy nhiên, mặc dù vậy, mặc dù... nhưng..., dẫu... song, mặt khác..., ngoại trừ trường hợp... (however, nevertheless, although... yet..., on the other hand..., except in cases where...).* Teaching rebuttal also helps learners develop academic interactional competence, allowing them to acknowledge opposing viewpoints while reaffirming their own arguments.

#### 4.2. Progression Across Proficiency Levels

Since the Vietnamese Language Proficiency Framework includes six levels aligned with CEFR, the use of the Toulmin model should develop progressively: At Levels 1 and 2, the practical objective is to help learners construct a basic Claim-Data pair using simple or compound sentences with fundamental cohesive markers. At Level 3, learners are described as being able to “briefly present reasons or explanations.” At this stage, instruction can introduce the warrant as a sentence explaining why the evidence supports the claim, typically placed after the data. At Level 4, the framework specifies that learners should be able to express opinions and identify the advantages and disadvantages of different options. This creates a natural opportunity to introduce rebuttals and qualifiers into speaking and writing tasks. At Levels 5 and 6, learners are expected to comprehend and produce longer and more complex texts, often for academic or professional purposes. This stage is therefore appropriate for standardizing practices such as source citation (backing), academic hedging (qualifiers), and multi-layered rebuttals addressing different assumptions.

#### 4.3. Illustrating Activity Design and Analyzing Vietnamese Argumentative Samples

To make the Toulmin model a practical tool for applied linguistics, classroom activities should follow a sequence of:

Identification → Guided reconstruction → Independent production → Feedback based on guidelines. This structure aligns with instructional approaches emphasizing instruction, task structuring, and modeling found in studies that apply Toulmin-based interventions in classroom settings.

##### Reading and Analytical Activity:

Learners are given a short commentary text (approximately 200-300 words) and asked to identify sentences functioning as claim, data, or warrant. From level 4 onwards, two additional tasks can be incorporated: Identifying qualifiers (degree markers indicating certainty or limitation); identifying markers of concession or contrast (e.g., *however, although...yet*). Highlighting these linguistic signals directly addresses a common gap among learners: the absence of counterarguments and rebuttals.

### Writing Activity Based on a Toulmin Outline

Suggested writing task (levels 3-4): Do you agree that learners of Vietnamese should participate in a weekly Vietnamese speaking club? Why or why not?

#### Step-by-step outline:

Write the Claim in one sentence.

Provide Data using two examples or observations (numerical data not required).

Write a Warrant as a general statement explaining why the examples support the conclusion.

Add a Qualifier, beginning with a hedging phrase (e.g., *in many cases, if...*).

Write a Rebuttal acknowledging a possible exception and responding to it.

This “minimal-to-expanded” structure reflects how many Toulmin-based writing resources identify claim-grounds warrant as the argumentative core, while backing, qualifier, and rebuttal function as extensions that increase the sophistication of reasoning.

### Structured Speaking and Debate Activities

A speaking task suitable for levels 4-5 may involve dividing the class into two groups to debate a familiar social issue (e.g., “*Should motorcycles be restricted in city centers?*”). Each speaking turn must include at least one claim and one piece of data, while each response must contain: one acknowledgement (concession), and one rebuttal. This minimal requirement is grounded in research findings indicating that counterarguments and rebuttals rarely appear spontaneously unless they are explicitly prompted through task design.

#### 4.4. An Example of a Vietnamese Argument Using the Toulmin Model

The following example is intended solely to illustrate argumentative structure, not to assert the truth of the content.

Claim: In my opinion, learners of Vietnamese should practice speaking in groups at least once a week.

Data: In group-speaking activities, learners tend to have more opportunities to speak and receive immediate feedback from peers.

Warrant: If the frequency of language use increases and feedback is provided promptly, learners are more able to adjust their expressions, which tends to improve speaking proficiency.

Backing: This reasoning is consistent with learning principles based on practice and feedback. Teachers may ask learners to keep a journal of common errors to demonstrate improvement over time.

Qualifier: In many cases, especially when the group has a facilitator and the discussion topics are appropriate to learners’ proficiency levels.

Rebuttal: However, if there is a large proficiency gap within the group or if speaking turns are not regulated, weaker learners may participate less. In such cases, group composition and task design should be adjusted.

Including qualifiers and rebuttals in the example highlights a key principle of the Toulmin model: a strong argument does not rely on absolute claims but anticipates conditions of applicability and engages with potential counterarguments.

#### 4.5. Assessment Based on Toulmin Rubrics and Alignment with Learning Outcomes

One practical advantage of the Toulmin model is that it can be translated into transparent assessment criteria, such as: whether the claim is clear or ambiguous, whether the data are relevant and sufficiently specific, whether the warrant effectively links the data to the claim or

represents a logical leap, the academic appropriateness of qualifiers, and the presence and quality of rebuttals. Studies discussing the application of Toulmin in teaching and learning also recommend the use of rubrics to facilitate feedback and improve argumentative quality, demonstrating the model's ease of transformation into classroom assessment tools.

When aligned with the Vietnamese Language Proficiency Framework, a Toulmin-based rubric can be anchored to the requirements of Levels 3-4 (explaining reasons, expressing opinions, comparing advantages and disadvantages) and expanded for Levels 5-6 (complex argumentation, longer texts, and academic or professional purposes). From this perspective, the Toulmin model does not replace the proficiency framework; rather, it functions as a structured argumentative template that helps teachers operationalize what it means to present well-supported opinions in Vietnamese.

#### **4.6. Pedagogical Considerations in Using the Toulmin Model**

First, warrants and backing may remain implicit in authentic discourse. Therefore, when teaching Vietnamese to foreign learners, instructors should balance making argumentative relationships explicit for learning purposes with maintaining natural communicative practice. A methodological implication is that, at lower proficiency levels, requiring learners to produce highly abstract warrants may lead to cognitive overload. Accordingly, warrants should initially be introduced as simple explanatory sentences that clarify why the evidence supports the claim, expressed in everyday language before gradually moving toward more abstract academic generalizations.

Second, while the Toulmin model primarily describes the structural organization of arguments, the overall quality of discourse also depends on the perspective and competence of both the producer and the audience. The stance–engagement framework reminds us that writers must balance their degree of commitment with the expectations of the discourse community. For this reason, qualifiers and hedging should be taught as part of discursive competence, rather than merely as isolated linguistic markers.

Third, when transferring the model from English-language instruction to Vietnamese language teaching, educators should avoid mechanically translating the labels of Toulmin components. Instead, it is more appropriate to develop genre-based corpora and teaching materials (e.g., commentaries, letters of suggestion, expository texts, argumentative essays, and academic discussions). The genre itself determines the extent to which rebuttal or backing is required and the types of qualifiers that are appropriate. This recommendation aligns with the view that teaching Vietnamese as a foreign language requires systematic and up-to-date instructional materials that incorporate advances in modern language pedagogy.

### **5. CONCLUSION**

The Toulmin model offers a highly practical framework for analyzing and organizing arguments. By dividing argumentation into functional components, emphasizing the warrant as the logical bridge, and treating qualifiers and rebuttals as mechanisms that make arguments reasonable under conditions of potential challenge, the model provides a clear structure for argumentative discourse. In the context of teaching Vietnamese to foreign learners, the Toulmin model is particularly valuable in two respects. First, it helps operationalize intermediate and advanced proficiency requirements (B1, B2, C1, C2) within the Vietnamese Language Proficiency Framework, such as presenting opinions, giving reasons, and engaging in multi-perspective discussion. Second, it enables teachers to design structured task sequences and feedback mechanisms that directly address common weaknesses among foreign language learners, particularly the lack of counterarguments and rebuttals, as well as the absence of appropriate hedging strategies.

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