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**Investigating EFL Learners' Difficulties in Writing Argumentative Essays:
The Case of 1st and 2nd Master Students of English at Kasdi Merbah University
of Ouargla**

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Dedication

We dedicate this work:

To our beloved parents

To our sisters

To our brothers

Acknowledgments

This dissertation could not have been completed without the help of Allah and the contribution of our supervisor, our teachers and classmates, and finally our families.

First and foremost, we would like to thank Allah, the most Gracious and Merciful for giving us the power and patience to complete the dissertation.

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Abstract

The present study aims at investigating the different difficulties that are often encountered by EFL master students while producing the genre of argumentative essays writing. This study has been achieved through a qualitative and a quantitative analysis. To collect data, the researchers used two research tools: a semi-structured interview was addressed to three EFL teachers and a written test was used to assess 29 master students' performance in writing argumentative essays in the Department of English section at Kasdi Merbah University in Ouargla. The results revealed that most of the participants did not only face a set of difficulties in producing an opinion and advancing arguments, but also they failed to structure a well-organized argumentative essay according to its academic norms and patterns. According to their points of view, EFL teachers agreed that students find argumentative essay highly difficult in comparison to the other types of essay writing. This can be justified by the fact that they do not give much importance to the techniques of writing. Also, they confirmed that EFL students are lack motivated, and the time devoted for teaching this essay genre is extremely short. To conclude, some activities are proposed to improve students' writing argumentative essay and teaching it by encouraging them to write outside the classroom and giving them the opportunity to enhance their abilities in producing the argumentative essays.

Keywords: argumentative essays, EFL learners, opinion, arguments.

List of Abbreviations

- EFL:** English as Foreign Language
- ESL:** English as a Second Language
- IELTS:** International English Language Testing System
- L2:** Second Language
- N°:** Number
- P:** Paragraph
- SMS:** Short Message Service
- TEFL:** Teaching English as a Foreign Language
- TOEFL:** Test of English as a Foreign Language

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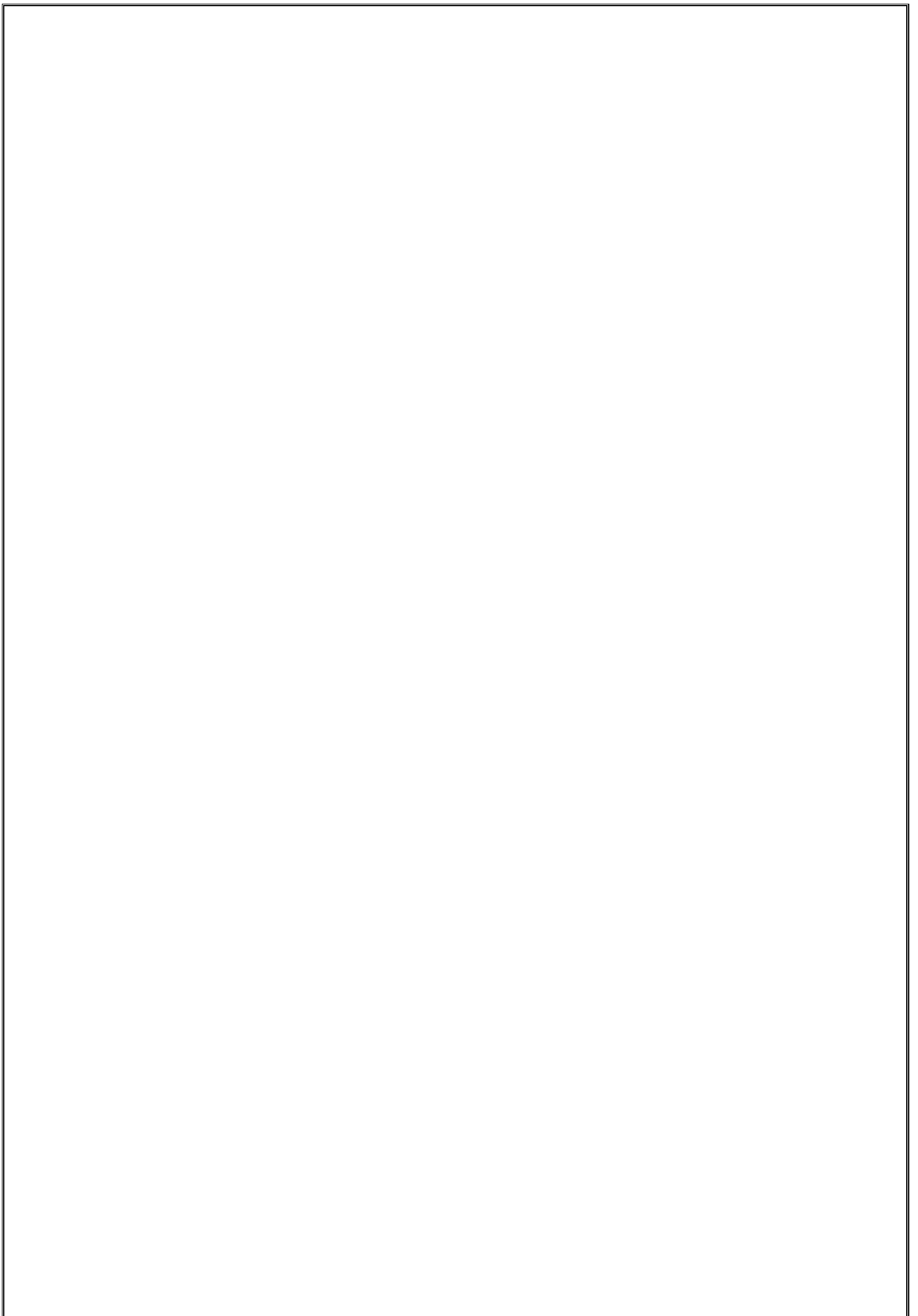
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General Introduction

I. Background of the Study

Writing has been given much attention due to the increasing demands of higher education, employment, business, and academic studies. It is claimed that the writing skill is a vital component of the curriculum from the primary school up to university (Weigle, 2002). In foreign language learning, writing is considered as a challenging task for most EFL learners, especially when it comes to argumentative writing. Becoming an essential skill, this type of writing is seen as the cornerstone of EFL learners' academic experience in most universities. Hence, it should be cautiously mastered. In writing argumentatively, Anker (2005) explains that the writer has a hard task in which s/he argues to convince the reader by composing argument and supporting it in a debatable context to be accepted. In spite of its common use, argumentative writing as a crucial mode of written discourse is considered as a difficult type of text because of its complex nature (Ferris, 1994). Particularly, writing an argumentative essay has been seen as a common type of assignment for learners at the tertiary level. Indeed, the argumentative essay as a genre of academic texts is highly important for them to express and discuss their views professionally and appropriately

Although the nature of an argumentative essay varies considerably across and even within disciplines, developing an argument is seen as a key feature of successful academic writing (Lea & Street, 1998). Connor (1987) describes what the writer intends, and what the audience expects in a conventional pattern and contextual setting as a cognitive process that appears in writing an argumentative essay. Although argumentative essay plays a fundamental role in measuring one's level of academic success, both EFL and ESL learners often encounter specific difficulties in composing this type (Applebee, 1984).

II. Rationale

The present study is conducted for several reasons. First of all, personal interest and experience are of a prominent role. They encourage the present researchers to investigate the issue of argumentative essay writing. Further, in the Algerian context, previous studies have dealt with various aspects of academic writing; however, they neglect to emphasize the problems of the EFL learners in producing argumentative essays, especially, at university level. Therefore, there is a critical need to fill the gap between the argumentative essay structure in English academic writing and the challenges encountered by EFL Master

learners in writing this genre. This can be achieved by examining the nature of the difficulties they face when they write this genre.

III. Objectives

The main objective of the current study is to investigate the major difficulties EFL master students experience in writing argumentative essays. Particularly, this study focuses on assessing two aspects: expressing opinion and developing argument. A further objective is to determine a set of strategies in which their proficiency will be developed so that it meets the conventions of English academic writing in producing argumentative essays.

IV. Research Questions

On the basis of the aforementioned objectives, the main research questions to be explored in the present study are the following:

1. What are the EFL master students' difficulties in writing argumentative essays?
 - a. What are the main EFL master student' difficulties in expressing and placing opinion?
 - b. What are the main EFL master students' difficulties in expressing and placing arguments?
2. How can EFL master students' writing argumentative essays proficiency be developed?

V. Population

The current study involves two categories of participants:

1. First and second year EFL master students at Kasdi Merbah Universiy (KMU), Ouargla, Algeria registered for the academic year 2018/2019.
2. Teachers of written expression at Kasdi Merbah University (KMU), Ouargla, Algeria.

VI. Research Means

A combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods are used in the present piece of research. A written test is used to elicit essays from the EFL master students. Additionally, an interview is addressed to the teachers of writing about their perceptions on the students' difficulties in producing the argumentative essays as well as the ways in which EFL master students' proficiency can be bettered.

VII. Structure of the Dissertation

The present dissertation is organized in two parts: a theoretical and a practical one. The first includes two chapters, and the second contains one. More explicitly, the first two chapters give a theoretical framework, which is the basis for the investigation, and the third one discusses its methods and results. The first chapter is an introduction to academic essay writing. The second chapter concentrates on the academic argumentative essay writing. The last one, which is the practical part, is regarded as an application of the study. It represents the methodology, data collection, and the analysis of the findings.

VIII. Definitions of Key Terms

Argument

As defined by *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, an argument is “a set of reasons used by one to show that something is true or wrong”(p.65). Argument is also defined as “persuasion on a topic about which reasonable people disagree. Argument involves controversy”(Brandon& Brandon, 2011, p.341).

Argumentative Essay

“Argumentative essay represents logical reasoning and solid evidence that will persuade your readers to accept your point of view...Whatever your exact purpose, your argumentative essay should be composed of a clear thesis and body paragraphs that offer enough sensible reasons and persuasive evidence to convince your readers to agree with you”(Brandon& Brandon ,2011, p.287).

Essay

An essay is defined as: “a short piece of writing about a given topic” (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 2006, p.496). Brandon and Brandon (2011) define an essay as: “a group of paragraphs, each with the function of supporting a controlling idea called the thesis. The main parts of an essay are the introduction, development, and conclusion. The essay can be considered an amplification of a developmental paragraph”(p.96).

Opinion

An opinion is defined, according to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, as: “a view or judgment formed about something not necessarily based on facts or knowledge but rather on one's beliefs or thought” (p.1024). Opinion is also seen as “a type of statement

which expresses some sort of position which, as a rule, will not go undisputed and can be individual and subjective” (VanEemeren, 2001, p.36).

Section One: Review of Literature

Chapter One: Introduction to Essay Writing Teaching

Introduction

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Section One: Review of the Literature

Chapter One: Introduction to Academic Essay

Introduction

The ability to write has become an important skill. It is a challenging task especially in a foreign language, however. In academic settings, learners are expected to have academic writing skills that are beneficial to operate in the various domains that require the use of language. Critical thinking is one of these skills that need to be developed. As a crucial task in such settings, essay is one way to build and develop them. It is highly used at university to promote learners to be socially active. This chapter aims at reviewing the realm of academic writing briefly by clarifying how it is different from other types of writing. The emphasis is mainly on its common genre, the essay. Its conventional boundaries are reset to draw a clear and simple image for learners to follow.

1.1. Introduction to Academic Writing

1.1.1. The Importance of Writing

Writing is a cardinal skill that is required in several contexts throughout life. Indeed, it is an essential instrument in both academic and professional settings. In the academic context, learners need it to write reports, research papers, research proposals, and to deal with exams. One may also need to write a statement of purpose to a foreign University. As described by Ingrid (2015), in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL), it becomes the heart of academic work where it is mainly used as a tool to measure the learners' level of success. In the professional setting, writing is widely needed for job application, business report, advertisement, and the like. In fact, writing is not solely based on getting and putting words on the piece of paper, but also it is the effective task of how to write one's complex ideas in the simplest form, which can be clear and understandable to the readers. In this vein, Gabrielatos (2002) sees writing as a complex skill which requires more than the accurate use of grammar and a good range of vocabulary. Actually, it is one of the skills which depends a lot on one's research skills. Thus, the more one seeks new information, the better writer s/he will become. As well as helping one to stimulate thinking and to organize his/her ideas, writing develops the learner's ability to summarize, criticize, and analyze (Rao, 2007). From the importance of writing discussed above, it is obvious that effective writing skill has been treated as an essential part in TEFL. As a

result, the enhancement of academic writing ability is highly required for EFL learners at all levels, particularly at university.

1.1.2. Definition of Academic Writing

The concept of academic writing can be viewed from several perspectives by different experts. Academic writing, first, is defined according to Ingrid (2015) as a formal style which involves a variety of aspects and some standard conventions. In this vein, writing for academic purposes is mainly based on evidence and differs from one discipline to another. Besides, it depends largely on presenting facts, investigating knowledge, and providing arguments. The latter, hence, will reinforce one's thoughts and findings with logical justified answers. Bailey (2011) describes academic writing as a kind of writing skills that is characterized by the necessary standard to straightforwardly open the path to EFL learners to international English exams. As well as being consistent, Christine and Jhon (2012) see academic writing as a style of a particular piece which should be suitable both in terms of the message being conveyed and the audience being addressed. Typically, to write academically is not only done for the sake of showing everything that the learner knows about the topic, but rather to show that s/he understands and can think critically and logically about it. In short, academic writing cannot stand on its own by simply presenting the others' ideas, but rather it is the critical way of how to take a part in a debatable academia in order to investigate a stated issue via presenting one's position and weighing up the others' perspectives.

1.1.3. The Importance of Academic Writing for EFL Learners

There are six main reasons which make academic writing important, notably, for EFL learners. Baratta (2007) stresses its importance because most of the exams often rely on the learner' writing proficiency to measure their knowledge. In this vein, Bailey (2011) sees that writing for academic purposes prepares EFL learners for a successful participation in international exams, such as IELTS, TOEFL, and the like. Thus, acquiring powerful academic writing skill will improve their chances for success. The importance of academic writing is also highlighted since it makes EFL learners better thinkers and researchers.

Instead of solely taking from others' ideas and styles, writing academically will develop one's skills in researching, evaluating information, organizing, arguing, responding to others' arguments, and analyzing. Additionally, academic writing betters EFL learners' understanding. In doing so, it gives them the opportunity to explain what they have learned via using the exact terminology and the suitable style to make information understood by the audiences. As far as it obliges learners to look at ideas from

different perspectives, Hunter (2009) believes that writing academically teaches EFL learners how to think critically and objectively. Hence, they will learn how to arguably analyze theories from a number of different views and then state them in a logical and a reasonable way. “Academic writing provides an important means to personal self-expression” (Fitzgerald, Graham & Mc Arthur, 2008, p.105). In other words, it helps one to express him/herself clearly and appropriately. On the whole, academic writing is a helpful skill for people to learn early in academic as well as in real life.

1.1.4. The Features of Academic Writing

Academic writing is different from personal writing and creative writing as well. It has distinctive features which promote it to be used in higher education settings. Hence, university learners, as researchers, need to accomplish their language to be purely an academic one. Since informing is its main objective rather than entertaining, Gitana (2005) mentions that six main characteristics are to be highlighted: complexity, formality, objectivity, explicitness, hedging, and responsibility (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Features of academic writing

1.1.4.1. Complexity

Due to the use of several markers, academic written language is considered to be more complex than the spoken one; its complexity creates its power. It is characterized by the use of subordinate clauses, complement clauses, long sequences of prepositional phrases, attributive adjectives and more passives. In addition, noun-based phrases and lexical variation are highly marked.

1.1.4.2. Formality

Academic writing has a formal tone; such as, the use of passive forms of the verb, impersonal pronouns (e.g. one), and phrases, complex sentence structures, and specialized formal vocabulary. This lies mainly in avoiding informal words and expressions, tautology, vague words or phrases and everyday similes. Hacker (1998) points out that: “Formal writing emphasizes the importance of its subject and the exactness of its information. Its tone is dignified, and it maintains a certain distance between writer and audience” (p.126). Formal language serves both professional and academic purposes. It is about what words to choose and how to put them together.

1.1.4.3. Objectivity

To write academically signifies the total negligence of the personal style i.e. one needs to be objective in conveying any given information or constructing any argument without demonstrating his/her own angle of view. Indeed, objective writing differs from the personal one in the sense that it is based on analysing and evaluating others’ ideas using subject specific vocabulary rather than using everyday words. In addition, it takes information from different sources, and uses evidence to express views. Personal feeling and experience are not reliable (“The Open University,” 2014).

1.1.4.4. Explicitness

Academic writing also involves being explicit. It is necessary for the writer to adopt appropriate words that clearly transmit his/her intention to satisfy his/her targeted audience. Parts of texts should be coherently and cohesively related and organized. Explicitness lies in using the right signalling words. They display the writer’s attitudes in any given discourse precisely. Thus, these connections mirror one’s explicitness and facilitate its comprehension.

1.1.4.5. Hedging

Furthermore, cautious language, often called ‘Hedging’, is marked to be a feature of academic writing. Writing academically necessitates the writer to be aware enough when deciding about a certain subject or even building strong claims. Tribble (1996) claims that hedging involves the extent of responsibility a writer takes either when expressing how his/her ideas are accurate or for the ideas themselves.

1.1.4.6. Responsibility

As a last feature, responsibility should be considered when making any claims or stating critical understanding and support them with appropriate evidence and justifications. The writer should be able to use any source of references via summarizing, paraphrasing and to acknowledge the referred sources. Failing to adhere to this feature will lead to plagiarism which is counted as an academic crime.

1.1.5. Genres of Academic Writing

Within the academic writing framework, one can produce different well-organized written pieces based on a clear reason s/he writes for. Bailey (2011) suggests notes, reports, projects, essays, dissertations/theses, and papers as the most common types of academic writing as shown in Figure 2. Despite the fact that they are governed by certain conventional rules, Gitana (2005) maintains that they differ in terms of their content, structure or format, and the purpose they are written for.

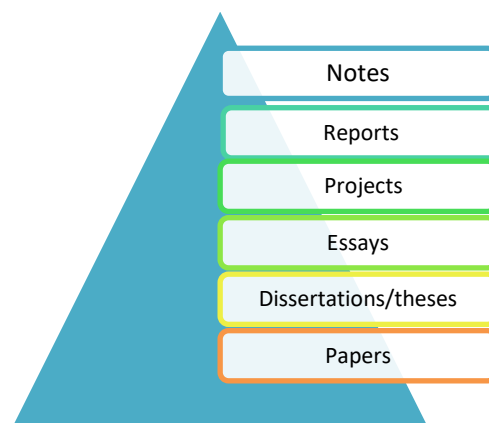


Figure 2: Genres of academic writing

Bailey (2011) sees that notes are the main points extracted from a lecture. Students write them in their personal style. Reports give descriptive details about a work that students have already done as conducting a survey. Concerning projects, he states that they are a form of research conducted by students who choose its subject by themselves. They can be done either individually or by a group of students. Essays are the most familiar assignment given to students, whose topic is chosen by the teacher and whose length extends between 1000 and 5000 words. As for dissertations or theses, they are prepared by higher degree students on a topic of their choice, and they extend over than 20000 words. Finally, he mentions that papers cover any academic production including essays, reports, presentations or articles.

1.1.6. Factors Affecting EFL Learners' Academic Writing

A number of factors can contribute to the poor performance of EFL learners' academic writing, amongst the overuse of internet and SMS texting. Brown (2017) sees that students are more likely to take shortcuts or plagiarize when using the internet. Website articles, for example, decrease the learners' motivation in reading, and this will automatically reduce the quality of their academic writing skills. Similarly, ML, (2010) argues that short message (SMS) texting affects negatively on the students' writing skills. Spellings are most contrived, very badly. Thus, sending a ton of short messages may finish up utilizing shortened forms, and abbreviations; such as, 'l8r' use for 'later', 'u' for 'you', 'wanna' for 'want,' and 'sec' for a 'second'. Acronyms, as well, are letter sequences that stand for a longer phrase; such as, 'IDk' for I don't know, 'OMG' for 'oh my God' used in projects, exams, research papers... Additionally, because of the excessive use of SMS texting students, mostly, use the wrong spellings and sentences and this will be difficult for them to overcome this informal style in the near future or during their professional life or carrier (Samson, 2008). Consequently, these factors affect the quality of students' academic writing at tertiary level.

1.2. Academic Essay Writing

Among other skills, writing essays is highly required at university. However, this skill is not easily acquired. Learners are expected to take a long path to reach a satisfying outcome. This path is to be focused on.

1.2.1. Definition of Academic Essay

As listed above, the essay is an academic writing genre. Indeed, Bailey (2011) considers it as the most common written piece. Zemach and Rumisek (2005) define an essay as: "a group of paragraphs written about a single topic and a central main idea" (p.56). An essay develops a particular subject based on analysing the involved main idea and proving it. In addition, Schwerin (2007) states: "essay writing is an instrument of communication; your essay should be a structured treatment of a particular topic" (p.2). Hence, the task of writing an essay creates a communicative atmosphere between the writer and the reader in the way that transmits the writer's intentions and what interests him/her about the topic to attract and convince his/her targeted audience.

1.2.2. Academic Essay structure

An Academic essay can be structured according to the nature of the topic and the developments of ideas which may provide a particular guidance for the essay form. In addition, essays mostly are organized on the basis of the purpose that they are written for.

So, this structure will facilitate the process of reading. Learners, then, need to be aware of the general academic essay format and for each particular essay type. According to Zemach and Rumisek (2005), it must have at least three paragraphs, while a five-paragraph essay is the common length for academic writing. An example of the academic essay structure provided by Rolls and Wignell (2013) is a framework to organize the ideas according to academic standard (see Table 1).

Table 1
Academic Essay Structure

Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Statement • Thesis Statement • Outline of the main ideas that will be discussed
Body of Essay	Paragraph (1, 2, 3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic sentence • Supporting evidence 1 • Supporting evidence 2 • Supporting evidence 3 • concluding sentence
Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of the main points • Paraphrase of the introduction

1.2.3. The Process of Academic Essay Writing

Generally, the process of writing an essay goes through different stages within the process approach framework, which dictates that to perform the final product, students should pre-write, revise and edit (Badger & White, 2000). In this vein, Oshima and Hogue (2007) strongly reject the idea that writing can be performed in one step. On the contrary, it is a result of interrelated stages which are done creatively. So, to exactly express what is intended to be said, Oshima and Hogue (ibid) believe that any written format has four steps: prewriting, organizing, writing, and polishing, which includes revising and editing (see Figure 3).

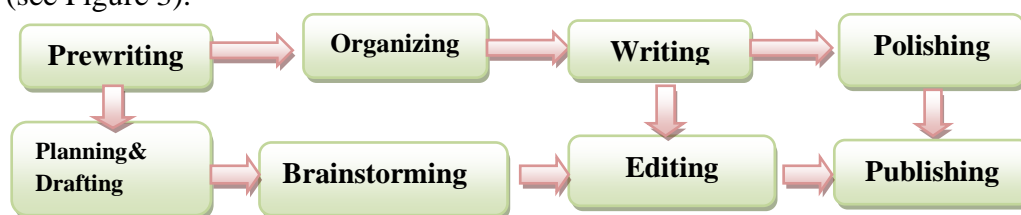


Figure 3: The process of academic essay writing (Oshima& Hogue(ibid))

1.2.3.1. Prewriting

The first step which is prewriting focuses mainly on collecting ideas that underlie the topic after, certainly, choosing the topic. Greetham (2001) and Bowker (2007) give much attention to this primary act as long as it is based on students' appropriate interpretation of the question given. They agree on the fact that it is an anxious moment for almost any writer. Performing it well facilitates the rest of the work and saves time, however. This performance includes reading the appropriate sources and extracting key words to be familiar to the topic and hence recycle ideas in one's own words. It reflects his/her understanding of the topic. While Bowker (ibid) suggests brainstorming as an effective manner to interpret the topic, Oshima and Hogue (2007) highlight, among the various existing techniques, listing as a helpful one. This prewriting technique involves writing the topic at the head of a paper and then drawing each relevant piece of information that comes to mind no matter how good or bad it is.

1.2.3.2. Organizing

The second step is organizing. Both concepts outlining and planning are to be included under organizing. Collected ideas need to be drawn into a simple outline. As Oshima and Hogue (ibid) mention, the outline should be headed by a title and information are separated to main ideas and supporting ones. It is an essay plan when to decide what arguments are appropriate and when to state them and what points support them if they are well-ordered and written in complete sentences so that they strengthen one's position. Besides, these sentences function as a main idea that develops a paragraph in the essay, as Bowker (ibid) argues.

1.2.3.3. Writing

After those two steps, the writing step takes place. In fact, the organizing step has a valuable role as it facilitates writing and works as a guide. Starting with a rough draft, it is important to write down what the entire outline summarised without caring about errors as they will be fixed later. Additional ideas that are not mentioned are expected to appear due to one's knowledge about the subject. Bowker (ibid) stresses: "what is important though is writing down information in your own words, so that you have something to show at the end of your reading and analysis" (p.33). Using one's own style mirrors one's efforts in comprehending the topic and the active reading of it.

1.2.3.4. Polishing

Oshima and Hogue (2007) describe the final step as polishing, in which one revises and edits what has been written. They relate the process of revising to content and organization problems whereas editing is concerned with grammar, punctuation, and mechanics issues. It is about having a big picture of your work and deciding whether it is relevant to the point you aimed to reach and its effectiveness in addressing the reader. Indeed, Bowker (2007) suggests taking time between finishing the draft and revising it at least 24 hours to have a critical picture. Besides, he adds the evaluation of the outsider that contributes, to a great extent, in making the necessary modifications. This point was specified by Oshima and Hogue (ibid) to a classmate's evaluation so called 'peer editing'. Yet, s/he has nothing to do with grammar or punctuation as they are corrected by the teacher. Peer editing helps students to learn more from each other and improve their writing.

1.2.4. Types of Academic Essays

Developing a certain topic in an essay differs in the 'why'. Variety in essays' organization is the result of the purpose that the writer draws in mind and the needs s/he intends to fit. To build a paragraph in an essay, one can embrace an appropriate method to do so depending on the necessity (Hodges, 1990). Hence, four modes of essays exist: descriptive, narrative, expository, and persuasive. Each type has specific purposes (see Figure 4).

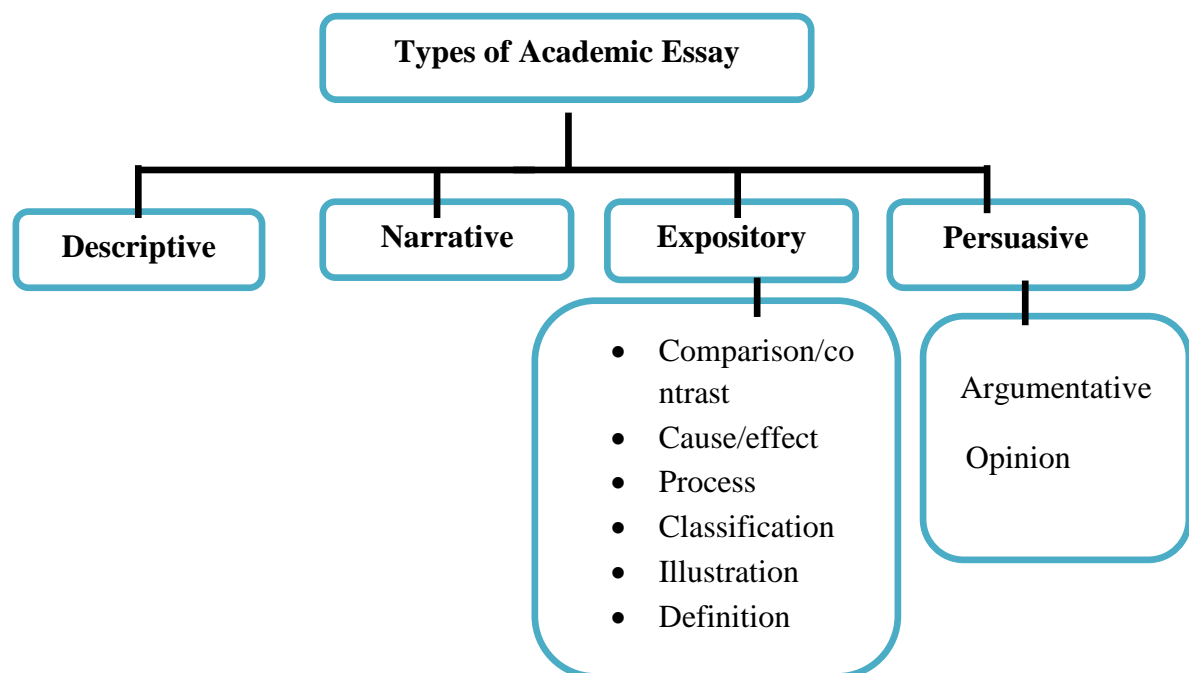


Figure 4: Types of academic essay

1.2.4.1. Descriptive Essays

Descriptive essays, according to Savage and Mayer (2005), are written to depict what has been seen, heard, smelt, tasted or felt. A good writer creates a picture by his/her words and seeks to involve his/her reader in the communicative world s/he draws to appeal to the reader's emotions. According to the Brandons (2011), there are four points that a writer of description need to highlight: to draw his/her writing on a specific and dominant point, to carefully select the appropriate words and diction, to demonstrate an angle from which s/he builds a good description, and to maintain the order of a text based on its coherence.

While Wyrick (2011) emphasizes four other techniques to be considered: recognition of the purpose description is used for at the first place and whether it is subjective or objective, the choice of the right details to clearly transmit the message because not every single point may assist in conveying the impression, and making the description vivid by keeping style's clarity and preciseness.

1.2.4.2. Narrative Essays

This mode involves a narration of a story or an experience. Some consider it a subcategory of the expository mode as it tells an experience and fact that happens to a person. However, since it has a relation to personal knowledge, it can be built in a storytelling framework with all its features. It is all about the introduction in which the writer proves his/her creativity to attract his/her reader's attention. When telling the details, parts of text need to cooperate to show that the story is vivid. Chronological order and time sequence should be respected. The common verb tenses used in narration are present simple, past perfect, and passive past simple. A well-made narrative essay draws an interesting conclusion that describes the result of the story (Savage & Mayer, *ibid*).

1.2.4.3. Expository Essays

It is stated that this type presents facts and interprets them. A variety of subcategories of essays are to be highlighted under this purpose.

Comparison and contrast essays, for Savage and Mayer (*ibid*) are written pieces that evaluate similarities and differences between two subjects or ideas. The nature of such type offers two possible organizations of body paragraphs. The writer either devotes each body paragraph to a point of comparison or contrast and supports it with evidence (point-

by-point body paragraph) or lists differences and similarities in separated paragraphs. Transitional words are of valuable use in this kind of essays as long as they help the writer to clearly state his/her ideas.

For cause and effect essays, the ultimate aim is to explain the factors and their consequences of a given phenomenon in a detailed manner. They add that it is very important in this type of writing to logically parallel the causes and effects. As all types of essays, there must be an eye-catching introduction. Two body paragraphs are written to explain the causes in details; transition words build a bridge between ideas to clarify the relationship between cause and effect.

Fawcett (2013) reports that process essays display either the explanation of how something is done or the description of how something can work. Oshima and Hogue (2006) describe it as the 'how to' essays which are based on the chronological order in organizing the ideas. The thesis statement in such types should mention the process being developed. The body describes its details in which each paragraph holds a step, respecting time sequence via using transitional words.

Classification essays are the type of dividing a group of things that are similar into subgroups according to certain criteria. Illustration essays are used when developing a point and supporting it with examples separately. Definition essays summarise the different definitions of a certain term from the author's different angles based on experience (Fawcett, *ibid*).

1.2.4.4. Persuasive Essays

In this part, the meaning of persuasion is taken similar to argumentation. In spite of their minor differences, some people reject to use them interchangeably (Savage & Mayar, 2005). Since the major goal of this type is to gain people's acceptability of the opinion, the following types exist: opinion essays and argumentative essays.

Opinion Essays are the discourse in which the author gives his/her opinion on a controversial subject and works on persuading his audience. It has a similar introduction to the argumentative one. Thesis statement carries the author's point of view. Control over the body is settled via the topic sentence that functions as a support to his/her claim. What follows support it with facts, explanations, and reasons to clarify the picture for the reader. Under the term of persuasion, counterarguments and their refutation do exist in this type (Savage & Mayar, *ibid*).

Argumentative essay is necessary in the land of academia since it gives learners opportunity to persuade the others to adopt their stance. Stephen and Laurie (2014), in their definition of this genre of writing, mention that:

Argumentative essay takes a stand on an issue and uses logic and evidence to change the way of readers think or to move them to action. When you write an argumentative essay, you follow the same process you use when you write an essay. However, argumentative essays use special strategies to win audience approach and to overcome potential position. (p.35)

In short, an argumentative essay covers an issue to offer its acceptability based on evidence. In spite of the fact that it follows the same standards when writing an essay, it is special in the nature of attracting the audience and gaining their conviction.

Conclusion

The essay is a vital task set at university as it has a valuable contribution in EFL teaching. It measures EFL learners' abilities and requires the use of their thinking skills. This beneficial tool enables them to discover who they are in revealing their intellectual strengths and weaknesses, their abilities and lacks. Hence, it cooperates in enhancing themselves when learning how to organize ideas and prioritize them, when taking it in its general term. Specifically, one can establish a strong personality in society and make the right judgements. It is by engaging in debates and gaining the audience agreement. To successfully achieve it, argumentative writing constructs certain skills and features to be well applied.

Chapter Two: Argumentative Essay Writing

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Chapter Two: Academic Argumentative Essay

Introduction

As a mode of academic writing, argumentative writing takes an important part of EFL learners' academic experience at university level. Due to its prevalence in the academic curriculum and because of the challenges associated with its development, a key component of this writing genre, argumentative essay, should be highlighted. This chapter sheds light on argumentative writing, and explains the different aspects of the argumentative essay.

2.1. Argumentative Writing

In academic settings, argumentation plays a vital role to equip students with the basic skills for their success. It reflects their critical thinking ability, and it helps them to enhance their understanding. So, argumentative writing needs to be examined.

2.1.1. An Overview on Argumentative Writing

One kind of academic writing is argumentation. In the tertiary level of education, argumentative writing is referred to a formal style of arguing convincingly, which requires a clear thinking and logic. The writers of such mode are required to explicitly state a main issue, present supporting evidence and reasoning, and use a formal language and academic terminology. Further, writing argumentatively requires one to be objective and to include opposing views with due care. To convince, argumentation should be presented straightforwardly and directly (Kuhn, 1991).

While presenting the argument, the writer needs to inform the reader of the instrumental arguments 'for' and 'against' the topic under discussion. Then, the writer needs to take his/her position on the topic and present his/her view in the attempt of persuading or influencing the reader. Thus, the writer may express a personal opinion to maintain the interaction with the reader. All in all, arguing skillfully is based on presenting "a careful reasoned, well-supported argument" and taking into consideration other points of view where the writer's major task is to present this argument in a thoughtful and convincing way.

2.1.2. The Importance of Argumentative Writing

Argumentative writing is a cardinal type in academia and has been proven by many researchers to be the most important one. Indeed, Kuhn (1991) considers argumentation to be a thinking skill, essential to idea formulation, problem-solving, and a good judgment. According to him, argumentation is needed for a full participation in society. In this respect, argumentation is involved everywhere; for instance, participating in job interview requires critical discussion and hence argumentation. Although argumentative writing is deemed to be one of the most difficult writing types, which involves all other writing skills, it prepares learners for the kinds of tasks demanded in higher tertiary level courses and future careers (McCann, 1989).

Besides, O’Keefe (1999) sees that the ability to integrate claims and counterclaims in writing argumentatively makes one more knowledgeable and less biased. Additionally, argumentative writing is important as far as the ability to develop an argument is considered as a sign of the examinee’s ability to speak and to write academic English in some standardized professional exams at universities (Stirling, 2009). Last but not least, the value of argumentative writing is also highlighted since learners, at most universities, are often tested on the basis of their ability to argue convincingly (Axelrod & Cooper, 2012).

2.1.3. The Process of Argumentative Writing

Toulmin (1958) considers the production of an argumentative text as a cognitive process of problem-solving. The goal of the writer, then, is to change the reader’s initial position to the final position that equals that of the writer. Fundamentally, the process of writing argumentatively consists of four main structural elements: situation, problem, solution, and evaluation. As seen by Connor (1987), the situation includes the background of the issue under discussion; the problem is a statement of non-desirable condition of things, while the solution is a statement of the desirable condition, and it is often followed by an evaluation.

2.1.4. Features of Argumentative Writing

The mode of argumentative writing is characterized by a three-stage structure with the organization into thesis, argument, and conclusion (Hyland, 1990). Basically, each stage is organized into moves, and these moves are expressed through a variety of grammatical and lexical means. Argumentative writing is also characterized by

presenting evidence, facts, and opinion. The evidence can take dissimilar forms; such as, details, examples, illustrations, statistics, and the like. Essentially, an effective argument depends on logical reasoning and concrete support for stated facts via making a heavy use of transition words and phrases (Axelrod & Cooper, 1988).

Skillful argumentation should include the division of the arguments which is marked by linguistic signals of argumentation; such as, conjunctions as ‘therefore’ or ‘because’. By the use of these signals, the argumentative relation can be clearly established (Fulkerson, 1996). Thus, the organization of the argument is to construct a claim, to provide supporting reasons and evidence, and to handle counterarguments. Richards and Schmidt (2002) argue that a key function of writing argumentatively is to support a controversial issue and to defend a position on which there is a difference of opinion. On the whole, argumentative writing, as seen by Kuhn(1991), is the process of formulating a claim, challenging it, supporting it with reasons, questioning those reasons, refuting them, and lastly reaching a conclusion.

2.1.4.1. Characteristics of Argument

Argumentative writing is different from other genres of writing as it is characterized by the use of argument. To clarify, five major characteristics of argument are to be explained: rationality, audience, purpose, arguable issue, and evidence (see Figure 5).

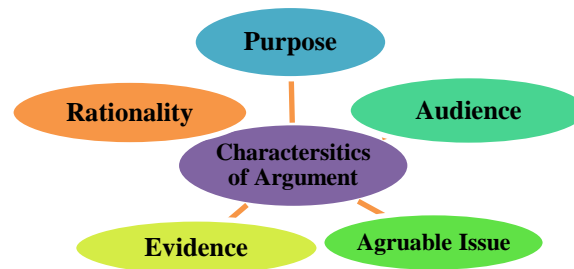


Figure 5: Characteristics of argument

Argumentation, first, is a form of communication, characterized by the use of rationality. In this vein, debaters, mainly writers, present reasonable claims with a full care to assess not only the assertion being made, but also the audience to whom claims are being presented. It is claimed that “writers can connect with an audience by showing

that they are part of it, understand what readers need to know, and share in their beliefs and concerns” (Brannan, 2006, p.419). In other words, it is fundamental to recognize the audience’s (readers’) characteristics and draw their attention by establishing a purpose for writing. When developing an argument, one needs to become a participant in an ongoing debate about an issue. According to Nguyen and Trinh (2014), argument takes a stance on an arguable issue, and it is characterized by the use of reasons and evidence. To shape convincing arguments and to formulate the most effective evidence, one needs more than stating facts, i.e. to think critically, to analyze the issue, to see the relationships, and to weigh evidence. So, building a sound argument exceeds stating one’s opinion. To sum up, arguments are not only based on reason and evidence, but also on the beliefs and values that one holds in a reasonable debate.

2.1.4.2. Types of Arguments

Zarefsky (2005) distinguishes between two different types of the arguments: formal and informal argument, depending on the relationship between the premise and the conclusion. According to him, “formal argument is deductive in nature” (p. 14). That is to say, formal argument, also known as deductive logic, is the formal way of thinking, which enables one to deduce its conclusion from its premise. Its opposite, informal argument or inductive logic, moves from the premise or the statement of evidence to the conclusion. Both require the use of logical reasoning and rationality; however, using the informal argument may obscure its logical power. Thus, in informal argument, conclusion contains new information which is not stated in the premise. To sum up, although the area of academic writing relies more on formal argument, effective writing is a combination of the two kinds (Zarefsky, *ibid*).

2.2. Academic Argumentative Essay

Successful structuring of an academic essay is based on attending one’s ideas into a coherent logic and into an argument. So, as being a key component of argumentative writing, argumentative essay has to be given much emphasis to be developed accurately and correctly by university learners.

2.2.1. Argumentative Essay Definition

There is a wide range of definitions that explain what argumentative essay is from different angles. Generally, argumentative essay writing is produced where a conflict arises between beliefs and attitudes of the writer and the reader. Hyland (1990) assumes that the purpose of writing an argumentative essay is to convince the audience, which

needs critical thinking as well as a stated opinion. So that, readers will accept the writer's argument and believe that the opinion is true. According to Dally (1997), argumentative essay is constructed around a specific statement or main premise included in a debatable context within the field where people are put in. In sum, the content of an argumentative essay needs to be reasonable and writers should organize their ideas when they attempt not to judge others.

Two types are emphasized in argumentative essays with distinct functions: analytical and hortatory modes as stated in Wulan (2014). While the former gives a clear explanation to the readers, the latter has a social function to persuade them.

2.2.2. Argumentative Essay Structure

Adopting the genre approach path, the comprehension of text structure and features is emphasized. As an important and familiar genre, argumentative essay gains conventionally a distinctive format. Hyland (1990) states that argumentative essay is constructed of three main stages: thesis, argument, and conclusion.

2.2.2.1. Thesis stage

This introductory part is a necessary one. It is preferable to attract the reader's attention right from the beginning using controversial statement or dramatic illustration. Contextualization of the topic, then, means the presentation of its background. At the end of this paragraph, the thesis statement holds the writer's opinion in an independent clause to express the opposing point of view in the subordinate one. Opinion is the standpoint of the speaker or the writer which is defended by arguments (VanEemeren, 2001).

a. Norms of opinion

As a major element in this genre of piece of writing, opinion establishes one's direction and contributes in composing an effective argumentative essay. This could successfully be applied, according to Wyrick (2011), when choosing the appropriate topic that is in one's area of interest. It is preferable to select a narrowed topic to be treated and to save time and energy.

Although the subject is interesting for the writer, yet his/her opinion is undefined. In this case, a global knowledge about the topic is required which offers different possibilities for the writer and helps him/her to settle his/her opinion and to show his/her position. Most of the time, people tend to feel comfortable for certain opinions with no basic justification

(as adopting some beliefs, holding opinions of emotional attachment ...). Having a detailed view on the topic allows one to examine his/her position and justify it by providing strong evidence that is factual and persuasive. Thus, the larger knowledge one has about a topic, the stronger his/her argumentative essay is.

Wyrick (2011) adds that it is necessary to anticipate the opposing views. The research about the given topic leads to have a background about the counter opinions on this area. One's position must be supported by solid arguments in the rest of the essay to succeed in changing people's mind and leading them to adopt the writer's ideas. The advanced arguments must hold reasonable answers to the objections i.e. refuting the opposition by revealing its falseness.

Audience, as the targeted part in this process, should be carefully respected. Usually, any writer considers his/her audience in advance so that s/he presents satisfying work. A writer of an argumentative essay should consider them before and during writing and attempts hard to select the appropriate evidence that will convince them. Asking different goal-oriented questions, the writer can analyse his/her audience in which the answers clarify the picture.

2.2.2.2. Argument stage

It is the body of the essay which differs according to the pattern adopted. Indeed, it is important to highlight that the topic, sometimes, dictates which pattern to be used. The one that is suitable for the nature of the subject and its construction. In this stage, one mentions a summary of the opposing arguments and rebuts them by building solid arguments. This genre necessitates claims to be based on evidence or data to convince the reader, and supported with references. Transition signals are valuable to build the relationship between opposing arguments and counterarguments.

To succeed in writing an argumentative essay, one needs to organize carefully its arguments in the attempt of persuading the readers. Thus, the logical strengths or weakness of the argument presented depends on how it is structured and developed. In this sense, Wyrick (2011) suggests some techniques for developing an argument since in academic college writing, argument needs to be tightly organized. For a well-structured argumentative essay, she sees that four elements are to be considered by the writer: background, qualification of proposition, refutation, and support.

More precisely, to link one's ideas in a logical order, three ways of mapping arguments are suggested: classical or Aristotelian, Rogerian, and Toulmin model (Wyrlik, *ibid*).

a. Classical / Aristotelian Strategy

The classical strategy is one of the most common ways of constructing argument into a coherent logical set of ideas. Following this strategy, one should present the problem first, and why it should be considered. Then, s/he should state the solution and finally convince the readers that this solution is the most adequate one.

b. Rogerian Strategy

A further strategy of developing argument is known as Rogerian. This kind of strategy attempts to persuade the readers by finding points of agreement. It is claimed that this strategy is used in debates where neither side seems to listen to each other. Adopting such strategy is a sign that the writer listens to the opposing ideas which are valid and hence this will show that s/he argues for the middle position.

c. Toulmin Strategy

The final strategy is called Toulmin's strategy. It is used in a highly charged debate where a clear logic and careful quantifiers are provided to limit the presented argument. Developing an argument in such manner will reveal its strengths and limitations. To clarify, no argument should pretend to be stronger than it is, and no argument should apply further than it is meant to be since the writer's aim is not to win all the counter-arguments but rather to come closer to the truth or to a realistic and feasible solution (Toulmin, 1958). According to his model, the ability to explain and justify from statements is part of constructing an argument.

2.2.2.3. Conclusion Stage

To conclude the essay, one could restate his/her point of view by mentioning how significant was the argument stage to the proposition. An unstated idea may be marked in this part.

To sum up, although the three stages of the argumentative essay structure are treated equally in terms of their importance, the second one 'the argument stage' is seen as a challenging task for EFL and ESL learners (Wulan, 2014).

2.2.3. Patterns of Argumentative Essay

To organize an argumentative essay, different patterns can be used. The possible formats are in Figures 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 (“Scoolwork,”2013).

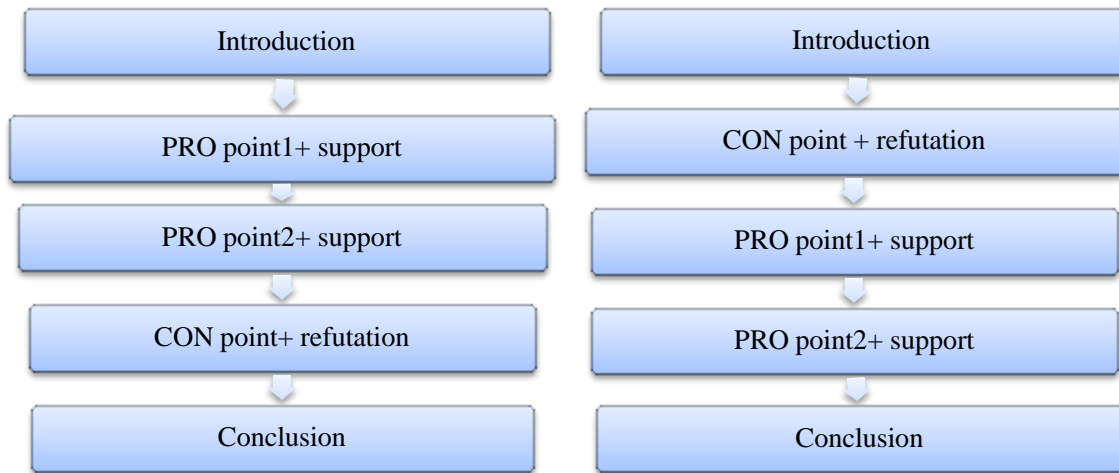


Figure 6: PRO-CON pattern

Figure 7: CON-PRO pattern

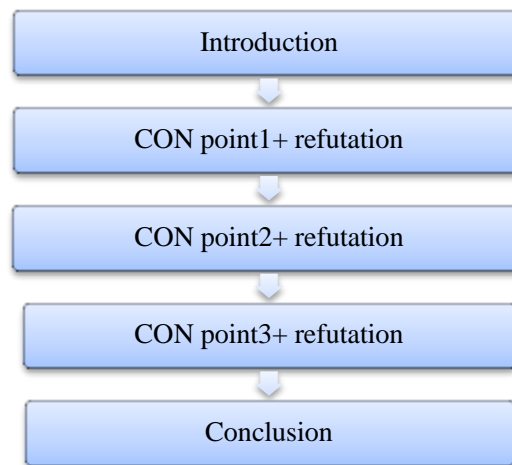


Figure 8: CON pattern

As seen in the previous figures (6, 7, and 8), the argumentative essay structure differs in the three-body paragraphs in which the writer has to cautiously advancing his/her arguments. Following the ‘PRO-CON’ pattern, both the first and the second ‘argument for’ the discussed issue with their supporting evidence are presented in the first and the second body paragraphs respectively. Unlike, the counter-argument with its refutation should be stated in the last/third body paragraph. Adopting the ‘CON-PRO’ pattern, the counter-argument with its refutation should be firstly stated in the first body paragraph, while the two arguments ‘for’ and their supporting evidence have to be discussed equally in the last

two body paragraphs. In the 'CON' pattern, one has to discuss only the three counter arguments with their refutations in the three body paragraphs separately.

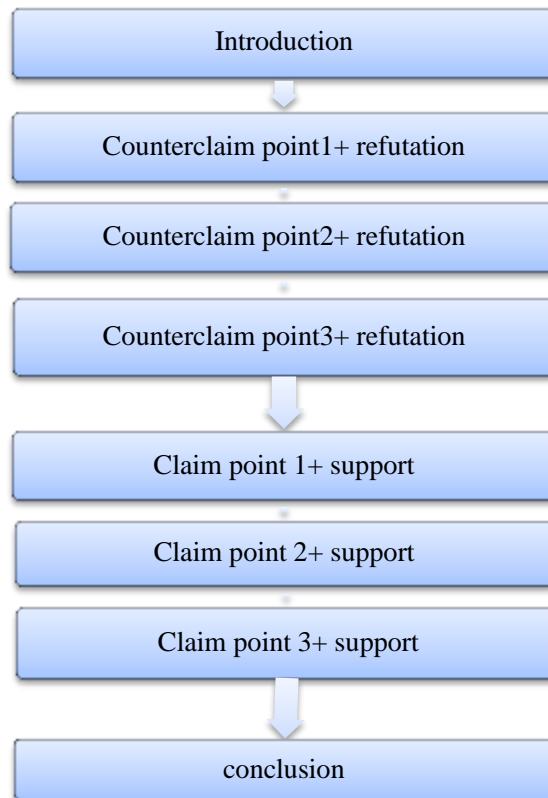


Figure 9: Claim / counterclaim pattern

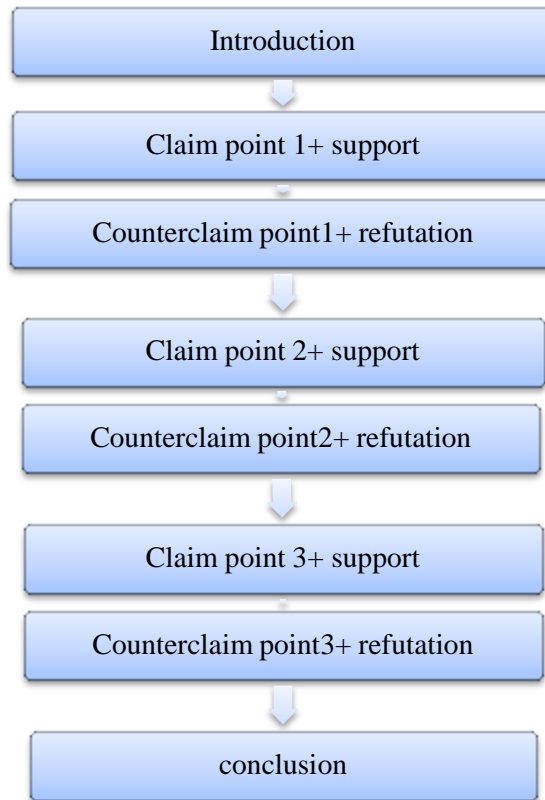


Figure 10: Alternating pattern

In short, adopting one of the previous argumentative essay patterns is based on the nature and the complexity of the topic in which the writer has to select accordingly.

2.2.4. Research on Argumentative Essay Writing

Due to the fact that argumentative writing is highly important to be continuously and consistently done, research on English as a Foreign and as a Second language (EFL/ESL) has examined multiple aspects of argumentative writing, including essays and difficulties produced by EFL/ ESL learners in different contexts.

2.2.4.1. Cohesion in Argumentative Essay Writing

Research on cohesion in argumentative essay writing is very often juxtaposed with coherence as both of them are crucial components of texture. The relationship between the two has been explored by Connor (1984), who states that even though the essays are cohesive, they are not always coherent. Her findings show that ESL learners' essays display cohesive links, but they not only lack the variety of lexical cohesive devices but also an adequate justification and support for the claim or concluding inductive statements. Taking into account this view, this relationship in writing this genre seems to be a complex matter for EFL and ESL learners.

2.2.4.2. Rhetorical and Textual Differences in Argumentative Writing

A different angle in which research takes place is text-based research that has compared argumentative writing by native and nonnative English speakers to reveal rhetorical and textual differences. For example, Lux (1991) observes that compared with 11 English-speaking college learners, native Spanish-speaking learners favored an elaborate style in writing argumentative tasks. In the same vein, Ferris (1994) and Hinkel (1999) found that native English speakers and ESL learners differ with respect to how they handle counterarguments. It is concluded that many of the rhetorical difficulties and differences observed through textual analysis of L2 argumentative essays are explained in terms of the cultural and linguistic influences transferred from the writer's first language.

2.2.4.3. Difficulties in Writing an Argumentative Essay

Another study is conducted by Abed-AI-Haq and Ahmed (1994) who have examined 62 argumentative essays written in English by Saudi university learners. By evaluating nine components and 24 subcomponents of the argumentative essays, they conclude that the quantity (completeness and balance in arguments and counterarguments), argumentativeness (development, support, organization, and persuasiveness of the argument), and thesis (clarity and quality of the thesis and the direction the thesis provides for the reader) are the most difficult areas for the Saudi learners.

2.2.4.4. Needs Analysis on Writing Argumentative Essays

Few studies, however, have examined the learners' difficulties from their perspective by eliciting input from them; i.e. what the L2 writers perceive to be difficult. In this respect, Carson and Leki (1994) believe in the importance of understanding the learners' needs by asking them what difficulties they experience. They argue that this type of needs assessment is appropriate for all students in any environments. As a summary, understanding the writing difficulties and needs from the learners'/writers' point of view is very important since it can help teachers provide meaningful instructions by adopting teaching strategies that target the learners' specific needs and difficulties.

2.2.4.5. The Impact of Culture on Writing Argumentative Essays

Grabe and Kaplan (1997) see that EFL learners may challenge some cultural aspects of the context where EFL writing is taught. In many Asian cultures, as stated by

Hinkel (2002), Vietnamese, for example, tend to avoid objecting and reacting by not stating straightforwardly the main point in argumentative writing. As a result, their performance in writing argumentative essays seems not to be persuasive due to the lack of argumentative characteristics.

2.2.4.6. Strategies on Writing an Argumentative Essay

Several studies have undertaken the strategies used by EFL learners to accomplish argumentative tasks. For example, Khaldieh (2002) examined the strategies used by 43 learners on two argumentative tasks, and it is found that a big difference exists between the proficient versus less proficient learners. As a summary, EFL writers' difficulties with English argumentative writing have largely been approached from the textual perspective or what the researchers and readers can detect from the written products.

2.2.4.7. Balance between Self and Source in Argumentative Essay Writing

In his analysis on worktable balance between self and source in argumentative essay writing, Groom (2000) discovered three patterns of difficulty produced by learners: “solipsistic voice, unaverred voice, and unattributed voice”(p.67). “Solipsistic” difficulties refer to the situation in which learners express their own opinion and experience without referring to any kind of literature. On the contrary, “unaverred voice” is making summaries of others’ ideas without making their own claims, and “unattributed voice” is related to making claims sound as if they are their own while in fact they are taken from another source. As a conclusion, EFL learners fail to balance between their own source and other sources in producing an argumentative essay.

2.2.4.8. Genre-based Teaching Strategy and Argumentative Essay Writing

According to Saito (2010), Thai EFL learners have both linguistic and rhetorical insufficiency in performing argumentative tasks. Their writing has varied areas of weaknesses such as poor organization, including a lack of knowledge about argumentative structure, and a failure to elaborate reasons to support the arguments. He concludes that Thai learners have insufficient exposure to argumentative writing and receive little explicit instructions about argumentative essay structure.

2.2.4.9. The Rhetorical and Communicative Impacts of Native Culture on Argumentative Essay Writing

The last study conducted on the argumentative essay writing and organization is provided by Drid (2015). By analyzing 104 Algerian master students’ essays, the results

have shown that EFL master students have several problems both in deductive and inductive organization due to the influence of their native culture in structuring the argumentative essays.

Drid (2015) summarizes three categorizations of deviation of the writing participants in deductive organization of the argumentative essays. It is claimed that EFL students face problems in the statement of opinion, which appears at the very beginning of the second paragraph rather than the first. Additionally, they face problems with introduction writing, either writing very brief introduction with no thesis statement, or writing two introductions. The last problem is with closing the discussion where the participants' essays have no conclusion or very broad one, which is not directly linked the discussed topic.

Added to these problems, the results of the analysis have revealed that the master students also face problems in the inductive organization of argumentative essays. More clearly, the majority of students' argumentative essays lack the component of counter-argument. Additionally, students do face problems in stating their opinion which appears in the body paragraph. Like deductive pattern of writing argumentative essays, the participants have problems in the introduction and the conclusion.

Conclusion

It has been shown in this chapter that argumentative writing is a fundamental part of academic writing in EFL classes. The argumentative essay is considered as a common assignment needed for multiple purposes. However, EFL learners cannot write a quality argumentative essay unless they are familiar with its value, its structure, and unless they are able to distinguish between the different features of this kind of text to write it effectively. These theoretical foundations play a great role in enhancing the learners' performance. As a conclusion, previous research on argumentative essay writing have shown that EFL learners often face several difficulties in producing this genre, which need to be dealt with cautiously. However, in the Algerian context specifically, few pieces of research have been conducted, so the present study aims to bridge this gap.

The Practical Part

Chapter Three: Methodology and Results

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Introduction

The major objective of the present study is to identify what difficulties EFL master students face in writing argumentative essays, particularly in expressing and placing their opinions and arguments. By highlighting these obstacles, a clear picture is to be drawn about the most effective ways in the attempt of enhancing the EFL master students' proficiency in producing this genre of text. So, the following chapter is designed to present the methodology of the study. It defines the sample as well as the instruments used to collect and analyze data. Additionally, it provides a detailed description of the research tools, the data analysis procedures, and it reports the results.

3.1. Methodology

To seek answers to the proposed questions, this study adopts the descriptive approach. In this respect, Tavakoli (2012) claims that descriptive approach has common features with both qualitative and quantitative research. Fundamentally, Kothari (2004) sees that descriptive design helps the researchers to accurately identify the characteristics of a particular individual, situation, or a group of studies. Indeed, it determines the problem in a current practice to better outcomes. Descriptive studies deal with a descriptive, comparative, contrastive, classifiable or analytical eye on individuals, groups, institutions, methods and materials to be interpreted according to Cohen et al. (2007).

To fulfil the aforementioned objectives, this study employs both the qualitative and the quantitative methods. Tavakoli (ibid) stresses the importance of qualitative research in studying small samples that are selected purposely. Whereas, he sees that quantitative research is needed to study large groups that are chosen randomly.

3.2. Methods

A writing test (quantitative) and a semi-structured interview (qualitative) were used to collect data to reach the objectives of the present study. The test was used to measure participants' ability and proficiency in writing argumentative essay, and the interview was addressed to investigate the teachers' perceptions towards the appropriate ways in which learners' ability in writing this genre can be improved.

3.2.1. Description of Instruments

3.2.1.1. Description of the Test

The test used in the present study is a free writing task. Students were asked to produce a five-paragraph argumentative essay. The essay topic of the test was “The Use of Facebook”. More clearly, “while facebook tends to make people more social, it separates them by computer screens” (See Appendix I). This topic is related to student’s social life to stimulate their interests to do the test.

The test theme was designed by the researchers in such way it fulfills the study’s objectives. Furthermore, it was selected according to the students’ personal motivations as far as the argumentative topics are controversial, debatable, and recent issues which are directly extracted from the participants’ environment and real life. Some of the cardinal assessment principles such as, validity and authenticity were taken into the researchers’ consideration to construct this test. In sum, the essay topic was selected to motivate the participants to take a position and construct arguments to support and defend this stance.

3.2.1.2. Description of the Interview

The second instrument used in the present study is the interview. “Using the interview is based on questioning” (Drid, 2015, p.161). In this path, Gass and Mackey (2005) see that the interview helps the researchers to examine non-seen phenomena, such as attitudes and perceptions. Despite the fact that there are different types of interview, the researchers used a semi-structured interview to investigate the present study.

The interview (Appendix II) contains an introductory part for explaining the purpose of the study to the interviewees. The question types are mostly open-ended. So that, the interviewees (the teachers) can add more clarifications and explanations to the investigated study, and researchers can benefit from their answers to this qualitative research instrument. To draw a clear picture about the teaching practices concerning the argumentative essay writing in the Algerian university context, the interview’s questions were divided into three sub-sections including: general or background information of the interviewees, teaching essays in general, and teaching argumentative essays in particular.

3.2.2. Administration of the Instruments

3.2.2.1. Administration of the Test

The written test was distributed to EFL master students voluntarily. The participants were asked to write a five-paragraph essay in which they need to clarify their opinion on the topic. Each learner took a single copy of the test. They were given two weeks as a deadline to collect the copies. Only a number of 29 participants responded and returned the copies.

3.2.2.2. Administration of the Interview

The interview was addressed to 3 teachers of writing skill after the spring holidays. The interview's questions were designed according to the nature of the research questions and in the attempt of reaching its objectives. Semi-structured interview was conducted to gain insights into participants' perceptions to enhance the learners' argumentative essays writing.

3.2.3. Piloting

A pilot study is regarded to be a very significant means to assess the feasibility and the convenience of data collection methods (Tavakoli, 2012). According to him, the purpose of using such study is to test, to revise and to finalize the methods. Furthermore, it is used to deal with any problem before the major study is to be investigated. From what is seen before, the current research did not use a pilot study.

3.3. Samples

The sample of this study is master students, a total of 29 EFL students from the first and second year master linguistics and translation classes at Kasdi Merbah University Ouargla (KMUO) in Algeria. Under the non-random technique of sampling, the researchers adopted the convenience sampling to choose their sample i.e. based on availability. Besides, 3 teachers of writing were interviewed. They were chosen purposively based on the intention of the researchers.

3.4. Data Analysis Procedure

Once the data were collected, the most suitable statistical were performed to analyze them. Depending on the nature of the research instrument, each of the writing test or the interview has a different way of analysis. While test data were analyzed on the basis of quantitative view, interview data were analyzed on the qualitative one.

3.4.1. Analysis Procedure of the Test

Fundamentally, after numbering the copies and setting the suitable tables, the data were analyzed on four basic steps to answer the research questions.

Step one: Analysis of essay division

The argumentative essay structure as stated in Figure 11 was considered to be the main procedure to analyze the findings.

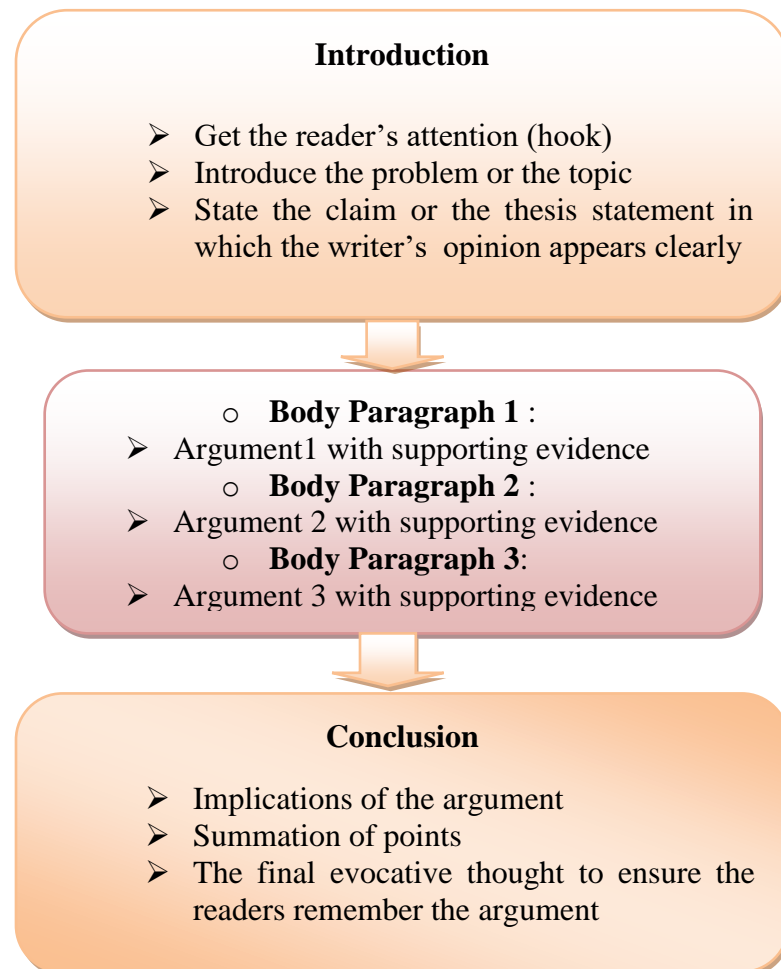


Figure 11: Argumentative essay structure

Step two: Analysis of opinion

As a second step, the researchers focused on how opinion was expressed and where it was placed by their participants. More clearly, Hyland (1990) explains that the writer's opinion should appear in the thesis statement in the introduction of the argumentative essay genre, however in inductive organization of argument; it is not the case (See Figure 11).

Step three: Analysis of arguments

The third step used for the data analysis was the inductive and deductive organization of the written test essay. In inductive organization, Gillett et al. (2009) claim that the writer should explain both sides of the argument, for and against the stated issue, without necessarily expressing his/her opinion. The structure of such organization is as follow:

- Introduction of the argument to the readers
- Reasons against the argument(stating the position, the evidence and the reasons)
- Reasons in favor the argument(stating the position, the evidence and the reasons)
- After summarizing the two sides, the writer's opinion is expressed

By contrast, in deductive format of argumentative essay, the writer's opinion is stated first then followed by supporting evidence to strengthen its validity and to convince the reader.

- Introducing the topic in general, then stating the writer's opinion
- Providing reasons against the argument
- The main oppositions to the writer's are stated, providing evidence and reasons
- Providing reasons for the writer's argument, supporting them by evidence
- Concluding the discussion by restating the writer's claim and its importance.

Step four: Analysis of essay patterns

To be consistent, the researchers selected, as a final step, the three patterns (see Figures 6, 7, and 8,p.28) of the argumentative essay as a reference to analyze data since the participants were required to write a five-paragraph essay. These patterns were chosen to answer the questions raised in the present study.

In short, to analyze the data collection for the present study, the researchers focused on the following criteria: the right place of the opinion and how it is expressed, and the right place of an argument and how it is developed with the suitable argumentative essay structure and pattern.

3.4.2. Analysis Procedure of the Interview

The interview was used to answer the second research question that aims at determining the appropriate ways to enhance EFL master students' performance in writing argumentative

essays. To analyze the data collected, answers of the questions were illustrated in main categories in tables. Then, they were interpreted to fit the necessary results.

3.5. Reporting the Results

Results of the investigated study were divided into two main categorizations according to the research instruments used to collect data. One category of the results was related to the test; the other however was dealt with the interview.

3.5.1. Results of the Test

According to the quantitative results of the written test, two main categories of problems were highlighted. One of the problems is related to opinion: its presence, placement, and expressing it. The other one has to do with advancing of the arguments and their location.

Step one: Analysis of essay division

The division of the essay was firstly examined to check whether students follow academic norms.

Table 2

The Number of Paragraphs in the Essay

The division of the essay according to the discussed issue is taken into account. Learners were assessed on how they could control the topic over the whole essay.

N° of paragraphs	2	3	4	5	
N° of essays	1	5	6	17	29
Percentage	3.45%	17.24%	20.69%	58.62%	100%

The results in Table 2 show that the majority of master students (58.62%) wrote a five-paragraph essay which is the typical length for the academic essay. Although the participants were explicitly required to write a five-paragraph essay, 41.38% of them did not respect this structure. An example of the case of four paragraph essay is the following:

Social media has revolutionized communication. Over than 2000 million users around the world have accounts on facebook...A question is raised whether facebook more social or less.

On the one hand, facebook has made people more social...Last but not least, it eliminates the factor of geographical distance between people. They can buy, sell products, and make advertisements

On the other hand, facebook has made people anti-social...Finally, people become more careless about those who are around them.

To sum up, one can say that the short comings overweigh the benefits...

(Participant 28)

It is concluded that the deviation occurred due to the inability of students to discuss the topic more regarding their limit background on it or their disability to control it in five paragraphs.

3.5.1.1.Problems of Opinion

Step two: Analysis of opinion

It is found that learners face a difficulty with the different aspects of opinion (taking a stance, placement of opinion in its right place, and expressing it) which leads to a clear deviation from the academic English argumentative essay norms. The results are shown in Tables 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 below.

The first aspect of difficulties related to opinion is the presence or the absence of this cardinal component (Table 3).

Table 3

The Presence of Opinion.

To narrow the topic in a clear opinion was differently treated among learners. Unlike few of learners, the majority of EFL master students succeeded in taking a stance.

Taking a stance	Yes	No	
N° of essays	25	4	29
Percentage	86.21%	13.79%	100%

The results of Table 3 indicate that most of the participants (86.21%) were able to take a stance in the issue given which means necessarily their wiliness to argue for or against. However, a percentage of 13.79% of essays is marked by the absence of opinion. These students were unable to take a definite position. The topic was tackled generally with a remarkable lack of interest. These are examples of taking a clear stance:

a) Undoubtedly, people around the world have become closer to a great measure due to the media and social networks. A chiefly used social network is that of

facebook. Whether good or bad, facebook has evidently altered individuals' lives within a society. As it may bring people together, facebook; however, breaks all sorts of relation. (Participant 3)

b) I personally believe that everything has two sides as the coin, one side maybe positive and the other one negative that does not mean we have to give up or not to use it but we have to be aware of the negative side which helps us not to go on that direction. (Participant 14)

On the other hand, these are examples of the absence of opinion:

a) Nowadays, a lot of people are using social media such as facebook, twitter, and so on. Since the internet has propagated rapidly social media have progressed a lot. The generalization of the internet makes us to live conveniently and fast.(Participant 6)

b) Facebook is a social network site has a good impact in our society because it is the key that links people, enables them to have opportunities in making relations, solving problems, and building new aspirations and future. (Participant 11)

So, it was hard for some learners to identify their position toward the discussed topic whereas others controlled to take a given stance.

The second aspect related to opinion is its placement in the introduction (the normal position), the body, or the conclusion as well as the way it was stated within the whole essay. The results point to three types of difficulties: redundancy in expressing opinion, wrong placement of opinion and un-clarity in expressing it.

Table 4

Placement of Opinion

To succeed in adopting an opinion doesn't necessarily mean the success in writing the essay. Apparently, placing it causes another difficulty for learners.

Placement of opinion	Introduction	Body	Conclusion	
N° of essays	14	5	8	29
Percentage	48.28%	17.24%	27.59%	100%

It is seen in Table 4 that redundancy in locating opinion occurred either in both the introduction and the body or both in the body and the conclusion.

An example in which the writer's opinion appeared in both the introduction (particularly at the thesis statement) and again in the second body paragraph is the following:

...I think that facebook is crucial in our society thanks to its benefits.

...Furthermore, in my point of view, facebook is a way to be familiar with different new cultures and languages. (Participant 19)

The results of Table 4 show that 48.28% of the students preferred to mention their stance right from the beginning; 27.59% kept it to the end of their discussion, whereas 17.24% declared their view during their development.

Table 5

Placement of Opinion in the Essay Introduction

In the introduction, which normally is the right placement of opinion, learners differ in where to express their position exactly.

Opinion in introduction	The beginning	The middle	The thesis statement	
N° of essays	1	1	12	29
Percentage	3.49%	3.49%	41.38%	100%

41.38% of students, who clarified their views at the beginning of the discussion, succeeded, according to Hyland (1990), in placing their opinion in the thesis statement. Hence, they are expected to develop arguments deductively.

An example of opinion expressed in the essay introduction in particular in the thesis statement is illustrated as follow:

Although many people argue that the aforementioned turned the trend of humanity in a positive, for me it did so but in negative way.(Participant 9)

In brief, most of learners found the thesis statement the appropriate location for their opinions.

Table 6***Placement of Opinion in the Body Paragraphs***

Some learners preferred to state their position when developing the discussion. This may mislead the reader to recognize the writer's position on the negotiated topic.

Opinion in the body	Body paragraph 1	Body paragraph2	Body paragraph 3	
N° of essays	3	1	1	29
Percentage	10.34%	3.49%	3.49%	100%

Table 6 displays that 17.24% of the participants expressed their opinions in the body paragraph, and the majority (10.34%) placed them in the first body paragraph. This means that they lacked knowledge where to express their opinions. An example of situating opinion in the first body paragraph is the following:

...., in my opinion I will be in middle because in some cases facebook is as positive as negative and both sides influence the user... (Participant 10)

Table 7***Placement of Opinion in the Conclusion***

Another location for the opinion is the conclusion. EFL master students again differ in which of the parts of the conclusion opinion should be written.

Opinion in conclusion	The beginning	The middle	The end	
N° of essays	5	1	2	29
Percentage	17.24%	3.49%	6.9%	100%

From Table7, it is revealed that 27.59% students placed opinion in the conclusion, and 17.24% placed at the beginning of the essay conclusion. This means that 27.59% students were expected to inductively develop the arguments.

A case in which the opinion was placed at the beginning of the essay conclusion is the following:

To end with, in my opinion, facebook makes people more social because it seems like a tool of connecting all the time... (Participant 16)

Table 8***Expressing Opinion***

When expressing opinion, learners differ in being explicit and direct or implicit and indirect while stating their opinions.

Expressing opinion	Directly/explicitly	Indirectly/implicitly	
N° of essays	18	7	29
Percentage	62.07%	24.14%	100%

From Table 8, the results show that 62.07% students expressed their opinions directly and explicitly using some expressions such as, as *I see, in my opinion, I believe* and the like. On the contrary, 24.14% students had hidden expressions of opinion and failed to take their stance clearly. This is often juxtaposed with academic writing features in general and argumentative essay norms in particular. This is an example of the implicit express of opinion:

*Facebook is the most famous social website. Hundreds of members enjoy the site monthly. It allows family members and friends to keep in touch easily even if they were thousands of miles away. **But it has a lot of drawbacks mainly it keeps people separated and from face-to-face interactions.*** (Participant 2)

An example of expressing opinion explicitly is the following:

- a) ***In my opinion, facebook is very beneficial if we use it in good manner, because it's a social platform where the world comes together.*** (Participant 22)
- b) ***In brief, I think that social networks have a great role to bring people together...***(Participant 29)

3.5.1.2.Problems of Arguments

Step three: Analysis of arguments

Advancing arguments makes a problem for most of EFL master students. Three fundamental types of issues are marked: the absence of argument, its wrong placement, and how it is developed in the essay. Tables 9, 10, and 11, illustrate the different difficulties encountered.

Table 9***Placement of arguments***

A good argumentative essay depends also on its solid arguments. Placing arguments appeared to be a problem for some learners.

Argument	Introduction	Body	Conclusion	
N° of essays	2	22	2	29
Percentage	6.9%	75.86%	6.9%	100%

It is shown in Table 9 that most of the students (75.86%) placed arguments in the body paragraphs, which is the right place. In addition to the body, 6.9% students placed arguments in the introduction, and the same number placed them in the conclusion. This denotes that they wrote too long introduction and conclusion. Whereas, a percentage of 10.34% of the essays had no arguments which is marked as the absence of arguments.

Table 10***Placement of Arguments in the Body Paragraphs***

The body of the essay is the typical location for rational and poignant arguments.

Argument	Body p1	Body p2	Body p3	
N° of essays	21	21	15	29
Percentage	72.41%	72.41%	51.72%	100%

Table 10 demonstrates that 72.41% of the students presented the arguments in the first and the second body paragraphs. This means that those participants did not exceed to a third paragraph since they did not follow the format of five-paragraph essay. On the contrary, 51.72% developed the arguments in the three body paragraphs. Also, none of the body paragraph was empty of arguments. However, most of them were repeated. The negotiation was weak (developing weak arguments) and some kept turning on the same point. This is due to the lack of knowledge on the topic itself (reading gaps) and on the structure and organization of the argumentative essay.

Table 11***Expressing Argument***

Besides their appropriate location, arguments are advanced either deductively or inductively. It depends on the writer's view and way of negotiating and presenting the topic.

Expressing argument	Deductively	Inductively	
N° of essays	20	6	29
Percentage	69%	20.7%	100%

As indicated in Table 11, the majority of the students (69%) had deductive development of arguments which means that they tended to express their opinions first and then providing arguments with supporting evidence. On the contrary, 20.7% of them preferred the inductive organization of arguments, i.e. they kept expressing their opinions till the end of the discussion.

Step four: Analysis of essay patterns

Table 12 is concerned only with the five-paragraph essays which are 17 essays.

Table 12***Pattern of Expressing Arguments***

When discussing any controversial topic, one adopts certain pattern that is suitable for his/her building of the issue. This was a difficulty for EFL master students.

Patterns	PRO-CON	CON-PRO	CON	
N° of essays	3	3	1	29
Percentage	10.34%	10.34%	3.45%	100%

It is shown in Table 12 that only 7 students (24.14%) did follow a specific pattern of the argumentative essay. More consistently, 10.34% followed the PRO-CON pattern, the same did with CON-PRO pattern, while only 3.45% followed CON pattern. It means that they lacked the basic knowledge and rules of the argumentative essay patterns. Additionally, most of them used "PRO-argument" in all body paragraphs. Others took a free pattern as the one of "CON-CON-PRO" or "PRO-CON-CON". What is definite in the presented sample is the absolute absence of refutation and sometimes the support. The following example illustrates the absence of refutation for a learner who adopted the CON-PRO pattern:

... Nowadays, many companies rely on it in selecting their employees. The personal information of the users and their posts give view of their interests, supporting parties, religious and political orientations. All these data function as a reliable CV for employers.

Although facebook has broken all the social and political boundaries becoming the apotheosis of the technological development, this magnetic network has caused more personal, social, and political issues...(Participant 15)

Most of learners found it difficult to follow a certain pattern or follow all its items.

Table 13

Deviations from the Argumentative Essay Norms

This table summarizes the deviations from the argumentative essay norms which were marked from the previous tables and were made by the participants.

Deviations	N° of assays	Percentage
Essay division	7	24.14%
The absence of opinion	4	13.79%
Opinion in body	5	17.24%
Expressing opinion implicitly	7	24.14%
Arguments in introduction	2	6.9%
Arguments in conclusion	2	6.9%
Absence of arguments	3	10.34%
Absence of counter arguments	10	34.48%
Deviations from the argumentative patterns	19	62.52%

The results of Table 13 concluded that almost of the master students (65.52%) faced a difficulty in organizing the argumentative essay in accordance with standard patterns. This could be justified by the lack of their knowledge on these patterns, the complexity of the argumentative essay nature as well as to the lack of practice in producing such genre.

3.5.2. Results of the Interview

The analyses of the interview are based on thematic views.

3.5.2.1. Section one: General Information

Section one reveals the background information of the participants. Both questions 1 and 2 are displayed in Table 14.

Q1: How long have you been working as a teacher of writing?

Q2: How can you describe your experience in teaching writing?

Table 14

Background Information of the Teachers

Data presented are about the general information of participated teachers.

The categories	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
Experience	21 years (part time then full time)	8 years	8 years
Status of experience	A teacher then a researcher in the domain	A good and difficult experience	A challenging and important experience

Results in Table14 show that two participants had the experience of 8 years who found it beneficial and hard at the same time whereas the other participant spent about 21 years as a part time teacher then a full time teacher. This experience was oriented firstly to teaching only then it developed to be engaged in the theory and its application in the classroom.

3.5.2.2. Section two: Teaching Essays

The second section is related to teaching essays in general including its importance, the circumstances where they have been taught and the approach adopted. The results are shown in Tables 15, 16 and 17 below.

Q3: Does teaching essays writing have a great importance in your syllabus?

Table 15***The Importance of Essays Writing in the Syllabus***

As being an important skill, essay writing has been given much importance especially in second year licence.

Main categories	Sub-categories
Syllabus	The main focus on essays
Period	Second year licence The whole year

Results in Table 15 indicate that writing academic essays is very important especially in the second year which is the main focus of the syllabus because writing is a cardinal skill especially in the foreign language. Teaching essays takes a whole year to ensure students' ability to produce an essay that is the departure point for other text types.

Q4: How do you assess the circumstances under which teaching essays writing takes place?

Table 16***The Circumstances of Teaching Essays Writing***

The surrounding circumstances under which essay writing is performed are assessed to highlight how easy or difficult it was for learners to grasp.

Main categories	Sub-categories
Sessions	Three sessions per week Tutorials and lectures
Classes	Large number of students

Responses of the fourth questions display that teaching essay writing takes 3 sessions a week which are sufficient for students to write, practice and learn. However, teachers find a difficulty with the large number of students that prevent them from a full control, guidance, and observations that creates a negligence of some members.

Results of questions 5, 6 and 7 are presented in Table 17.

Q5: Are you using the approach given to you or is it of your own choice? Why?

Q6: Regarding the results you have, how do you assess the success of this approach?

Q7: Can these results be applicable to the teaching of argumentative essay writing?

Table 17

The Approach Used and its Success on Teaching Essay Writing

The participants followed different approaches. Each has its own results.

Main categories	Sub-categories
Syllabus	Freedom of approach choice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Genre based approach (P1) - Eclectic approach (P2, P3)
Approach application	Level of students Context Variety Input's type Equal value

The presented data show that participants are not obliged to use a certain approach but rather it is of their own choice; that is to say, they use the appropriate approach according to several factors as the level of students, the context and the input exposed to them. This creates variety in the classroom that is suitable and effective for learners. Since all types of essay are treated equally, the approach is successful with all kinds including the argumentative essay.

3.5.2.3. Section three: Teaching Argumentative Essays

The third and the last section focused on argumentative essay teaching including its different aspects and some solutions suggested by the teachers to enhance the learners' argumentative essay writing. The results are presented in Tables 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 and 24.

Table 18 shows the results of both questions 8 and 9.

Q8: How many sessions do you devote to teaching argumentative essays?

Q9: Regarding its importance at university, how do you emphasize its necessity to your learners?

Table 18***Time Allocation and the Necessity of Argumentative Essays***

Time allocated for teaching argumentative essays indicates its importance at university and how it is treated in comparison to the other types.

Main categories	Sub-categories
Time allocation	From 4 to 6 sessions
Importance	No emphasis (equal treatment of all types)
	Implicit importance
	Basic key in exams
	Topic choice

As it is presented in Table 18, teaching argumentative essays takes about 4 to 6 sessions. As it is regarded equal for any other type of essay, there is no explicit emphasis on its importance at university. However, it is required in exams and in developing certain topics which make students discover its necessity.

Since both questions 10 and 11 are of the same target, they are gathered in Table19.

Q10: What is your first step in introducing this genre of writing?

Q11: Is there any introduction to the realm of argumentation and its main concepts that students will use later?

Table 19***The Introduction to Argumentative Writing***

The introduction to the realm of argumentation is a first step to indicate its necessity and importance to be dealt with.

Participants	Strategies
Participant 1	- Theoretical background about argumentation and its components
Participant 2	- Theoretical background - Recognition of one's own view - Introducing the different outlines (for or against or in between)
Participant 3	- Overview about argumentative writing - Definitions - Samples of argumentative essays - Steps to write argumentative essays

Table 19 demonstrates that there exist different introductions to the argumentative realm but teachers stress its importance with its main basic concepts, as participant 1 commented, such as opinion, argument, types of arguments, etc. She added:

Argumentative writing differs from the others in the sense that argumentation has to do with using rationality and the mind. It is an independent skill even if it is not expressed in writing.

Questions from 12 to 16 are related to the organization of argumentative essays. Their responses are illustrated in Table 20.

Q12: What organization do you advise your learners to adopt when writing the thesis stage?

Q13: Do you stress that opinion should be mentioned explicitly?

Q14: What patterns do you encourage your learners to follow in the argumentative stage?

Q15: Are the different types of arguments and their precise use emphasized in this section?

Q16: What types of conclusion are students advised to write?

Table 20

Argumentative Essay's Organization

The organization of the argumentative essay works as a vehicle to direct the reader to the construction of the essay.

Participants	Organizations	Sub-categories
Participant 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduction - Body (1) - (2) - Conclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opinion should be explicitly mentioned in the thesis statement - Arguments For are grouped together - Arguments Against in a separate paragraph - Their refutation in the third paragraph - Each argument is separated from the rest followed by the counterargument and their refutation in a separate paragraph - Restatement of the opinion
Participant 2 and 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No limited organization - Opinion - arguments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - According to the nature of the topic - According to student's knowledge - Creating flexibility (with some pieces of advice) - should be explicitly mentioned (proving the writer's view) - according to the topic discussed - students' awareness of the different types - students' awareness of their use

Data in Table 20 demonstrates that participant 1 advises her learners to follow certain organization that is relatively related to the issue discussed with a high stress of mentioning the opinion explicitly as she comments:

The writer should express his/her opinion explicitly because I notice that students have the tendency not to mention the opinion. I believe that this has to do with inner factors. They

either do not state their opinion in the introduction or they present a kind of an open debate i.e. a kind of a question.

Whereas the other participants give the choice of the organization to the learners themselves which is related to the topic they negotiate or to the knowledge they have. Besides, they ensured their learners' knowledge about the different types of arguments and their correct use. Participant 2 says:

I give them the choice to not feel afraid and to learn how to choose for themselves. They are adults that you should teach them whenever they make choice they have to make a good one...I may advise them but I cannot say it is a must for them because still they have the choice when having another case.

Q17: Are there enough exercises to examine learners' argumentative writing?

Table 21

Classroom Exercises to Teach Argumentative Essays

Teachers use various activities to introduce writing argumentative essays and to provide the easiest ways to teach it. Effective input ensures satisfying output.

Classroom exercises

- Production of the essay
 - Having a text and its questions
 - Analysing the structure of an argumentative essay as a departure point to write another essay
 - Giving one part of the essay to continue the rest of the essay
 - Organizing the outline together to write the essay individually
-

Responses in Table 21 show the variety of exercises planned to reinforce students' comprehension and measure their argumentative ability.

Q18: Do learners' drafts reflect what you have taught them?

Table 22

Learners' Argumentative Drafts

Learners' production works as a primary assessment of teachers' efforts. It enables them to determine what is going on exactly and how to fix it.

Main categories	Sub-categories
Results	Satisfying to some extent

Table 22 displays that learners' attempts in writing an argumentative essay were somehow reflecting what they have grasped regarding the difficult nature of this type of essay as participants mentioned.

The questions 19, 20 and 21 are discussed in Table 23 which represents the main students' problems, the reasons behind them and how they should be fixed.

Q19: What are the different problems that students have in writing this type of essays?

Q20: According to you, what are the reasons behind committing these mistakes?

Q21: What are the different efforts made to fix these problems?

Table 23

Problems, Reasons behind them, and the Efforts to fix them

It is quite normal to encounter learners' problems. What really matters is to identify the reasons behind committing them and to make the necessary processes to fix them. This is what this table illustrates based on the participants' sayings.

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
The main problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calculation of arguments, refutation and counter-arguments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negligence of the other's position • subjectivity in convincing the reader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of ideas • Lack of arguments
The reasons behind them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • thinking • writing itself. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of practicing writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of experiencing reading • Lack of practicing writing
The efforts made to fix them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to fix them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time • motivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities that motivate learners to write.

It is seen in Table 23 that the three participants have different views concerning the main problems faced by their students. However, both participants 2 and 3 agreed that the major reason behind these problems is that students lacked practicing writing. Unlike, participant 1 saw that the main reason is linked to the learner's way of thinking. Last, efforts

made to fix the students' problems differ from one participant to another. Both participants 2 and 3 focused on motivating learners to write, while participant 1 said:

“Still, it is hard to find the best situations to fix the students' problems”.

The answer of question 22 is displayed in Table 24 which represents some solutions that are suggested by the participants to improve the learners' essay writing in general and argumentative essay writing in particular.

Q22: What do you propose as solutions to enhance learners' performance in writing essays in general and their argumentative proficiency specifically?

Table 24

Solutions to Enhance Learners' Essay Writing and Argumentative Essay in Particular

Participants proposed some beneficial solutions according to their experience in this field.

Solutions to enhance	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
Essay writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change on the syllable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practicing writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remedial work
Argumentative Essay writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More time and emphasis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being familiar with some controversial topics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing it as assignments and homework

According to Table 24, participant1 suggested that change must occur on the syllabus itself and argumentative essay should be given more focus and time. Participant 2 agreed that learners need to practice writing and to be familiar with some debatable topics related to argumentative essay specifically. While, participant 3 saw that teachers should make remedial work and learners need to be forced to write argumentative essay either as assignments or as homework.

The last question (23) is displayed in Table 25.

Q23: Do you have any comments on this issue to add?

Table 25***Comments on the Issue of Argumentative Essay Writing***

This question gives participants the space to add what seems to them important to be mentioned or to recommend other teachers about certain details that need to be taken into account.

Comments to add on this issue	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handling teaching writing in general and argumentative essay in particular 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing fluency • Motivating students • Give them enough time to write 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the stage of (prewriting) • freedom of the topic • Teaching a list of vocabulary related to argument

It is shown in Table 25 that participant 1 advised teachers to handle teaching writing in general and argumentative essay in particular with due care. While, participant 2 kept emphasising on motivating learners, and providing them with enough time to practice writing. Some comments provided by participant 3 were the following: focusing on the prewriting stage or planning to make sure that learners have grasped the basis of writing, freedom in choosing the topic, and teaching lists of items related the argument.

3.6. Recapitulation

From the results and the data analysis that were reached through the use of the two instruments: a written test and a semi-structure interview, it is concluded that master students face several difficulties in producing argumentative essay both in structuring its format and developing the arguments. As the present study focused on difficulties in placing and expressing both opinion and arguments, the results have shown that some of the students could not even take a position on the arguable issue. It is also shown they preferred to express their opinions in the essay introduction (in the thesis statement) or in the conclusion (at the topic sentence); however, some were repeated.

Furthermore, it is found that some of the participants preferred to express their opinions implicitly which often confuses the readers and breaks one the academic writing feature which is, clarity. These problems are related to two fundamental points: either lacking

background on the structure and the organization of the argumentative essay, which leads to mark a deviation from English academic writing norms or lacking ideas on the topic so that they could not control it over the whole essay. It is important to highlight that the topic should be in the area of interest of the writer to gain his/her care in convincing the audience choosing the right evidence. This point was clearly missed may be due to the difficult nature of the argumentative essay which decreased their motivation.

Fundamental issues reached from the teachers' views are that the production of the essay is the most suitable exercise to produce a well-structured argumentative essay. It relies heavily on direct instruction from teachers, with a particular focus on appropriate lexical items and essay structure/patterns. It is highlighted that this type of essays should be given more time and emphasis regarding its importance. Teachers, also, insisted on increasing learners' motivation. Additionally, the genre-based approach is advised to be used since it is based on exposing students to authentic and variable input.

Conclusion

This study aims mainly at assessing EFL master students' expressing of opinions and advancing arguments. In addition, it attempts to define the appropriate ways to enhance their proficiency in writing argumentative essay. From the results discussed above, the following answers could be responses for the proposed research questions. It is concluded that the main difficulties of EFL master students in writing an argumentative essay lie in expressing their opinion and adopting a clear view on any given issue after analyzing and covering it profoundly. This, definitely, will enlighten them to successfully locate the opinion in its typical place (in the thesis statement or the conclusion). Furthermore, they face a problem in creating a meaningful debate hence advancing strong arguments in the body paragraphs by adopting the suitable pattern. Finally, seen from the perspective of the teachers, the most appropriate ways to enhance proficiency in writing argumentative essays include devoting enough time for reading debatable topics and practicing writing related to them, making some remedial work, and teaching strictly the different essay patterns.

General Conclusion

The writing craft gains a great role as a means of communication among people. However, in academic settings especially university, it is governed by conventional academic rules in order to fulfill the different purposes the author intends to write for. Consequently, different genres of writing are underlined, among which the argumentative essay. So, this study focuses on the complexities that EFL master learners often take as a difficulty and which decrease their ability to compose such genre of writing.

The results of the present study have shown that most of master learners failed to produce a clear opinion and to develop arguments, refutation and counter-arguments appropriately. A further major difficulty is the organization of the argumentative essay according to its patterns. In spite of its complex nature, teachers believe that learners can overcome these difficulties through devoting extra time for the learners to learn, and practice. Also, it is advised that change must appear at the level of syllabus since the different essay types are treated equally. So, the argumentative essay should be given more emphasis and time.

To conclude, one may say that argumentative essay writing is a complex genre and difficult to teach. However, writing courses can be helpful to develop the level of master students. So, it is important to make a deep research on the situation of teaching/learning argumentative essays at Algerian Universities.

At the end, it is hoped that the present study is worthy and detailed in the attempt of looking for further future research. It is also preferred that future research will be conducted on how to faster the teaching and learning of argumentative essay with much emphasis on the structure and the different patterns since learners cannot produce a well-organized argumentative essay.

Limitations of the Study

Further studies can be the result of the limitations of this study. The sample of 29 EFL master students was very small to be generalized on all EFL students since it cannot be judged as a reflection of their levels. Besides, data were collected from the University of Kasdi Merbah Ouargla which do not mean necessarily that they are applicable for all universities. Accordingly, further research need to cover a large sample from different universities.

Pedagogical Implications

After the discussion of the results mentioned above, these implications are to be identified for EFL learners in writing argumentative essays. Fundamentally, it is paramount to consider learners' errors and use them as a reference to teach. Besides, peer and group correction must be encouraged among learners. In this respect, Klassen (1991) states that correcting the essay provides an interesting activity for students to do since "it is more fun for them to correct other students' errors than their own" (p.136).

Hence, the criteria, including the features of academic writing and argumentative essay in particular are to be highlighted in assessing this genre.

Style, Format, structure

- The essay discusses in detailed the topic with the balance in its five-paragraphs (Introduction, three-body paragraphs and the conclusion).
- Thesis statement fully addresses the complexity of the question, takes a position (a clear opinion), and provides organizational patterns for the essay.
- Supporting paragraphs have topic sentences, provide evidence with analysis, and have transitional sentences(Cohesion/ Coherence)
- Essay contains an argument 'for' with its supporting evidence and counter-argument(s) with its refutation
- The Essay format follows a specific pattern(PRO-CON, CON-PRO, CON)
- Conclusion analyzes significance of evidence in relation to the essay question
- Control of language is impressive and contains insignificant errors.
- On the whole, essay maintains a clear, relevant and logical organization that is organized into multiple sections that creatively and intelligently build up to support a unique and complex argument taking into account the opposing side.

The following activities are proposed to enhance the argumentative essay writing:

Activity 1: Teaching theoretical foundation

Teaching the theoretical basis and the main terms related to argumentation, and how it is characterized. The different patterns and how they should be used. This will help the students to enrich their understanding of the world of argumentation.

Activity 2: Small group

Working in small groups to answer some questions related to the field of argumentation based on a reading text such as the following:

1. What is the writer's claim? And what does s/he want us to believe?
2. What reasons does s/he use to support the claim?
3. What facts, quotations, evidence, or specific details does s/he give to support these reasons?
4. Is there a counterclaim? What is it?

Activity 3: Peer Evaluation

Providing the learners with a list of the mistakes related to opinions and arguments' structure extracted from learners' drafts to correct them and suggest the right answers. Accordingly, learners will learn from their own mistakes and develop their views to the issue.

Activity 4: Reinforcing learners' position

Learners are asked to take a position in each statement that is mentioned between parentheses. The ultimate aim of this task is supporting, refuting, arguing, etc. It helps them to recognize their stance and to reinforce it.

- The issue is that fast food isn't healthy. Healthy foods don't contain many of the chemicals that fast foods do..... (Counterargument).
- Mobile phones have become a must in our modern society. (Supporting).
- Freedom of speech reinforces one's right which is a kind of change in society. (Refuting).

On the whole, to enhance the learners' ability to produce well-written argumentative essays, teachers ought to focus on and highlight the right placement of opinion and arguments and how to develop them for master learners. This will make their written texts clear. Since they had weak organization of the argumentative essay, its different patterns have to be taught in detailed manner and strictly.

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Appendix II: Teachers' Interview

This interview is conducted to allow researchers to investigate the perceptions of the teachers of writing at Kasdi Merbah University Ouargla (KMUO) on the issue of the different difficulties encountered by EFL master students when composing an argumentative essay. The main aim of this qualitative tool is to collect data about the appropriate ways that teachers propose to enhance learners' performance and proficiency in writing this genre. The interview will be recorded and its data will be used for research purposes with a total anonymity of the interviewees.

Section One: General information

1. How long have you been working as a teacher of writing?
2. How can you describe your experience in teaching writing?

Section Two: Teaching essays

3. Does teaching essays writing have a great importance in your syllabus?
4. How do you assess the circumstances under which teaching essays writing takes place?
5. Are you using the approach given to you or it is of your own choice? Why?
6. Regarding the results you have, how do you assess the success of this approach?

Section Three: Teaching argumentative essays

7. Can these results be applicable to the teaching of argumentative essay writing?
8. How many sessions do you devote to teaching argumentative essays?
9. Regarding its importance at university, how do you emphasize its necessity to your learners?
10. What is your first step in introducing this genre of writing?
11. Is there any introduction to the realm of argumentation and its main concepts that students will use later?
12. What organization do you advise your learners to adopt when writing the thesis stage?
13. Do you stress that opinion should be mentioned explicitly?
14. What patterns do you encourage your learners to follow in the argumentative stage?
15. Are the different types of arguments and their precise use emphasized in this section?
16. What types of conclusion are students advised to write?
17. Are there enough exercises to examine learners' argumentative writing?
18. Do learners' drafts reflect what you have taught them?

19. What are the different problems that students have in writing this type of essays?
20. According to you, what are the reasons behind committing these mistakes?
21. What are the different efforts made to fix these problems?
22. What do you propose as solutions to enhance learners' performance in writing essays in general and their argumentative proficiency specifically?
23. Do you have any comments on this issue to add?

Résumé

La présente étude vise donc à mettre en évidence les différentes difficultés souvent rencontrées par les masters apprenants EFL lors de la production de genre d'essais argumentatifs. Cette étude a été réalisée grâce à une analyse qualitative et quantitative. Pour collecter les données, les chercheurs ont utilisé deux outils de recherche: une interview semi-structurée a été adressée à trois professeurs d'écriture EFL et en plus d'un test écrit qui a été utilisé pour évaluer la performance de 29 étudiants en master dans la rédaction d'essais argumentatifs au département d'anglais de l'Université de Kasdi Merbah. Les résultats ont révélé que non seulement la plupart des participants se heurtaient à une série de difficultés pour formuler une opinion et faire avancer les arguments, mais aussi qu'ils ne parvenaient pas à structurer un essai argumentatif bien organisé en fonction de ses normes et modèles académiques. Selon leurs points de vue, les enseignants d'anglais langue étrangère ont convenu que les étudiants trouvaient l'essai argumentatif très difficile par rapport aux autres types d'écritures. Cela peut se justifier par le fait qu'ils n'accordent pas beaucoup d'importance aux techniques d'écriture. Ils ont également confirmé que les apprenants EFL sont moins motivés et que le temps consacré à l'enseignement de ce genre d'essais est insuffisant. En conclusion, certaines activités ont été proposées d'afin d'encourager les étudiants à exercer en dehors de la classe et en leur donnant l'occasion de renforcer leurs capacités de production de l'essai argumentatif.

Mots-clés: essai argumentatif, étudiants d'anglais langue étrangère, opinion, arguments.

الملخص

تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى تسليط الضوء على الصعوبات المختلفة التي غالباً ما يواجهها متعلمو ماستر اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية أثناء كتابة المقالات الحجاجية. تم تحقيق هذه الدراسة من خلال تحليلين نوعي وكمي حيث استخدم الباحثان أدوات بحث لجمع البيانات فقد تم توجيه مقابلة شبه هيكلية مع ثلاثة من أساتذة الكتابة في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بالإضافة إلى استخدام اختبار كتابي لتقييم أداء 29 طالب ماستر في كتابة المقالات الجدلية في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة قاصدي مرباح. كشفت النتائج أن معظم الطلبة لم يواجهوا فقط مجموعة من الصعوبات في طرح الرأي و تقديم الحجج ولكن أيضاً فشلوا في بناء مقال حجاج يجيد التنظيم وفقاً لمعايير وأنماطه الأكاديمية. وقد اتفق أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من خلال وجهات نظرهم على أن الطلاب يجدون المقالة الجدلية صعبة للغاية مقارنة بالأنماط الأخرى من المقالات ويعود هذا لحقيقة أنهم لا يعطون أهمية كبيرة لتقنيات الكتابة. كما أكدوا أن متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية أقل دافعية وأن الوقت المخصص لتدريس هذا النوع من المقال غير كافٍ. في الختام تم اقتراح بعض الأنشطة لتحسين مستوى الطلبة في الكتابة الجدلية وتعليمه ممن خلال تشجيعهم على الكتابة خارج الحصص ومنحهم الفرصة لتعزيز قدراتهم في إنتاج المقالة الجدلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المقالات الحجاجية ، طلاب اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية، رأي ، حجج