

Teaching Persuasive Writing for Arabic-Speaking Students

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Abstract

Studies reveal that English-speaking countries are facing problems in teaching the country's language to emigrants coming from different cultural backgrounds. These problems get worse in non-English speaking countries for students are not exposed to this language in their daily life. This issue has become ubiquitous notably in the Arab world, turning into hate in some college students who do not realize that their weakness in English is due to the lack of or wrong exposure to this language in childhood and early adolescence. Teaching writing is the most difficult skill that instructors face in classrooms for different reasons including the demotivation of students, Arabic-influenced sentence structure, and general knowledge. There have been many theories revolving around teaching writing; but instructors struggle to make students write with logic flow, and students strive to satisfy instructors who deduct grades from the supporting details part without a precise clarification for pupils. It is worth noting that students are aware of the various parts of a paragraph without having the ability to apply them. Low grades, in turn, demotivate students and push them to surrender. Therefore, there should be precise criteria of assessment along with clear guidelines that enable students to write functionally. This paper displays practical techniques that might enable Arab instructors to root the concept of persuasion, and Arab students to write a persuasive body paragraph. The strategies would help instructors orient and regulate student's way of thinking and sentence structure, respectively. Moreover, it suggests a rubric to assess a persuasive paragraph.

Keywords: Persuasive Paragraph, Logos, English as a Foreign Language, Assessment

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Introduction

English is the first lingua franca worldwide. It has got the status of global language for its flexibility and adaptability. It is not only used by scientists, businesses, diplomacy, mass entertainment, and international telecommunications but also in education for being an essential tool for students who wish to work in a foreign language or in a multi-national company, to pursue higher education, or to do research (Giridharan & Robson, 2011). 85% of scientific journals are written in English. The increased use on English is triggered by cultural, educational and economic globalization. Therefore, English as a foreign language (EFL) has become a necessity to keep up with a rapidly changing world.

To learn EFL, four skills - reading, writing, listening and speaking- must be covered. The most difficult one for students is writing (Nunan, 1999). Writing is a critical skill that students need to succeed academically and professionally. Writing is not limited to language arts classes. It is essential to help students develop their critical thinking and communication skills. Studies have shown that students who are strong writers tend to perform better in school and have more success in their careers (Rashid & Hui, 2021).

Therefore, university instructors face a challenge when teaching writing notably persuasion as they have to convey the concept of persuasion and fix the accumulation of weak sentence structures (Rashid & Hui, 2021) and illogical flow of ideas (Fareed et al., 2016) resulting from several factors including but not limited to:

- The phase of Covid-19: students have dropped out of school for a period of time despite the attempts of finding alternatives like online learning that has proven inefficiency in some countries like Lebanon for not having the needed infrastructure including electricity, stable connection, appropriate space, etc...
- The lack of teaching methods: instructors don't consider creating or adapting new methodological styles that facilitate writing for students. Instructors adopt general concepts that remain too vague for students who cannot easily apply the explanation (Rashid & Hui, 2021).
- The students' poor language: students reach university with a poor language that hampers writing. Students lack the fundamental language including vocabulary, grammar, and spelling (Heaton, 1988).
- The holistic answers by students: most instructors are satisfied with the holistic answers that include technical terms (like topic sentence, supporting details, etc...) without pinpointing the ideas of every student, leading to flaws in structures and concepts (Rashid & Hui, 2021).
- The challenges of teaching writing: There are several challenges that instructors may face when teaching writing. These include limited instructional time, lack of resources, and the need to differentiate instruction for students with diverse learning needs.

In summary, teaching writing is a complex process that requires effective teaching strategies, and a focus on providing feedback. It is essential to teach writing skills across the curriculum and to be aware of the challenges and opportunities presented by diverse student populations. Therefore, instructors should find out not only ways to root the logical flow required by persuasion, but also ways to rectify the simple sentence structure at least to be able to build on it in the advanced levels (Rashid & Hui, 2021). Therefore, the researcher proposes a new strategy- WH-Logos based strategy- to teach a persuasive paragraph in addition to an assessment pattern.

Literature Review

Teaching writing is a complex process that involves multiple factors, including the development of writing skills, and the use of effective teaching strategies. The following is a brief literature review of some approaches and strategies to teaching writing, and strategies to teaching persuasion.

Approaches to Teaching Writing

Hereunder are the various approaches to teaching writing, according to Raimes (1983):

- The controlled-to-free approach: it was adopted in the 1950s and early 1960s. it stresses the audio-lingual approach to learn a second language. Speech came first and writing served to reinforce speech with mastery of grammar and syntactic forms.
- The free-writing approach: it stresses quantity rather than quality. Assessment is based on minimal errors compared to a vast amount of free writing. In this approach, students jot down content and fluency first on paper then grammatical accuracy, organization, and the rest gradually follow.
- The paragraph-pattern approach: organization is highly stressed in this approach. Accuracy of grammar and content are secondary.
- The grammar-syntax-organization approach: writing encompasses organization as well as grammar and syntax.
- The communicative approach: it is based on the purpose and audience of a piece of writing.
- The process approach: this approach requires several drafts. Students acquire new vocabulary, new sentences, new ideas with an appropriate feedback every time they submit a draft. It makes the writing process a process of discovery for students (Kroll, 2001; Raimes, 1983).

Studies reveal that all the approaches overlap because they all have an intersection point. They all depart from the assumption that writing means connected sentences with a specific purpose (Raimes, 1983). Therefore, the eclectic approach comes on top because there is no one way to enhance students' writing competence in EFL classes (Rashid & Hui, 2021).

Challenges Students Face When Writing Persuasion

Writing is considered a complex activity for students if they cannot meet the grammar, content, vocabulary, mechanic, and organization writing (Nurtjahyo, Drajadi & Sumardi, 2019). According to Raimes (1983), students face many challenges during the process of writing including the teaching style, the lack of motivation, the influence of the mother tongue language, the ill-structured sentences, and the limited vocabulary. The difficulty is not limited to finding the correct expressions and words but also to finding ideas and expressing them in a new language.

Strategies to Teaching Writing

Instructors play a vital role in facilitating the writing process for students through the following strategies:

1. Modelling: It is about the steps followed in the writing process including planning, drafting, revising and editing (Rashid & Hui, 2021).
2. Peer Review: Students check each other's work and give tips to peers.

3. Writing Workshops: Students revise and edit work together. This technique allows students to learn from each other.
4. Mini-lessons: Instructors give grammar, sentence structure or organization skills.
5. Writing Conferences: They are one-on-one meetings where instructors address individual writing needs.
6. Revision Activities: They include self-evaluation, peer review, or instructor feedback (Raimes, 1983).

Methodology

This study found a strategy that reduces pressure on students when writing particularly a persuasive paragraph. Students can create their own writing by following the Wh-Logos based strategy. It incorporates the Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Cognitive-Process approach. It can make students express their ideas to write easily through posing a set of wh-questions. This strategy permits students to demonstrate understanding with some options in the outputs. Besides, it also allows them to write coherent, contextual, and acceptable sentences.

Discussion

The instructor departs from a hypothesis like: Food leftovers cause climate change. The hypothesis forms the topic sentence of a paragraph. The topic sentence should contain two variables, which are usually the topic given in the prompt and the sub-topic about which the student has gathered information. In the given hypothesis, there are two variables: food leftovers and climate change. The instructor motivates students to put the two variables in a complete sentence, which is somehow ready in this case. And the instructor should stress that variable 1 (which is more important than the second) is better to be at the beginning of the sentence while variable 2 should be at the end of the sentence. And the two variables must be linked with a verb that reflects the correlation between both variables. In such a hypothesis, the correlation between the two variables is a cause-effect relationship, so the verb must be a word that means “lead to”.

Here, the instructor integrates the culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive teaching involves incorporating students’ cultural backgrounds and experiences into the teaching process. This can be particularly important when teaching writing as students’ cultural backgrounds can influence their writing styles and preferences (Rashid & Hui, 2021).

The culturally responsive teaching is applied through linking the hypothesis given to a situation students are witnessing. Since the targeted audience is Lebanese students, the instructor proposes to add the phrase “in Lebanon” to the topic sentence. The final topic sentence becomes: Food leftovers cause climate change in Lebanon.

Now, the instructor applies the cognitive-process approach for it allows students overcome the problem of expressing themselves (Rashid & Hui, 2021). This approach stimulates students to express ideas and be guided in their writing process (Nurtjahyo, Drajiati & Sumardi, 2019).

This approach is applied through posing a set of questions:

- Are there recycling plants in Lebanon? Students answer: no, there aren't.

- What do families and restaurants do with food leftovers? Students answer: they throw them (this is what usually happens).
- Where do they throw leftovers? Students reply: in trash baskets.
- What happens here? Students reply: trash trucks collect leftovers and other wastes, and transport them to landfills.
- What happens to leftovers thrown in landfills? Students answer: they get fermented.
- What happens during fermentation? Students reply: the oxygen is rapidly converted to carbon dioxide, whereby the anaerobic bacteria start to proliferate and produce methane (Berytech, 2020).
- What do Carbon dioxide and methane cause? Students answer: they cause climate change.

The instructor moves to the second part, which is combining the sequence of information next to each other in a paragraph. The instructor mentions that the first supporting detail should start with variable 1 and the last supporting detail should end with variable 2 to guarantee a logical flow of ideas.

Now, the instructor tells students to move to the second step which is combining the information discussed in a paragraph. One expected paragraph is:

Food leftovers trigger climate change in Lebanon. Food leftovers are thrown. They are thrown in trash baskets. Leftovers and other wastes are collected by Trash trucks, and transported to landfills. In landfills, leftovers get fermented. During fermentation, the oxygen is rapidly converted to carbon dioxide and methane. Carbon dioxide and methane cause climate change.

Here the instructor interferes to boost the sentence structures through giving tips related to:

- Avoiding repetition through relative clauses
- Avoiding the passive voice to meet the academic writing
- Selecting the appropriate word choice according to the topic and audience

Based on the instructions given, the paragraph becomes as follows:

Food leftovers trigger climate change in Lebanon. Lebanese households and restaurants throw food leftovers in trash baskets. Trash trucks collect leftovers and other wastes, and transport them to landfills where leftovers get fermented. During fermentation, the oxygen is rapidly converted to carbon dioxide and methane, which cause climate change.

At this phase, the instructor pinpoints the fact that the concluding statement is missing. S/He tells students that the concluding statement should start with a transitional word that reflects consequence (consequently, hence, thus, etc...) followed by a comma and then they have to paraphrase the topic sentence by finding synonyms to words and expressions. So the paragraph becomes as follows:

Food leftovers trigger climate change in Lebanon. Lebanese households and restaurants throw food leftovers in trash baskets. Trash trucks collect leftovers and other wastes, and transport them to landfills where leftovers get fermented. During fermentation, the oxygen is rapidly converted to carbon dioxide and methane, which cause climate change. Thus, food remnants are a reason for global warming.

Now that the paragraph is written, it is time to apply ethos through finding references for the facts mentioned in the paragraph particularly the scientific ones. According to Junior Skill Builders (2008), the argument must be solid and reasonable by stating facts, giving logical reasons, using examples, and quoting experts. The in-text citation can be introduced for students. So the paragraph becomes as follows:

Food leftovers trigger climate change in Lebanon. Lebanese households and restaurants throw food leftovers in trash baskets (Nudge Lebanon, 2019). Trash trucks collect leftovers and other wastes, and transport them to landfills where leftovers get fermented. During fermentation, the oxygen is rapidly converted to carbon dioxide and methane, which cause climate change (Berytech. 2020). Thus, food remnants are a reason for global warming.

Students can apply the steps given at their own pace (Rashid & Hui, 2021). The steps start with organizing facts and ideas first, then comes grammar to construct sentences (Rashid & Hui, 2021).

Assessment

Assessment enables students to evaluate their work (Iter, 2017). Using rubrics in evaluation provide students a clear idea about their performances. Rubrics are designed according to the assigned task (Nurtjahyo, Drajati & Sumardi, 2019). A teacher can adapt a rubric according to the given task and desired results (Wiggins & Mctighe, 2005).

Since instructors are given the freedom of determining the goal, standards and criteria (Nurtjahyo, Drajati & Sumardi, 2019), they should use authentic assessments and performance tasks to make students interact in the courses (Nurtjahyo, Drajati & Sumardi, 2019). Rubrics should cover the content and skill task. They should cover good understanding and successful performance (Wiggins & Mctighe, 2005) taking into consideration that teachers create performance tasks for the students as an opportunity for them to demonstrate what they know and are able to do in relation to a given concept or skill (Nurtjahyo, Drajati & Sumardi, 2019).

One rubric that can be adopted to the Wh-Logos based strategy is as follows:

Table 1: Tentative Rubric (Based on topic).../20 points	
Topic sentence	3 points
Concluding statement	2 points
Supporting details	The mark depends on the length of the paragraph, but usually it is the total of the topic sentence and concluding statement, so 5 marks would be fine in this case
Transitional words & language	10 marks. Since English is a foreign language, and instructors need to stress the necessity of using the patterns taught during the explanation.

Being done with the paragraph, students should do a self-assessment based on the given rubric:

- If they have a topic sentence composed of 2 variables with a verb that means “lead to”, they take a full mark.
- If the supporting details are logical and every single step is clarified, they should take a full mark.
- If there is a concluding statement that starts with an appropriate transitional word, they should take a full mark.
- If the paragraph has various sentence structures with no mistakes, they should take a full mark.

Validity

The Wh-Logos Based approach is valid given that it departs from the logical flow based on facts required for persuasion by using reasons and logical pieces, and it is efficient for EFL students who show progress in writing when instructed according to the above-mentioned methodology and assessment.

Conclusion

To learn a language, there are four skills that should be acquired. EFL students consider writing a complex skill for their weak language and poor reasoning as information should be accurate, and the whole process is based on thinking that requires systematic instructions unlike speaking (Raimes, 1983). So, instructors should adapt the writing strategies to enable these students write with logical flow and minimal mistakes. To guarantee minimal mistakes, instructors should teach specific patterns, upon which students build on, which makes the sentence level of paramount importance when teaching writing in EFL as writers have to deal with a bunch of tips to produce a piece of writing including syntax, content, grammar, organization, mechanics, word choice, audience, etc... (Raimes, 1983). Moreover, instructors should work on providing feedback for its significance in teaching writing. Feedback help students evaluate their progress provided being straightforward, actionable and objective-based.

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