Features of Academic Writing in English: Recommendations to Remedy Teaching EFL Writing in the Arab Context

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Abstract

Academic writing in English is a mode of writing that, to a greater or lesser degree, underlies various academic tasks and assignments across almost all disciplines at the university level. It is one of the most demanding skills to acquire. Students need to be aware of the cognitive operations they go through in the process of composing, and the discursive norms of writing in order for them to operate successfully in academia.

This paper sets out to demonstrate the significance, purposes of academic writing and its key demands from both the cognitive and socio-cultural perspectives. The significance of this paper arises from two complementary angles: First, it foregrounds the demanding aspects of writing in English that teachers should focus on in an endeavour to help Arab students extend their writing competence. Second, the practical implications of the socio-cognitive demands may inform and guide teachers, course designers and education policy makers to develop an appropriate instructional writing model and design classroom activities that are believed to better meet these demands and thus help Arab students overcome them. The paper finishes off with a conclusion.

Key Words: Academic writing; Argumentation; Critical thinking skills; Topic content knowledge; Argumentation quality; Evidence resources.

الكتابة الاكاديمية في الإنكليزية كلغة اجنبية: نظرة في متطلباتها الأساسية وتأثيراتها على تعليمها في الوطن العربي

المستخلص

الكتابة الاكاديمية هي نمط من الكتابة وهي بدرجة أكبر او اقل تشكل الاساس في انجازات مختلف المهام والواجبات الاكاديمية في مختلف الاختصاصات في الجامعة. الكتابة باللغة الانكليزية هي واحدة من أكثر المهارات المطلوبة في تعلم اللغة الانكليزية كلغة ثانية/ واللغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية في التعليم العالي. فهي تشمل الاحاطة بالعمليات المعرفية للكتابة، مهارات التفكير والمعايير الخطابية الاجتماعية-الثقافية لكي يكون الطلبة مهنيين بشكل جيد لتحقيق اهدافهم التواصلية والعمل بشكل فعال وكفء في مجتمع الوسط الأكاديمي. وقد بينت الدراسة اهمية اهداف ومهام الكتابة الاكاديمية. كما تهدف الدراسة الى اظهار المتطلبات المهمة لكل من المنظور المعرفي والثقافي-اجتماعي. تأتي اهمية هذه الدراسة من خلال زاويتين متكاملتين: الاولى، انها تُبرز الجوانب المطلوبة للكتابة التي ينبغي التركيز عليها في تدريس الطلبة العرب ليتعلموها في اللغة الانكليزية كلغة ثانية. ثانيا، مثل هذه المتطلبات قد تنبه وتُرشد المعلمين، ومصممي المقررات وصناع السياسة التربوية لإيجاد نموذج مناسب لتدريسي للكتابة وتحديد اهدافها، وايجاد مواد التدريس والنشاطات الصفية التي يعتقد انها تساعد الطلبة على تطوير قدراتهم في الكتابة ومن ثم العمل بفاعلية في المجال الأكاديمي. وختمت الدراسة بالاستنتاج.

1. Introduction

Writing is an indispensable instrument of scholarship and the currency of higher education to better prepare students to communicate competently in their academic community. Researchers (Hedge, 2005; Graham, 2006; Shih, 1986, Hyland, 2002) agree that academic writing is more than producing accurate and complete sentences and phrases. It is about guiding students to synthesise and reflect on discipline-specific content knowledge with the purpose of constructing substantial arguments intended to convince a particular reader(s) on a particular controversial issue.

From this perspective, Shih (1986) asserts that writing has the function of assessing and enhancing students' conceptual understanding and independent thinking on a specific topic. Emphasising its significance, writing can serve as a central instrumental predictor of students' academic success because the assessment of their achievement is almost completely based on how far they are able to produce coherent and well-argued essays in their course work and examinations (Graham, 2006). Chandrasegaran (1991) contends that those who lack effective skills in written communication are disadvantaged because they will be unable to produce quality written wok with substantial arguments.

Students need writing for a variety of prototypical purposes to achieve. The most common ones (Whitaker, 2009, p.2) are:

(i) Persuasive purpose to get the reader to adopt the writer's favoured point of view.

(ii) Analytical purpose to explain and evaluate an issue from multi-perspectives, choosing the best perspective based on certain criteria. Analytical assignments often investigate causes, examine effects, evaluate effectiveness, assess ways to solve problems, find the relationships between various ideas, or analyse other people's arguments.

(iii) Informative purpose to explain possible answers to an issue, giving the readers new information about a topic. This differs from analytical writing in that writers do not force their viewpoints onto the readers, but rather try to enlarge their understanding. Horowitz (1986) identifies several categories of academic writing tasks expected of students to fulfill their course requirements. They include critical reviews; term papers, essays; synthesis of data from multiple sources, and research assignments.

2. The Basic Features of Academic Writing

2.1 Argumentation as a Mode of Academic Writing

In Western educational and intellectual traditions, there is a consensus that argumentation is a mode of academic writing because it is concerned with argument, summary, synthesis, evaluation, reflection and analysis (Lillis & Turner, 2001). In a broad sense, the term argumentation, as applied in academic settings, is a social process through which individuals put forward a number of arguments to provide supportive evidence to justify a particular claim and deny an opponent's one aiming at reaching a reasonable solution to resolve a conflict of opinions on a controversial issue (Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004).

Argumentation seeks to convince the potential audience of the validity and significance of the position favoured by the author. Its ultimate rhetorical goal is to earn their considerations or approval of the claim, to ask them to change an opinion or to justify a way of interpreting facts or to suggest possibilities for future research, or to direct them to take a new course of action (Connor, 1996). In the light of this understanding, Silva and Matsuda (2002) argue that the writer's task "is not as simple as constructing an accurate representation of reality; the writer also has to negotiate, through the construction of the text, his or her own view of these elements of writing with the views held by the readers" (p. 253).

Under these conditions, argumentation "makes the writing event a significant experience in which students have the opportunity to express, communicate, share, and negotiate their views of the world and feelings through the written text"(Chala & Chapetón, 2012, p, 24) and therefore "critical analysis is firmly established as one of the most desirable aspect of undergraduate writing" (Woodward-Kron, 2002, p.121). From this perspective, Hyland (2002) stresses that it is not surprising that writing for academic purposes cannot be

seen as a simple straightforward process nor be reduced to mere transmission and summarisation of preconceived subject content knowledge students memorise and reproduce.

2.2 Writing as a Problem Solving Process

Under the cognitive approach, the act of composing is a complex process involving distinctive problem-solving processes that writers go through before producing their final drafts (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Crowley, 1998). These processes can be grouped into three stages: pre-writing, writing and post writing (Tompkins, 2004). They are "hierarchically organized with component processes embedded within other components" (Flower & Hayes, 1981, p. 375).

2.2.1 Prewriting Stage

Prewriting strategies are invaluable to lessen confusion and diminish the writer's block while actually writing (Wing, 2009). They guide the production of a writing task to meet writers' goals. In this stage, writers form a mental representation of the meaning they convey to the potential audience and how they formulate it in writing. Flower and Hayes (1981) claim that writers store knowledge not only of the topic, but also of the audience and of various writing plans to plan the basic content structure and rules for grammar in long-term memory (LTM). In this stage, writers need to find a key clue from the topic of the writing task to use it to probe long-term memory (LMT) to search for and retrieve a network of relevant and well-structured preliminary ideas and thoughts relevant to it.

However, the case that the writer can formulate them directly in English is not always straightforward like this "retrieving knowledge and creating an adequate conceptual structure of what you think can be a demanding task" (Flower & Hayes, 1980, p. 36). Fragmented, unconnected, and even contradictory ideas may only be available in LTM. Here writers need to go beyond its resources and use their prior knowledge to generate new ones, evaluate, coordinate and transform them into more organized ones by their associative conceptual relationships in such a manner that makes them adaptable to realise their own network of rhetorical goals that grow as writing proceeds. As Flower and Hayes (1980, p. 28) put it "at one end of the spectrum, writers are merely trying to express a network of ideas already formed and available in memory; at the other, writers are consciously attempting to probe for analogues and contradictions, to form new concepts, and perhaps even to restructure their knowledge of the subject".

Likewise, in their Knowledge-Transforming Model, Bereiter and Scardamalia (1978) make a strong case for the connection between the communicative goals and the generation and evaluation of content. In arguing their case, Bereiter and Scardamalia (1978) contend that writing goes beyond the simple cognitive activities of recalling ideas already in existence in LTM nor is a matter of getting them directly down on paper as they are retrieved. They sustain that a new network of goals may emerge as the writer's sense of the overall goal develops in the course of producing a text. These goals need to be integrated in the text in support of achieving his/her overall communicative purpose and, as a result, he/she needs to generate new strings of ideas.

The writers' ability to wrestle with and resolve both content and communicative goals calls upon a dialectical thinking process to reflect on the relevant domain-specific information they retrieve from both LTM and other multiple sources. In Lang's (2000) view, reflection involves writers' engagement in higher order thinking skills of analysis, evaluation, and synthesis to generate and organise their conceptual understanding of the topic at hand and to monitor the stream of "what is going to be written as well as what has been written" (White & Ardnt, 1995, p.3). The ultimate purpose of such engagement is to ensure the

realisation of the writers' rhetorical ends and the coherence and comprehensibility of the final draft to meet the audience's expectations.

2.2.2 Writing Stage

This second stage consists of translating the ideas that arise from the pre-writing stage into a linear piece of writing. However, translating is not a straightforward process since what writers put down on paper is not necessarily the finished meaning to convey to the audience but the setting out of their preliminary ideas (Raimes, 1983). The act of translating is a distinctive thinking process that writers use recursively during the whole process of composing (Flower &Hayes, 1981). Perceived as such, it often forces writers to develop, elaborate, and often revise that meaning (Hayes & Flower, 1983). Perl (1979) shares the same belief when confirming that translating itself is an act of discovery by which writers invent new words, details and syntactic structures as they write in pursuit of refining the final draft.

2.2. 3 Post-writing Stage

Once the first draft is completed, writers then begin to revise it by undertaking minor or major adjustments to the ideas with the purpose of clarifying and refining them to ensure a smooth comprehensibility of the final draft. Revision is a constructive and inventive process involving adding, deleting, substituting, or moving ideas on a variety of discourse levels (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Tompkins, 2004). The post-writing stage also involves evaluating the writer's overall plan to see how far it is compliant with his/her communicative purposes. This suggests that developing new goals may call to modify the original plan or even discover a more satisfying alternative one to maintain coherence of the final draft (Zamel, 1983; Flower & Hayes, 1981). During this stage, editing is also performed to meet the "standard language conventions, accuracy of meaning, reader understanding, or reader acceptance" (Hayes & Flower, 1980, p.18).

3. Writing as a Topic Content Knowledge Constituting Process

It has become evident that writing is a complex cognitive developmental process of inquiry, and discovery, rather than a single-shot action (Crowley, 1998). According to Hyland (2003, p.11), these processes

> can be reviewed, evaluated and revised even before any text has been produced at all. At any point, the writer can jump backward or forward to any of these activities: returning to the library for more data, revising the plan to accommodate new ideas or rewriting for readability after peer feedback.

Researchers (Emig, 1971; Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1978; Flower& Hayes, 1980; Thomson 2000) claim that with the exploratory and generative nature of the cognitive operations, text production is actually an active content knowledge-constituting process in its own right. They create more opportunities to encourage writers to employ critical thinking strategies to process and reflect on the topic content of the writing task. They (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1986) help writers discover and create new ideas prior to transcribing them in writing. These strategies are deployed to elicit and link new substantive and salient ideas and thoughts with pre-existing ones drawing on others' views and perspectives, to explore conceptual relations among them through deriving inferences and implications, to establish logical sequencing among them, and to classify and reflect on bodies of data gathered from multiple sources. Such higher-level thinking processes help writers re-examine, refine and rearrange their initial knowledge, beliefs and assumptions, and thus have extensive resources from which to synthesize richer conceptual knowledge about the topic they writer about. Along a similar line of focus, researchers (e.g. Emig, 1971; Applebee, 1981) claim that there

is ample evidence suggesting that composing process can be conceptualised as especially a powerful intellectual act that helps writers discover meaning rather than just writing down ideas and therefore create new and more elaborated knowledge that they bring from various perspectives in their content areas.

3.1 Topic Knowledge and Argumentative Writing Quality

Reasoning is an essential ingredient that features prominently and effectively in argumentative writing, a mode of writing that underlies almost all students' writing assignments and tasks in academia (Lillis & Turner, 2001). There is a commonly held assumption that there is a positive interplay between students' topic content knowledge and their ability to produce a sound and persuasive argumentative writing.

It is asserted that writers have more chances to perform significantly better in argumentative writing on topics for which their background content knowledge is well integrated (Langer, 1984). Indeed, writers, as highlighted by Halpern (2002), can utilise such knowledge to provide more illustrative examples and detailed explanations to further clarify their ideas, and to express concession and cause or effect among ideas that all serve to substantiate their claims.

From this perspective, Nystrand (1989) sustains that quality argumentation is indicative of engagement in reasoning operations drawing on such knowledge. In a similar vein, it is reported (Sadler & Zeidler, 2005; Sadler & Donnelly, 2006) that the ability to offer high quality evidentiary data to support or refute the premises of a particular proposition or standpoint is based on the writer's content knowledge.   Wiley (2005) goes further than this and argues that writers with richer content knowledge can gather, debate and assess several voices representing different perspectives on the issue at hand. These thinking processes enable them to construct a deeper and more complex structurally argumentation in terms of the number of supportive arguments, counter-arguments and rebuttals. In other words, writers can address not only the claim they favour but also the views that are divergent or incompatible with their own ones, while less knowledgeable ones present a single-sided argumentation drawing only on their own position. According to Wiley (2005, p. 96), considering possible counterarguments enhances the credibility of the writer. Wiley and Voss (1999) hold the view that with a richer domain-specific conceptual framework, writers have extensive resources from which to weigh and decide on what can be counted as relevant and sufficient evidentiary grounds to best substantiate the merits of their claims, and to discredit the premises of adversary ones. In Knudson's (1992) words, "lack of background knowledge will result in students' making unsupported claims that may or may not be logically connected to the proposition, warrant, or opposition" (p.176).

4. Writing: As a Socially-embedded Process

However, though the mental processes involved in the act of composing help students be aware of the cyclical, exploratory and generative nature of writing, they tend to focus on teaching writing simply as "a highly cognitive, individualist, largely asocial process" (Atkinson 2003, p.10). To put simply, writing does not take place independent of its broader social and cultural context in which the writer produces the text and within which these operations should function (Flower, 1994; Chandrasegaran, 2009).

Writing has therefore become a socially embedded act that cannot be detached from the notions of genre and discourse community (Kostouli, 2005). This line of thought echoes back Swales' (1990) contention that writing "should not be viewed solely as an individually-oriented, inner-directed cognitive process, but as much as an acquired response to the discourse conventions . . . within particular communities" (p. 4).   Johns (1997)

stresses the dynamic interdependence of the notions of genre and discourse community. Genre reflects relatively predictable and recurring institutional textual practices of a particular English-speaking academic community whose members are inherently entrenched in it and where the effectiveness and appropriateness of writing are judged (Hyland, 2007). These generic practices are invented and deployed by those members to realize common communicative purposes they routinely encounter in a variety of rhetorical situations and to regulate their membership (Swales, 1990). Without such practices, interactions among those members "would be random and chaotic" (Derewianka, 2003, p.135).

A profound advantage of genre pedagogy is that it is not just a matter of training students to mechanically reproduce forms of texts, but it offers them "a way of seeing how different texts are created in distinct and recognizable ways in terms of their purpose, audience and message" (Hyland,2004, p.12). Its ultimate objective is to help students satisfy the textual expectations of acceptable writing behaviours dictated by a particular academic community (Horowitz 1986). In Hyland's words (2003), "thrown back on their own resources, they [students] are forced to draw on the discourse conventions of their own cultures and may fail to produce texts that are either contextually adequate or educationally valued" (p. 20) since these conventions "are not readily apparent to 'outsiders'" (Chandrasegaran, 2009, p.342).

4.1 The Schematic Structure of Argumentative Genre

Swales (1990) maintains that texts are conventionally segmented into elements or stages that help writers better interact with the readership and effectively convey their message. These "stages" or "elements" are called moves. Regarding the generic structure of argumentative writing, Connor (1996) and Hyland (1990) propose that it could be visually represented, or mapped by a three-stage formula: Thesis, Argument and Conclusion. In turn, each stage is expressed in terms of moves, **some of which are optional, others are obligatory**. Each of them has a functional contribution to realize its ultimate rhetorical communicative end in pursuit of a thoughtful decision.

1. Introductory chapter: The Thesis stage. It is realised by five moves only (c) is indispensable:

a. Attention grabber realised by a controversial statement or dramatic illustration whose function is to capture the reader's attention rather than inform

b. Background information about the issue to be argued. Such information has the function of placing the issue in a particular context.

c. The proposition is the central move in this stage. Its function is to introduce and articulate an arguable stance (claim or, premise) that gives focus to the development and direction of the entire argumentative text.

d. Informing move realised by a number of definitions, classifications, descriptions, or critiques.

e. Evaluation move which provides a positive comment on the proposition.

2. Body paragraphs. The argument stage

The body of the argumentative genre comprises several paragraphs appealing to several sources of evidence. Each paragraph is realized by stating well-backed evidence (data) to justify the acceptance of the writer's original claim, and anticipating and assessing the counter-argument that the audience may hold, and if appropriate, denying it by discrediting its merits in defence of his/her claim.

3. Concluding paragraph

In this paragraph, the writer synthesizes the discussion to consolidate the validity of the claim, or restate it to keep it vivid in the audiences' mind (optional).

4.2 Evidence Resources

Undoubtedly, in argumentative type of writing, writers need to defend a position or thesis and challenge alternatives with reliable evidential data. It is reliable in the sense that it is accurate, relevant, and sufficient. Not all evidence is created equally, some is considered to be stronger than others. Evidence can generally be categorized in the following categories (Hyland, 1990):

a. Expert testimony**:** This source of evidence usually takes the form of quoting someone who is an expert in the field relating to the topic. This type of evidence is particularly strong because experts are able to conduct research, compare their research with other ones, apply methods to examine problems critically, and use their findings to generate verifiable or quasi-verifiable data.

b. Statistics: They can provide excellent support to substantiate the scope and significance of a claim. Arguments employing amounts and numbers are concrete because they use logic and facts.

c. Experiments and factual demonstrations: They are a form of evidence that is extremely powerful.

d. Other forms of testimony (other than "expert"): They include quotations or references to statements from non-expert sources and authorities in the relevant fields. These testimonies can be very useful to back up claims since they provide additional supportive materials.

e. Examples. They can be an important way to contextualize an argument and to offer a quick form of support.

f. Narratives**:** They are statements made by individuals who have personally experienced the subject matter under discussion. However, since narratives are personal, they are very difficult, if not impossible, to verify.

5. EFL Writing Instruction in the Arab Context: Traditional Concerns

The writing instruction currently dominates at the Arab university level is exclusively inspired by product approaches. Under such approaches, the development of learners' writing competence heavily draws on practising grammatically perfect sentences and rigidly prescribed discourse patterns. Learners memorise and copy them to carry out and produce a final written product that is parallel to the prescriptive one they already learn by imitation (Silva, 1990; Johns, 1997).

The main concerns that reside with the product trends are: First, learning language features cannot be carried over to develop true writing proficiency and "may not even be the best measures of good writing as learning and acquiring grammar and lexis cannot ensure that the students will write good compositions" (Hyland, 2003, p.3). This objection lends support to Silva and Matsuda's (2002) argument that writing is not a matter of using grammatically perfect sentences, spelling, and punctuation to produce accurate paragraphs and essays, which fit prototypical text patterns.

Second, under product-oriented approaches, imitating pre-existing patterns and using them as input to perform future writing tasks are closely linked with Silva's (1990)

dissatisfaction with linearity and prescriptivism. These two features present academic writing as finished products. In Bizzell's (1986) view, they undervalue or even ignore students' individual creativity and self-motivation, their purposes and opinions are scarified

On the contrary, from a cognitive perspective, teaching writing is better conceptualised as a thinking process that "stresses the creativity of the individual writer, and which pays attention to the development of good writing practices rather than the imitation of models" (Tribbles,1996, p.160). A paradigm whereby the act of composing consists of a set of cyclical, generative and exploratory distinctive mental processes. A profound advantage of this perspective is that it allows students to generate and organise their ideas and thoughts, to set communicative goals, to move backward and forward to evaluate and refine their plans and thoughts to realise their ultimate communicative purpose and to meet the expectations of a potential audience before attaining the final product (Flower & Hays, 1981).

Third, under the paradigm of product approaches, writing is seen as a decontextualized and depersonalised action resulting in a finished product (Al-Hazmi.2006). In direct opposition to this premise, writing is rather perceived as an activity that is dialectically interwoven with and deeply embedded in a specific socio- cultural context where it operates to achieve particular communicative goals (Kostouli, 2005). An immediate consequence of this premise is that academic writing is codified in distinctive and recognizable patterns that match institutionally embedded norms and therefore genre naturally comes into play as a major factor that determines its quality (Canagarajah, 2002). Muncie (2002) and Clark and Sampson (2008) stress that if L2 undergraduates and postgraduates, in particular, are to be successful in producing texts dictated and valued by an English-speaking discourse community, they necessarily need to develop awareness of genre-specific conventions that produce them and share the conventions with its members.

5.1 Writing Instruction in the Arab World: Recommendations

Bearing the complementary socio-cognitive perspective of writing in mind, learning to write has become frustrating and challenging for Arab EFL students. The real crux of the problems they encounter can be basically traced to the very nature of the current writing instruction for two pertinent reasons. First, university level composition syllabus has failed to accommodate teaching the cyclical mental operations that students need to go through before producing any text at all. Such pitfall leads to further confusion and thus writing becomes frustrating for them (Fageeh, 2003). Second, the syllabus also fails to bring the textual regularities of academic argumentative genre dictated by an English-speaking discourse community to students' conscious awareness so that they can activate and apply them to produce instances of academic genre (Kamel, 2000).

An important implication emerging from the issues raised above is that a gap exists between students' need to develop their writing competence to meet the writing demands and the theoretical and pedagogical pitfalls of the current writing instruction. In an effort to address this pedagogical concern, a number of recommendations is introduced. With such recommendations in mind, teachers can design a more promising approach to teach writing to EFL students. It would hopefully help them extend the repertoire of their writing competence. A factor that would enable them to produce coherent and goal-directed academic argumentative texts and hence to operate competently in academia (Kim &Kim, 2005).

- Exposing students to authentic model texts should be encouraged. Such texts should be explored through using the mapping and explicit systematic instruction by the teacher and be rehearsed by students. Such potentially effective pedagogical

technique can make the teaching/learning of the textual macro-structure of argumentative writing transparent through a set of manageable and recognizable stages and moves. Familiarising and socialising students into these generic norms has the advantage of helping them develop and foster their awareness of argumentative genre. Students can transfer such knowledge and creatively exploit it to plan and construct claims, evidence, counterarguments, and rebuttals to perform subsequent writing tasks. The ultimate purpose is for them to become better able to take most of the responsibilities of producing those tasks (Badger& White, 2000).

• Students should be guided and encouraged to explore the social and intellectual variables surrounding the context where the topic of writing is grounded. Such variables include the target audience's beliefs, values, interests, concerns, attitudes, their potential competing ones and their topic knowledge. Such teaching practice makes students aware of these parameters, and accordingly tailor and present the content of their argumentation in such a purposeful manner that shows alliance and conformity with the audience's variables and thereby win approval of the claims students favour (Thomson, 2001).

• Inquiry-based collaborative environment with purposeful learning classroom activities should be emphasized as opposed to teaching abstract formalities of language by imitation. Such environment values reflection and negotiation and encourages students to practise reasoning skills, a factor that fosters their critical thinking competence. Eventually, students would be well equipped to produce evidence- supported and structured argumentation in their subsequent writing tasks. Al-Hazmi (2006) strongly advocates that Arab students are in need of such guided pedagogy that is "uniquely suited to promoting the skills of critical thinking and self-reflection" (p.36).

• Collaborative learning settings should be encouraged as opposed to one-way written feedback the teacher-controlled teaching still prevails in the Arab context (El-Aswad, 2002). Such setting should involve a number of carefully designed writing activities encourage student-to-student interaction where they discover how their peers, other than the teacher, appreciate their writing and positively respond to their constructive comments and feedback and use them with the purpose of enhancing their writing competence to a higher level and improving their written products (Tribble, 1996).

• Students with different levels of writing competence should work together during the pre-writing and revision stages. Less competent students are paired with a comparatively more competent one so that they can benefit from a collective pool to extend and move his/her existing abilities to a higher level on all aspects of composing (Shayer, 2002).

Conclusion

By and large, it can be concluded that the thrust of the preceding review highlightsthat the basic characteristics of academic writing are: First, it is argumentative in nature. Second, it is purposeful and inseparable from the social and cultural contexts in which it occurs and acquires meaning in order to fulfil certain social functions. Third, writing is a cognitive process that involves inter-related problem-solving mental operations that the student goes through to generate, organize, and revise their ideas and thoughts in such a manner that makes them adaptable to realize their communicative ends and to meet the audience' expectation before producing any text at all.

This paper also stresses the fact that the composing process promotes students' independent critical thinking skills and strategies that help them acquire newer and richer

knowledge specific to their disciplines. With such knowledge students are well- equipped to construct more structurally and high quality argumentative texts in terms of the number of supportive arguments, counter-arguments and rebuttals. A factor that enables them to operate effectively in academia. Finally, drawing on the demands of writing in L2, a number of practical recommendations is suggested to guide EFL writing teachers to develop a more productive and comprehensive writing instructional approach in the Iraqi context to teach students to learn writing.

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