

# Some Techniques to Develop the Argumentative Writing Skill of the First Year Students in Technological Universities

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**Abstract**— This research paper aims at developing techniques for argumentative writing skills for the technological university students. First year students have never had the experience of argumentative writing since they were at the high school. In this research paper, a survey on selected students from first year is carried out within eight weeks. To collect the data, need analysis questionnaires about how they write an essay are given. The pretest-posttest research design is used to work out this research. The selected students have participated in testing two times. As a result, there is a significant improvement in the second test. The score they have got is much better than the first time. But there has still remained the limitation. The main difficulties through these tests are that they cannot use a wide range of lexical resources and linking words. Some techniques are implemented in this research to enhance argumentative writing skill of the first year students. This paper is hoped to be useful for the students and teachers to be able to write the argumentative essay.

**Keywords**— argumentative writing, testing, techniques, pretest-posttest research, language

## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to develop the writing skills of the first year students who are attending at the Technological Universities. In Myanmar, all of the students have exposed to English since their very beginning of learning, but they have never had the experience of argumentative writing. So, first year students have at least 12 year of learning English. They are used to write the essay and letter in their high school. It is a compulsory subject for engineering students at all technological universities in Myanmar. The students have said that writing skill is also important for their academic and social development. Some students are very keen on practising writing.

Writing is one of the productive skills which is tested in the formal exam. Through writing, a person is able to share ideas, arouses feelings, persuades and convinces people (Ron White and Valerie Arndt, 1992). Most students also said that they are keen on being able to write to express their opinion and think that it is important for their future improvement, but they do not practise writing on their own. In order to investigate what they want, need analysis questionnaires were given to the learners and findings are presented through the data from the students. So, the habit that the students do before, while and after writing have been collected.

In this paper, findings from the questionnaires, data analysis and the procedure of testing are carried out, and some techniques and language are implemented in developing writing skills of the subject students. This paper gives suggestion both to the students who always focus on the correct product and the one who are always keen on giving so much idea in the limited time.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Argumentative writing is a form of expressing opinion, a way of sharing message and a mean to improve collaboration.

### A. Theoretical perspectives

Byrne (1993: 1) stated that writing is the act of forming graphic symbols. Farbairn and Winch (1996: 32) stated that writing is about conveying meaning by using words that have been selected and put together in a written or printed form. Each student contributes at each stage of the writing process: brainstorming ideas, gathering and organising information, drafting, revising, and editing the writing. It means that in pairs or triads, students will produce better work than when they work alone. Collaborative writing will improve document quality by pooling the strengths of group members. At the same time, individual weaknesses are caught by the group and revised. Ultimately, collaboration can be a form of motivation for students as they become excited about working in a group as well as the prospect of learning from other students.

### B. Linguistic perspectives

Linguistic analyses can be helpful because texts are written in natural language by writers who have considerable discretion with respect to their goals, genre, word choice, and grammatical structures (Pirnay-Dummer, 2016). Skilled readers bring their language, text structures, and world knowledge to bear on the interpretation of text (Duke, Pearson, Strachan, & Billman, 2011). However, even skilled readers can draw different interpretations about the simplest of texts.

MacArthur, Jennings, and Philippatkos (2018) analysed the argumentative essays of basic college writers to determine the linguistic features that predicted their writing development. A corpus of argumentative essays was drawn from an earlier study focusing on the effects of strategy instruction on writing quality. They found that essay length, referential cohesion, and lexical complexity were positively associated with writing quality. Furthermore, changes in writing in response to instruction were linked to improvements in referential cohesion and lexical complexity. These findings suggest that the text's linguistic features are sensitive to instruction.

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Pretest-posttest research design is used in this paper. The writer used the essay questions from 'Grammar for IELTS'. The participants for this research are the first year students who are attending at TU (Hmawbi) in 2018-2019 academic year. In order to collect the data, survey questions were given to 40 students and then the learners' background level of

language and the ways they write an essay were recognised. Firstly, the teacher explained what the argumentative writing is and gave the instructions to the subject students. The learners were also given the techniques to organise their ideas before the first testing. After that, the teacher had the students written the essay on the given topic in allotted time. After correcting their essays, students were shown their products and given the feedback and positive comments. Before doing the second test, the students were given the language for argumentative writing. Finally, they expressed their ideas by using the words and phrases.

#### IV. APPROACHES TO WRITING

There are many ways to approach writing in the classroom. The learners must carefully plan the structure and adopt the correct style and deal with the range of arguments.

##### A. *Process approach*

Process writing is an approach to teaching writing that allows the teacher and students to go through the process of producing a text together. In process writing, students have the chance to think about what they are going to write, produce draft, revise, edit and give and receive feedback on their works before coming up with the final product of the text. The process approach includes four steps: prewriting, writing, revising and rewriting.

In the first step, learners can compose the first draft of their texts. As students will be given the chance to revise and edit their texts later, accuracy of language, punctuation and vocabulary are not essential at this point. Composing the text can be done individually or collaboratively. Learners can be given the chance to choose according to their preference.

Secondly, students can exchange their draft, so that they become the readers of each other's work. By responding as readers, students develop an awareness of the fact that a writer is producing something to be read by someone else, and thus, they can improve their own drafts.

In the third step, revising, this is when the opportunity to look back at their texts and organise ideas, add, change and remove sentences and adapt their choice of words to make sure the ideas are being conveyed clearly. Feedback has essential role in this stage. It can be provided by the teacher or by peers: learners can exchange the drafts and comment on each other's work.

Finally, they rewrite the final product of the essay. Their products seem to be more clear and well-organised.

In the process approach, students are given considerable freedom within the task. They are not limited by pre-emptive teaching of lexical or grammatical items. What differentiate the process-focused approach from a product-centered approach is that the outcome of the writing, the product, is not preconceived.

##### B. *Product Approach*

This is a traditional approach, in which students are encouraged to mimic a model text, which is usually presented and analysed in early stage. A model for such an approach is outlined below. Model texts are read, and then features of the genre are highlighted. For example, if the learners are studying a formal letter, their attention may be drawn to the importance of paragraphing and the language used to make formal requests.

This consists of controlled practice of the highlighted features, usually in isolation. So if students are studying a formal letter, they may be asked to practice the language used to make formal requests, practising substituting like 'I would be grateful if you would...' structure.

At the same time, organisation of the ideas is important. Those who favour this approach believe that the organisation of ideas is more important than the ideas themselves and as important as the control of language. In this stage, students use skills, structures and vocabulary they have been taught to produce the product to show what they can do as fluent and competent users of the language.

Some of the benefits and characteristics of product approach are as follows:

- Difficulties in writing are minimised since students start writing from a very controlled basis.
- Model texts are imitated.
- The organisation of the ideas is more important than the ideas themselves.
- A lot of emphasis is placed on the end of the product.

Strength of the product approach:

- It is easy to use with a large class.
- It is really useful when teaching beginners.
- It is easy to grade because this approach mainly focuses on forms.
- Students know how the end results look like.

Weaknesses

- This approach does not teach students to write independently.
- It discourages creativity since this approach heavily relies on the imitation of the model text.
- It devalues the learners' linguistic and personal potential.

##### C. *Balancing process and product*

TABLE I  
COMPARISON OF PROCESS AND PRODUCTS WRITING

Process writing	Product writing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Text as a resource for comparison</li> <li>• Ideas as starting point</li> <li>• More than one draft</li> <li>• More global, focus on purpose, theme, text type, i.e., reader is emphasised collaborative</li> <li>• Emphasis on creative process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Imitate model text</li> <li>• Organisation of ideas is more important than the ideas themselves</li> <li>• One draft</li> <li>• Features highlighted including controlled practice of those features</li> <li>• Individual</li> <li>• Emphasis on end product</li> </ul>

The process approach identifies four stages in writing: (1) prewriting, (2) composing or drafting, (3) revising, and editing (Tribble 1996). These four stages are recursive or nonlinear, and they can interact with each other throughout the writing process. The process approach emphasises revision and also feedback from others, so students may produce many drafts with much crossing out of sentences and moving around of paragraphs. The correction of spelling and punctuation is not of central importance at the early stages. With product approach, teacher focus on what a final piece of writing will look like and measure it against criteria of

vocabulary use, grammatical use, mechanical consideration such as spellings and punctuation as well as contents and organisation. Instead it focuses on limitation and churning out a perfect product, even though very few people can create a perfect product on the first draft. Another criticism is that this approach requires constant error correction, and that affects students' motivation and self-esteem.

The product does not effectively prepare students for the real world or teach them to be the best writer. Nevertheless, the product approach still has some credibility because at the same point there will be a final draft that requires attention to grammar, spelling and punctuation. If the students extremely emphasise on product of writing, they cannot express their ideas in different range of structure. So they cannot write a longer paragraph logically and coherently. On the one hand, if the students focus on only the process of writing, they may make many grammatical mistakes, spelling mistakes and the use of inappropriate language in their writing. Many writing teachers recognise that they need not rigidly adopt just one approach in the writing classroom. In many cases, this approach results in a new way of thinking about writing.

The new emphasis on process writing, however, must be seen in the perspective of a balance between process and product. As in most language teaching approaches, it is quite possible for the writer goes to an extreme in emphasising process to the extent that the final product diminishes in importance. The product is, after all, the ultimate goal; it is the reason that we go through the process of prewriting, drafting, revising and editing. The process not the end; it is the mean of the end.

#### V. TECHNIQUES FOR ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY WRITING

First, the topic, subject or question should be thought about carefully; what is required in the essay should be understood. Then, a note should be made of ideas, from knowledge and experience from peer group. In addition, the content of the essay should be decided on how it is to be organised or planned. The materials should be carefully selected if the ideas are relevant to the question or not. At the same time, the students must think carefully about the essay and questions which are raised and prepared by gathering the information and doing the background reading. Finally, the draft should be read critically, in particular, the organisation of the ideas, coherence and cohesion and the language should be checked. Then, the final draft should be written legibly.

##### A. Approaching to the questions

There are two approaches to an argument and opinion question. The first one is to consider ideas on both sides of an issue. This is called a balanced argument essay, in which the writers look at both sides and then make a judgment at the end. In this approach, the writers have to support the statement with 'the advantages and disadvantages' or point 'for and against'. The second approach, opinion essay, which involves making a judgment at the beginning and then continues supporting it throughout the essay.

In some questions, the task makes it clear which approach to take, for example, 'Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this'. On the one hand, the tasks 'To what extent do you agree or disagree?' in this case, it helps to consider how strong their own views are to help them. In both essay types, the writers need to make their own opinion

and they must be aware not to argue very strongly to the others' opinions. The key to a good writing is to read the question carefully, and then the learners have to choose the most suitable essay approach.

##### B. What to write about the Argument

The students need to practise brainstorming techniques, which involves thinking about the topic and trying to come up with major supporting details quickly. Techniques they may find useful when discussing a problem are to spend a minute or two writing down all of the points they can think of for both sides of the argument. It is not necessary for the students whether the points they are writing down are good or not – sometimes, writing down a weak point will be helpful for them to think of a better one.

When the students are writing argumentative essays, they should choose the position that is easiest for them to support their ideas. They write down the ideas they generated while brainstorming. Which ideas have more points and are familiar for them. They must know that there are no right or wrong answers in this task because it is the expression of the writer's own opinion. Moreover, they need to know they are not graded based on the opinion themselves. What really important is how the opinion is supported and organised.

The teachers have to encourage their students not to delay to write their personal experiences and knowledge to include in their essay. At this moment, students are free to express their ideas and they are not controlled in this type of writing.

##### C. Useful language for Argumentative Essay

TABLE II  
LANGUAGE FOR EXPRESSING OPINION

Describing your own opinions	Describing other people's opinions
<p><b>Agreeing with an idea (+ reasons)</b> I am certain that ... For me it is obvious that ... I am convinced that ... It has long been my belief that ...</p>	<p>It is often said that ... It is often claimed that ... It seems that ... Scientist are convinced that ... Many researchers have found that ... Some people believe/ think that ... Some people argue / confirm / state / point out that ... Some people feel differently that ...</p>
<p><b>Disagreeing with an idea (+ reason)</b> There is no justification for ... I am completely against ... I believe there is no evidence to support ... I do not agree with the idea that ...</p>	
<p><b>Giving an opinion</b> In my view ... I would agree that ... I feel strongly that ... It seems to me that ... I would argue that ... In my opinion,</p>	

Opinion	<b>g opinion</b> I be a case for saying that ... It would appear that ...
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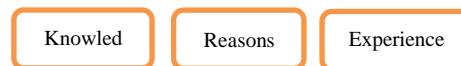


Fig. 1 Structure of main body paragraph

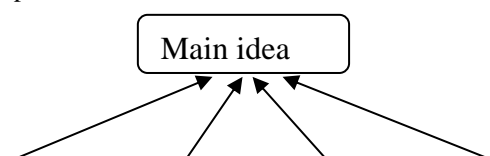
TABLE III  
LINKING WORDS AND PHRASES

Expressing contrast or concession	despite, nevertheless, on the other hand, but, conversely, however, in contrast,
Providing reasons	as a result of, due to in order to, because of, because
Adding further support	in addition, moreover, likewise, furthermore, also, and besides, additionally
Giving examples	for example, as an example, Take X for instance,
Stating results or consequences	so, consequently,
Drawing a conclusion	hence, therefore, thus, for these reasons, accordingly

**D. Paragraph plan**

1) *Introduction*: The introduction, especially the introductory paragraph, is important for a number of reasons. It must introduce the topic by rephrasing the statement. If it is clearly structured, it can also give a good impression and a general idea of the essay to the readers. A good introduction will not be too long. Moreover, a clear introduction will help the writer to write a well-organised essay and help the readers to follow the argument.

2) *Main body*: The main body usually consists of two or more paragraphs and its purpose is to develop the points related to the topic of the essay. Each paragraph should deal with the points related to the same topic. Whenever the writer discusses a new topic, the writer should begin a new paragraph. Main body paragraph should begin with a topic sentence that introduces or summarises the main topic of a paragraph and give the readers an idea of the paragraph will be about. The main ideas of the argumentative essay should be supported with the writer's opinion, knowledge, reasons and experiences.



3) *Conclusion*: The conclusion is a short final paragraph in which the writer has to summarise the main ideas of the argument and restate his or her opinion in other words. It must not include any new idea and it should not be too long.

**VI. PROCEDURE OF TESTING**

Argumentative writing is tested in their formal examination in the technological universities. But first year students are not familiar with the argument. So, they need to practise writing for getting the good grading in the exam.

Before testing, the teacher explained the nature of the argumentative writing because they are not familiar with this kind of writing. And then, the teacher gave the instructions to the learners to analyse the question focus and to be able to support the statements with their ideas, opinions and gave the relevant examples of their own. It was a kind of free writing and the teacher encouraged the learners to feel free to share their opinions and to support their opinion with their ideas.

In this stage, they were not given the language for the argumentative essay. They were suggested how to organise the essay and how to make mind mapping to develop their ideas. Firstly, they were delayed to write down what they think. That is why teacher encouraged them to write freely what they think relevant to the topic. When they completed their tasks, the teacher had them shared the text between the peer groups and read other people opinions. So, they know both their ideas and others' were acceptable.

The learners knew that it does not matter whether the idea is good or bad. So, they dare to present their opinions in their group. Therefore, encouraging students is very important in this stage. After that, they have to write the final product. The teacher collected and corrected the answer. And then, the teacher gave them suggestion and feedback about their essay individually. Consequently, they recognised their weak and good points and how to develop the essay. Moreover, they became keen on practicing writing with the help of the teacher.

They have knowledge enough to complete the task in the limited time. But some of them did not complete the task because they go back to what they have written and checked and corrected the spelling and grammar mistakes while writing. They used the limited range of vocabulary. Moreover, their level of accuracy is fair to express their ideas. They could use different types of sentence structures both simple and compound, different voices and tenses.

In the second test, the languages to express their own opinions in argumentative writing were given. Consequently, they avoided the use of strong expressions in their essay and balanced their view on the given statement. Moreover, they were able to use cohesive devices and knew how to support their opinions with their own knowledge and experience. They can organise their ideas cohesively and coherently.

**VII. FINDINGS**

In order to investigate the actual needs of students for writing argumentative essay, a survey was conducted by means of questionnaires given to 26 selected students who are attending at the first year in (2018-2019) academic year.

According to the data collected in the questionnaires, the main findings are as follows.

93% of students said that argumentative writing is important to develop their academic skills. But 56 % of them said that they did not practise on their own and 65 % of them could not organise the ideas well and they were afraid of making mistakes in essay. In addition, they find difficulty in choosing the suitable words for the ideas. So, they are delayed to write anything they want to say. At the same time, 82% of students said that they usually go back and read what they have written to correct the mistakes while they are writing. That kind of student emphasises too much on accuracy. And they also checked spelling and grammar after writing.

Conclusion was drawn from the data that students should be given cohesive devices and lexical resources to develop their argumentative writing. If the students are concerned too much on correct product, they revise and rewrite their text repeatedly. So, their writing is recursive and they cannot complete the given task in the allotted time although they have good knowledge on the topic. In contrast, if they emphasise too much on generating ideas without checking any mistake, their writing may be lack of accuracy.

#### VIII. RESULTS

In the first test on the given statement, 60% of students could accomplish the task in the allotted time (40 minutes) because they have knowledge enough for the topic. Some students could organise their ideas clearly. In contrast, 92% of students could not use the transitional words and logical conjunctions to link the ideas. So, the flow of the text was not smooth because of the lack of coherence and cohesion. In addition, the range of vocabulary was limited and the use of word was repeated in their essays.

As a result, the flow of their text looks smooth. In this stage, 93 % of students could complete the task in the allotted time. But the use of lexical resource has still remained a little poor. So, their word choice sometimes leads to diverse from the meaning they want to give. That is why they need to learn rephrasing the words and the use of synonyms. In order to develop the use of correct word, the teachers need to encourage them to read different kinds of book and to practise writing themselves in their free time.

#### IX. CONCLUSIONS

This research has been done through the questionnaires to the twenty-six selected students from first year. In accordance with the findings and results from the questionnaires, some strategies and language for argumentative writing are given in this paper. This paper may encourage the students to be able to write and to practise writing on their own. The students may not be delayed to

express their opinion because they understand what the argumentative essay is. At the same time, they become the reader of their friend's text and they may more cooperate in their peer groups.

The results from the two tests show that the learners are fairly good at the accuracy level. Few students cannot complete the task in the allotted time. But when they understand well the nature of the argument, they can write their opinion. It is found that the organisation of their text is markedly better in the second test than in the first test.

But there has still remained the difficulty in choosing the correct words. Most of the learners cannot use wide range of lexical resources. So, their use of word is repeated and sometimes incorrect. Thus, the students need to read different kinds of book to develop their vocabulary. This paper is hoped to be helpful both for the teachers and for learners who are teaching and learning at the technological universities.

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