



A Mind Habits Based Program to Develop Al-Azhar Model Secondary Institutes Students' EFL Argumentative Writing Skills

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at investigating the effect of the mind habits based program on developing Al Azhar model secondary institutes students' EFL argumentative writing skills. The researcher adopted the quasi-experimental design of two groups. The participants were sixty students from Kafr Saqr Model secondary institute for girls, Kafr Saqr Educational Directorate, Sharkia Governorate, Egypt, who were divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group was taught by the mind habits program while the control group received regular instruction in the second term of academic year 2022-2023. The experiment lasted for nine weeks. The researcher carried out 9 sessions; each session took about 50 minutes. To achieve the aim of the study, the researcher designed a questionnaire for determining the targeted argumentative writing skills as approved by a panel of jury. Based on these argumentative writing skills a pre-post argumentative writing skills test was designed and pre/post administered to both groups. The data obtained were statistically treated through the SPSS program. Results indicated that the experimental group outperformed the control group as a result of adopting this program.

Key words: mind habits, EFL argumentative writing skills

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Introduction

Argumentative writing is one of writing styles which aims to convince the reader to follow the writers' opinion of something. Moreover, critical thinking and logic are the main notion of argumentative writing. It means that, in argumentative writing the writers should cover their opinion with the reasonable thinking in conveying ideas to the readers (1).

Argumentative writing is inseparable form to critical reading. In order to write a good analysis and evaluation on a topic careful critical reading is essential to strengthen the argument. The judgments and interpretations made based on the texts are the first steps towards formulating the writer's own approach. By reading critically, students can develop reflective skill before starting to write critically. Therefore, critical reading and critical thinking play a vital role in the development of argumentative writing (2).

In argumentative writing the writer must know well about the topic or issue discussed as it must be supported with sufficient and valid data. The necessary thing in convincing the reader is providing some credible and realistic evidence which can be taken from personal experience. To build the opinion in argumentative writing, the writers should have awareness with the characteristics of argumentative writing. The writer's point of view is important when writing argumentatively, and the way in which the argument is utilized also important because they reflect their personal opinions. Then, the writer should provide the reasons with the sufficient evidences that aimed to refute the opposing argument. Finally, the writer should conclude and close the writing based on argument which they have built (3).

In addition, Indah (4) defines four important steps to write argumentative writing.

The first step: the student can start the contestable issue by reading, listening, or watching the conversational issue that will be argued. This aims to make the readers fully understood with the topic that will be discussed.

The second step: the writer's position of the issue must be clearly stated because the writer should try to identify and understand the opponent's point of view. Yet, if the writers only argue their own opinions, it means that the writers not likely to convince the reader at all. Therefore, this step is very important to be understood for the writers before they start to write an argumentative writing.

The third step: Providing the sufficient evidence in order to convince the readers. The evidence used to prove the writer's opinion should be taken from credible sources.

The last step: Making conclusion is the fourth step in in composing an argumentative writing. The writer should conclude what have been written in their argumentative writing with reasonable or logic conclusion as well as keeping the reader in the writer's side.

Despite the importance of argumentative writing, it is considered to be difficult for EFL learners because it requires advanced cognitive and linguistic abilities. Another problem in writing argumentatively is that EFL learners often lack experiences so teachers and students have responsibility of co-operating and working together to achieve success and overcome problems students face during the teaching and learning process (5).

A pilot study was conducted in order to document the problem. A pilot argumentative writing skills test was conducted to a group of fifteen 2nd year Al-Azhar secondary stage institutes. They could not connect the ideas during writing and cohesion between ideas was poor.

In order to help students, write argumentatively, it is important to encourage the students to deal with writing habitually, to read in English, think critically and write argumentatively. So, the researcher focused on mind habits as a means to improve the students' argumentative writing skills. Actually, habits of mind were commonly used in physics, Science and Math studies but recently, it is time to focus on brain and mind-based methods to develop the English language.

Mind habits are the characteristics of what intelligent people do when they are confronted with problems and the ways students use to produce knowledge (6). There are sixteen habits of mind that teachers and parents can use, observe and cultivate. The aim is to help students get into the habit of behaving intelligently.

The sixteen mind habits identified by Costa and Kallick (6) are:

1. Persisting: means the ability of the students to carry out the task entrusted to them and to continue to work and not to surrender easily to the difficulties in the course of their work; the persistent student has

the ability to analyze the problems he faces in an organized way; and he has the ability to use successful alternative strategies in a convenient way.

2. Managing Impulsivity: means the ability to carefully consider and listen to alternative viewpoints and instructions, to think before making a vision or developing a work-plan for a task, including the ability to think and reflect on alternatives and outcomes from alternative perspectives, and then create strategies to deal with the task, and delay in making judgments.

3. Listening with Understanding and Empathy: students seek to understand other's thoughts and ideas. Highly effective persons spend a lot of time and energy listening. Listening to another person and understanding his point of view is one of the highest forms of intelligent behavior.

4. Thinking flexibly: means the ability of the readers to think about new alternatives, options, solutions, and different perspectives; the students who are thinking flexibly have the ability to change their mental state when facing a situation or solving a particular problem.

5. Thinking about Thinking (Metacognition): means the ability of the student to understand the steps needed for his plan, explaining his abilities and cognitive needs, the ability to assess the proficiency of his plan, planning his thinking skills, and the effects of his acts on himself and on others.

6. Striving for Accuracy: Students aspire to be exact and master the demands of a task. They carefully use success criteria to self and peer assess.

7. Questioning and Posing Problems: Students ask thoughtful, high order questions. They try their own strategies to solve problems.

8. Applying past Knowledge to New Situations: Referring to previous knowledge and understanding past performance accomplishments to encourage students to consider how previous experiences could support understanding in a new setting.

9. Thinking and Communicating with Clarity and Precision: Students convey thoughts accurately when speaking, listening and writing. They consider appropriate use of vocabulary and gesture.

10. Gathering Data through All Senses: Providing students with a variety of learning opportunities that do not just focus on the auditory and visual forms of delivery. Students use all senses to source information to develop understandings.

11. Creating, Imagining, and Innovating: means the ability of the student to improve his style in order to achieve more fluency, detail, and innovation by putting himself in different roles, enabling himself to examine alternative possibilities from several angles.

12. Responding with Wonderment and Awe: Teachers are conscious to develop curiosity within their subjects. Actively linking content to relevant real-life situations and sharing impressive findings within the subject.

13. Taking Responsible Risks: means providing students with opportunities to take calculated risks. Students are prepared to answer questions and give opinions even if not completely sure.

14. Finding Humor: means the ability to perceive the relationships and situations from an appropriate, original and interesting location, and to accept the other student's humors, to encourage pleasure and fun and to create an atmosphere of fun in dealing with others.

15. Thinking Interdependently: Students have opportunities to productively work with others to understand and apply content. They learn from others through discussing, supporting and challenging ideas.

16. Remaining Open to Continuous Learning: Students enjoy learning and are keen to add to knowledge and skills. They are not fearful of not knowing an answer and trying new techniques.

Minds habits are affected by collective thought shared among the members of a community in a certain field. Community of researchers in Applied Linguistics, including the undergraduate students of EFL teacher candidates, shared collective thought. According to Young (7), habits of mind, shared from a collective thought of community, are reflected in three aspects, they are shared language or jargons, shared nature of knowledge and method of developing the knowledge, and shared knowledge of how to select suitable research method for developing the knowledge.

1.1. Methodology

- The study design

The current research adopted the quasi-experimental design as a major source for data collection in which participants were divided into two groups (control and experimental). The experimental group was taught through the habits of mind based program while the control group was taught in a regular manner.

- Participants of the study

The participants included 60 second year secondary students, in the second semester of the academic year (2022- 2023) from Kafr Saqr secondary Institute for girls, Kafr Saqr Al Azhar Educational Directorate, Sharkia Governorate, Egypt. They were assigned into two groups, experimental (30) students and control (30) students. It was assumed that the participants formed a homogenous group as they were drawn intentionally. So they were expected to have a lot in common and would not differ much regarding the quality of experience or their age.

- The study instruments

The EFL argumentative writing skills questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to determine the most important argumentative writing skills to be developed among the second-year secondary students. The results of the questionnaire were used to construct the argumentative writing skills test that would be pre-post used.

The EFL argumentative writing test

It was designed in order to be pre used to identify the actual level of argumentative writing skills for both groups to assure homogeneity. It was post used to investigate the effect of the proposed program on developing 2nd year secondary stage argumentative writing skills.

The test was constructed in the light of the following Sources:

1. Reviewing literature and related studies on testing EFL argumentative writing skills.
2. Identifying the argumentative writing skills which were fitted to the second year of secondary stage students through the final form of the argumentative writing skills questionnaire.

Experimental participants were asked to choose only one topic from the three topics given. They were asked if they do not understand the topic, they should ask the teacher to explain or translate them. While writing their handwriting should be readable. Their writing would be judged based on their performance on thesis statement, producing an argument, organization, coherence and mechanics of writing.

The EFL argumentative writing skills rubric

The rubric was designed to assess the argumentative writing skills test. It included some criteria to guide the researcher to correctly determine the participants' levels.

The rubric was designed in the light of the following sources:

- 1-Reviewing literature related to the area of EFL argumentative writing skills assessment.
- 2-Surveying relevant studies concerning with EFL argumentative writing skills assessment.

The rubric was divided into five parts (thesis statement, producing an argument, organization, coherence and mechanics of writing). Each part has four scales (excellent, good, acceptable and poor).

1.2. Results of the study

- 1- The experimental group outperformed the control group in the means of scores in the post administration of the EFL argumentative writing skills test.
- 2- The post administration of the argumentative writing test results outperformed the pre ones in the means of scores of the EFL argumentative writing skills test results.
- 3- The mind habits based program had a high effect size on the experimental participants' overall dimensions of EFL argumentative writing skills test results.

1.3. Discussion

The experimental participants' advance in the post administration of argumentative writing skills test could be attributed to the use of the program. It increased their motivation to writing and helped them to be aware of themselves during the writing process this result supports that of Bandura (8); Mezei (9); Sachor (10) who clarified the importance of motivation in developing writing skills. Moreover, they were encouraged by the mind habits based program to arrange their ideas. They were interested and happy when the researcher taught them how to use the mind habits in gathering different ideas that were related to the topic. The experimental participants were so excited while using The L.E.T.S Connect strategy, this finding support that Costa & Kallick (11).

In order to explain the improvement for all the experimental participants in the treatment group when they write argumentative text was in the area of easy organization. There was a difficulty that faced both teacher and experimental participants in the beginning of teaching argumentative writing that, it was the first time for them to learn this type of writing. Learners learned how to take a position or point of view and support this view with reasons, facts and explanation. The teacher helped the experimental participants be interested in argumentative writing through an atmosphere of cooperation in the classroom. They learned how to listen to each other through having different opinions and how to defend or refuse the opposing ideas, they showed improvement in including argumentative elements, and these findings are consistent with the results of Sachor (10); Song (12); and Haria (13).

1.4. Conclusion

- 1- Written argumentation helps student-writers acquire knowledge, promotes thinking skills and enhance comprehension.
- 2- Good argumentative essays should be logic, reasonable, well-planned ideas, the content of the ideas and information are enough, related to the topic and persuasive.
- 3- The material used for argumentative writing should not be taken from the student's natural interests, but related to daily experiences.
- 4- Argumentation can be judged as the process that uses reasoned discourse in advancing, examining and responding to claims.
- 5- Argumentative writing helps learners reach many purposes including persuasion, negotiation, debate, conclusion and resolving differences of opinions.
- 6- Students have to learn critical thinking, logical analysis, supporting facts, using examples and a variety of ideas and opinions through argumentative writing skills.
- 7- Argumentative writing allows students to act as discoverers. It plays a role of increasing understanding and democracy in the classroom.
- 8- When students learn to argue in their class or in their life, they can convince others easily, defend opposing positions and prove their point of view, so they can be good leaders in any situations.
- 9- Before starting writing an argument, it must be known what it is wanted to achieve and think about the goal carefully, then write it in clear sentence. The goal should be realistic when an argument is presented or prepared. The secondary goal should be also identified.

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