

# THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL IMPERATIVES ON ACADEMIC WRITING IN ARAB CONTEXTS

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## Abstract

EFL Arab students have experienced difficulties in replicating the cultural thought patterns of L1 English users (Kaplan, 1966; Hirose, 2003). Also, they experience difficulties in replicating the textual expectations of academic genre in the English-speaking discourse community (Al-Khuweileh & Al-Shoumali, 2000; Al-Hazmi & Schofield, 2007) at the tertiary level. However, two factors diminish their ability to produce an effective and efficient written product in academia. To this end, the purpose of this study is to answer the following question “Can a modified integrated process-genre model (MIM) extend and enrich the repertoire of Iraqi undergraduates’ writing competence to encounter the challenges of academic writing?”

Third-year EFL students English majors were the targeted research population. The participants of this study were 92 students. They were randomly assigned to two relatively comparable groups. These groups include the non-intervention being taught by the current product-based approach, and the intervention being taught by the MIM. All the participants were pre-tested for their proficiency in academic argumentative writing before the commencement of the intervention. Following the treatment, a post-test was administered to them.

A mixed methods research methodology was adopted. An Exploratory Sequential Mixed Methods Research Design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) was employed to analyse the data coming from the students’ pre-and post-test’s written essays. The pre-test results had the evidence to suggest that the two groups were relatively similar and there were no statistically significant differences in their performance. The finding showed that most of the intervention group students achieved improvements in the quality of their argumentation as compared to peers in the non-intervention group.

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**Keywords:** Academic writing, Product approach, Process-genre approach, Arabic rhetoric, L1 rhetorical conventions, Cultural imperatives

## **Introduction: Theoretical Background**

This section provides the theoretical background on what the study is based on. From a cognitive perspective, academic writing involves goal setting, ideas discovery, and decision making processes that play out in the mind of the writer as well as the search for language with which to express the intended meaning (Flower & Hayes, 1981; White & Ardnt, 1991).

Additionally, writing is not merely an autonomous mental process. Writing is a socio-culturally embedded activity, a defining characteristic of which is foregrounding of institutionally generated and valued discourse norms (Swales, 1990). The successful writing of academic assignments by EFL students entails adopting the culture-specific discourse regularities of the English discourse community (Flower, 1994).

Research (El-Daly, 1991; Fageeh, 2003) on EFL writing in the Arab world has shown that students are disadvantaged by the teaching of academic writing using a product approach. Hence, this is due to their focus in manipulating grammatical structures and rhetorical formulae (Silva & Matsuda, 2002). Furthermore, students manipulate, imitate, and utilise prescribed patterns to reproduce similar ones and ensure linguistic accuracy (Aljamhoor, 1997; Al-Hazmi & Schofield, 2007; Alshahrani, 2011). Therefore, such writing pedagogy has been criticised for its linearity and prescriptivism.

In English academic communities, writing is recursive, generative, and exploratory in nature. From a cognitive perspective, instead of the prescriptive and linear view of writing, emphasis has been given on writing as a cyclical 'process'. Flower and Hayes (1981) assert that writing typically consists of planning (goal setting, idea exploration, and idea organisation), translating (formulating texts), and reviewing (responding to different sources of feedback). More importantly, the process approach "stresses the creativity of the individual writer, and...pays attention to the development of good writing practices rather than the imitation of models" (Tribble, 1996, p.160). However, this results in students assuming more responsibility and autonomy. A collaborative learning environment contributes to the establishment of an interactive relationship between the teacher and students whereby the teacher plays the role of a facilitator to facilitate the exercise of writing skills and in drawing out students' potential (Applebee, 1986, p. 95).

The process approach has been criticised (Silva, 1990) on the basis that it takes a monolithic view of writing, narrowly focusing on the skills and processes of writing regardless of what is being written and who is doing the writing. It fails to attach sufficient importance to the purpose and to the social and cultural aspects of writing (Badger & White, 2000; Atkinson, 2003).

This deficit is accommodated by the genre approach, which holds that the decisions about content, organisation, and language resources are

socially situated. Thus, they are unable to be detached from “the genres and the communities within which these strategies operate and which they help construct” (Kostouli, 2005, p.18). Writing process is “purposeful, socially situated responses to particular contexts and communities” (Hyland, 2003, p. 17). It is claimed that a fundamental feature of the genre approach is that it offers students the ability to gain access to the intellectual traditions of an English-speaking discourse community (Hyland, 2002, 2003) and how to use them (Knapp & Watkins, 2005). Consequently, it offers students a way of seeing how texts are codified in distinct and recognisable ways in terms of their purpose, audience, and message (Macken-Horarik, 2002; Muncie, 2002).

However, research has (Bizzell, 1986; Coe, 1994; Badger & White, 2000; Hyland, 2003; Chandrasegaran, 2009) identified the potential drawbacks of genre-based instruction. This is particularly based on the fact that its pedagogical focus is traditionally prescriptive –“a matter of pouring one’s thoughts into the ‘formal shells” (Bizzell, 1986, p. 295). However, this results in “restricting freedom of expression” (Coe, 1994, p. 158).

### **Badger and White’s (2000) Model**

A number of scholars (Cumming, 1998; Matsuda, 1999; Yan, 2005) have argued that there is no need to rigidly separate the work of composition into competing theoretical and pedagogical positions. However, it is beneficial to examine what they have in common to produce a coherent and plausible writing pedagogy. Badger and White (2000) responded in their promotion of the integrated process-genre approach (IPGA).

The IPGA combines the merits of two influential approaches resulting in a writing pedagogy that is more coherent and comprehensive (Hyland, 2002; Chandrasegaran, 2009). In addition, it provides a social-cognitive model from which a more effective pedagogical approach to teaching writing can emerge.

The Badger and White’s (2000, pp. 157-158) model is based on the essential idea that writing involves knowledge about language, context, and its purpose (genre approach). Thus, it employs skills in using language (process approach), optimises the learners’ potential (process approaches), and provides input to which the learners responds (product and genre approaches).

Badger and White (2000) model proposes a six-stage plan for teaching academic writing: Preparation, Text modelling and reinforcing, Planning, Joint text construction, Independent text construction, and Revising. Several of these stages have a number of practical limitations for Arab students. In the Preparation stage, students draw on their ability to decide on the communicative purpose, on their knowledge of vocabulary and

grammar, and in recalling a mental representation of the required genre schema into which they put their ideas that matches the particular purpose of the writing task (Yan, 2005). Therefore, these demands constitute a big challenge for Arab students because they have had limited exposure to academic genre in terms of its textual and linguistic attributes (Al-Khuweileh & Al-Shoumali, 2000; Al-Hazmi & Schofield, 2007). Consequently, students find it difficult to construct a mental representation of genre, activate it, and act upon it. Furthermore, many lack adequate knowledge to help them make decisions about the language that is most appropriate to a particular audience. Also, they find it difficult to relate the purpose of writing to the subject matter and the audience.

In the Planning stage, the writing processes and strategies of brainstorming, drafting, and revising do not receive detailed individual treatment. The consequence is that the students may experience what Flower (1981, p.30) calls "writer's block"- they get stuck at a point in the writing process and cannot proceed. The Translating process is taught together with other writing processes and strategies in the Planning stage, potentially limiting students' ability to convert brainstormed ideas into a coherent linear piece of written English. Therefore, these cognitive operations demand that students cope with a variety of distinctive problem-solving and decision making processes when ascertaining which of the students that have limited knowledge (Flower & Hayes, 1981).

Badger and White's model does not do justice to the Revising process required by EFL students in that this process is delayed until the final text is produced. Here, it is often too late for students to reflect on the comments and suggestions from their teachers and peers, and to incorporate new ones. Revision stage must be treated as a non-stop key process that happens simultaneously at any stage (Flower & Hayes, 1981). Students need to be aware from the very beginning of the composing process to share ideas with peers and critically respond to the facilitative feedback they receive from them and the teacher. Also, they need to incorporate it into their drafts to reach an improved final revised draft that will better communicate their ideas to the target audience (Flower & Hayes, 1981).

### **The MIM Structure**

To accommodate and overcome the practical barriers of the plan of Badger and White's model mentioned above, and to make it more responsive to the local context of Iraqi EFL students, an instructional model based on Flower and Hayes' (1981) model was incorporated into the EAP genre. Thus, this was termed as a modified process-genre model (MIM), to teach Arab students in this study how to write.

The major value of Flower and Hayes' model is its focus on the coordination and implementation of cognitive activities in such a way that students have a clearer understanding of the key steps and thought patterns that occur throughout the writing process. It provides a systematic and detailed description of the complex, non-linear, and recursive nature of the internal processes that occurs or may occur repeatedly without any fixed sequence or order during the composing process. Also, it states the external factors that influence the writing performance. Importantly, Flower and Hayes' (1981) cognitive model provides the writing teacher with valuable insights that facilitate the design of a focused and a clear instructional plan.

On the other hand, genre in the EAP tradition is not for students to learn it as fixed templates, but as a cultural artefact that they consciously acquire and creatively apply in subsequent writing tasks (Bhatia, 1993). One of its most influential and broadly conceived pedagogical objectives is to help students raise their awareness of the rhetorical and linguistic constraints of academic genre. This objective also aims to familiarise them with the procedures, practices, and cultural conventions that make the production of the text relevant to a particular socio-rhetorical context (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2002). Consequently, it was claimed that such awareness is an essential prerequisite in developing students' academic communicative competence (Swales, 1998; Bhatia, 2002; Paltridge, 2002).

University students routinely use a particular genre type - academic argumentation - to give expression to a specific communicative purpose. EFL students are expected to use structural forms which impose constraints, not only on the lexico-grammatical resources required, but also on the schematic regularity, content, and style (Swales, 1990). Swales' (1990) move structure analysis can be applied to the teaching of academic genre, especially to novice L2 writers in a tertiary education context. However, this is because of the fact that it has identifiable, manageable, and teachable components (Bhatia, 1993; Dudley-Evans, 1997; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 2000; Hyland, 2004).

The resultant MIM has four main cycles and three embedded strategies. They consist of Context exploration; Text modelling and reinforcing; Joint-text construction which involves the teaching of the processes and strategies of Planning, Translating and Revising; and Independent text –construction. They are intertwined and unified. Hence, each is based on expanding the preceding one. Informed by a socio-constructive paradigm (Vygotsky,1978), the key elements of the plan are an “emphasis on the interactive collaboration between teacher and student, with the teacher taking an authoritative role to ‘scaffold’ or support learners as they move towards their potential level of performance” (Vygotsky, 1978, cited in Hyland, 2003, p.26).

The MIM teaching plan is distinguishable from Badger and White's model in that it offers students focused exposure to model texts. Also, it provides careful and critical sessions of reading of model texts and comparison with other texts to heighten their awareness of the rhetorical stages and moves of academic argumentative texts, as well as their typical linguistic resources.

The teaching plan treats reviewing as an on-going process that students may undertake at any point in the writing process, resulting in recursive planning and transcribing processes. The MIM teaching plan offers EFL students who struggle with the opportunity to concentrate on and complete one cognitive operation at a time to proceed more confidently with the writing task through a set of hierarchical and manageable stages (Flower & Hayes, 1981). Thus, this helps them to cope with the complexity of the writing process. The MIM teaching plan allows them ample time to practise planning, translating, and revising strategies. Also, it helps them gradually gain control over them to generate, to revise, and to edit their first drafts.

## **Methodology**

### **The Context and Participants**

A study of third-year EFL students studying English for an AB degree was conducted at Al-Qadisiya University in Iraq. During this study, the compulsory curriculum of EFL mainstream English academic writing classes is a representative of those at other universities throughout Iraq. The students were both male and female and native speakers of Arabic, aged between 21 and 23. The Oxford Placement Test (Allan, 2004) was administered to assess English proficiency and students were assigned to one of two comparable groups (age, gender, and English proficiency). Consequently, a different writing pedagogy was implemented in each group i.e., the product-driven approach (non-intervention group) and the MIM (intervention group). Both groups were taught using the same teaching materials and by the same teacher.

A team of eight English L1 native speakers - Representative Educated Readers (RERs) -were recruited from the Humanities departments in four universities in Western Australia. These academic staff members were selected based on the belief that each person was a parent member of an English-speaking academic community and was familiar with argumentation writing due to their ongoing assessment of student's understanding as part of the course evaluation process. A sample of eight socio-scientific issue (SSI) model texts were holistically ranked and assessed by the RERs based on their linguistic and rhetorical style and the extent to which they contained multiple perspectives on the issue. Thus, this allowed the RERs the opportunity to evaluate a wide variety of argumentative writing styles. The data was used to generate an assessment matrix based on four criteria including: organisation, content, vocabulary, and language use and mechanics. However, these

criteria were closely aligned to and supported by those described by Jacobs, Zinkgraf, Wormuth, Hartfiel and Hughley's (1981) Composition Profile. The matrix was used by the RERs to assess EFL students' pre- and post-test essays.

### Data Analysis

Both the pre- and post-test essays were assessed by the RERs against the assessment matrix. Exploratory Sequential Design (ESD) as described by Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) was adopted. The organisation and flow of data collection and analysis were weighed qualitatively in the first phase of the research, and building from the exploratory results, the second quantitative phase provided the means for the results to be statistically processed. The two methodologies were conducted sequentially and were of equal importance.

### Pre-test Performance Levels

Table 1. Pre-test: Number of students achieving writing criteria

<b>Non-intervention group (N = 51)</b>	<b>No. of students</b>	<b>Intervention group (N = 41)</b>	<b>No. of students</b>
<b>1. Organisation</b>		<b>1. Organisation</b>	
<b>Introductory paragraph</b>		<b>Introductory paragraph</b>	
<i>Proficient</i>	0	<i>Proficient</i>	0
<i>Acceptable</i>	0	<i>Acceptable</i>	0
<i>Inadequate</i>	25	<i>Inadequate</i>	20
<i>No evidence</i>	26	<i>No evidence</i>	21
<b>Thesis statement</b>		<b>Thesis development</b>	
<i>Proficient</i>	0	<i>Proficient</i>	0
<i>Acceptable</i>	0	<i>Acceptable</i>	0
<i>Inadequate</i>	18	<i>Inadequate</i>	17
<i>No evidence</i>	33	<i>No evidence</i>	24
<b>Body paragraph</b>		<b>Body paragraph</b>	
<i>Proficient</i>	0	<i>Proficient</i>	0
<i>Acceptable</i>	0	<i>Acceptable</i>	0
<i>Inadequate</i>	22	<i>Inadequate</i>	19
<i>No evidence</i>	29	<i>No evidence</i>	22
<b>Concluding paragraph</b>		<b>Concluding paragraph</b>	
<i>Proficient</i>	0	<i>Proficient</i>	0
<i>Acceptable</i>	0	<i>Acceptable</i>	0
<i>Inadequate</i>	25	<i>Inadequate</i>	20
<i>No evidence</i>	26	<i>No evidence</i>	21
<b>2. Content</b>		<b>2. Content</b>	
<i>Proficient</i>	0	<i>Proficient</i>	0
<i>Acceptable</i>	0	<i>Acceptable</i>	0
<i>Inadequate</i>	28	<i>Inadequate</i>	24
<i>No evidence</i>	23	<i>No evidence</i>	17
<b>3. Vocabulary</b>		<b>3. Vocabulary</b>	
<i>Proficient</i>	0	<i>Proficient</i>	0
<i>Acceptable</i>	0	<i>Acceptable</i>	0

Non-intervention group (N = 51)	No. of students	Intervention group (N = 41)	No. of students
<i>Inadequate</i>	29	<i>Inadequate</i>	27
<i>No evidence</i>	22	<i>No evidence</i>	14
<b>4. Language use and mechanics</b>		<b>4. Language use and mechanics</b>	
<i>Proficient</i>	0	<i>Proficient</i>	0
<i>Acceptable</i>	0	<i>Acceptable</i>	0
<i>Inadequate</i>	25	<i>Inadequate</i>	21
<i>No evidence</i>	26	<i>No evidence</i>	20

The absence of scores in the Proficient and Acceptable categories of both groups in Table 1 shows that the students performed poorly. Therefore, it can be concluded that both groups performed similarly before the commencement of the intervention. This analysis was confirmed when the frequencies of the writing criteria in the students' pre-test essay from both groups were analysed using descriptive statistics to determine the mean values (M) and standard deviation (SD) of their writing achievements. Table 2 shows the analysis results.

Table 2. Comparison of pre-test mean scores and standard deviation

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Introductory paragraph	non-intervention group	51	1.49	.505	.071
	intervention group	41	1.49	.506	.079
Thesis statement	non-intervention group	51	1.35	.483	.068
	intervention group	41	1.41	.499	.078
Body paragraph construction	non-intervention group	51	1.43	.500	.070
	intervention group	41	1.46	.505	.079
Concluding paragraph	non-intervention group	51	1.49	.505	.071
	Intervention t group	41	1.49	.506	.079
Content	non-intervention group	51	1.55	.503	.070
	intervention group	41	1.59	.499	.078
Vocabulary	non-intervention group	51	1.57	.500	.070
	intervention group	41	1.66	.480	.075
Language use and mechanics	Non-intervention group	51	1.49	.505	.071
	intervention group	41	1.51	.506	.079

As displayed in Table 2, the measures of central tendency and dispersion used to compare the pre-test results are closely aligned in both groups on the writing criteria. Therefore, it can be concluded that they performed relatively similar before the commencement of the intervention.

The differences between the mean gain values of the pre-test of both groups were computed using inferential statistics for which an independent sample t-test was employed. A two-tailed significance value (p) with a p value < 0.05 was set as significant. The purpose of the t-test was to compare the mean scores of the students’ writing achievements and determine whether the two-point differences in mean scores of a certain group were statistically significant in comparison to the other group.

Table 3. Independent samples t-test on pre-test results for both groups

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Introductory paragraph	Equal variances assumed	.002	.964	.023	90	.982	.002	.106	-.208	.213
	Equal variances not assumed			.023	85.718	.982	.002	.106	-.208	.213
Thesis statement	Equal variances assumed	1.296	.258	-.600	90	.550	-.062	.103	-.266	.142
	Equal variances not assumed			-.598	84.555	.551	-.062	.103	-.267	.143
Body paragraph construction	Equal variances assumed	.320	.573	-.304	90	.762	-.032	.105	-.241	.177
	Equal variances not assumed			-.304	85.464	.762	-.032	.105	-.242	.178
Concluding paragraph	Equal variances assumed	.002	.964	.023	90	.982	.002	.106	-.208	.213
	Equal variances not assumed			.023	85.718	.982	.002	.106	-.208	.213
Content	Equal variances assumed	.474	.493	-.346	90	.730	-.036	.105	-.245	.172
	Equal variances not assumed			-.346	86.070	.730	-.036	.105	-.245	.172
Vocabulary	Equal variances assumed	2.936	.090	-.872	90	.385	-.090	.103	-.295	.115
	Equal variances not assumed			-.876	87.169	.383	-.090	.103	-.294	.114
Language use and Mechanics	Equal variances assumed	.002	.964	-.208	90	.836	-.022	.106	-.233	.189
	Equal variances not assumed			-.207	85.718	.836	-.022	.106	-.233	.189

In Table 3, the results of the independent samples t-test show that the p-value is greater than the standard cut-off of 0.05. This value suggests that

there were no statistically significant differences in the mean scores of students' writing achievements on writing quality criteria across the two groups. The results shows: *Introductory paragraph* [  $t(0.023, p=.982 > 0.05)$ ]; *Thesis development* [  $t(0.600, p=.550 > 0.05)$ ]; *Body paragraphs* [  $t(0.304, p=.762 > 0.05)$ ]; *Concluding paragraphs* [  $t(0.023, p=.982 > 0.05)$ ]; *Content* [  $t(0.346, p=.730 > 0.05)$ ]; *Vocabulary* [  $t(0.872, p=.385 > 0.05)$ ]; and *Language Use and Mechanics* [  $t(0.208, p=.836 > 0.05)$ ].

### Post-test Performance Levels

The students' post-test essays of both groups were assessed by the same RERs against the same criteria as in the pre-test. In addition, the frequencies of the occurrence of the four quality writing criteria were counted. The aim was to determine whether there were differences in their frequencies across the two groups. Table 4 shows the results.

Table 4. Post-test: Number of students achieving writing criteria

Non-intervention group (N = 51)	No. of student	Intervention group (N = 41)	No. of student
<b>1. Organisation</b>		<b>1. Organisation</b>	
<b>Introductory paragraph</b>		<b>Introductory paragraph</b>	
<i>Proficient</i>	0	<i>Proficient</i>	0
<i>Acceptable</i>	0	<i>Acceptable</i>	8
<i>Inadequate</i>	27	<i>Inadequate</i>	19
<i>No evidence</i>	24	<i>No evidence</i>	14
<b>Thesis statement</b>		<b>Thesis statement</b>	
<i>Proficient</i>	0	<i>Proficient</i>	0
<i>Acceptable</i>	0	<i>Acceptable</i>	9
<i>Inadequate</i>	26	<i>Inadequate</i>	18
<i>No evidence</i>	25	<i>No evidence</i>	14
<b>Body paragraph construction</b>		<b>Body paragraph construction</b>	
<i>Proficient</i>	0	<i>Proficient</i>	0
<i>Acceptable</i>	0	<i>Acceptable</i>	8
<i>Inadequate</i>	29	<i>Inadequate</i>	19
<i>No evidence</i>	22	<i>No evidence</i>	14
<b>Concluding paragraph</b>		<b>Concluding paragraph</b>	
<i>Proficient</i>	0	<i>Proficient</i>	0
<i>Acceptable</i>	0	<i>Acceptable</i>	8
<i>Inadequate</i>	18	<i>Inadequate</i>	18
<i>No evidence</i>	33	<i>No evidence</i>	15
<b>2. Content</b>		<b>2. Content</b>	
<i>Proficient</i>	0	<i>Proficient</i>	0
<i>Acceptable</i>	0	<i>Acceptable</i>	10
<i>Inadequate</i>	28	<i>Inadequate</i>	17
<i>No evidence</i>	23	<i>No evidence</i>	14
<b>3. Vocabulary</b>		<b>3. Vocabulary</b>	
<i>Proficient</i>	0	<i>Proficient</i>	0
<i>Acceptable</i>	0	<i>Acceptable</i>	11
<i>Inadequate</i>	27	<i>Inadequate</i>	19
<i>No evidence</i>	24	<i>No evidence</i>	11
<b>4. Language use and mechanics</b>		<b>4. Language use and mechanics</b>	

<i>Proficient</i>	0	<i>Proficient</i>	0
<i>Acceptable</i>	0	<i>Acceptable</i>	9
<i>Inadequate</i>	26	<i>Inadequate</i>	21
<i>No evidence</i>	25	<i>No evidence</i>	11

As shown in Table 4, the post-test data reveal that there were significant discrepancies between the intervention students' performance level and those in the non-intervention group on all of the four main criteria. However, this is with a number of intervention students who were able to achieve an Acceptable rating in the four criteria and their subcategories. Also, no student in the non-intervention group was able to achieve this rating.

The frequency of the occurrence of each of the writing criteria in the EFL students' post-test essay was computed using descriptive statistics to determine the mean values (M) and the standard deviation (SD) of their writing achievements. Therefore, these findings are reported in Table 5.

Table 5. Comparison of post-test mean scores and standard deviation

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Introductory paragraph	Non-intervention	51	1.53	.504	.071
	Intervention	41	1.85	.727	.113
Thesis development	Non-intervention	51	1.51	.505	.071
	Intervention	41	1.88	.748	.117
Body paragraph construction	Non-intervention	51	1.57	.500	.070
	Intervention	41	1.85	.727	.113
Concluding paragraph	Non-intervention	51	1.35	.483	.068
	Intervention	41	1.83	.738	.115
Content	Non-intervention	51	1.55	.503	.070
	Intervention	41	1.90	.768	.120
Vocabulary	Non-intervention	51	1.53	.504	.071
	Intervention	41	2.00	.742	.116
Language use and mechanics	Non-intervention	51	1.51	.505	.071
	Intervention	41	1.95	.705	.110

Table 5 shows that the measures of central tendency and dispersion are higher across all criteria in the intervention group as compared to the values obtained from the non-intervention group. The differences between the mean gain values of the post-test of both groups were calculated using an independent sample t-test. A two-tailed significance value (p) with a p value < 0.05 was set as significant. The purpose of the t-test was to compare the mean scores of the students' writing achievements and determine whether

the two-point differences in the mean scores of a certain group were statistically significant in comparison to the other group.

Table 6. Post-test mean scores and standard deviation

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variance		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Diff.	95% Confidence Interval of Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Introductory paragraph	Equal variances assumed	2.030	.158	-2.521	90	.013	-.324	.129	-.580	-.069
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.426	68.71	.018	-.324	.134	-.591	-.058
Thesis statement	Equal variances assumed	2.664	.106	2.810	90	.006	-.368	.131	-.629	-.108
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.696	67.420	.009	-.368	.137	-.641	-.096
Body paragraph construction	Equal variances assumed	2.353	.129	2.223	90	.029	-.285	.128	-.540	-.030
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.137	68.343	.036	-.285	.133	-.551	-.019
Concluding paragraph	Equal variances assumed	5.967	.017	-3.725	90	.000	-.476	.128	-.730	-.222
	Equal variances not assumed			3.564	65.974	.001	-.476	.134	-.743	-.209
Content	Equal variances assumed	3.677	.058	-2.655	90	.009	-.353	.133	-.618	-.089
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.541	66.003	.013	-.353	.139	-.631	-.076
Vocabulary	Equal variances assumed	.293	.589	-3.613	90	.000	-.471	.130	-.729	-.212
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.469	67.755	.001	-.471	.136	-.741	-.200
Language use and mechanics	Equal variances assumed	.025	.875	-3.494	90	.001	-.441	.126	-.692	-.190
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.372	70.206	.001	-.441	.131	-.702	-.180

As indicated in Table 6, the results of the independent samples t-test show that the p-value is less than the standard cut-off of 0.05. This value suggests that there were statistically significant differences on the mean scores of students’ writing achievements on writing quality criteria across the two groups in their post-test. The mean scores and SD for both the non-intervention group and the intervention group were presented respectively. With Introductory paragraph, the mean values and standard deviations are Mean=1.53 and SD=.504 as against M=1.85 and SD=.727; Thesis statement is M=1.51 and SD=.505 as against M=1.88 and SD=.748; Body paragraph is M=1.57 and SD=.500 as against M=1.85 and SD=.727; Concluding paragraph is M=1.35 and SD=.483 as against M=1.83 and SD=.738; Content is M=1.55 and SD=.503 as against M=1.90 and SD=.768; Vocabulary is M=1.53 and SD=.504 as against M=2.00 and SD=.742; and Language use and Mechanics is M=1.51 and SD=.505 as against M=1.95 and .705.

Comparisons between their mean scores show noticeable discrepancies in the values of each group. However, some of the intervention

group students achieving higher values than their counterparts in the non-intervention group make noticeable improvements in their writing. Such comparison leads to the conclusion that the two groups did not perform similarly at the conclusion of the intervention.

### **Findings and Discussion**

Some of the intervention group students had noticeable improvements in the performance of all criteria in comparison with their counterparts in the non-intervention group. Even though the non-intervention students were exposed to the same content as the intervention group and were taught by the same teacher, the only difference between them was that the former received writing pedagogies based on the MIM, whereas the latter was taught with the current product-based instructions. Hence, their performance on that criterion remained unchanged.

Meaningful qualitative differences were evident between the two groups. Nearly half of the intervention group students were able to enhance their performance in all criteria. However, only approximately 20% were able to demonstrate ‘Adequate’ performance in all criteria and showed the ability to write competent argumentative essays.

A possible interpretation is to account for the qualitative and quantitative differences in the significant benefit from the structure and methodology of the MIM. The reasons behind the improvements made by some intervention students were not clear. The inclusion of explicit instruction into the institutionalised discourse norms and conventions may have contributed to better awareness of English academic argumentative genre practices and norms. Thus, this promotes writing competence to the extent that it minimises interference from their L1 Arabic. The systematic and explicit explanation of writing processes and strategies in manageable step-by-step moves may have provided an opportunity for students to learn the cognitive operations involved in writing separately, though interactively.

Some of the students transferred the knowledge they acquired, independently applied it, and eventually became part of their higher mental knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978; Storch, 2002). Such strategic knowledge helped students to be apprenticed into the intellectual traditions of a new discourse community (Warschauer, 2002). In addition, it helps them to acquire a new knowledge and develop a new way of structuring their own thinking (Wenger, 1998). Furthermore, it adjusted their writing to make cultural adaptations to meet the expectations of an English-speaking community. This can be observed in their tendency to sacrifice their L1 rhetorical thought patterns and manifest a dual cultural tendency in their L2 writing. Hence, they try to match native English writing to produce essays in

compliance with cultural codes recognised and valued by an English speaking community.

This interpretation is consistent with Connor's (2002) argument that in order to overcome or avoid potential interference and negative transference from the L1 into the L2 writing, EFL learners need to be explicitly inculcated into a new rhetoric. Thus, this is done in order for them to accommodate it and to take of a new culture. This is a contention supported by other Arab researchers (El-Daly, 1991; Fageeh, 2003; Ezza, 2010; Kamel, 2000) who assert that L1 Arabic EFL students are in need of a more comprehensive, balanced, and effective writing approach. Thus, this writing approach incorporates explicit and systematic instruction to develop conscious awareness of the textual stages and moves as well as the typical linguistic features to overcome the difficulties they experience. If such a comprehensive pedagogical tool is not incorporated into the writing syllabus in Arab tertiary institutions, academic writing will continue to be a challenge for most students.

Although the MIM had a positive impact on the post-test performance level of some of the intervention group students, students from this group clearly varies in their response to the new writing model. One possible explanation is that some of the students had difficulty extending their thought patterns beyond those pertaining to their L1 Arabic. The continuing influence of the product-based method of teaching writing appears to have diminished the impact of the MIM on some students. Students are well-entrenched in the conventional writing methodology and many still prefer it. The collaborative processes of the MIM are possibly not amenable to a culture where writing is viewed as "reordering sentences in scrambled paragraphs, selecting appropriate sentences to complete gapped paragraphs, and writing from provided information" (Hyland, 2003, p.6).

Current education policy in Iraq dictates that the EFL current writing curriculum adopts a traditional didactic pedagogical approach in which the teaching of the writing processes and strategies and academic argumentative norms and practices have not received attention in regular writing classes in Iraq. In their study, Al-Abed Al-Haq and Ahmed (1994) suggest that the methods used in teaching composition at the university level are the major causes of EFL Arab students' lack of argumentative skills. As a consequence, they were more likely to think in terms of the rhetorical tradition of their L1 as a compensation composing strategy (Kharma & Hajjaj, 1989; Halimah, 1991). Other research (Al-Khatib, 2001; El-Aswad, 2002; Abu Rass, 2011) has reported that students, especially those with low level of proficiency, exploit translation to facilitate the process of thinking and writing in L2 writing. This occurs when they experience difficulties that interrupted the flow of their ideas or solve linguistic problems such as the choice of appropriate vocabulary in their

L2 writing. For some students, at least their current repertoire of L2 vocabulary and grammar constrained the expression of their ideas in the writing process.

## **Conclusion**

This study is the first of its kind in the Iraqi context. Thus, it provides insights into the ways in which the design and implementation of pedagogical practices in writing instruction in Arab contexts can be improved. The study provides a springboard for further research studies where the MIM can be applied and perhaps new insights can be gained into EFL methodology.

The MIM provides an eclectic and effective writing pedagogy which states that attending to students' pedagogical needs has the potential to improve writing competence and critical thinking skills. Also, it facilitates some of the intervention on students' ability to deliver well-formed academic argumentation. However, it is clear that most students had trouble in extending their thought patterns beyond those pertaining to their L1 Arabic. Recognising classical Arabic is the language of the holy Qur'an. Subsequently, it is possible that many Arabs manifest overzealous adherence to its rhetorical conventions. This rhetorical preference is a pragmatic phenomenon bound to solidarity, politeness, and face-saving strategies that are highly valued in the Arab society (Hatim, 1990). Thus, this might go a long way to explain students' tendency to favour and incorporate learned stylistic and rhetorical patterns from their L1 writing into their L2 writing (AL-Qahtani, 2006).

Lack of knowledge of the writing process, academic writing genre conventions, and critical thinking skills are other important factors limiting EFL Arab students' ability to produce high quality academic writing. The influence of Arabic rhetoric on L2 writing has been identified in contrastive rhetorical studies (for example, Liebmann, 1992; Kaplan, 1966; Hirose, 2003). Therefore, these studies maintain that distinct rhetorical differences in the organisation of academic argumentative genre will occur in writing in English. Thus, writing is based on the conventions of the students' mother tongue and the influence of interference and negative transfer from L1 rhetorical conventions (Allen, 1970). Arabic is characterised by being circular and not cumulative; hence, it tends to employ digressions (Kaplan, 1966). Nevertheless, while acknowledging the impact of cultural imperatives and the influence of Arabic rhetoric on L2 writing, such influence may not be a permanent or an isolated phenomenon. However, it may only be a factor which contributes to the difficulties of EFL students encounter in academic writing. Unlike commonly long-held views on contrastive rhetoric, Arab students' poor competence in academic writing may be explained by a combination of traditional syllabus constraints and teaching methodology.

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