Detected Difficulties in Argumentative Writing: The Case of Culturally and Linguistically Saudi Backgrounded Students

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Abstract: Argumentative writing is a mode of academic writing and a common writing genre that college-level students use at universities. The purpose of the study is to investigate common difficulties that affect the second language learners' argumentative wiring. The significance of the study is to explore the struggles that culturally and linguistically Saudi backgrounded students face in writing argumentative essays to provide insights that could be used to improve instruction and student performance. The researchers examined 187 Saudi students' (100 male and 87 female) argumentative writings to explore the frequency of the common difficulties students might encounter with writing argumentative essays. The second phase of the study included independent-samples t-test to statistically compare differences between male and female students' difficulties in writing an argumentative essay. Anticipated results of the study lent to the improvement of the writing courses. The findings of the study statistically revealed the common difficulties of writing argumentative essays: organization/structure, thesis statement, integrating academic sources, finding evidence, writing counterclaims, writing refutation paragraph, academic tone, and content and development. The instructors of argumentative writing courses (or closely related courses) may accordingly want to change the structure of the course design, teaching strategies, and course materials to develop their courses efficiently.
Keywords: Argumentative Essays, English Learners, Language Development, Second Language Writing, Writing Approach.

Introduction

Argumentative writing is a genre of writing, which establishes a position on an issue or topic, and explains and supports this position with reliable pieces of evidence. Argumentative writing composes an essential component of English language learning programs since it is considered as a critical mode of written discourse. According to Allen et al. (2019), argumentative writing is a complex cognitive process that is related to the authors' purpose, the prospects of audiences, the contextual position, and the predictable rhetorical patterns. The purpose of this study is to investigate common difficulties that affect the second language (L2) learners' argumentative

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wiring. The significance of the study is to explore the struggles that Saudi undergraduate students face in writing argumentative essays to provide insights that could be used to improve instruction and student performance.

Argumentative writing is a mode of academic writing and a common writing genre that college-level students use at universities. The purpose of argumentative writing is to persuade the audience and make them understand the other side of the argument by offering logical reasons to support a belief or idea (Wolfe et al., 2009). It also involves critical thinking skills as well as organizational skills that involves planning how to construct the argument(Vögelin et al., 2019). Argumentative writing, according to Zhao (2017), is the most difficult writing genre that second language (L2) learners encounter at universities since most of them do not have experience in writing academic texts in their first language (L1). Based on previous studies in the field of L2 writing, there are some common problems that L2 students usually face while they are writing an argumentative essay. The literature has claimed that these common problems are: organizational structure of writing, integrating academic sources, finding sources, writing topic sentences, grammar, writing counterclaims and refutation, punctuation, academic tone, and including unrelated information in writing (Al-Haq & Ahmed, 1994; Granger & Tyson, 1996; Victori, 1999; Zhao, 2017; Ozfidan & Burlbaw, 2019). L2 learners have to develop different skills and competencies in order to overcome these problems (Eckes, 2008; Hyland, 2008). The objective of this study is to investigate the ability of L2 learners' argumentative essay writing skills, explore the difficulties L2 students experience with argumentative essay writing, and discuss the limitations found in the current situation and provide insight into the teaching and learning practices in the classroom. Additionally, this study will explore if there is any correlation between the difficulty of argumentative essay writing and their sex (female or male).

- Research question: What difficulties do Saudi students experience in writing an argumentative essay?

Literature Review

Writing is considered one of the most important skills a college student should have (Morris et al., 2018). This skill is not only important for the students' life at the undergraduate level, but it is also an important factor for students' employability and career success. To be an effective writer means a better ability to express one's opinions and ideas (Al-Jamal & Zennou, 2018; Lam et al., 2018). The argumentative essay is one of the most common models of writing taught in higher education (Rubiaee et al., 2020; Zarrabi & Bozorgian, 2020). The current literature about L2 argumentative essay writing has led to different ideologies. The section below highlights some of the current approaches.

Approaches in Second Language Writing

Atkinson (2018) highlighted the different theoretical influences on L2 writing, whether it is the genre approach or contrastive rhetoric. In reference to the argumentative essay, Hyland (1990) proposed a descriptive framework for the genre or rhetorical structure of it. He argued for students to be taught the structures in order to allow them to write their texts according to the assigned genre. There were 3 parts to his framework: 1. the thesis which introduces the proposition to be argued, 2. Argument discusses grounds for thesis, and 3. A conclusion that synthesizes the discussion and affirms the validity of the argument (Hyland, 1990, p. 69). The key to successful argumentative essay writing is learning the organization of a well-founded argument consists of moves and recognizing what pieces are optional versus required for the argument to be solid. For

the purpose of this research, Hyland's (1990) definition of what an argumentative essay will be used. It is an essay whose purpose is to convince the reader of a central proposition.

Shahriari and Shadloo (2019) investigated the engagement features of the argumentative genre. They utilized Hyland's engagement framework by studying the use of 5 different engagement markers for EFL learners. They found from their data that "it can be argued that [their] EFL learners did not make systematic use of engagement markers in their writing and as the quality of argumentative essays improved, no significant differences were observed in the use of these features" (p. 105). Furthermore, they recommended that teachers should help their students to think of using a variety of types of engagement markers in their writing, more specifically with argumentative essays where the art of persuasion is paramount.

Schneer's (2014) research investigated the use of moves in 50 argumentative opinion blog entries. He found that there was not a connection between the quality of writing and using engagement markers. Furthermore, he claimed that based on his findings designing rubrics that account for the different sub-registers of academic writing, "may provide a more careful and realistic assessment of learners' argumentation" (p. 106).

Difficulties, Processes, and Strategies

Rahmatunisa (2014) examined EFL learners', from Indonesia, argumentative essay areas of difficulties. The study found that the learners struggled with the grammatical forms, the structure of a paragraph, and issues of attitude, in other words, linguistic problems, cognitive problems, and psychological problems. The primary aim of the current study is to investigate the difficulties students from this culture face when creating argumentative essays in another language, in this case, English (Aydin & Ozfidan, 2014; Ozfidan et al., 2014; Beckett & Kobayashi, 2020). Another study, conducted by Zhu (2001), also examined the difficulties students face with writing argumentative essays in another language. Zhu found that the ESL students primarily had difficulties in the following areas: the rhetorical aspects of English argumentative writing and metacognitive strategies were used infrequently.

Another study conducted by Lee and Deakin (2016) examined the interactional discourse of successful and less-successful argumentative essays of Chinese ESL students. They found that successful essays, as defined in their study, whether L1 or L2, had a larger number of hedging devices. Interestingly, they found that the L2 students in the study were less likely "to demarcate their authorial presence within their texts" (Lee & Deakin, 2019, p. 31).

Ong and Zhang (2010) investigated task complexity and the impact it has on the fluency and lexical complexity in EFL argumentative essay writing. Their study found that the free writing group was able to produce significantly higher for both fluency and lexical complexity than those from the pre-task and the extended pre-task groups. This is relevant in how argumentative essays are taught as well as the testing conditions within the classrooms of L2 learners.

Methodology

The first phase of the study explored the frequency of the common difficulties among the ELL undergraduate students by examining two hundred Saudi students' argumentative essays on a topic. The second phase of the study included independent-samples t-test to statistically compare differences between male and female students' difficulties in argumentative writing.

Participants

The researchers examined 187 students' (100 male and 87 female) argumentative writings. The participants of the study were students enrolled in ENG 103 (Research Writing Techniques) in a Saudi university. All participants were from native Arabic speaking countries, and all of them were ELL students, and the age range of the participants was between 18 and 30. The college of the participants was varying as follows: College of Engineering, College of Business Administration, and College of Computer and Information Sciences.

Data Collection and Analysis

This research was being conducted in order to investigate common factors that affect L2 learners' argumentative writing. In accordance with the IRB guidelines (reference #2019-10-0021), the participation of this study was voluntary. The students (participants) enrolled in ENG 103 (Research Writing Techniques) was given a final exam at the end of Fall 2019 at a Saudi university. The researchers gave a consent form to each student to ask them to use their final exam for a research purpose, and 187 students out of 191 agreed to be part of this research project. The researchers received signed consent forms from 187 students, and they have kept all these forms in a secure location.

The researchers examined the dataset, which was a subset of argumentative essays written by Saudi undergraduate students. The frequency of each item in the analytical rubric (Appendix A) was calculated and normalized to minimize redundancy between the two coders. This normalization process allowed for the use of parametric statistical procedures (May & Finch, 2009). Afterward, the data was entered into SPSS statistical software to find out Cronbach Alpha scores for the reliability of the data and descriptive statistical analysis of the difficulties in writing argumentative essays. The researchers, furthermore, used independent-samples t-test to statistically compare differences between male and female students' difficulties in argumentative writing. The researchers used independent-samples t-test to compare the mean differences between male and female participants. The independent-samples t-test was used to understand if there were any interactions among the independent variables on the dependent variable. Thompson (1992) stated that "this model assumes that a difference in the mean score of the dependent variable is found because of the influence of the independent variable that distinguishes the two groups" (p.436). The researchers used the SPSS software to perform an independent samples t-test, assuming that there were no assumptions violated.

Writing Task

The students enrolled in ENG 103 (Research Writing Techniques) were given a final exam at the end of Fall 2019 at a Saudi university. All students took the exam at the same time and signed a consent form. They were given a choice of two essay questions, and they had to pick one and wrote an argumentative essay that directly answers the essay questions. The essay had to consist of five paragraphs (approximately 600-750 words in length). In the introduction, the students were asked to start with a hook and then present some background information about the topic. Afterward, they had to present the essay question and describe the debate/controversy. They had to end the introduction with a clear and concise thesis statement that shows their claim and two reasons. For the first two body paragraphs, the students were asked to present two reasons (one per body paragraph) to support their thesis statement. Each reason had to be supported by an explanation, details (facts and/or statistics), an example or two, expert opinion (if possible, but

paraphrased), and their own interpretation and analysis. They were asked to end each paragraph with an appropriate concluding sentence. The third body paragraph had to consist of a refutation of one counterclaim from the other side. In the topic sentence, the students had to identify both the counterclaim and who said it clearly. Then they needed to clarify for the reader exactly what the counterargument was, and how it connected to the other side's main argument. In the remainder of the paragraph, they needed to present a reason (or reasons) that refute the counterargument. They had to use evidence (in the form of facts, statistics, and examples) to support their refutation in the essay. The conclusion had to restate the thesis statement, and it had to consist of a summary and then a final thought. The students were also provided with two different sources (two articles) that discussed each topic. They were expected to use these sources to support their statements in their argumentative essay.

Interrater Reliability

This study conducted an interrater reliability test to determine the level of agreement between coders to represent the extent to which the data collected in this study are correct representations of the variables measured. According to McHugh (2012), "high inter-rater reliability values refer to a high degree of agreement between two examiners. Low inter-rater reliability values refer to a low degree of agreement between two examiners" (p.279). Scoring procedures for written assessments often include some form of verification of scoring among the different scorers (Wind & Walker, 2019). In the current study, there were two coders for each essay who used the analytical rubric to assess each student's written argumentative essay. Therefore, ensuring that each of the essays was scored two times by different coders. The coders were faculty members and had the experience of teaching argumentative writing and/or closely related courses. All essays were evaluated according to the rubric given by the researchers. The coders were trained to explain each of the items in the rubric before they started reviewing the essays. The researchers elected to test for Kappa as the means of verifying the scoring in this study. Creswell (1994) stated, "a value of Kappa .80 is considered outstanding, values for Kappa from .60 to .79 are considered substantial, and those from .40 to .59 are considered moderate" (p.89). For Kappa values, Creswell also stated, "before claiming a good level of agreement, most statisticians generally prefer values to be greater than .7, but values of least .6 are acceptable" (p.90). The researchers found acceptable and statistically significant of the measure of the agreement between the coders. The Kappa value of this study, according to Table 1, is .679, which represents a substantial strength of agreement. The researchers in Table 1 also reported a 95% confidence interval for Kappa, which was is .398 to .746. In other words, the researchers are 95% confident that the true population value of Kappa was between .398 and .746. Additionally, our kappa (κ) coefficient is statistically significantly different from zero since $p = .000$ ($p < .0005$). Overall, there was moderate agreement between the coders, $\kappa = .679$ (95% CI, .398 to .746), $p < .0005$. The use of multiple coders and running tests for Kappa values were done to try to minimize the impact of any possible discrepancies in scoring from the different scorers.

Table 1

Symmetric Measures

	Kappa	Asymptotic Std. Error	Z	P-value	Lower 95% Asymptotic CI Bound	Upper 95% Asymptotic CI Bound
Overall	.679	.087	6.612	.000	.398	.746

An analytical rubric and two different argumentative essay topics were prepared to evaluate the difficulties in writing an argumentative essay. The essay topics were given to students to choose one of them and start writing an argumentative essay. The analytical rubric was given to course instructors to evaluate the students' written essays accordingly. The researchers asked four different reviewers (faculty members) who were experts in the field of academic/research writing to evaluate the feasibility of the instruments to assess the quality of the rubric and essay topics. They removed and revised vague items, unclear terminology, and inappropriateness. Essay questions and some items in the rubric that were found problematic were fixed according to the reviewers' feedback.

Findings

In the first phase of the study, the researchers reported the descriptive statistics of argumentative writing criteria. The second phase of the study provided the two groups' (male and female) descriptive analysis to statistically compare differences between male and female students' difficulties in argumentative writing.

Descriptive Analysis Results

Table 2 below highlighted the frequency of the criteria, which evaluated the argumentative writings of the students. Table 2 showed that 45.46% of the students' organization/structure of writing argumentative essay met and/or exceeded the expectations. In other words, these students' writings had a clear structure, which enhanced and showcased the theme or central idea and moved the reader through the text. The papers were developed logically, and the progression of ideas in their essays made sense and allowed the coder to go through the text easily. Strong transitions existed throughout and added to the essay's coherence. However, 22.46% of the students' organization/structure of writing the argumentative essay did not meet and/or were below expectations. This meant that these writings were unclear and illogical. Ideas and details seemed strung together in a loose or random fashion. And also, there was no identifiable internal structure, and readers had trouble following the writer's line of thought. Besides, 32.09% of the students' organization/structure of writing an argumentative essay was developing expectations. In other words, the writers sometimes lunged ahead too quickly or spent too much time on details that did not matter, and transitions sporadically appeared. Table 2 also highlights that 55.08% of the students' thesis statements included in their argumentative essays met and/or exceeded the expectations. In essence, the thesis clearly stated a relevant position and argument preview completed, in the same order as the body of the essay, not a simple recitation of class material. It also meant that some of the students' thesis stated a relevant position but is somewhat vague or unclear. Conversely, 17.64% of the students' thesis statements did not meet and/or below the expectations. In other words, they didn't have a thesis statement, or their thesis statements were completely unclear, not relevant, or missing entirely. Furthermore, 26.74% of the students' thesis statements included in their argumentative essays were developing expectations. It also meant that their thesis was largely unclear or was not directly relevant to the assignment.

Table 2 below also showed that 45.46% of the students integrated academic sources in their argumentative essay correctly. In other words, sources met the guidelines, and only a few errors noted in parenthetical documentation. The essays were written in formal language (avoided slang completely), and language was appropriate for the topic (words conveyed intended message). On the other hand, 13.90% of the students couldn't meet or below the expectation of integrating academic sources in writing an argumentative essay. In short, there was little, or no academic

sources or integration of sources were awkward, and paper dominantly used informal language, and the message was unclear. Besides, 22.46% of the students were developing the expectations of writing an argumentative essay. In other words, the majority of the sources were used incorrectly, and informal language was frequently. Table 2 showed that 42.25% of the students' finding evidence/lack of evidence of writing argumentative essay met and/or exceeded the expectations. It meant that supporting sentences clarified and explained the topic sentence and included some good paraphrases from packet texts and addressed the best arguments of the opposition. However, 27.80% of the students' finding evidence/lack of evidence of writing argumentative essays did not meet and/or below expectations. In other words, the evidence was irrelevant or confusing and did not support the argument. Furthermore, 29.95% of the students were developing the expectations of including relevant evidence. This meant that these students addressed some of the best arguments of the opposition and included a few good paraphrases from packet texts. Table 2 also reflected that 51.33% of the students' writing counterclaims in writing argumentative essay met and/or exceeded the expectations. In other words, the counterclaim was stated quite clearly and concisely that included some reasoned analysis and partial or uneven use of source material. These students discussed reasons against the overall argument or supporting claim but left some reasons out and/or did not explain. On the other hand, 13.90% of the students couldn't meet or below the expectation of writing counterclaims in writing an argumentative essay. In short, these students' counterclaim was vague and included little or no use of source material and did not discuss the reasons against the argument or supporting the claim. Besides, 34.76% of the students' writing counterclaims were developing expectations. In other words, these students' counterclaim was sufficiently stated clearly and concisely that included a few reasoned analyses and partial or uneven use of source material. They also discussed weak reasons against the overall argument or supporting claim but left some reasons out and/or did not explain.

Table 2

Frequency of Argumentative Writing Difficulties (N=187)

Criteria	1	2	3	4	5
Organization / Structure	15	27	60	50	35
	8.02%	14.44%	32.09%	26.74%	18.72%
Thesis statement (preview to the argument)	11	22	50	54	49
	5.88%	11.76%	26.74%	28.88%	26.20%
Integrating academic sources	9	17	42	62	57
	4.81%	9.09%	22.46%	33.16%	30.48%
Finding Evidence / Lack of evidence	22	30	56	47	32
	11.76%	16.04%	29.95%	25.13%	17.12%
Writing counterclaims	10	16	65	51	45
	5.35%	8.56%	34.76%	27.27%	24.06%
Writing Refutation Paragraph	25	55	49	37	21
	13.37%	29.41%	26.20%	19.79%	11.23%
Academic tone	20	52	50	40	25
	10.70%	27.81%	26.74%	21.39%	13.37%
Content & Development	19	40	55	39	24
	10.16%	21.39%	29.41%	20.86%	12.83%

Note. 1=Does not meet expectations; 2=Below Expectations; 3=Developing Expectations; 4=Meets Expectations; 5=Exceeds Expectations.

Table 2 above indicated that 31.02% of the students' writing refutation paragraph met and/or exceeded the expectations. In other words, the refutation was stated successfully countering

it through evidence, whether it's evidence that conclusively disproved it by its findings or it proved to be credible evidence. However, 42.78% of the students' writing refutation paragraph did not meet and/or below expectations. It meant that these students' refutation paragraph was vague, or some attempt at refutation was made, but the points were not sufficiently developed. Besides, 26.20% of the students' writing refutation paragraph were developing expectations. In short, a sufficient attempt at refutation was made, but not all of the points were sufficiently developed. Table 2 above indicated that 34.76% of the students' academic tone of writing met and/or exceeded the expectations. In other words, these students' writings were in an appropriate academic tone, and the character of writers was consistently conveyed, and the tone fitted the narrative. Nevertheless, 38.51% of the students' academic tone of writing did not meet and/or below expectations. This meant that these students needed to improve academic writing and needed to appeal to the readers more. Furthermore, 26.74% of the students' academic tone of the writing was developing expectations. In other words, the tone strayed from the narrative and left some unanswered questions. Table 2 also indicated that 33.69% of the students' content and development of argumentative writing met and/or exceeded the expectations. In other words, the content was comprehensive and accurate. Major points were stated clearly and were well supported with good details, and the content and purpose of the writing were clear. However, 31.55% of the students' content and development of argumentative writing did not meet and/or below expectations. This meant that content was incomplete, and major points were not clear and/or persuasive appeals. Besides, 29.41% of the students' content and development of argumentative writing were developing expectations. In other words, the content was not comprehensive and/or persuasive, and major points were addressed, but not well supported.

Table 3 below shows the indicated mean, standard deviation, and Cronbach's alpha scores of each criterion of writing an argumentative essay. Table 3 displayed that students were good at integrating academic sources while writing an argumentative paper (M=4.2; SD=1.2). This table highlighted that students were also good at writing thesis statement and counterclaim (M=4.1; SD=1.0), and organization/structure (M=4.0; SD=1.3) while they were writing an argumentative paper. Table 3 also includes the results that show that students mostly had difficulties while they were writing a refutation paragraph (M=2.6; SD=1.2). Students also had difficulties while they were dealing with their academic tone (M=2.7; SD=1.1), and content and development (M=2.9; SD=1.2) of their argumentative essays. This table reflected that the students need to develop their finding evidence/lack of evidence (M=3.8; SD=1.1) of writing an argumentative essay.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics of each Criterion

Criteria	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Organization / Structure	4.0	1.3	.91
Thesis statement (preview to the argument)	4.1	1.0	.89
Integrating academic sources	4.2	1.2	.93
Finding Evidence / Lack of evidence	3.8	1.1	.90
Writing counterclaims	4.1	1.0	.86
Writing Refutation Paragraph	2.6	1.2	.92
Academic tone	2.7	1.1	.87
Content & Development	2.9	1.2	.94

Note. Criteria values: 1=Does not meet expectations; 2=Below Expectations; 3=Developing Expectations; 4=Meets Expectations; 5=Exceeds Expectations.

Table 3 above indicated Cronbach's alpha value for each criterion. The minimum Cronbach's alpha value, according to Nunnally (1978), should be .70 or above. Table 3 clarified that each criterion has reasonably high Cronbach's alpha scores (.86<items<.94), which indicated that each criterion of writing an argumentative essay is reliable.

Table 4
Correlation Matrix

	1	2	3	4	5
1: Does not meet expectations	1.000				
2: Below Expectations	.543	1.000			
3: Developing Expectations	.431	.427	1.000		
4: Meets Expectations	.474	.412	.434	1.000	
5: Exceeds Expectations	.391	.376	.382	.389	1.000

In table 4, the numbers (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) measure the direction and strength of the linear relationship between the variables. According to Cohen et al. (2014), "the correlation coefficient can range from -1 to +1, with -1 indicating a perfect negative correlation, +1 indicating a perfect positive correlation, and 0 indicating no correlation at all" (p.143). The points tend to be closer to the line when the correlation is higher; the points tend to be farther away from the line when the correlation is smaller. The correlation matrix above highlighted that variables were not highly correlated with each other, and this indicated that each variable represented the different perspectives of evaluating argumentative writing. Each variable measures different perspectives don evaluating argumentative writing criteria when they are not highly correlated with each other.

Independent-sample t-test results

Table 5
Group Statistics

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Organization / Structure	Male	100	50.13	8.15
	Female	87	53.44	10.32
Thesis statement	Male	100	41.58	9.43
	Female	87	39.79	8.54
Integrating academic sources	Male	100	41.50	9.21
	Female	87	45.65	10.12
Finding Evidence / Lack of evidence	Male	100	43.65	11.34
	Female	87	39.75	9.56
Writing counterclaims	Male	100	41.45	9.87
	Female	87	43.76	10.31
WritingRefutation Paragraph	Male	100	40.65	9.67
	Female	87	43.45	9.92
Academic tone	Male	100	51.43	8.87
	Female	87	52.54	9.65
Content& Development	Male	100	46.76	10.32
	Female	87	43.34	9.43

Tables 5 and 6 provided the two groups' descriptive statistics that the researchers compared and also provided the results of the independent t-test. The results of the independent-sample t-test indicated that there is a significant difference regarding the organization/structure of argumentative writing in the scores for males (M=50.13, SD=8.15) and females (M=53.44, SD=10.32) conditions;

t(181)=2.73, p = .021. For the writing thesis statement of argumentative writing, the results of the independent-sample t-test showed that there is a significant difference in the scores for males (M=41.58, SD=9.43) and females students (M=39.79, SD=8.54) conditions; t(173)=1.21, p = .041. The researchers found a significant difference regarding integrating academic sources into argumentative writing in the scores of the males (M=25.18, SD=2.31) and females (M=41.50, SD=9.21) conditions; t(141)=2.05, p=.015. The results of the independent-sample t-test also highlighted that there is a significant difference regarding the finding evidence/lack of evidence of argumentative writing in the scores between the male (M=43.65, SD=11.34) and female students (M=39.75, SD=9.56) conditions; t(121)=2.06, p = .029.

Table 6
Independent Samples T-test

		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Organization / Structure	Equal variances assumed	.185	.678	2.733	181	.021
	Equal variances not assumed			2.655	167.801	.020
Thesis statement	Equal variances assumed	.170	.395	1.216	173	.041
	Equal variances not assumed			1.196	165.403	.040
Integrating academic sources	Equal variances assumed	.252	.434	2.051	141	.015
	Equal variances not assumed			2.078	137.541	.013
Finding Evidence / Lack of evidence	Equal variances assumed	.184	.510	2.057	121	.029
	Equal variances not assumed			2.065	119.126	.028
Writing counterclaims	Equal variances assumed	.354	.656	2.435	125	.035
	Equal variances not assumed			2.497	123.435	.033
Writing Refutation Paragraph	Equal variances assumed	.276	.487	3.436	132	.044
	Equal variances not assumed			3.495	129.376	.041
Academic tone	Equal variances assumed	.368	.576	4.254	145	.022
	Equal variances not assumed			4.249	139.546	.020
Content & Development	Equal variances assumed	.453	.582	3.756	163	.015
	Equal variances not assumed			3.749	157.735	.017

Continuing to the independent-samples t-test, which was conducted to compare argumentative writings of male and female students, the researchers found significant differences in the scores of argumentative writing. The results of the independent-sample t-test indicated that there is a significant difference regarding the writing counterclaims of argumentative writing in the scores for the male (M=41.45, SD=9.87) and female students (M=43.76, SD=10.31) conditions; t(125)=2.44, p = .035. There is also a significant difference regarding the writing refutation paragraph of an argumentative essay in the scores between the male (M=40.65, SD=9.67) and

female students (M=43.45, SD=9.92) conditions; t(132)=3.44, p = .044. Regarding the using academic tone in argumentative writing, the results of the independent-sample t-test showed that there is a significant difference in the scores between the male (M=51.43, SD=8.87) and female students (M=52.54, SD=9.65) conditions; t(145)=4.25, p = .022. The results of the independent-sample t-test also highlighted that there is a significant difference regarding the Content and Development of argumentative writing in the scores for the male (M=46.76, SD=10.32) and female students (M=43.34, SD=9.43) conditions; t(163)=3.76, p = .015.

The independent-sample t-test showed that there is some significant difference in writing an argumentative essay between male and female students. In some particular areas, such as organization/structure, integrating academic sources, writing counterclaim and refutation paragraph, and academic tone of writing an argumentative paper, the male students are having more difficulties than female students. On the contrary, the independent-sample t-test indicated that the female students are having more difficulties than the male students in some particular areas of argumentative writing, such as writing a thesis statement, finding evidence / lack of evidence, and content and development.

Discussion and Conclusion

Argumentative writing is a genre of writing, which establishes a position on an issue or topic, and explains and supports this position with reliable pieces of evidence. The purpose of argumentative writing is to persuade the audience and make them understand the other side of the argument by offering logical reasons to support a belief or idea (Boykin et al., 2019; Wolfe et al., 2009). Anticipated results of the study will lend to the improvement of the writing courses in Saudi schooling. This study discovered what difficulties that students within a higher education setting might have with argumentative writing in the context of a private higher education institution in Saudi Arabia. The findings of the study revealed the common difficulties of writing argumentative essays. The instructors of argumentative writing courses (or closely related courses) may accordingly want to change the structure of the course design, teaching strategies, and course materials to develop their courses efficiently. The purpose of this study was to investigate common difficulties that affect the second language (L2) learners' argumentative wiring. The significance of the study is to explore the struggles that Saudi undergraduate students face in writing argumentative essays to provide insights that could be used to improve instruction and student performance.

The findings of the study showed that 45.46% of the students' organization/structure of writing argumentative essay met and/or exceeded the expectations. However, 22.46% of the students' organization/structure of writing argumentative essays did not meet and/or below expectations. The results also indicated that 55.08% of the students' thesis statements of writing argumentative essays met and/or exceeded the expectations. Conversely, 17.64% of the students' thesis statements did not meet and/or below the expectations. The findings highlighted that 45.46% of the students integrated academic sources in their argumentative essay correctly. On the other hand, 13.90% of the students couldn't meet or below the expectation of integrating academic sources in writing an argumentative essay. The findings reflected that 42.25% of the students' finding evidence/lack of evidence of writing argumentative essay met and/or exceeded the expectations. However, 27.80% of the students' finding evidence/lack of evidence of writing an argumentative essay did not meet and/or below expectations. The results of the study showed that 51.33% of the students' writing counterclaims met and/or exceeded the expectations. On the other hand, 13.90% of the students couldn't meet or below the expectation of writing counterclaims in

writing an argumentative essay. The findings indicated that 31.02% of the students' writing refutation paragraph met and/or exceeded the expectations. However, 42.78% of the students' writing refutation paragraph did not meet and/or below expectations. The results indicated that 34.76% of the students' academic tone of writing met and/or exceeded the expectations. Nevertheless, 38.51% of the students' academic tone of writing did not meet and/or below expectations. The findings also indicated that 33.69% of the students' content and development of argumentative writing met and/or exceeded the expectations. However, 31.55% of the students' content and development of argumentative writing did not meet and/or below expectations.

This current study found that students were good at integrating academic sources while writing an argumentative paper, and they were also good at writing thesis statement and counterclaim and organization/structure while they were writing an argumentative paper. The study displayed that students mostly had difficulties while they were writing a refutation paragraph. They also had difficulties while they were dealing with their academic tone and content and development of their argumentative essays. Students also need to develop their finding evidence/lack of evidence of writing an argumentative paper. In order to find out the differences between male and female students, the researchers conducted an independent-sample t-test, which indicated that there is some significant difference in writing an argumentative essay between male and female students. In some particular areas, such as organization/structure, integrating academic sources, writing counterclaim and refutation paragraph, and academic tone of writing an argumentative paper, the male students are having more difficulties than female students. On the contrary, the independent-sample t-test indicated that the female students are having more difficulties than a male student in some particular areas of argumentative writing, such as writing a thesis statement, finding evidence/lack of evidence, and content and development.

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Appendix A

Criteria	Does not meet expectations (Mark 1)	Below Expectations (Mark 2)	Developing Expectations (Mark 3)	Meets Expectations (Mark 4)	Exceeds Expectations (Mark 5)
Organization / Structure	There is no identifiable internal structure and readers have trouble following the writer's line of thought. Few, forced transitions in the essay or no transitions are present.	Arrangement of essay is unclear and illogical. The writing lacks a clear sense of direction. Ideas, details or events seem strung together in a loose or random fashion	Progression of ideas in essay is good. The writer sometimes lunges ahead too quickly or spends too much time on details that do not matter. Transitions appear sporadically, but not equally throughout the essay.	Overall, the paper is logically developed. Progression of ideas in essay makes sense and moves the reader easily through the text. Strong transitions exist throughout and add to the essay's coherence	Logical, compelling progression of ideas in essay; clear structure which enhances and showcases the central idea or theme and moves the reader through the text. Organization flows so smoothly the reader hardly thinks about it. Effective, mature, graceful transitions exist throughout the essay.
Thesis statement (preview to the argument)	No thesis statement	Thesis is completely unclear, not relevant, or missing entirely. No preview of argument. Paragraph consists largely of opinion, filler, or "contextualizing" material.	Thesis is largely unclear or is not directly relevant to assignment. Little identifiable preview, or preview is largely class material. Contains sentences that are neither preview nor thesis.	Thesis states a relevant position, but is somewhat vague or unclear. Preview is incomplete, not in correct order; some recitation of class material. Nothing other than thesis and preview.	Thesis clearly states a relevant position. Argument preview complete, in same order as body of essay, not simple recitation of class material. Contains nothing other than thesis and preview.
Integrating academic sources	Used little or no parenthetical documentation. APA in-text citations are not understandable. Paper dominantly uses informal language. Language is not appropriate to topic. Message is unclear.	Appropriate academic sources, but not a reliable. Source material is used, but integration may be awkward. All sources are accurately documented, but many are not in the desired format or lack credibility.	Majority of parenthetical documentation done incorrectly. Random APA citations throughout paper. Rarely documents sources. Some use of formal language recognized; informal language is frequently. Most language is appropriate to topic. Able to get vague idea of message.	Appropriate and reliable sources. Source material is used. All sources are accurately documented, but a few are not in the desired format. Some sources lack credibility.	Sources meet the guidelines for types of sources (APA in-text citations. Few errors noted in parenthetical documentation. Most research info is documented. Written in formal language (avoids slang completely). Language appropriate to topic. Words convey intended message.
Finding Evidence / Lack of evidence	Supporting evidence sentences lack development. Gives 1 or 2 weak claims that do not support that argument and/or are irrelevant or confusing. Does not include any paraphrasing from the packet texts.	Addresses few or none of the best arguments of the opposition. Includes some paraphrases from packet texts.	Addresses some of the best arguments of the oppositionIncludes a few good paraphrases from packet texts.	Supporting sentences clarify and explain the topic sentence. Includes some good paraphrases from packet texts.	Addresses the best arguments of the opposition. Includes good paraphrasing from packet texts. Paraphrasing supports student's ideas.
Writing counterclaims	Counterclaim is vague and includes little or no use of source material. Does not discuss the reasons against the argument or supporting claim.	Counterclaim not sufficiently clear and concise. Suggests there are reasons against the argument or supporting claim but does not discuss any specifically.	Counterclaim is stated sufficiently clearly and concisely that includes a few reasoned analyses and partial or uneven use of source material. Discusses weak reasons against the overall argument or supporting claim but leaves some reasons out and/or does not explain.	Counterclaim is stated quite clearly and concisely that includes some reasoned analysis and partial or uneven use of source material. Discusses reasons against the overall argument or supporting claim but leaves some reasons out and/or does not explain.	Counterclaim is stated very clearly and concisely that includes reasoned analysis and the use of source material. Discusses reasons against the overall argument or supporting claim and why it is invalid.
Writing Refutation Paragraph	Refutation is vague.	Some attempt at refutation is made but the points are not sufficiently developed.	A sufficient attempt at refutation is made but not all of the points are sufficiently developed.	The refutation is effective and the points are sufficiently developed.	The refutation is stated successfully countering it through evidence, whether it's evidence that conclusively disproves it by its findings or because it's more credible evidence.
Academic tone	No character of writer. Few connections between the narrative and the tone. It does not answer readers' questions. Invites little reader interest. Overuse of the passive voice.	Need to Improve academic writing. The tone is bland and does not fit the narrative. Needs to appeal to the readers more.	Character of writer varies. The tone strays from the narrative. Leaves some unanswered questions. Invites some interest. Moderate use of the passive voice.	Writing is in an appropriate academic tone. It is not distinctive and needs to engage the readers more.	Character of writer is consistently conveyed. The tone fits the narrative. Anticipates & answers readers' questions. Engages readers' interest and has an active voice.
Content & Development	Content is inconsistent and unclear.	Content is incomplete. Major points are not clear and/or persuasive appeals.	Content is not comprehensive and/or persuasive. Major points are addressed, but not well supported.	Content is comprehensive and/or persuasive. Major points are addressed, and somewhat supported.	Content is comprehensive and accurate. Major points are stated clearly and are well supported with good details. Content and purpose of the writing are clear.