

## **A Study of the Rhetorical Features and the Argument Structure of EAP Essays by L1 and L2 Students in the UAE**

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### **Introduction**

The topic of this study revolves around writing and rhetoric. Many undergraduates struggle in EAP writing courses, especially beginner writers whose L1 is different from English. There are several reasons for this phenomenon. For native Arabic speakers, a possible reason is that Arabic has an entirely different language system with a different orthography. Also, Arabic is written from right to left, and unlike English, the letters are not derived from a Latin origin. In general, non-native speakers struggle with English writing, whether this is because of grammar, lexis, discourse, language mechanics (spelling, punctuation, capitalisation, and paragraph division), or because the students' mother tongue influences their L2 writing production process. Therefore, this study compared EAP argumentative essay writing among native and non-native writers of English, with a specific focus on the rhetorical appeals and the argument structure, to reveal the factors influencing students' writing. The aim was to know how to improve writing instruction, so students' level can be improved and produce better argumentative essays. Through the current study, the differences were identified and described, along with their pedagogical implications.

### **Literature Review**

The writing skill plays a vital role in L2 development. It is one of the four skills of language development including reading, listening, and speaking. These skills are divided into two categories, productive and receptive language skills (Mundhe, 2015). The productive skills are speaking and writing; whereby the receptive skills are reading and listening (Mundhe, 2015). Argumentative writing is an essential genre of writing, and it is the essence of many high-stakes tests. Therefore, it was selected as the topic of this study. There were two elements targeted in this study: the rhetorical appeals and the argument structure. The first aspect, rhetorical appeals, is typically a critical element in the teaching and learning of writing. The second aspect, the argument structure, is another indicator of the quality of an argumentative essay.

On the one hand, an important type of rhetoric is contrastive rhetoric, which focuses on the effect of learners' first language on their L2 writing. In that respect, Ting (2017) conducted a study on discourse transfer between the Chinese and the English languages under the contrastive rhetoric framework, and the

study quoted many aspects of discourse transfer. The study described important pedagogical implications that should be taken into consideration when teaching composition. Another study was conducted by Zhou (2016) to investigate contrastive rhetoric in writing classes as a pedagogical method. The researcher experimented with two classes, one of which received contrastive rhetoric comparisons instruction, and the other did not. The study concluded that the method selected contributed significantly to students' development and awareness. The study also revealed that students became aware of the differences between writing in their L1 and writing in English.

Moreover, in an attempt to use contrastive rhetoric as an analysis tool to compare authentic British essay writing and Iranian essay writing, Monfared and Safarzadeh (2015) used the genre analysis method to find differences in rhetoric in business letters and to compare British speakers and Iranian non-native English speakers' writing. The researchers also conducted interviews with ten British and Iranian participants. The study revealed several differences in the way Iranians write their business letters as there was more stress on rapport-building strategies. The differences revealed in the study may have arisen from the fact that English produced by L2 learners must have different characteristics, and this is due to the first language impact on culture and style. The conclusion was that contrastive rhetoric is essential to understand the root of the differences and the effect of culture on students' writing.

Another aspect of rhetoric studies is rhetorical appeals. These are described and analysed by Aristotle. However, there were very few studies on rhetorical appeals and their relation to composition in the literature. For example, there is the study of Ting (2018) who is a professor in a Malaysian university. She asked her students to write a script to persuade their professor to let them leave early. In this attempt, the researcher wanted to know the most used rhetorical appeal in students' writing, and whether it would be *Pathos*, *Logos*, *Ethos* or a combination of one, two or three of the types. The findings revealed that students used only one type of appeal more frequently in their writing and that *Pathos* or emotional appeals were the most used strategy to persuade their professor. In the second stage, they used *Logos*, which is the appeal to logic, and they never used *Ethos*, which depends on credibility.

On the other hand, many research studies were conducted on argumentative essays, as they are the most popular type used in high-stakes tests such as the IELTS. A recent study by Ananda, Arsyad, and Dharmayana (2018) examined the rhetorical features of IELTS-type essays and stated that certain elements should be taken into consideration to determine the students' essay quality. These elements included argumentation and the argument structure. The study concluded that these elements were essential to describe the quality of the IELTS essays' organisation. The study also highlighted the importance of the essays' organisation to deliver the intended message. However, a limitation for this study was that it looked at the structure only and neglected the meaning aspect.

In another study, Jo (2017) examined the quality of adolescents' essays as he noticed that most research on essays was conducted on university students. He aimed at analysing essays for adolescents who came from three different cultures; Russia, China, and the USA. Two raters assessed the essays, and the findings revealed that the linguistic elements were the most important elements to increase the essays' quality, while other aspects such the rhetorical questions, examples used and appeals did not contribute to a difference in quality. An important finding of the study was the fact that the researcher was able to identify particular discourse patterns for each culture, which led to reinforcing my assumption about the impact of culture as well as other factors on the essays' writing quality. There was no study found in the literature about non-native speakers' argumentative writing discussing the aspects targeted by the current study, which are the rhetorical appeals and the argument structure among non-native speakers.

The current study is essential to identify and understand the differences between L2 students and their native peers' writing when they produce this type of essay with a specific focus on these two aspects, which are considered essential to persuade the reader with the intended message. The research question of the current study was: Are there differences in the rhetorical appeals and the argument structure found in EAP argumentative essays by L1 (native English speaking) writers and L2 writers (Arabic speakers)?

### The theoretical framework

The main theories/models related to the current study are derived from composition studies, rhetoric, and argumentation theories. The genre theory and the rhetorical theory were vital to understanding the process of writing facilitation in class. In addition, the art of rhetoric with a specific focus on persuasion, as mentioned by Poole (2016), was also utilised in the current study. Therefore, the theoretical framework of the study focused on two main aspects; on the one hand; the genre theory and the Toulmin's model, and on the other hand; the rhetorical theory and Aristotle's appeals. The theoretical framework is illustrated in Figure 1:

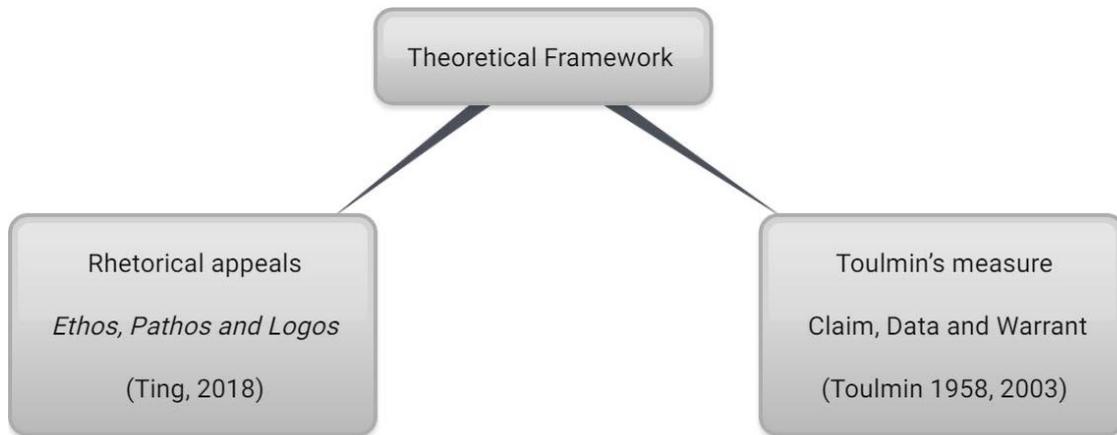


Figure 1. *The theoretical framework of the study.*

Therefore, the study analysed two aspects in the students' essays; the argument structure using the Toulmin measure's categories as described by Connor (1990), and the rhetorical appeals using the framework for rhetorical appeals as described by Ting (2018).

### Method

The main objective of the study was to compare L2 students' essays to their L1 peers'. Therefore, through quantitative analysis, students' essays were analysed to highlight the differences regarding the rhetorical appeals and the argument structure. The study design utilised the quantitative method, which is an appropriate method to address discourse analysis, according to Renkema (2009). The main objective was to assess and evaluate the students' essays according to the Toulmin model and to count the frequency of the appeals occurrences in the scripts based on the framework described by Ting (2018). The site chosen for the current study was a higher education institution. Approval was obtained from the institution to collect data according to its standard ethical procedures of conducting research. Since the study compared students' L2 essays to their L1 native peers' essays, samples of L1 essays were taken from the Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays (LOCNESS), and the L2 students' essays were taken from their actual classwork in writing classes. The sample size was comprised of 48 essays from both corpora. The sampling technique used in the study was purposive sampling. According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003, p. 713), "purposive sampling techniques are primarily used in Qual. studies and may be defined as selecting units based on specific purposes associated with answering a research study's questions." In other words, a purposive sample is a sample that is chosen for the population's specific characteristics. Two raters rated the essays according to the criteria described for each model.

## Results and Discussion

### Analysis of the Argument Structure

The first type of essay analysis was based on the model described by Toulmin (1958, 2003). The three main aspects described in this model were the claim, data, and the warrant. Table 1 shows the criteria used for judging the quality of the different elements described in Toulmin's model adapted from Connor (1990):

TABLE 1  
*Marking Criteria adapted from Connor (1990)*

<b>Claim</b>
1-No specific problem stated and no consistent point of view. May have one sub-claim. No solution offered, or it offered non-feasible, unoriginal, and inconsistent with the claim.
2-Specific explicitly stated problem. Somewhat consistent point of view. Relevant to the task. Has two or more sub-claims that have been developed — solutions offered with some feasibility with major claim.
3-Specific, explicitly stated problem with a consistent point of view. Several well-developed sub-claims, explicitly tied to the major claim. Highly relevant to the task. Solution offered that is feasible, original and consistent with major claim.
<b>Data</b>
1-Minimal use of data. Data of the “everyone knows” type, with little reliance on personal experience or authority. Not directly related to major claim.
2-Some use of data with reliance on personal experience or authority. Some variety in use of data. Data generally related to major claim.
3-Extensive use of specific, well-developed data of a variety of types. Data explicitly connected to major claim.
<b>Warrant</b>
1-Minimal use of warrants. Warrants only minimally reliable and relevant to the case. Warrants may include logical fallacies.
2- Some use of warrants. Though warrants allow the writer to make the bridge between data and claim, some distortion and informal fallacies are evident.
3-Extensive use of warrants. Reliable and trustworthy allowing rater to accept the bridge from data to claim. Slightly relevant. Evidence of some backing.

Table 1 shows that each aspect was rated according to three sub-criteria. The rationale behind this division was to build reliability into the measure. Based on the same marking criteria, two PhD holders with several years of teaching experience rated the essays. The two raters convened to moderate the essays and reached agreement on the given scores. The scores were based on a range from 1-3 for each criterion, three being the highest score and one being the lowest. The three criterion scores were added together to give an overall score between 1-9, with nine being the highest score and one being the lowest score. The scores were meant to judge the quality of the essays' argument structure. However, grammatical errors or other types of errors were not counted in any given scores as this was not the focus of the study. The scores of L2 essays were compared to the scores of L1 essays from the LOCNESS corpus, which were rated in the same way, and the mean was calculated along with the standard deviation. Table 2 shows the scores of L2 students and L1 students based on Toulmin's score:

TABLE 2  
*L2 Students and L1 Students' Scores Based on Toulmin's Measure.*

Criteria	L2 students		L1 students	
	M	SD	M	SD
Claim (1-3)	<u>1.85</u>	0.28	<u>1.77</u>	0.38
Data (1-3)	<u>1.97</u>	0.46	<u>2.18</u>	0.67
Warrant (1-3)	1.90	0.62	2.47	0.77
Toulmin's score (1-9)	<u>5.72</u>	1.05	<u>6.40</u>	1.24

In general, the results show that L1 students' scores of the Toulmin's measure were higher than L2 students' scores. However, a significant finding was that L2 students' scores were higher (1.85) in one category, which is "claim" and lower in the other two categories; Data and warrant. Another finding was that L1 students' scores in data (2.18) were higher than their L2 peers, and they were also significantly higher for warrants (2.47). These results show that the quality of L1 students' argument structure is slightly higher than their L2 peers' except in one category, "claim," where L2 students scored higher.

## Analysis of Rhetorical Appeals

The second aspect of the essays' analysis focused on the use of rhetorical appeals. The rhetorical appeals targeted were; *Ethos*, *Pathos*, and *Logos*. The researcher targeted two types of analysis; 1- counting the frequency of the appeals' appearance in the text, and 2- identifying the types used in students' essays, according to the analysis framework described by Ting (2018). Table 3 illustrates the rhetorical appeals types, their meanings, and their examples:

TABLE 3

*Framework for Analysing Rhetorical Appeals' Meaning Based on Ting's (2018) Study*

Appeal	Definition	Indicators
Pathos	Appeal to emotions	Talking about feelings, needs, values, and desires for the target or themselves (Higgins & Walker, 2012). Confessing, regretting making a plea, promising, praising, and thanking (AlMomani, 2014). Using emotive words and adjectives to manipulate feelings. Mentioning values and either their own or the target's emotional state in order to persuade.
Logos	Appeal to reason	Using argumentation, logic, warrants/justifications, claims, data, and evidence/examples. Questioning and wondering (Higgins & Walker, 2012) Using factual language when mentioning behaviors and actions in order to reason. May use linguistic links such as initially, later, and finally for logical reasoning (Mshvenieradze, 2013).
Ethos	Appeal to credibility and trustworthiness of the speaker or the audience	<u>Positive sense:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appealing to their similarities with their audience.</li> <li>• Showing deference or respect for the rights or the feeling of the target.</li> <li>• Using ingratiation, expertise, and self-criticism (Higgins &amp; Walker, 2012).</li> </ul> <u>Negative sense:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using reserve accusation, denying and negation of the credibility and trustworthiness of the target (AlMomani, 2014)</li> <li>• Using descriptors that highlight positive or negative attributes of the target.</li> </ul>

Forty-eight essays were analysed, and the results are illustrated in the following section. The first focus of the analysis was how frequently appeals were used in the text. The second focus was the type of appeal used. For the first focus of the analysis, the researcher analysed the frequency of appeals used in students' essays and classified the use of appeals into three categories; one, two, or three appeals used in the same essay. The analysis was done through two raters who highlighted *Pathos*, *Logos*, and *Ethos* examples in the essays and counted the frequency of appearance for each appeal type, then conducted a moderation session to agree on the results. Table 4 shows the frequency of rhetorical appeals used by students:

TABLE 4

*The Frequency of Rhetorical Appeals' Used by Students*

	One type of appeal used frequency	Two types of appeals used frequency	Three types of appeals used frequency	Total
L2 students				
Students' essays	19 (79.1%)	4 (16.6%)	1 (4.1%)	24
Appeals produced	19 (63.3%)	8 (26.6%)	3 (10%)	30
L1 students				
Students' essays	16 (66.6%)	6 (25%)	2 (8.3%)	24
Appeals produced	16 (47%)	12 (35.2%)	6 (17.6%)	34

The results show that in general, L2 students produced fewer appeals than their L1 peers in their essays. L2 students scored higher in using one type of appeal in their essays and scored lower in using two or three types of appeal.

The second focus of the analysis was the type of appeal used in students' essays from both groups. Table 5 shows the frequency of each type of rhetorical appeal used by L1 and L2 students:

TABLE 5  
*The Frequency of Rhetorical Appeals Types Used by Students*

L2Students	Used appeals number	Frequency percentage
Pathos	<u>16</u>	53.3%
Logos	13	43.3%
Ethos	1	3.3%
Total	30	100
L1 Students	Used appeals number	Frequency percentage
Pathos	12	35.2%
Logos	<u>20</u>	58.8%
Ethos	<u>2</u>	5.8%
Total	34	100

Table 5 shows that L2 students used *Pathos* (53.3%) more often than *Logos* (43.3%). They used *Ethos* only once (3.3%). The table also shows that L1 students used *Logos* (58.8%) more than *Pathos* (35.2%). The findings reveal that L2 students used more *Pathos* than their L1 peers, while L1 students used *Logos* more than their L2 peers.

For the first aspect of the essays' analysis, which is the argument structure; the findings revealed that L2 students scored less in their argument structure. The main reason for this was students had missing elements in their essays or scored less on the quality of their warrants. This finding concurs with the findings of Ellis (2015), who stated that it was difficult for students to produce warrants. Ellis (2015, p. 207) states: "There is also significant confusion about how to help students learn to identify and to invent warrants." Therefore, it is not only challenging for students to produce successful warrants, but it is also challenging for teachers to provide successful instruction to teach warrants. Moreover, according to Yeh (2016); warrants play a vital role in persuading the audience, and therefore, they represent an essential part of any argument even in other disciplines. This fact helped to justify the slightly lower scores of L2 students.

For the second aspect, which is the use of rhetorical appeals; the findings were classified into two categories. The first category was the type of appeals used more frequently in L2 students' essays in comparison to their L1 peers' and the other category was the number of appeals used in each script. For the first category, the analysis revealed that L2 students used *Pathos* more than any other type of appeals, while L1 students used *Logos* more than any other type of appeals. This finding concurs with Lewis (2003), as L2 students belong to multi-active cultures, and one important characteristic of this culture is to value emotions and feelings more. For the second category, the data analysis revealed that L2 students used one appeal only more frequently in their essays, while L1 students used two appeals more frequently. Using more than one appeal can benefit the argument according to Wachsmuth et al., (2018, p.3753); who stated that "Persuasion is rarely achieved through a loose set of arguments alone. Rather, effective delivery of arguments follows a rhetorical strategy, combining logical reasoning with appeals to ethics and emotion." Therefore, using more than one appeal can benefit the quality of the argument presented. However, in all cases, it is evident that students would be able to increase their essays' persuasiveness through learning how to efficiently use the rhetorical appeals.

## Conclusions and Recommendation

The study's objective was to identify the differences between L1 and L2 students' essays in terms of the argument structure and the rhetorical appeals. The study concluded that there were differences between L1 and L2 students' writings. It was found that L1 students had better argument structure than L2 students with a small difference in the overall scores. It was also found that L2 students scored higher than L1 students in the quality of their claims. However, L1 students scored higher than their L2 peers in two categories; "Data" and Warrants". The study also concluded that L2 students used the appeal *Pathos* more than their L1 peers and that they mostly used one appeal in their essays. The reasons behind these differences in the Toulmin scores and the use of appeals are numerous. For example, it could be the methods used in class for writing instruction, or it could be relevant to the students' culture (being members of multi-active cultures that value emotions and feelings). These factors should be addressed by lecturers and professors to enable students to have better argument quality and effective persuasion in their essays. Therefore, lecturers and professors should draw the students' attention to the fact that there should be more emphasis on *Logos* to persuade the reader according to Aristotle, and that it is important to build a good and a complete argument structure to convey the essays' intended messages. It is also recommended that professional development courses are offered to the teaching staff about rhetoric and using Toulmin-based material so that they focus more on these two aspects in their writing instruction.

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