
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Mapping the Moves: Genre Analysis of Saudi EFL Students' Argumentative Essays

Ghada A. AlGhamdi

Assistant Professor, College of Language Sciences, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Corresponding Author: Ghada A. AlGhamdi, **E-mail:** galghamdi@ksu.edu.sa

ABSTRACT

Argumentative writing poses significant challenges for EFL learners, particularly in contexts with limited exposure to academic English conventions. This study investigates the rhetorical move-step structures in 30 argumentative essays written by Saudi female EFL students, using Hyland's (1990) genre-based model as the analytical framework. The findings reveal that while students consistently incorporated the three main stages of argumentative writing—Thesis, Argument, and Conclusion—there were notable variations in their use of both obligatory and optional moves. For example, the Information move, although optional in Hyland's model, appeared in nearly all essays, suggesting its perceived necessity among learners. Conversely, persuasive strategies such as the Gambit move were underutilized. The study also highlights areas of structural weakness, particularly in the conclusion stage, and suggests pedagogical interventions to enhance students' genre awareness. The results offer practical implications for EFL writing instruction, emphasizing the value of explicit genre-based teaching in improving learners' academic writing proficiency.

KEYWORDS

EFL writing, argumentative essays, genre analysis, schematic structures

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1. Introduction

Research on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learner writing has grown significantly in applied linguistics over the past two decades (Polio, 2003). However, much of this work has focused on formal analysis, particularly error analysis (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005), with limited attention to the communicative potential of student writing. To better understand interlanguage development, EFL research must consider the rhetorical and organizational aspects of writing, which are central to Genre Theory (Hyland, 2019; Tardy, 2020).

Genre analysis extends beyond grammatical form to examine the rhetorical functions of language. As Schoff and Robinson (1991) stated, a writer's purpose is shaped by the broader culture. Thus, genre refers not only to a text type but also to the role of the text in the community in which it is produced (Devitt, 2015). This view is particularly relevant in EFL contexts where learners must engage with unfamiliar academic conventions.

Recent shifts in EFL writing research treat texts as genre exemplars—classes of communicative events with shared social purposes (Norton & Christie, 1999; Flowerdew, 2020). Genre-based pedagogy has been widely adopted in English for Specific Purposes (Bhatia, 2017), Rhetoric and Composition, and New Literacy Studies, and is now considered as essential in teaching academic writing effectively (Hyland, 2021; Paltridge, 2022). Despite its global application, such pedagogical models remain underexplored in Saudi Arabia, where academic writing instruction continues to face challenges (Abdel Latif, Alghizzi, & Alshahrani, 2024; Alharbi, 2021).

Although advanced Saudi EFL learners may demonstrate general English proficiency, many struggle with organizing academic essays and articulating arguments (Alotaibi, 2020; Alasbali, Baharum, & Zin, 2023). These challenges are not limited to grammar or vocabulary, but reflect a lack of awareness of genre conventions (Dudley-Evans, 1995; Alharbi, 2018). Argumentative

writing in particular is an underexplored genre in Saudi academic settings, and little research has examined how students construct arguments or how genre-based instruction could support them (Hakami, 2019; Khadawardi, 2022).

To address this gap, the current study investigates the move-step structure of 30 English-language argumentative essays written by Saudi EFL college students. By applying Hyland's (1990) genre-based model, the study aims to identify rhetorical patterns, evaluate students' use of moves, and propose pedagogical implications for improving argumentative writing instruction in Saudi EFL contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Genre in EFL Writing

The concept of genre has provided a significant and effective framework for research into various aspects of writing. Its pedagogical relevance has made it applicable across multiple educational domains. Martin (1984) defined genre as a "staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture" (p. 25). Swales (1990) characterized genre as a set of communicative events with shared purposes, while Hyland (2003) referred to it as "abstract, socially recognized ways of using language for particular purposes" (p. 18).

Genres are flexible and adapt to the communicative needs of society. They are socially embedded and vary across discourse communities. In such communities, similar linguistic expressions are used to fulfill specific rhetorical purposes. The goal of genre analysis, therefore, is not only to identify structural moves and linguistic features but also to understand how these elements collectively fulfill a communicative aim (Bhatia, 1997). This perspective is especially useful in EFL contexts, where students often struggle with unfamiliar academic conventions (Alharbi, 2021; Abdel Latif et al., 2024).

2.2. Pedagogical Applications of Genre-Based Writing

Genre-based approaches have become increasingly prominent in EFL writing instruction. Two theoretical pillars supporting this pedagogy are schema theory and explicit instruction.

2.2.1. Schema Theory

Originally rooted in reading comprehension, schema theory has been extended to writing instruction. It posits that learners comprehend and produce texts more effectively when they can connect new content to existing knowledge (Carrell, 1983). Formal schema refers to the organizational structure of texts, while content schema involves background knowledge of the topic (Hyland, 1990, 2004). In EFL writing, activating both schema types enables learners to recognize genre conventions and compose more coherent texts.

2.2.2. Explicit Instruction

Hyland (2004, 2007) emphasized the importance of teaching genres through explicit instruction, where students are made aware of textual structures and rhetorical strategies. This contrasts with inductive methods that rely on repeated exposure or teacher corrections. Genre pedagogy promotes a conscious understanding of how texts function, empowering students to analyze and replicate genre-specific features. Hyland (2003) argued that providing learners with a metalanguage and rhetorical models enhances their ability to navigate academic writing successfully. Recent studies confirm that explicit genre instruction improves both motivation and performance among Saudi university students (Abdel Latif et al., 2024; Hakami, 2019).

2.3. The Genre of Argumentative Essays

Argumentative essays are a staple of EFL academic writing, requiring students to present logical reasoning supported by evidence. Their structure can range from a single-point exposition (Martin, 1992) to a more complex treatment involving refutation of opposing views (Jenkins & Pico, 2006). Students are expected to support their positions with coherent and cohesive arguments.

However, these essays often blur with discussion-type tasks, where both sides are presented without necessarily adopting a stance (Martin, 1992). Despite such overlap, argumentative writing remains a distinct genre taught at the transitional stage between secondary and higher education (Moore & Morton, 2005; Wilcox & Jeffery, 2014). It is used to evaluate writing proficiency (Aull, 2017) and development across academic disciplines (Crossley et al., 2014; Dryer, 2013).

There is a clear need for research that integrates attention to both the rhetorical structure and linguistic features of academic writing (Derewianka, 2003; Feez, 1998). As Derewianka observed, meaning-making occurs at the text level—not merely through isolated words or sentences. Students' writing difficulties often arise from unfamiliarity with genre conventions rather than simple lexical or grammatical errors (Sidaway, 2006).

This issue is particularly pronounced in Saudi Arabia, where EFL students are encouraged to write argumentatively but often lack instruction on the schematic structure of the genre (Alasbali et al., 2023; Alotaibi, 2020). As Khadawardi (2022) noted, Saudi learners frequently report challenges in organization, coherence, and argument development. Despite generally being proficient in English, students often lack awareness of how to structure academic arguments effectively (Alharbi, 2018; Hakami, 2019).

The present study investigates the rhetorical move patterns in argumentative essays written by Saudi EFL students. By analyzing a corpus of 30 essays using Hyland's (1990) model, this study aims to identify patterns, assess their consistency with academic conventions, and offer pedagogical insights.

1. What type of move patterns are employed by Saudi EFL students in argumentative essays?
2. What is the frequency of move patterns employed by Saudi EFL students in argumentative essays?
3. How are move patterns in students' essays consistent with Hyland's (1990) model?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The current study is framed within a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate and describe the rhetorical move-step structure in argumentative essays written by Saudi EFL students. Logical positive — we conduct qualitative approach since it identifies textual organization and genre inclusion according to student results. One criteria for selecting Hyland's (1990) for this analysis was because it gives a detailed genre-based framework that consists of three high-level stages for argumentative essays (Thesis, Argument, Conclusion), and each stage is composed of individual rhetorical moves. This model has been widely used in EFL writing research and appears to be especially suitable for analyzing texts produced by non-native speakers due to its clear, schematic representation and pedagogical applicability. This study employs concepts of genre analysis which are supported by the umbrella of applied linguistics. More specifically, it is text-based, focused on the structured, functional use of language in academic settings. This vantage point enables the investigation to illuminate the extent to which students' essay language selections manifest their genre cognizance and control. Using Hyland's model, the study aims to analyze the occurrence, frequency, and consistency of rhetorical moves in the essays. The methodology is congruent with the study's aims as it allows for a systematic identification of structural patterns, while also indicating areas of strength and areas of weakness and provides pedagogical implications for teaching by genre in EFL settings.

3.2. Participants and Context of the Study

The participants included 30 Saudi female students of English as a foreign language (EFL) who studied in King Saud University in the College of Language Sciences. They were prompted to write an argumentative essay in English in response to the statement: *"There is more pressure on men to succeed than there is on women."* The essays were between 500–1000 words long. As part of their course on academic writing, students had six weeks of instruction in argumentative writing. Essentially, the instruction was structured in the following way: Thesis → Arguments → Thesis reassertion → The teaching context was naturalistic; no external intervention in terms of course delivery or assessment practices.

3.3. Data Collection

Participants were instructed to write argumentative essays, resulting in a corpus of 30 essays for this study. This collection of essays was gathered at the end of the instructional unit. This sampling was purposive, focusing on students who had fulfilled the instructional requirements for argumentative writing. Ethics was maintained, and students' names were made anonymous.

3.4. Analytical Framework

The essays were analyzed in terms of their rhetorical structures using Hyland's (1990) genre-based model. This model consists of three phases of argumentative essays (Thesis, Argument, and Conclusion) consisting either obligatory or optional rhetorical moves.

Table 1.

Hyland's model of the genre of argumentative essays

Stage	Move
Thesis Introduces the proposition to be argued.	(Gambit)
	Attention Grabber – controversial statement of dramatic illusion.
	(Information)
	Presents background material for topic contextualization.
	Proposition
	Furnishes a specific statement of position.
	(Evaluation)
	Positive gloss – brief support of the proposition.

Stage	Move
	(Marker) Introduces and /or identifies a list.
Argument Discusses grounds for the thesis. (four move argument sequence can be repeated indefinitely)	Marker Signals the introduction of a claim and relates it to the text. (Restatement) Rephrasing or repetition of the proposition. Claim States reason for acceptance of the proposition. a. strength of perceived shared assumptions, b. generalization based on data or evidence, c. Force of conviction Support States the grounds which underpin the claim. a. assumptions used to make a claim, b. data or references.
Conclusion Synthesized discussion and affirms the validity of the thesis.	(Marker) Signals conclusion boundary Consolidation Presents the significance of the argument stage to the proposition. (Affirmation) Restates proposition. (Close) Widens context or perspective of the proposition.

(Hyland, 1990, p. 69)

Based on Hyland's criteria, each move was operationally defined. For example, the Thesis stage includes Gambit, Information, Proposition, Evaluation and Marker moves. Argument consists of that Claim, Support, Marker, Restatement. The Conclusion has Consolidation, Marker, Affirmation, and Close.

3.6. Validation and Reliability

A peer coding procedure was employed to enhance the validity and reliability of the analysis. A subset of the coded essays was independently reviewed by two researchers with expertise in genre analysis. The inter-coder agreement, measured using Cohen's Kappa, was found to be strong ($\kappa = 0.84$). Discrepancies were discussed and resolved collaboratively, leading to refinements in the coding criteria. Coding inconsistencies were addressed through consensus. Additionally, NVivo was used to systematically manage the corpus and cross-check coding consistency. The triangulation of peer review, software-assisted validation, and manual coding contributed to the overall credibility and reliability of the findings.

4. Results of data analysis

The move pattern used by the students in their argumentative essays is first analyzed using a grid that was designed based on Hyland's model (1990) to analyze the essay's general structure of introduction, body, and conclusion (Appendix A). The frequencies of occurrence of various moves in each stage are then calculated. The findings showed that the majority of the argumentative essays are developed according to the three stages of the model and also have the mandatory moves specified in the model. The findings also showed that some of the optional moves had switched classes. The following sections provide a detailed analysis of the type of move patterns and their frequency as well as their consistency with Hyland's (1990) model in each stage; Thesis, Argument, and Conclusion.

4.1. Move Patterns in the Thesis stage

The Thesis stage introduces the discourse topic and advances the writer's proposition or central statement. Frequently presented in the first paragraph, its possible structure is identified as consisting of four optional moves; the gambit, information, evaluation, marker and one obligatory move; the proposition.

Table 2.*The frequency of moves in the Thesis stage*

Move	Frequency	Percentage
(Gambit)	1	3.33 %
(Information)	28	93.33 %
Proposition	25	83.33
(Evaluation)	3	10 %
(Marker)	2	6.66 %

Information move was the most frequent move in the Thesis stage. It used in 28 essays out of 30 (93.33 %) and seemed to be obligatory across essays, while it is optional in Hyland's model. Its use in the essays makes it appear as almost a universal feature for this type of writing. Students in this sense resort to including background information about the topic such as *Nowadays, more women are working in pursuit of a successful career that helps them fulfill their responsibilities as mothers and wives* (Essay 3). They resort to providing classifications or descriptions such as *A lot of single mothers want to be good examples for their children by having a successful career as well as earning a good salary that helps them pay for their household expenses* (Essay 3). However, it is possible that there is a restricted variety of ways of which this move may be realized, and that future analyses may suggest a rank level of discourse acts (Hyland, 1990).

The proposition move was the second most frequent move occurring in 83.33 % of the essays. In this sense, it is a central move in the thesis stage as well as an indispensable component according to Hyland's model. The students employed this move in their argumentative essays to present a specific statement of position which defined the topic and gave a focus to the entire essay. Some students explicitly stated their proposition as a thesis statement at the end of the introduction such as *Some people claim that men are having an easy life. However, there is no doubt that men are under pressure to be succeed* (Essay 11). Others expressed it so succinctly emerging from an informing move such as *Many people the pressure to succeed affect both genders, but that is most likely not the case as I that is a must for a man to be more pressured* (Essay 7). However, Hyland (1990) highlighted that experienced writers often make their proposition move initially by composing the central statement in the form of a gambit; a case not found in students' essays in this study.

The gambit move was the least frequent move and rarely used in the Thesis stage in the students' essays (3.33 %). It only occurred in one essay, and was presented in the form of a question to grab the reader's attention, for example, *Do women have less pressure than men if they do not succeed?* (Essay 24). This could be due to the fact that gambits require a certain skill and authority to impress rather than aggravate the uncommitted reader (Hyland, 1990). Gambits in EFL writing are explicitly taught and often referred to as a hook to get the reader's attention. Despite the fact that it was an explicitly taught move in EFL writing classes, it was rarely used. However, it is an optional move in Hyland's model.

Similarly, the marker move in the thesis stage was the second least frequent move occurring only twice across essays (6.66 %). It is an optional move, but it occurs more frequently in students' essays and often confined to a restricted class of formulae (Hyland, 1990), however, it did not frequently occur in the students' essays due to their focus on presenting their proposition. The evaluation move occurred only in three essays (10 %) where students provided an evaluation and a positive comment for their proposition. This rare occurrence of the evaluation move is consistent with Hyland's model as it is optional.

4.2. Move Patterns in the Argument stage

The argument stage presents the infrastructure of reasons which characterize the genre (Hyland, 1990). It consists of three possible optional moves; marker, claim and support that are repeated across the essay body in a specific order along with a restatement which is an optional move. The study looked at the occurrences of each move despite its repeated occurrence in the argument stage.

Table 3.*The frequency of moves in the Argument stage*

Move	Frequency	Percentage
Marker	27	90 %
(Restatement)	25	83.3 %
Claim	29	96.66 %
Support	28	93.33 %

Compared to the thesis and later the conclusion stage, the argument stage is revealed to be the highest in terms of frequency results. The marker move was employed by students as shown in about 90 % of the essays. In this sense the marker is used to generate a sequence and relates it to both the steps in the argument and proposition. The transition to a new sequence

may be implicit in the topic change over which the claim is made, but EFL students prefer an overt transition through the use of listing signals like *First, second, also, in addition*. This kind of marker is favored and commonly employed by students in their essays in this study to provide an inventory of items. However, they require interpretive work by the reader and, in this study, by the teacher to discover the relationship between them. Transition signals were frequently used by students in their argumentative essays to indicate the step to another sequence marking contrast, condition, specificity, etc. In this sense, students use adverbial connectives, conjunctions, and comments indicating changes in the discussion such as *however* and *therefore* as shown in the following excerpt,

Some might argue that women are as responsible as men. Therefore, they should strive for a job that fulfills these responsibilities as they pose the same role in society. However, that is not the case. Most women prefer staying at home and looking after their children instead of working in an environment that pressurize them to compete with coworkers and hold more responsibilities. (Essay 3)

According to Hyland (1990), Marker move in the Argument stage is indispensable, and so students in this study have taken it as an obligatory move. This consistent application of marker move is assumed to be a result of the explicit instruction of transitional and listing signals to students in EFL writing classes.

The restatement move is an optional move in argumentative essays according to Hyland (1990). However, it is used frequently by students in 83.3 % of the essays. EFL writing students tend to restate and foreground the proposition to provide a reminder of the subject, for example, *The second reason why men face more pressure than women is* It is noted that EFL students who write longer essays feel the need to remind their reader with their position in the essay. This tactic is taught in EFL writing classes to persuade their readers to their points of view.

The central move in the argument stage is the claim. Students provide a reason to endorse the validity of their proposition. Results showed that the claim move was used by the majority of students occurring in 96.66 % essays. Students used various tactics to present their claims and persuade the reader (Hyland, 1990). Some students presented statements that appeal to the potency of shared presuppositions or expectations about the topic background with their reader, for example, *Furthermore, families expect more from men than from women which can lead to a lot of pressure* (Essay 8). It is obviously expected to understand facts in the same way as the writer accepting the argument as relevant and the interpretation as favorable to her claim. The second tactic of persuasion used by students was the presentation of a generalization based on factual evidence, for example, *Furthermore, men have more jobs options than women do. A man can always be plumber, a blacksmith and even a president, while women have very limited options to choose from* (Essay 15). A final tactic used by students was the declaration of an opinion aiming for maximum effect with minimum regard for opposing views, for example, *It cannot be denied that men feel more responsible financially for their families than women* (Essay 9). The results concluded that students had no issues presenting their claims in an argumentative essay and such claims tactics were consistent with Hyland's (1990) model.

Students' claims were supported in their argumentative essays as they occurred in 93.33 % essays. However, some claims were unsupported. The support move employed by them was consistent with Hyland's model in which it appeared as an essential second part to the claim in a tied pair of moves. One can include few sentences or few paragraphs referring to few evidence to explicitly provide a bolster to the argument. In this sense, the support move is directly relevant to claim since it attempts at unveiling the claim's relevance to the proposition (Hyland, 1990). The connection involves some tacit understandings that were employed by the student's writer's knowledge of the audience. Furthermore, the length and complexity of the support move often reveal students beliefs about what is or ought to be a shared understanding between themselves and their reader. Where there is a shared assumption of common knowledge with the reader, as here, the writer can expect less pushback to a particular claim and leave a lot unsaid, for example, *as all women should be allowed a basic right for employment as men* (Essay 6).

4.3. Move Patterns in the Conclusion stage

The conclusion of an argumentative essay is a fusion of constituents rather than a summary or review (Hyland, 1990). It serves to wrap up the discussion and collectively prove the same point made in the whole essay. There is a possible four move sequence to this stage; marker, consolidation, restatement, and close.

Table 4.

The frequency of moves in the Conclusion stage

Move	Frequency	Percentage
(Marker)	12	40 %
Consolidation	18	60 %
(Affirmation)	18	60 %
(Close)	3	10 %

The only obligatory move in the Conclusion stage is Consolidation, and only 60% of the students have used it which shows that some students (the 40 %) took it as an optional move. It is the most frequent move in the conclusion stage along with the affirmation move (both 60 %). Through the consolidation move, students referred back to the content of the argument to relate its themes with the proposition, for example, *To conclude, the pressure to succeed is the same on men and women, but the society will never admit that. In the end, the pressure will still be put on men* (Essay 12). The results of the frequency of the Consolidation move in students' argumentative essays contradicts what EFL students were taught in EFL writing classes. Students are instructed on how to end their essays and convey a sense of closure and inclusiveness as well as a sense of the lingering possibilities of the topic; its implications. However, 40 % of essays lacked that important part of the essay which shows that some student was weak and unaware of the proper schema characteristics of essays in general and argumentative essays in particular.

While the consolidating move functions retroactively, the close serves the purpose of bringing the prospective focus of the reader (Hyland, 1990). However, this move was rarely used in the students' essays as it occurred only in 10 % of the data which was merely three essays. In this sense, the close move looks forward to unstated aspects of the discussion by widening the context, for example, *The society is changing and will continue to change, and both men and women will undergo the same pressure. As there are a lot of successful men, there are and will also be a lot of successful women* (Essay 13).

The Affirmation move is optional in Hyland's model and it 60% of the students have used it as an obligatory move in the Conclusion stage, but the 40 % took it as an optional move. In this sense, most students restated the proposition and employed it as a concluding move along with consolidation in most cases and instead of it in a few occurrences, for example, *To conclude, although some people think there is more pressure on men to succeed than on women, there is in fact, more pressure on women to succeed and become the breadwinner in the family* (Essay 1).

Almost half the participants in the study employed the marker move in the Conclusion stage in 40 % of the essays. Many of the essay samples included frequent use of marker from a restricted class and used phrases such as *in conclusion*, *to conclude*, and *to sum*. However, the majority managed to establish a sense of closure and close the discussion without resorting to such phrases. Such results are consistent with how the marker move in the conclusion stage is optional.

4.4. Strengths and weaknesses in EFL students' argumentative essays

Because the Move-Step analysis can trace the students' strengths and weaknesses in their argumentative writings, the study also attempted to discover these weaknesses in the students' argumentative essays and then make suggestions for EFL writing instruction and design. The results revealed the weaknesses and strengths of EFL students' writings of argumentative essays in the use of some move-step structures.

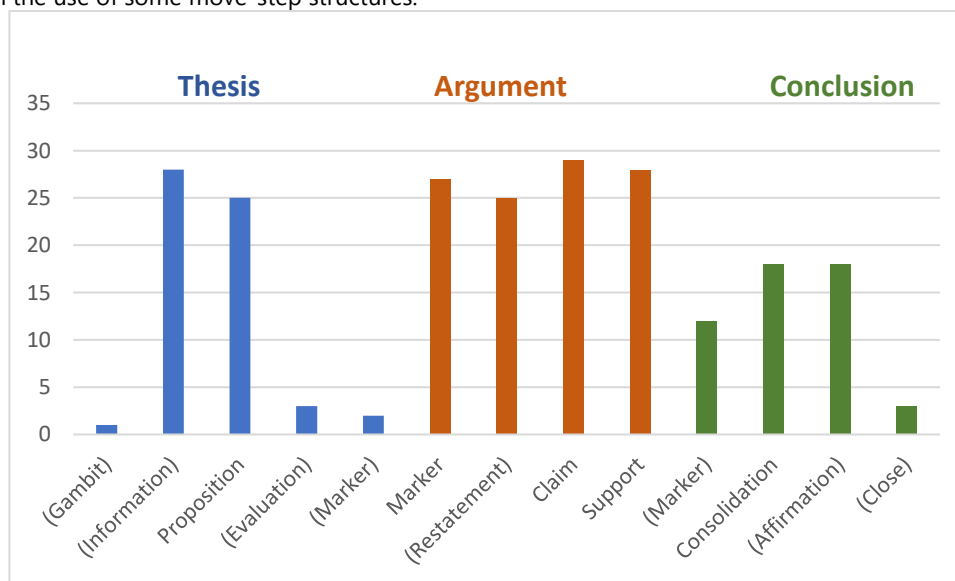


Figure 1. The frequency of Move-step in Thesis, Argument, and Conclusion Stages

Figure 1 shows that students were strong and aware of the importance of the Argument and the Thesis stages in essay writing. Some students had no issues formulating their claims and thesis statements. They were aware of the importance of using evidence to strengthen their arguments. They provided supporting evidence that aligned with their stance and expanded on it with ideas of their own. Some also presented opposing evidence and then refuted it to reinforce their position. While they were clearly aware of the presence and importance of the argument stage, most of their arguments were still weak and ill-formed. Many failed to logically connect their claims to the proposition, and some seemed unconvinced by their own premises. Additionally, students often avoided using the Gambit move, despite having been instructed in their EFL writing classes on how to write effective hooks to attract the reader's attention. This avoidance may be attributed to their EFL proficiency level, as the

Gambit move requires a higher level of rhetorical skill and confidence.

Compared to the Argument stage, students failed to conclude properly despite the explicit instruction of the Conclusion stage in EFL writing classes. Some students failed to close their essays and avoided closing the issue by simply restating their proposition. This stage is significant in argumentative essays because it aims at persuading and convincing the reader that all arguments were relevant to the issue in question and that your proposition was the best position on the issue. The results showed that students were aware of the stages and their relevant moves and their positions in the essay, but failed in understanding its function. Such an understanding can be achieved through the explicit instruction of the schemata of argumentative essays through genre-based approach.

Such findings show the importance of genre-based approaches to raise students' awareness of the proper schema of argumentative essays and provide them with explicit argumentative models of texts. In addition, students should be provided with metalanguage with which to analyze these texts, so they can more efficiently facilitate the practice of genre choice while questioning the authority of such texts. Through this, students will reach a better understanding of the proper structure of argumentative essays and consequently will be able to formulate better argumentative essays with strong arguments. It also can help teachers to give a better assessment of the organization of students' essays than just simple grading of grammatical structure and spelling.

5. Discussion

The study investigated the move-step structure of argumentative essays written in English by Saudi EFL students on a current issue. It also aimed to identify students' weaknesses to inform improvements in EFL writing instruction and course design. By applying genre analysis based on Hyland's (1990) model, the rhetorical patterns used in students' argumentative essays were examined. The occurrence percentages of various moves across the three stages—Thesis, Argument, and Conclusion—were calculated and discussed.

A significant finding of the study is that students demonstrated the ability to recognize and apply the three schematic stages of argumentative writing: Thesis, Argument, and Conclusion. This finding is consistent with previous research suggesting that explicit instruction in genre structures supports EFL learners' ability to control text organization (Derewianka, 1991; Feez, 1998; Abdel Latif et al., 2024). However, the presence of all three stages does not necessarily indicate strong argumentative control. Although students generally included claims and support, many arguments were weakly formed, lacked coherence, or failed to align logically with the central proposition.

A consistent limitation was not using or even completely avoiding moves such as the gambit and close, despite the instructional content. This indicates students' challenges are not in knowing moves, but in implementing them. Such difficulty mirrors wider educational issues, such as limited exposure to genuine argumentative texts, a relative lack of sustained writing practice, and a curriculum prioritizing grammar and vocabulary over rhetorical strategy (Alharbi, 2018; Alotaibi, 2020).

These challenges are not specific to the Saudi context. Similar trends are evident in other EFL areas, especially Southeast Asia. For instance, EFL learners in Indonesia and Thailand have been shown to depend on formulaic language to a large extent and often shun advanced rhetorical devices like counterargument and evaluative clauses, either because they have never engaged with or lack confidence to use them (Setiawan and Mulyadi, 2016; Supatranont, 2012). Although many studies suggest that genre-based writing instruction is effective in enhancing structural awareness in both regions, students still find the application of rhetorical flexibility and critical reasoning challenging (Kongpetch, 2006).

Furthermore, the Conclusion stage proved to be the most challenging for students, despite receiving explicit instruction. In many cases, students either repeated their proposition or skipped the consolidation move altogether. This may stem from a lack of understanding of the conclusion's role in argumentative writing—that it should not simply restate the thesis, but synthesize the preceding arguments to reinforce the main claim. This difficulty highlights the continued need for pedagogical approaches that guide students beyond structural formality, helping them embrace rhetorical purpose and adopt a more audience-aware stance.

The study showed that students consistently underutilized rhetorical moves of the Gambit, Evaluation and Close despite specific instruction to promote and use these cognitive strategies. Numerous causes could be behind this trend. These moves involve a higher order of rhetorical awareness and stylistic confidence—things that many EFL learners are still working toward. Consider the Gambit move (a hook for readers, by using a provocative or engaging opening), which is more creative and audience-aware than grammatically competent but has received less time than the aspect of whether the sentence is grammatically competent in EFL curricula. Likewise, the Close move asks students to generalize their argument to a large-scope or future-oriented issue—something they may find abstract or culturally bizarre. Second, as I argue, formal instruction in Saudi Arabia, while increasingly focused on genre, still often privileges structural clarity and correctness over rhetorical flexibility. Consequently, students tend toward “safe” moves like Proposition and Support while shying away from those that are optional or stylistically risky. Finally, more generally, the cultural and educational norms around students expressing strong personal evaluations, or discussing the degree of speculation embedded in their reasoning, could explain the relatively infrequent use of evaluative or closing strategies. To solve these problems demands not only more practicing in the genre but also more focus on rhetorical purpose and making the reader central to considerations as students listen to how others create persuasive models of

academic writing.

6. Conclusion and implication

The findings suggested the need to incorporate genre-based approaches in EFL writing instructions. Such approaches are based on the impression that explicit instruction makes valuable genres noticeable, and so clarifies the types of writing that will provide access to a greater variety of life choices. However, some might think that providing students with models limits their creativity as a result of a redundant reproduction of texts. One should not overlook the risks here. However, there is nothing fundamentally prescriptive in genre teaching. When EFL teachers provide learners with an explicit rhetorical awareness of texts in addition to a metalanguage for analyzing those texts, they will be able to better support the enactment of genre choice and questioning of authority in and through those texts.

Examples of the genre can be employed as models by making the schema characteristics explicit to learners. These examples could then be analyzed and subjugated section by section to illustrate how an essay is built and how meanings are persuasively transmitted. Many poorly structured texts offer the chance to explore weaknesses and examples of ineffective communication. The framework can be used in EFL writing classroom for genre guided writing practice. Control over structure can facilitate working on stages separately to refine strategies for articulating a proposition or developing an effective conclusion. This can be achieved by slowly increasing the density of how functional units are expressed. In fact, limitations on real content can exist to build expression within a wider narrative.

Furthermore, learners' research abilities can be developed and improved as they become an essential part of formulating an argument stage. Material selection, note taking and summaries become fundamental features of essay writing by focusing on the linking between claim and support moves and displaying how they are related to the proposition. The teacher's evaluation of student's essays can become more constructive. The genre description can offer a model for useful feedback, providing objective criteria for qualitative assessment of each stage in the essay. Hence, new strategies for improvement can be suggested based on explicit understandings of text requirements rather than simply grading.

7. Study Limitations and Future Research

It is important to note that this study has several limitations. First, only 30 argumentative essays were examined among Saudi female EFL students from one institution in this study. Therefore, the results may not be applicable in other EFL contexts, to male learners, to other universities, or to other educational levels. Second, the data were based solely on a textual analysis, conducted following Hyland's (1990) genre-based framework, and did not include interviews or classroom observations that would have provided further insight into the students' rhetorical choices and genre awareness. Third, although peer validation was achieved, the analysis was qualitative and interpretive in nature. Triangulating the findings with quantitative methods may enhance future research.

The scope of this study can be further explored in a few ways in future research. Similar comparative studies that involve male students as well as learners from diverse regions and educational contexts could possibly provide a wider view of genre competence across diverse EFL populations. Moreover, longitudinal studies that monitor students' increasing awareness of genre across time would clarify the long-term implications of genre-based teaching. Weaving together the students' reflections on their writing processes, or teacher's feedback methods, would provide deeper insight into how educators should teach, students perceive, and apply rhetorical moves in real classrooms.

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ORCID iD <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2468-4657>

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Appendix
The Frequency of Move Patterns in all Stages

	Obligatory Moves in BOLD		Thesis			Argument				Conclusion			
	Gambit	Information	Proposition	Evaluation	MarkerT	MarkerA	Restatement	Claim	Support	MarkerC	Consolidation	Affirmation	Close
1	NONE	-	-	NONE	NONE	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	NONE
2	NONE	-	-	NONE	NONE	-	NONE	-	-	-	-	NONE	NONE
3	NONE	-	-	NONE	-	-	-	-	-	-	NONE	-	NONE
4	NONE	-	-	NONE	NONE	-	-	-	-	NONE	NONE	-	NONE
5	NONE	NONE	-	-	NONE	-	-	-	-	NONE	-	-	NONE
6	NONE	-	-	NONE	NONE	-	-	-	-	-	NONE	-	NONE
7	NONE	-	-	NONE	NONE	-	NONE	-	-	NONE	-	-	NONE
8	NONE	-	NONE	NONE	NONE	-	-	-	-	NONE	-	-	NONE
9	NONE	-	-	NONE	NONE	-	-	NONE	-	-	NONE	-	NONE
10	NONE	-	-	NONE	NONE	NONE	-	-	-	-	NONE	-	NONE
11	NONE	-	-	NONE	NONE	-	-	-	-	NONE	NONE	-	NONE
12	NONE	-	NONE	NONE	NONE	-	-	-	-	-	-	NONE	NONE
13	NONE	-	-	NONE	NONE	-	-	-	-	NONE	NONE	NONE	-
14	NONE	-	-	NONE	NONE	-	-	-	-	NONE	-	-	NONE
15	NONE	-	-	-	NONE	-	-	-	-	NONE	-	NONE	NONE
16	NONE	-	-	NONE	NONE	-	-	-	-	-	-	NONE	NONE
17	NONE	NONE	NONE	NONE	NONE	-	-	-	NONE	NONE	-	NONE	NONE
18	NONE	-	-	NONE	NONE	-	-	-	-	NONE	NONE	-	NONE
19	NONE	-	-	NONE	NONE	-	-	-	-	-	NONE	-	-
20	NONE	-	-	NONE	NONE	NONE	-	-	-	-	-	NONE	NONE
21	NONE	-	NONE	NONE	NONE	NONE	NONE	-	-	NONE	-	-	NONE
22	NONE	-	-	NONE	NONE	-	-	-	-	NONE	-	NONE	NONE
23	NONE	-	-	NONE	-	-	-	-	NONE	NONE	-	-	NONE
24	-	-	-	NONE	NONE	-	-	-	-	-	-	NONE	NONE
25	NONE	-	-	NONE	NONE	-	-	-	-	NONE	-	NONE	-
26	NONE	-	-	NONE	NONE	-	NONE	-	-	-	-	NONE	NONE
27	NONE	-	-	NONE	NONE	-	NONE	-	-	NONE	-	NONE	NONE
28	NONE	-	-	NONE	NONE	-	-	-	-	NONE	-	-	NONE
29	NONE		NONE	NONE	NONE	-	-	-	-	NONE	NONE	-	NONE
30	NONE	-	-	NONE	NONE	-	-	-	-	NONE	NONE	-	NONE