أ.رندة عبدالمولى

Guidelines for using the Process Approach to Teachhow to write Compare-Contrast Essay in EAP Context

Abstract

This paper aims to evaluate and explain how the teachers of writing can help EAP students to write a compare-contrast essay throughout the process approach. The principles of this approach can provide EFL students with the actual procedures to produce that type of essay. This approach should be used to teach any group of EFL Libyan students at upper intermediate levelhow to write compare-contrast essay. This is due to that it helpsstudents to better understand how they can produce a good piece of writing, to promote their critical thinking and to reinforce the awareness of their readers.This paper also intends to show the different roles of teachers and students in writingcompare-contrast essays.The main role of the teacher is to help the students to see themselves as writers. However, learning to write depends on understanding the points behind that as well as the surrounding environment that provides readers for whom this writing will be written.

Key words: higher education, teaching writing,process approach, compare- contrast essay, scaffolding writing task.

ملخص البحث:

تهدف هذه الورقة لتوضيح كيف يمكن لأساتذة مادة الكتابة مساعدة طلبة (EAP) لكتابة مقالة المقارنة بإتباع نظرية المراحل (Process Approach). يمكن لمبادئ هذه النظرية تزويد طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL) بخطوات فعلية لكتابة ذلك النوع

أ.رندة عبدالمولى

من المقالات. من الأفضل إتباع هذه النظرية لتعليم الطلبة الليبيين الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (المستوى الثالث) كيفية كتابة مقالة المقارنة. و يرجع هذا لأن بإمكان هذه النظرية مساعدة الطلبة على فهم طرق الكتابة, تشجيع التفكير النقدي للطلبة و تعزيز الاستيعاب لمن يقرأ كتابات هؤلاء الطلبة. توضح هذه الورقة أيضا المهام المختلفة لكل من الأساتذة و الطلبة عند كتابة مقالة المقارنة. الدور الأساسي للأستاذ هو مساعدة الطلبة لكي يعتبروا أنفسهم كتاب. على الرغم من ذلك, يعتمد تعلم الكتابة على فهم هذه الأساسيات و أيضا البيئة التي توفر القراء الذين توجه إليهم هذه الكتابات.

1.Introduction:

Academic writing is a crucial part in higher education (HE) context, but it sometimes regarded as a hidden dimension of the curriculum (Coffin et al, 2003). Since the last three decades, the teaching of academic writing has some contradictory processes (Raimes, 1991). At the beginning of this period, the focus was on the product of writing (what learners write). Later on, the focus was shifted to the process of writing (how to construct a plan for the essay). Regarding the principles of the process approach, Coffin et al., (2003) state that this process focuses on the stages of writing that students may work through and how these students can explain their identity. Not all the teachers move through the steps of this approach. "Critics of process approach have argued that explicit teaching of the forms and conventions of academic writing must accompany any focus on process in order for students to gain control of dominant academic forms" (p, 103).

From my experience as a teacher of writing et the Libyan universities, I have noticed that many Libyan teachers adopt the product approach in the writing courses. Their students are not very satisfied with the results achieved from these courses. It has been also noticed that the students want to learn a process which can help them to produce an accurate piece of writing. The main problem is that many Libyan students face in writing courses is the process that they can follow in order to compare and contrast between two topics and how they can move from one idea to another with attention paid to the cohesion and coherence of their writing.Thus, the focus in this paper has been directed to teaching academic writing following the *process approach* that aims to choose suitable topics that match students' level, present helpful instructions and provide them with useful feedback which helps to improve their writing.

2.Writing in EAP Context:

According to Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991), the main argument in teaching writing in EAP is whether to focus on the process or the product of writing. The typical process-oriented writing classroom involves choosing topic, collecting information, writing the first draft and revising it, further evaluation and writing the final copy. On the other hand, the typical product-oriented writing classroom includes introducing the context (a particular situation which demands particular topics, aims and audience), model materials (supporting materials and reading texts of suitable genre), and explicit genre

analysis (when students analyze the main features of the text, such as the grammatical points, cohesion and coherence),(Badger and White, 2000).

Regarding the writing approaches, Paltridge (2001:140) points out that there are three key approaches: product, process and genre approaches, whose principles can be summarized as:

- The Product approachis concerned with language structure knowledge. Students can develop writing skill when they imitate the input which is provided by the teacher.

- The Process approachcame as a rejection against the product approach. This approachfocuses on the stages that students may follow when they learn academic writing, for example:*planning, collecting ideas, drafting and editing the text.*It assumes that writing is an exercise of linguistic skills and its development is an unconscious process that occurs when teachers simplify the writing tasks.

- The genre approachconcentrates on teaching specific academic genres,for instance:*reports, essays and dissertations*. Moreover, the development of writing depends on language awareness that results from elaboration and imitation of the input(ibid).

During the last decade, another argument has been raised. Coffin et al., (2003) maintain that the main argument of teachers and scholars is whether the essay should continue to be the most important type of writing which students need to master although they may be required

to write other types of writing such as*reports or projects.* Nevertheless, Hewings (2010) argues that although students in HE are asked to write a wide range of texts, essay is still the key type that students should master. Most essays share some important features, for instance, they are short pieces of writing which deal with a single subject providing analysis of opinion or stances from a student or a published writer.

From my experience, some Libyan teachers prefer to follow the product approach when they teach academic writing because it does not consume time. This can be attributed to the allowed time for the writing courses may be short. The students are encouraged to read a text and they try to write a piece of writing which is similar to that given one. Therefore, teaching or following the stages of the process approach can be a crucial part that has to be taken in order to help some Libyan students to support their information about a given title. This step is choosing related reading texts to scaffold the students' knowledge. Although process approach focuses mainly on the stages of writing rather than on textual features, it may consider one of these features, for instance reading to support the students' background knowledge (Coffin et al., 2003). Furthermore, Alexander et al., (2008) affirm that providing students with some resources can be helpful in gaining information about the title that they are going to write about and encouraging them to find other sources increases their self-dependence skill. A further advantage of supporting students with

reading materials is presented by Hewings (2010). He argues that, this stage provides students with evidences to support their claims. In other words, students' opinion and/or judgments will be based on practical foundations.

The following section will highlight how the teacher can start clarifying the stages of teaching compare-contrast essay in the writing classes.

3.Teaching Compare-Contrast Essay

Before starting to teach students compare-contrast essay, it can be helpful explaining the importance of this type of writing to students. Learning to write compare-contrast essay is crucial for students in HE because they are required to evaluate texts and to compare different perspectives. Furthermore, this type of essay analyses data such as statistics and the information which consists of diagrams or charts as well as deals with judgments that carry the writer's opinion and their evaluation of a specific situation (McCarter and Jakes, 2009).In contrast, the higher education system in Libya can help students to improve their writing skills by using two supporting materials.The first material which is adopted from Bailey (2003) is useful to show students the structure of comparative and superlative sentences which in turn help students to talk about statistics. The second are tasks which are adopted from Sanders (2010). These tasks provide students with some examples which help to know the possible ways to connect sentences with each other.

Furthermore, teachers in their writing lesson shouldfollow the gradual steps that help students to write compare-contrast essay. The first step isthe process of academic writing. In this stage, students shouldbe taught what they have to do before writing (pre-writing stage) as well as how to plan the topic. The second step is learning the structure of compare-contrast essay. In this stage, students should be informed that there are two types of structure (block and point by point) and they will know about the useful signposts. Scaffolding writing taskshould be the last step in the first lesson.Students reach this stage through reading a related text to support their knowledge of the topic.The final step is the writing stage,during which thestudents should apply what they have learned in the first lesson.In order to complete the process of academic writing, the teacher's response to the students' writing should be also considered.

3.1implementing the process approachof writing

As was mentioned earlier, by adopting the process approach the students should follow some steps in order to produce a good piece of writing. Before writing, nevertheless, it is important to introduce the steps of academic writing to the students.According to Oshima and Hogue (1999) there are three important steps for academic writing. They are *pre-writing, planning, writing and revising the draft*.Therefore, by using the whiteboard, the teacher should explain those steps to the students. For example, writing the three steps on the board and drawing a spider diagram or just using arrows to clarify

what is going on in each stage. At the first stage*as Figure 1 shows below*students have to think about narrowing the topic and brainstorming some ideas by making lists of words and phrases, the most important thing that students should know at this stage is to collect as many ideas as possible. So that,they do not have to worry about the spelling and grammatical mistakes. Students find this stage useful as it helps in collecting ideas before creating the formal text (Coffin et al., 2003). At theplanning stage,students have to organize and group the related ideas as well as outline the essay. At the third stage (writing and revising the draft), students have to revise the content in order to check the organization, cohesion and coherence and if the student achieved the purpose of the essay. Then, they have to proofread and write the final copy. The figure below shows allof these steps.
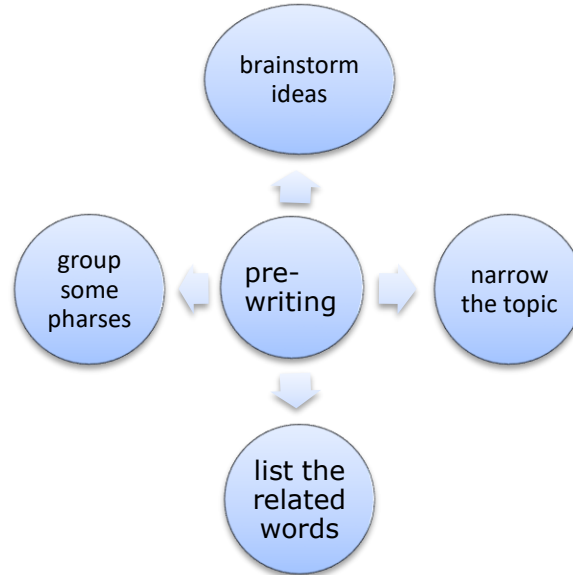
Figure 1: pre-writing stage

After students have learned about the steps of writing academic essays, they need to recognize the structure ofcompare-contrast essay. Therefore, the following section will be dedicated to teach those students the structure of this type of essay.

3.2TheStructure of the Compare-Contrast Essay

According toZemack and Rumisek (2005), to compare and contrast between two or more aspects (or topics) it is important to analyze the similarities and differences between them. The aim of this type of essay is to decide the most important aspects of a subject as well as providing students with deep knowledge about what has been written. At this preliminary stage, it is important to provide students with a planner sheet which helps to organize the content of the essay.

Students should be asked later to fill this sheet (after they read the model texts). It is highly important at this stage for the students to be informed about how they can construct the introduction of their texts.

Moreover, students need to knowthat there are two kinds of structure to write compare-contrast essay. The first kind isthe block style. In this style, students gather the similarities of the two aspects that they want to write about in one paragraph. The same order of presenting the similarities has to be used to present the differences. The second style is point by point. This has to be achieved by discussing one point from the first aspect and compare it with the same point from the second aspect. Another way of emphasizing teaching compare-contrast essay is to present the useful signposts. These signposts are helpful to move from one idea to another.The table below shows these signposts.

Table 1: key signposts for writing compare-contrast essay

Similarities	Differences
Similar to, as well, also, too, both….and, just as, alike.	On the other hand, however, nevertheless, in contrast, while, unlike, whereas, but, yet.

Furthermore, it can be helpful to provide students with some model sentences, for example;

- The English higher education system *and* the Libyan one, design annual training courses for teachers.

- Libyan students receive free higher education, *whereas*English students have to pay different tuition fees.

When students should provide with the most important information about the structure of compare-contrast essay, the common question which they are asking is *how to be critical when they write this type of essay.* Nevertheless, many students may feel that they are not satisfied with their ideas. Consequently,the teacher can use some strategies to help them. For instance,

a) Choosing suitable reading text to scaffold students' knowledge about the topic.

b) Elaborating the key words which they can be carried by the essay question like:*discuss, evaluate, identify.*

c) Encourage students to ask themselves questions about the text such as: *what is the writer's aim, what are the main areas that have been discussed.*

d) Informing students that using their experience to support their stance is useful idea (Paltridge, 2001: 85).

On the other hand, there is a very important point that the teacher has to clarify by this time. S/he needs to inform students that they have to specify their stances. That is to say, their points of view should be clear to the readers. Hyland (2003) argues that although academic writing is viewed as impersonal, more recent research affirms that greater attention has to be paid to the significance of the writers' voices or identities and to their ways of expressing themselves.

Nevertheless, Hewings (2010) claims that it is not acceptable if the students used the personal pronouns. They can present their voices in indirect way by using modal verbs. With regard to the students' level, age and experience,it can be argued that teachers should recommend students to be more tentative when they wish to state their stances. They can use some expressions, for instance:

It may seem that………

It can be concluded………

It would be better if……….

After students have learned almost everything about the process of writing compare-contrast essay and how to implement this process, it is time for them to find a way to learn and to gain some information about the given topic. The subsequent part will offer some instructions about how the students can do that.

3.3 Scaffolding Writing Tasks

Hyland (2003) and Chang and Swales (2006) argue that when teachers design writing tasks, they think of the importance of the linguistic forms which students use to express themselves. Scaffolding means providing students with support which includes conscious understanding of different types of texts when they start to create them. Moreover, teachers have to instruct their students in order to achieve a high level of performance. In other words, it can be helpful for students to read some information about topics that are asked to write about. While reading, teachers should encourage

students to focus on the organization of the reading texts, their purpose as well as their structure. Nevertheless, there are some tasks that help students to scaffold language as language familiarization. This task helps students to increase their independence gradually because it concentrates on raising language awareness without requiring production. This task enables students to understand how language is used in the relevant context and to use this language to create their own texts. Consequently,providing students with some reading texts helps them to create background knowledge about the topic.

3.3.1 Choosing ReadingRelatedText as Suitable Materials to Scaffold

As it was mentioned earlier, supporting students with some reading material can be helpful to form general idea about the topic. Swales and Feak (2000) point out that the reading materials work as a model. These supporting materials raise the students' consciousness and direct them to focus on the structure of the text. Those researchers add that, the selected texts should be authentic to the genres that students will write about. However, Flowerdew and Peacock (2001) criticize the idea of authentic texts because these texts are not authentic for a specific class and authentic does not mean relevant. Moreover, those texts are difficult linguistically.

The last step before writing is providing students with reading materials,whose aim is to enrich their knowledge about the topic. For

example, if the students will compare and contrast between the higher education systems in Libya and UK, it is useful to provide them with reading texts about both systems. First,the teacher should ask students to read the texts silently and then underline the most interesting points which can help to fill the planner sheet which was given earlier. BothKrashen (1993) and Hirvela (2001) argue that it is difficult to acquire writing depending on practicing writing only, but it has to be supported by extensive reading. At the end of lesson, students are advised to practice previously discussed sentences (which were adopted from Sanders, 2010) as homework as well as reading additional sources such as, *magazines and online articles* and to be prepared for writing in the next lecture.

4. Teacher's Role during the Writing Stage

In the writing stage, the teacher has several significant roles.Ferris (2001) argues that L2 writers need more instructions than L1 writers because of the differences between those languages. From the researcher's experience, it can be argued that, the main problem that faces EAP students when they start writing is the overlap between languages. The mother tongue of EAP Libyan students is completely different from the English language and this affects their writing outcome. Those students make major mistakes like writing noun before adjective because this is the situation in the Arabic language or selecting wrong adjectives.

During writing, teacher should work as a resource; walking around and answering students' questions as well as giving them advice whenever they need.The last point that teachers have to think about while students do their writing tasks is some students who finish before their colleagues. There are many choices to deal with issue. For example asking those students (who finished earlier) to compare their texts with each other. This is called (peer feedback), that according to Zemach and Rumisek (2005) has two advantages to the students. First is (for student writer) to get the reader's point of view about his/her colleague's writing. Second is (for student reader) to read more examples of writing. However, the last step of this section is the way that the teacher may follow to respond to the students' work, which will be clarified in the coming section.

5. Teacher's Response to Students' Writing

Correcting students' work demands openness to their points of views (Hamp-Lyons and Zhang, 2001). Teachers have to respond to their students' writing for many reasons. These reasons are: correcting students' errors to identify their weaknesses, monitoring the writing processin order to analyze students' needs and discovering if the teachers have given successful instructions. Another useful way of assessing students' work is through peer feedback (that was discussed earlier). Harmer (1991) statesthat, written texts provide base for peer feedback. This type of assessment allows students to proofread each other's work. The teacher can provide students with error correction

format to be filled whilst they are assessing their classmates' essay.Therefore, it can be argued that peer feedback is important from three perspectives. First, it is important from the academic perspective, when students can learn about different types of mistakes and how to avoid them. Second, from the social perspective when students get to know each other's opinions and way of thinking; therefore, they interact with each other easily. Third, from the psychological perspective when students know about other students' mistakes, theyfeel more comfortable and confident that anyone naturally makes mistakes. However, Kroll (2006) affirms that teachers' feedback is very important for students because they feel that their work has been appreciated and they know their readers' reaction.

In addition, teachers' comments work as stimuli for better writing. It can be useful for teacher and students to agree on how much to correct and in what way. Therefore, teachers have to be aware of their students' aim of the feedback. Some of them want their errors to be corrected and others want comments on their ideas (whether they are logical or not). However, some students do not like the teachers' feedback, but they have to receive that. With this group, oral and individual feedback is effective because the teachers can establish dialogue to explain their errors and how they can be corrected. It will be useful to tell students what we have liked about their work before telling them the errors. The teachers have to be careful when they tell

their comments to the students because this affects students' motivation, writing style and the rate of development. This implies that, suggesting some improvements to the student's writing style using indirect ways, for instance to say "would it be more interesting if you talk about this point, or add another paragraph supporting this idea"(Hyland, 2003: 177).Moreover, teachers have to ask the students how they want them to write their feedback. Some students do not like to receive papers which are covered with red comments. They preferto see ticks instead of long comments because they feel embarrassed. Others thought writing comments and detailed corrections are acceptable as long as a pencil was used. More advanced students may wish to see comments at the bottom of the page (ibid).It is also important to inform students that they have to revise the texts before submission.

Conclusion

It can be concluded from what has been discussed that academic writing is in the centre of teaching in higher education context and the essay writing is the core of any writing course. It is very important for the students to be involved in the writing process in order to practice different types of it.This paper evaluated the most important stages that EAP Libyan students, who are at upper intermediate level, have to follow when they write the compare-contrast essay. It explained how the teacher can help the students to scaffold writing tasks by

presenting related materials to read. Moreover, it shed light on the importance of giving feedback and comments to students.

 References

Alexander, O. Argent, S. and Spencer, J. (2008) *EAP Essential*. Grant Publishing LTD.

Badger, R. and White, G. (2000) A Process Genre Approach to
Teaching Writing. *In ELT Journal.* (54) 2. Oxford: Oxford
University Press. 153-160

Bailey, S. (2003) *Academic Writing*. Nelson Thornes LTD.

Chang, Y. and Swales, J. (2006) Gener Analysis and Academic Texts.
In Hyland, K (ed),*English for Academic Purposes.*
Routledge. 157-162

Coffin, C., Curry, M., Goodman, Sh. And Hewings, A. (2003)
Teaching Academic Writing: a Toolkit for Higher Education.
Routledge: London.

Ferris, D. (2001) Teaching Writing for Academic Purposes.
InFlowerdew, J. and Peacock, M. (ed),*Research Perspectives
on English for Academic Purposes.* Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press. 298-314

Flowerdew, J. and Peacock, M. (2001) *The EAP Curriculum: Issues,
Methods and Challenges. InResearch Perspectives on
English for Academic Purposes.* Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press.

Hamp-Lyons, L. and Zhang, B. (2001) World Englishes: Issues in and from Academic Writing. In Flowerdew, J. and Peacock, M. (ed), *Research Perspectives on English for Academic Purposes.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 101- 116

Harmer, J. (1991) *The Practice of English Language Teaching.* Longman

Hewings, M. (2010) *Materials for University Essay Writing. In Harwood, N. (ed.) Materials in ELT: Theory and Practice.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hirvela, A. (2001) In Cooperating Reading into EAP Writing Course. In Flowerdew, J. and Peacock, M. (ed), *Research Perspectives on English for Academic Purposes.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 330-346

Hyland, K. (2003) *Second Language Writing.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Johns, A. M. and Dudley-Evans, T. (1991) English for Specific Purposes: International in Scope, Specific in Purpose. In *TESOL Quarterly. (*25) 2. 297-314

Krashen, S. (1993) *The Power of Reading: Insights from the Research.* Englewood Co: Libraries Unlimited.

Kroll, J. (2006) Writing for Children and Yong Adults. In Harper, G. (ed), *Teaching Creative Writing.* Continuum. 47-62

McCarter, S. and Jakes, Ph. (2009) *Uncovering EAP: How to Teach Academic Writing and Reading.* Macmillan Education

Oshima, A. and Hogue, A. (1999) *Writing Academic English*. 3rd ed. Longman.

Paltridge, B. (2001) Linguistic Research and EAP Pedagogy. In Flowerdew, J. and Peacock, M. (ed), *Research Perspectives on English for Academic Purposes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 55-70

Raimes, A. (1991) Out of the Woods: Emerging Traditions in the Teaching of Writing. In *TESOL Quarterly*. (25) 3. University of New York Press. 407-430

Sanders, J. (2010) *Academic English and Study Skills: Level 2*. CELE: University of Nottingham.

Swales, J. and Feak, C. (2000) *English in Today's research World: a Writing Guide*. University of Michigan Press.