

Writing the Argumentative Literary Review in EFL/ESL Contexts: A Critical Analysis Perspective

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Abstract

Research studies have indicated that English as a Foreign/Second Language students attending English medium universities have problems in writing the literature review, an important requirement in their term and/or research papers. It has been noted that the main challenges these students face are often little or no knowledge of the task, organization and critical analysis needed. Effective literature reviews based on the western model have shown to include evaluation, clarification, integration, synthesis and organization of the controversies in past and current research on the topic being studied and identification of the gaps in the field and the question(s)/solution(s) which the researcher is attempting to address. Although much has been written on how to write literature reviews in various disciplines, there is little or none with L1 Arabic students in the Lebanese context. This paper outlines some teaching/learning guidelines of the task based on one organizational structure, the argumentative, and a critical analysis perspective to help develop these students' skills in writing the literature review.

Key words: literature review, EFL/ESL, academic writing, Lebanon

Introduction

Research is becoming more of a significant requirement in educational institutions of higher learning. It is not always clear to students, however, on how to go about researching a specific topic and more so the EFL/ESL students who come from a different culture of learning and are studying in English as a second/foreign language. As part of the term/research papers that students are required to do, is the literature review and which students often simply produce a list of summaries of the sources read with very little or no critical analysis or clear organization that builds an argument. It is understood that the literature review is the basis of any review and without a well written one, the rest of the research paper falls short. Although research abounds in many contexts, there is very little or none done with L1 Arabic students especially in the Lebanese context. The purpose, thus, of this paper is to share a few teaching/learning guidelines from the author's experience and others in the field that could help raise EFL/ESL students' awareness and thus proficiency in writing the literature review, an important genre in the academy.

Literature Review

Many instructors complain that although their students access appropriate sources and provide relevant data on the topic being researched, often in writing the literature review instead of a critical review and forming an argument towards the purpose of their study, they receive simple summaries and poor descriptions (Booth, 2012; Fink, 2005 among others). Literature reviews according to the Western model and normally in most disciplines give a critical analysis and evaluation of the relevant studies done previously and currently on the topic showing the controversies and the gap to which the author aims to add further knowledge. As part of the content of a literature review, an organizational structure towards the purpose and/or research questions of the study is necessary but which students often lack to make clear. Structural foci can vary from chronological, cause-effect, narrative, comparison and contrast, thematic, argumentative or a combination of these among others. Unfortunately, this is not the case. According to academic English researchers, EFL/ESL students need to be initiated into these organizational types (Bacha, 2010; Hyland & Shaw, 2016, Mukattash, 2003; Swales, 1990), and thus there is a need for explicit efficient teaching methods so that these students learn how to write effective reviews. This involves the students in understanding, summarizing, evaluating, analyzing, synthesizing various studies on the chosen topic and according to a well organized framework. Akindele (2008) gives a clear guideline as mentioned below in writing the literature review. If students are shown what is expected in a literature review and taught how to meet this expectation, they would be better empowered in dealing with the research assignment.

Review component	Realization
1. Summaries of each work Does the review provides a set of summaries of each work reviewed?	Evaluation
2. Relationship of each work with other research Does it show the relationship of each work with other research?	Evaluation
3. Filling gaps in previous study Does the review shed light on any gaps in previous research?	Evaluation & critical thinking
4. Resolve conflicts among research Does the writer resolve the conflict amongst seemingly contradictory previous research?	Critical thinking
5. Awareness of different views Does the writer show insight and awareness of differing arguments?	Authorial voice/identity
6. Link with the purpose of study Does the writer link the review at all times to the rationale and purpose of work	Authorial voice /identity

Figure 1. Akindele’s (2008) guideline in writing the literature review (p. 4 & 10-11)

As indicated in Figure 1 above, literature reviews are not just simply summaries of the source material. In fact, Lopez (2014) mentioned that examiners determine the success of the research by the effectiveness of the literature review. This effectiveness, researchers have argued, is based on how the author has critically compared and contrasted previous research and argued that there is a gap in the research that leads into the

research questions and/or hypotheses (Hunston,1994; Lopez, 2008; Mallet, 2004; Schmaltz, Jansen, & Wenckowski, 2017; Tiruneh, Verburgh & Elen, 2014). There are many definitions of a literature review, but Mongan-Rallis' (2014, p.1) below covers it adequately.

A literature review is *not* an annotated bibliography in which you summarize briefly each article that you have reviewed. While a summary of the what you have read is contained within the literature review, it goes well beyond merely summarizing professional literature. It focuses on a *specific* topic of interest to you and includes a *critical analysis* of the relationship among different works, and relating this research to your work. It may be written as a stand-alone paper or to provide a theoretical framework and rationale for a research study.

Fink (2005, p.2) further defines a literature review as a 'systematic, explicit, and reproducible method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing the existing body of completed and recorded work produced by researchers, scholars, and practitioners'.

Booth et al. (2012) mention different types of reviews along with their features such as critical, integrative, state of the art, and others depending upon the purpose and function of the review. These are noted in order to show the differences among reviews and that there are more than one type of review of which students should be aware. Some may be a combination. Hart (1998 in Booth et al, 2012) further explains the complexity of the types of literature reviews based on the function of the source documents.

'the selection of available documents . . . on the topic . . . written from a particular standpoint to fulfill certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic and how it is to be investigated, and the effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed.'

'In the context of literature reviews, quality [effectiveness] means 'appropriate breadth and depth, rigor and consistency, clarity and brevity, and effective analysis and synthesis' (Hart, 1998).

Further, the literature review should be systematic according to some plan, such as thematic, argumentative, chronological, or other so that it can be coherently linked to the research question(s) and study that follows (Booth et al. (2012).

Researchers in English for academic purposes (EAP) have further claimed that each discipline in the academy requires a different type of text (genre) and urge teachers to initiate their students in the required text (Hyland & Shaw, 2016; Hunston, 1994; Johns, 2002; Martin, 1994; Swales, 1990 among others). The literature review is one genre that students need to learn. It involves a process, and it is this process that is significant in this study. The literature review is thus a far cry from simply summarizing evidence.

Aim

This study then aims to provide a few guidelines that could help EFL/ESL students write a basic critical

review of a few sources as a step toward more different types of reviews. It focuses on first understanding a few articles on a topic by summarizing them and then evaluating and synthesizing the information showing the controversies and the need to do further research. Although there are many suggested methods and guidelines for writing a literature review, there is really no limit in sharing ideas to help EFL/ESL students who come from different cultures of learning and where often their reviews are only summaries of the work in the field with no input (or voice) from the student (Booth et al., 2012; Fink, 2005; Galvin, 2006; Machi, & McEvoy, 2012).

Thus, it is the aim of this paper to raise students' awareness that their analysis and interpretation of the texts and the controversies have an important place in the literature review (Moodie, 2001; Tiruneh, Verburgh, & Elen, 2014; Schmaltz, Jansen, & Wenckowski, 2017).

Methodology

Using Akindele's (2008) guideline for writing the literature review and along with the argumentative strategies (see details in Bacha, 2010), this will be outlined with a student sample (see Appendices A and B).

The topic selected is a highly controversial one: *Capital Punishment:*

The Debate and Solution

Sometimes, students are included in the choice of theme (and thus their narrowed topics) so they are motivated to work through the exercise. Students could then be taken through the steps together on how to review the debate with the instructor until students could work independently. Research questions, methodology, results and discussion are not part of the present study. In this paper, the steps in writing the literature review on the topic capital punishment will be the focus organized according to the argumentative structure

introduction (including the significance, purpose and/or research question), mentioning counterarguments, refutation (weakening the counterargument), and then the researcher's argument(s) (see Bacha, 2010 for organizational structure). The argumentative organizational structure is selected in this study as it is one of the important ones that students need in their academic university courses and one that L1Arabic students find difficult (Mukattash, 2003). As part of the advanced academic course at the university where the study was carried out, students were taken through the steps by the teacher as the facilitator. Students are given a few guidelines as outlined in Figure 1 along with a written student sample from a previous semester. The literature review in this study can be considered a stand alone one (see Figure 1).

Below are the steps or guidelines given again that this paper covers and the work related to each – Sample review highlighting these are given in Appendix A and Appendix B. The length of the literature review is not representative; length depends upon the assignment and the required length of the work in each discipline.

1. Summaries of each work	Evaluation
2. Relationship of each work with other research	Evaluation
Does it show the relationship of each work with other research?	
3. Filling gaps in previous study	Evaluation &
Does the review shed light on any gaps in previous research?	Critical thinking
4. Resolve conflicts among research	Critical thinking
Does the writer resolve the conflict amongst seemingly contradictory previous research?	
5. Awareness of different views	Authorial
Does the writer show insight and awareness of differing arguments?	voice/identity
6. Link with the purpose of study [Plus research question(s)]	Authorial <u>voice</u>
Does the writer link the review at all times to the rationale and	<u>/identity</u>
<u>purpose of the work</u>	

Step 1 Summaries of each work - Evaluation

Students are asked to search for approximately six to eight references on the topic of Capital Punishment – half of the articles that argue for capital punishment and the other half of the articles against and to summarize each one. In this way, students could see the relationship of each article to the others and read the evidence each author provides. Logical Fallacies are also discussed and students critically analyze the texts and identify these. Samples of six summaries of the articles are given in Appendix A. It is noted that the main arguments of the author and the counterarguments refuted are highlighted. Furthermore, in summarizing, there is use of reporting verbs such as ‘claims’ ‘argues’ ‘suggest’ to introduce arguments. Implications are also drawn in a few summaries to show inference and analysis, part of critical thinking.

The following steps are integrated in the review (see Appendix B)

Step 2 Relationship of each work with other research – Evaluation

Researchers with similar views were brought together and their views objectively provided

Step 3 Filling gaps in previous studies: Evaluation and Critical Thinking

Questions were asked in the review as to whether capital punishment is justified

Steps 4 Resolve Conflicts among research - Critical thinking

Questions were asked in the review and counter-arguments given

Step 5 Awareness of different views –Authorial voice/identity

Arguments refuted and counterarguments given

Opinions (based on evidence) are indicated with justification

Step 6 Link with the purpose of the study - Authorial voice/identity

Governmental solutions should be found which links to the purpose of the

research of postulating way(s) to better deal with those who commit capital crimes in society. (This step concludes by recommending any solution(s) and/or research questions that would lead into the rest of the research paper.)

Results and Discussion

The argumentative literature review in Appendix B indicates how the summaries help in first understanding and evaluating the arguments of the authors. It also clearly indicates the arguments and counterarguments with citations and shows the teacher's comments throughout the review indicated in the right hand margin. Further, the author uses a critical voice, the researcher's perspective which makes it very interesting to read. Although slightly indicated, since this is a literature review that stands alone, it is not necessary to focus a lot on the gap in the research nor to link it to research questions which is not within the scope of the present paper. However, based on the literature review here teachers could use it to scaffold what type of research questions and purpose or solution(s) would be appropriate.

The present study confirms previous research as discussed above that EFL/ESL students do need help in required writing genres in the disciplines; in this case the literature review (Bacha, 2010; Hyland & Shaw, 2016; Swales, 1990 among others) and although this study is limited as no diagnostic first literature review was provided for comparison nor an experimental and control group designed, the sample writing here, indicative of those written by the students in the course, does show important guidelines that should be considered and tried. It is left for teachers to experiment and share their results.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to provide a guideline in teaching EFL/ESL students to write a literature review as one stand and as Phase I in the writing up of a research paper. It is hoped that teachers and students can make some use of this approach in their EFL/ESL contexts. Further research needs to be carried out in extending the method into writing up research questions, methodology, results and discussion. The teaching/learning of EFL/ESL students is indeed a challenge and specifically in academic settings where the future of students begin.

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Appendix A

Step 1: Sample Summaries of Articles Selected

Topic: Capital Punishment: The Debate and Solutions

Step 1 Summaries Main ideas highlighted by the student

Student's summaries of the 6 articles

1. Death penalty by Gloria Jeans (against capital punishment)

Jeans, G.(2016, October 21). *The death penalty*. [http://studydemic.com/death-penalty-argumentative-essay- sample/](http://studydemic.com/death-penalty-argumentative-essay-sample/)

Retrieved July 3, 2017

In the article “Death penalty “ by the author Gloria Jeans, the author provide valid reasons which support her view on capital punishment that it is not beneficial. The first argument the author has is that death penalty doesn't prevent more killings as many people claim. The author states that in countries where capital punishment is not imposed murder rates are lower than in the United States where capital punishment is acted upon. It's because when a person is about to commit a crime, the thought of capital punishment doesn't even come to mind. The second argument the author has is that many innocent people are convicted and killed in the process. This act is a crime itself. Another idea people who are against capital punishment have is that it isn't fair to kill mentally ill people who commit crimes without being fully aware of their actions. When we murder a murderer, we will be doing the same mistake he did which is taking a soul. Who are we to do it? And who are we to judge that the ways in which we kill them aren't painful? The only person who can judge how effective the way of killing is the convicted man himself

2. Argumentative Essay Against Capital Punishment (against)

Anonymous (2012, August 12). *Argumentative Essay against capital punishment*. Retrieved from <http://capital-punishment-essay.blogspot.com/2012/08/argumentative-essay-against-capital.html>

Retrieved July 3, 2017

In the article, the author argues that even though many people are with capital punishment, some people aren't. The author is against capital punishment and provide examples which support their claim. Anti-capital punishment people argue that violence will never be a proper way to deter violence. In another words, we can't punish a murderer by committing the same crime he did which is murder. Another argument anti capital

punishment people have is that no scientific evidence show that the death penalty prevents crime as many

people claim. The reason behind this is because the crimes which people nowadays commit are driven by anger and passion motives , this implies that the person who is angry can't think rationally about the consequences which might follow. The third argument the author provides is that many convicted killers might turn out to be innocent. Many people who are convicted of murder don't afford the money to hire a competent lawyer to prove their innocence . Killing an innocent man therefore is a crime itself.

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3. We know that, together, we can end the death penalty everywhere (Amnesty International) Against

We know that, together, we can end the death penalty everywhere. (n.d) Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/death-penalty/?&gclid=CImJpP7d7dQCFW4R0wodQ8MCRw> July

3,2017

The author argues that capital punishment is inhumane and degrading regardless of who is accused. Whether the accused man was guilty or innocent, capital punishment must be abolished for many reasons. The first reason is that capital punishment is irreversible, and might be done on innocent people. For example Cameron Willingham was executed in 2004 for setting a fire that killed his three daughters. After his execution, and after further investigation it was g found that Willingham did not set the fire which killed his daughter. Another reason is because no scientific data shows that capital punishment deters crimes. 3rd, There is no "humane" way to kill. The 2006 execution of Angel Nieves Diaz, by a so-called 'humane' lethal injection, took 34 minutes and required two doses.

Retrieved from *HotEssays.blogspot.com (with)*

4. Anonymous (n.d). *Argumentative Essay on Capital Punishment*. Retrieved from *HotEssays.blogspot.com*

Retrieved July 3, 2017

In the article, the author is with capital punishments and mentions the reasons behind his opinion. The author argues that although some people state that it is unethical to kill a person, and that everybody should have a chance to correct their mistakes, capital punishment provides feeling of comfort to the families. By killing the murderer, the families of the victims will no longer feel the need to punish the murderer and bring back justice. It is also not fair to keep the families of the victims trapped in sadness while the murderer is still alive and breathing. The author argues that killing murderers would be less financially demanding for the government than imprisoning them for life. The third reason the author mentions is that it is a deterrent to crimes. When people know about the consequences which might follow the murder, this might prevent them from committing it. The author believes that capital punishment is a very effective way to ensure peace for the society.

5. Capital punishment and public safety (with)

Taylor, A.(2013, May 16). Capital punishment and public safety. Retrieved from <https://ethikapolitika.org/2013/05/16/capital-punishment-and-public-safety/> Retrieved July 3, 2017

In the article “capital punishment and public safety” written by Ethika Politika , the author mentions reasons why capital punishment might be beneficial for humanity. The author states that whether to impose capital punishment is not in the control of the judges but of the law authorities which would decide whether it’s proper to execute murderers . The author mentions the example of the man who did some research about whether capital punishment is imposed in the United State before killing his ex-girlfriend. This implies that in some cases imposing the death penalty would stop crimes. The author then mentions that in countries where there is no capital punishment, rapers would rather kill their victims after raping them. This implies that abolishing capital punishment has many consequences on the society which would put public safety in jeopardy.

6. The impact of the death penalty and executions on state level murder rates (with)

Gius, M. (2016). The impact of the death penalty and executions on state-level murder rates: 1980-2011. *Applied Economics Letters*, 23(3), 199-201. doi:10.1080/13504851.2015.1064074

Retrieved July 3, 2017

The author states that when it comes to the death penalty, numerous studies were made to come up with a conclusion about the relationship between capital punishment and murder rates. While some studies have found that capital punishment deters crimes, other studies have found no connection between the two. In order to come up with valid conclusion, a new study was conducted . This present study uses recent and large data in addition to effective techniques. Results of the study suggest that states with death penalty have 28% lower murder rates than states with no death penalty. We should take into account also that the death penalty in the Unites States is rarely used.

Appendix B Sample Literature Review

There is an execution somewhere around the world every 4 hours (Retrieved). According to Amnesty. At least

1,032 people were executed last year. In 2016, many people were executed after unfair trials, some were even below 18. Isn't this an important issue to tackle? Over the last decade, the number of murders has increased dramatically and whether to impose the death penalty has caused controversies around the world. In order to solve this problem serious actions should be done and beneficial solutions should be worked on. This literature review is going to view arguments with and against capital punishment with the evidence the authors provide. Should capital punishment be abolished? And to what extent does it affect murder rates?

When it comes to capital punishment, people differ in their opinions on whether it should be imposed or not. Capital punishment can sometimes act as a deterrent to crimes and as a source of comfort to the families of the victims. In the article the anonymous author has written, he is with capital punishments and mentions the reasons which support his opinion. The author argues that although some people state that it is unethical to kill a person, and that everybody should have a chance to correct their mistakes, capital punishment provides feeling of comfort to the families. Taylor (2013); Anonymous & Guis (2016) agree that imposing capital punishment prevents more crimes from happening. A study was conducted to show the link between capital punishment and murder rates. Results of the study suggest that states with death penalty have 28% lower murder rates than states with no death penalty (Mark Guis, 2016). The anonymous author believes that it is a deterrent to crimes when murderers are aware of the consequences which might follow. He shows an example on how capital punishment might prevent crimes. There was a man in the United States who did some research to see whether capital punishment is imposed before killing his ex-girlfriend (Anonymous, n.d). Even if abolishing capital punishment comes with life sentences for killers, it is not guaranteed that judges would honour this. Therefore, the killer might be free again and kill more people. This happened with the killer Kenneth McDuff who got out of jail after killing two young boys, and then killed more women after his release (Anonymous, n.d). He also claims that capital punishment is less financially demanding for the government than life sentence.

-capital punishment people argue that the death penalty doesn't deter crimes. In the article "Death penalty" by Gloria Jeans, the author provides valid reasons which support her view on capital punishment. Gloria (2016) argues that capital punishment doesn't prevent more killing as many people claim since in countries where capital punishment is not imposed, murder rates are lower than the US where capital punishment is legalized. Anonymous (2012) protests that no scientific evidence shows that capital punishment lowers murder rates. The

author argues that this is because people who commit crimes don't think about the consequences before doing it. (Amnesty International, 2016; Gloria, 2016) assert that capital punishment is inhumane and degrading regardless of who is accused. "There is no "humane" way to kill a person.. The 2006 execution of Angel Nieves Diaz, by a so-called 'humane' lethal injection, took 34 minutes and required two doses" (Amnesty International). Amnesty International (2016); Anonymous (2012) & Jeans (2016) argue that innocent and mentally ill people might be accused and executed, and killing an innocent man is a crime itself. For example Cameron Willingham was a man who got wrongly accused of killing his daughters in a fire. After his execution, further investigation showed that Willingham wasn't the cause of the fire (Amnesty International).

An incident like this is pure tragedy and can't be avoided easily.

The controversy of whether death penalty should be abolished or imposed might continue till the end of time. Even though capital punishment might give comfort to the victims' families and deter crimes. It is for sure that killing another person as a punishment for the murder he committed is unethical, keeping in mind that the accused person might be innocent as author Jeans states. Therefore, The government should find other ways to restore safety to the society. The death penalty will always be an inhumane act no matter who is accused (Amnesty International, 2016). The arguments anti-capital punishment people provide are more convincing since they take into consideration that the accused person might be innocent or mentally ill. Until governments find a solution which would deter crimes completely, governments should settle with life sentences to keep criminals off the streets.

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The student's work has been kept as it was written.

(Permission was obtained from the student attending an advanced Academic English language class, in an English medium University in Lebanon, to include the sample literature review in this study)

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