THE MOST INFLUENTIAL FACTOR AFFECTING THE ATTITUDES OF ESL LEARNERS IN LEARNING PERSUASIVE WRITING

Jeya Sarkunan Jayathilagaratnam
Faculty of Arts and Social Science, University Tunku Abdul Rahman(UTAR),
E-Mail: jeyasarkunan@utar.edu.my

Seow Yi Xuan
Faculty of Arts and Social Science, University Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR),
E-Mail: adamseow1212@1utar.my

ABSTRACT

This research investigates how important persuasive writing is to ESL instruction and how it affects students' academic and career paths. The goal of the study is to identify the variables that affect ESL students' attitudes towards acquiring persuasive writing abilities, with an emphasis on improving curriculum design and teaching methodologies. Using a mixed-methods approach, face-to-face interviews are used to acquire qualitative insights for in-depth analysis, while digital surveys are used to collect quantitative data for wider accessibility. The data is interpreted using statistical analysis and thematic analysis, including 120 participants from Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR). By addressing issues and promoting a supportive, student-centered learning environment, the research helps to improve ESL instruction.

Keywords: Persuasive-writing, Writing-abilities, ESL learners, curriculum, teaching-methodologies
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1.   Introduction

The foundation for successful academic performance and efficient communication in the ever-changing field of English as a Second Language (ESL) education is the acquisition of strong writing abilities. Persuasive writing holds a special place among the many different types of writing, requiring language skills and the development of critical thinking and expressive ability. According to Aziz et al. (2023), proficiency in academic writing, including persuasive writing, is vital for learners since it will be essential upon entering universities and pursuing work in the real world. Many variables influence how ESL learners view the learning process as some of them struggle with the subtleties of persuasive writing while others find pleasure and satisfaction in it.

To better understand how ESL learners' attitudes are affected as they work to develop their persuasive writing abilities, the study will investigate a variety of factors. Given the complexity of this educational endeavour, it aims to pinpoint and carefully examine the most important component influencing ESL learners' attitudes in the context of persuasive writing. By revealing these factors, this study hopes to help academics, educators, and curriculum makers gain a deeper grasp of the dynamics at work.

Since attitudes have a direct impact on the efficacy of ESL instruction, it is imperative to comprehend the pivotal role they play in the learning process. Learners' emotional, cognitive, and behavioural reactions to their educational experiences are shaped by their attitudes, which in turn influence their motivation, engagement, and success in general. Deciphering the relationship between these attitudes and the development of persuasive writing abilities and the experience of learning reveals the socio-cultural, educational, and personal elements that go into the intricate fabric of ESL instruction in addition to providing light on the cognitive processes at work.

The ultimate objective of the study is to offer practical insights that can guide the improvement of instructional tactics, curriculum design, and pedagogical approaches. By identifying the most important aspect influencing ESL students when it comes to persuasive writing, we open the door to a more customised and successful learning environment that promotes academic success and language growth. This also indicates a sign of great autonomy development in ESL learners which also shows that learners have strong abilities in presenting their opinions, ideas, and thoughts (Januin & Osman, 2021).

Nowadays, the domain of persuasive writing is an issue for both ESL learners and teachers. Aziz and Ahmad (2017) stated that it is not unexpected that Malaysian students choose to write descriptive and narrative essays—generic genres with which they are more comfortable—instead of persuasive essays in the annual Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) test. Due to a variety of linguistic and cultural variables, including the subtleties of persuasive language, restricted vocabulary, cultural differences, and many more, ESL learners frequently struggle to grasp the craft of persuasive writing. Not only do ESL learners face challenges in learning persuasive writing, but ESL teachers also find difficulties in teaching the learners and enabling them to master the skill and achieve academic success. Many teachers feel unqualified and unprepared to teach writing and writing instruction due to the assessment-driven curricula thus they restrict their teaching to stories or documents (Barone & Barone, 2018).

Persuasive writing abilities play a critical part in ESL instruction, but there is still a significant information gap regarding the aspects that have the greatest impact on ESL learners' attitudes towards learning how to write persuasively. The body of research on ESL education provides insights into the more general parts of the subject, but more focused research on the factors influencing attitudes towards persuasive writing is necessary. By exploring the complex network of variables, this study attempts to close this gap by identifying the key elements that have a major impact on ESL learners' attitudes towards and engagement with persuasive writing.
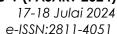
A detailed understanding of the variables influencing attitudes is crucial as educators and other stakeholders work to improve the calibre of ESL training. In addition to trying to pinpoint these variables, the study aims to shed light on how they may affect the viewpoints of ESL learners in learning persuasive writing. Thus, the teaching methods for teaching persuasive writing can be improved through the study, leading to the establishment of a more supportive and engaging atmosphere in English as a Second Language (ESL) learning. As Aziz and Said (2020) mentioned, learners are frequently spoon-fed the knowledge they need to pass their exams because writing training in Malaysia is focused on the exam and the instructor. By filling this vacuum in the literature, the study hopes to offer insightful information that will improve and enliven the field of ESL instruction, leading to the development of more efficient and learner-centred methods for teaching persuasive writing which benefits and assists ESL teachers and educators.

1.1 Research Objectives & Research Questions
1.1.1 Research objectives
The goals of the study "The most influential factor affecting the attitudes of ESL learners toward learning persuasive writing" are to:

1. Identify the attitudes of ESL learners in learning persuasive writing through surveys and interviews.

2. Explore and understand how the underlying factors mentioned by ESL learners have the greatest effect on their attitudes toward learning persuasive writing.

1.1.2 Research questions

The subsequent research questions that will be addressed in the study are:

1. What are the attitudes of ESL learners toward learning persuasive writing?

2. How do these underlying factors have the most influence on the attitudes of ESL learners in learning persuasive writing?

2. Methodology

To fully comprehend the study questions, a mixed-method approach will be used in the study. The mixed-method approach, which is a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods will be used to analyse and gather the qualitative and quantitative data necessary in the study.

Making a digital survey questionnaire is the study's quantitative approach. The reason for using a digital survey questionnaire to gather the quantitative data is due to its anonymous reaction capabilities. When answering the survey, participants can feel more at ease being open and truthful, especially if they can do it anonymously. More precise and trustworthy data may result from this. Secondly, a digital survey questionnaire has a better reach and accessibility. The researcher can reach a potentially bigger and geographically diverse pool of participants because the survey is accessible from any location with an internet connection. As most of the participants have a packed schedule, they can access the survey more easily.

Conversely, the study's qualitative methodology involves conducting physical interviews. The reason for using physical interviews to obtain qualitative data is because of their ability to gather rich qualitative information. The interviews enable a more thorough examination of participants' answers. Richer qualitative data can be obtained by the researcher by following up with queries, requesting clarification, and probing for more specific information. Next, choosing physical interviews is an explanation of reactions that can be carried out. The interviews allow the researcher to ask participants directly for clarification on any ambiguous or unclear comments they may have given, which helps to minimise the possibility of misinterpretation.

To analyse the data gathered by the digital survey questionnaires, ANOVA is chosen as the statistical technique for examination. The reason for choosing ANOVA to interpret the quantitative data is because it has high levels of flexibility. Because of its adaptability, ANOVA can be used in a variety of experimental designs, including more complicated ones as well as one-way and two-way ANOVAs for one and two independent variables, respectively. Apart from that, ANOVA can recognise correspondence in the data. ANOVA may evaluate how various independent variables interact with one another. Knowing if the impact of one variable depends on the degree of another is made easier with the help of this.

Thematic analysis is the statistical method selected to analyse the qualitative information obtained from the physical interviews. The reason for using thematic analysis to examine qualitative information as it provides a comprehensive comprehension of the information. A thorough grasp of participants' experiences, viewpoints, and meanings associated with particular events can be obtained by the researcher through thematic analysis, which makes it easier to explore the data in detail. Furthermore, thematic analysis is a citizen-centered analysis technique. Thematic analysis centres on

the voices and viewpoints of participants, making it a participant-centric process. This method respects people's subjective experiences and lets their narratives come through in the statistics.

2.1 Sample

The participants involved in the study are students enrolling at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) Kampar campus. The participants involved are aged 18 – 22 years old. A total of 120 participants will be involved in the study and these participants are divided into group A and group B.
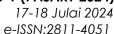
There are a total of 100 participants in group A who are undergoing the quantitative method. Regardless of their gender, English language proficiency levels, enrollment course, ethnicity and religion, these participants receive a survey questionnaire that requires them to answer. Utar students are chosen as the English language proficiency levels of each student in the university are different and there are many students from different countries and backgrounds which might also affect the findings of the study. If the participants are taken from other universities or schools, the study might be delayed as it is time-consuming to conduct research in distant places.

Apart from that, a total of 20 participants are allocated into group B and they are undergoing the interview session with the interviewer. These participants, whose gender, English language proficiency, enrollment course, ethnicity, and religion are all taken into consideration, are interviewed by the interviewer in answering and give out in-depth answers required for the study. Same as the participants in group A, Utar students are selected because there are a variety of students from various nations and backgrounds at the university, and this may have an impact on the study's conclusions. Additionally, each student's level of English language ability varies. Conducting the interview session with Utar students saves time hence ensuring the study can be completed within the time limit.Reka bentuk kajian pula ialah analisis kandungan. Analisis kandungan bertujuan menganalisis dokumen-dokumen dengan prosedur yang sistematik bagi menjelaskan kandungan sesebuah komunikasi. Fokus utamanya ialah mengukur kekerapan dan kepelbagaian mesej untuk mengesahkan hipotesis (Merriam, 2009). Dokumen-dokumen yang dianalisis melibatkan artikel, buku, laporan dan prosiding bagi mencapai objektif kajian yang telah ditetapkan iaitu mengkaji cabaran dan strategi untuk memperkasakan peranan Guru Pendidikan Islam di kawasan pedalaman.

2.2 Data Collection Procedure

Both the quantitative method and qualitative method will commence at the same time. Both methods are estimated to be completed within 3 – 4 months. The quantitative method used in the study is creating a digital survey questionnaire. A link will be created to ensure the participants can access the survey quickly and easily. The survey will be given randomly to 100 participants in group A. The use of the survey is to gather their perceptions about learning persuasive writing. The link to the survey will be posted on various online platforms such as Instagram, Hi-Hive and Xiaohongshu to reach out to a large group of participants. The survey is incorporated with open-ended questions and Likert scale elements. The participants who click on the survey link will answer the questions using their technological gadgets such as handphones, tablets and laptops. Later, they will submit the survey online. The survey will be gathered in the same online platform and their responses will be categorized.

On the other hand, the qualitative method used in the study is physical interviews. The interviews are conducted one-on-one with 20 participants in a physical space. The implementation of the

interviews is to examine the experiences of ESL learners in acquiring persuasive writing as well as to obtain in-depth reports of the underlying factors that influence them the most in their learning process and why are these the factors which influence them the most. The participants will be asked whether they want to join the interview or not. If they agree to participate in the interview, the researcher will discuss with them the interview schedule. Each of them will be scheduled with an interview on a certain date and time hence avoiding the collision with their timetable. The researcher will meet the interviewees in a specific physical space to conduct the interview. The researcher will also seek approval from the interviewees to record their conversations for future reference. Then, the researcher will hint the interviewee to start the interview by introducing themselves. The researcher will continue by asking the prepared questions and the interviewee will answer each question. The researcher will write down all of the answers given by the interviewee until the interview has ended. The recording will be collected and played several times in comparison to the answers written down to prevent any ambiguity or misinterpretation of their answers. The answers will be gathered at the same spot and undergo categorisation.

2.3 Data Analysis

In terms of the analysis of the quantitative method, the survey responses are evaluated and descriptive statistics are applied. ANOVA will be used to calculate the percentage and ratio of the participants who show positive attitudes and those who respond negatively towards learning persuasive writing. The data is also analysed through the use of ANOVA to find noteworthy variations in the background differences between ESL learners and their attitudes toward learning to write persuasively. Statistical charts and diagrams will be produced which demonstrate the relationship between the different variables in the participants with their learning attitudes. Last but not least, explanations of the percentages and ratios of each table will be elaborated in detail to ensure the readers will comprehend the data better.

To analyse the qualitative data obtained from the interview, the thematic analysis technique is employed to detect recurrent themes within the interview transcripts hence seeking out the variables and their connections with the attitudes of ESL learners in persuasive writing acquisition. Thematic analysis will be implemented to showcase the patterns of the answers and responses of the interviewees with the linkage to their previous learning experiences and their anticipation of the learning process. Tables of the qualitative data will be analysed in the study for readers to understand the data better. Detailed descriptions and analyses of the answers given by the interviewees will be discussed in the study.

3.   FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

In this chapter, important conclusions will be drawn from two weeks of investigation and examination conducted in Utar Kampar campus. This chapter offers a thorough analysis of the several elements that have a major influence on ESL learners' attitudes toward learning persuasive writing. By thoroughly examining these variables, this research hopes to significantly contribute to ESL teaching by illuminating practical methods for raising students' interest in and competence with persuasive writing tasks. The discussion from the findings provide a nuanced understanding of the complex interactions between instructional strategies, learner characteristics, and environmental influences through thorough data collection and interpretation, ultimately highlighting important success factors for teaching persuasive writing to ESL learners.

The results of this study provide useful strategies that might raise students' motivation and proficiency in persuasive writing assignments, which will improve ESL teaching strategies. It is significant to

highlight that a mixed-method approach was used in the research, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. The quantitative component of the study entailed the administration of questionnaires to participants, which facilitated the methodical collection of numerical data on a range of variables about the attitudes of ESL learners towards persuasive writing.

However, the qualitative approach included interviewing participants to gather their detailed thoughts and points of view. This allowed for a deeper comprehension of the intricate relationships that exist between learner traits, instructional tactics, and environmental factors. In summary, this chapter underscores the need to employ data-driven strategies and identifies critical success characteristics that can be advantageous to both teachers and learners when it comes to teaching persuasive writing to ESL learners.

4.   CONCLUSION

Two research questions listed in introduction are the focus of this section. The first question explores the attitudes of ESL learners towards learning persuasive writing. In contrast, the second question explores how underlying factors largely influence these attitudes in ESL learners in learning persuasive writing. Both of the research questions are satisfactorily addressed by the information gathered in the findings. Therefore, the research objectives are met by determining the attitudes of ESL learners towards learning persuasive writing and investigating and comprehending how the underlying causes described by ESL learners have the biggest influence on their attitudes towards learning persuasive writing.

The first research question is to ascertain how ESL students feel about learning persuasive writing. In the findings, 69 students, or 64.5% of the sample group, were found to have good attitudes towards learning persuasive writing. Of them, 60 students said they wanted to become proficient in persuasive writing techniques, and all 69 showed a strong interest in learning persuasive writing. Furthermore, 53 out of the 69 students said that they had a good outlook on studying persuasive writing since they found the process to be satisfying and enjoyable. According to the survey conducted by Feng (2021), 80% of students recognised the value and advantages of developing persuasive writing abilities. This research shares the same results as 53 students, or 49.5%, thought the learning experience was worthwhile and engaging. Apart from that, 65 students or 60.7% highlighted that the English teachers who taught them persuasive writing were suitable and taught them effectively. 62 of them responded that their teachers provide sufficient assistance and feedback during the persuasive writing learning process while 61 of them stated that the teachers are also motivated in teaching them to master the skill of writing persuasively. On the other hand, just 9 students, or 8.4% of students in this research, had negative opinions about learning how to write persuasively. 45 students in this research felt anxious when asked to write persuasive essays, but Feng (2021) found that about 90% of participants felt confident in their ability to write compelling content. Skar et al. (2023) found that Norwegian students had a favourable attitude towards writing and had a high level of confidence and proficiency in generating compelling content. In comparison, 45 students in this research lacked confidence when it came to generating convincing content. All in all, most ESL learners in the research have positive attitudes towards learning how to write persuasively in contrast to Olson (2017), whose participants had a neutral opinion towards it.

The second research question looks into the underlying causes of the attitudes which affect the attitudes of ESL learners in learning persuasive writing to better understand how these elements affect their attitudes towards persuasive writing acquisition. According to findings, the environment has
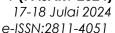
the biggest impact on interviewees' ability to learn persuasive writing. 3 of the 6 interviewees provided this specific response. 1 of the 3 interviewees stated that their family members mostly speak Mandarin or Chinese and do not often use English, which results in a lower level of English proficiency and makes it harder to acquire persuasive writing. Regarding the other 2 interviewees, they explained that their academic setting such as their secondary school, university and their educators encourages them to develop persuasive writing abilities since the setting demands them to perform well overall, which piques their curiosity. According to the students, viewing television is the factor that influences them the most, in contrast to the findings of Aziz and Said's (2020) research. However, the interviewers in this research also particularly address the elements with a good attitude towards learning persuasive writing. Given that 4 of the 6 interviewees provided the same response, they concluded that the desire to increase their language competence levels is the most influential factor that affects them to learn persuasive writing positively. Better persuasive writing skills are satisfying, according to the interviewees, because readers and reviewers will recognise the effort and commitment made to the final output. Additionally, the interviewees stated that stronger persuasive writing abilities might increase other language proficiency, including communication and presenting abilities. Similar findings are presented in the study by Skar et al. (2023), wherein Norwegian students report improvements in their language and/or cognitive abilities as well as a favourable attitude towards it. Additionally, earlier research by Aziz and Said (2020) showed that watching English-language television improves the calibre of persuasive writing.

4.1 Implication

The research's findings are notable and beneficial since they greatly enhance the field of education. As noted in the introduction, these findings could have a direct impact on how ESL is taught. This suggests that by using the data from the research, ESL teachers and educators can design and implement lesson plans that are specifically suited to the challenges and attitudes seen in ESL learners. Alghamdi (2019) claims that by using the data from his study, teachers may create effective lessons that suit the students' behaviour by organising the activities in the classroom effectively. To improve learners' persuasive writing acquisition, for example, instructional interventions such as vocabulary-building exercises and scaffolding strategies can be implemented into lessons to address the language aspect, which was noted by some interviewees in the findings as a major challenge. According to Barone and Barone (2018), hearing what students have to say can help teachers create better classes that will lessen the difficulties that students have in the classroom. As a result, these findings enable teachers and educators to create a more encouraging learning environment for ESL learners, which will ultimately increase their success in school and the workplace.

Secondly, the findings of the research can help ESL instructors as well as curriculum designers by providing data on the particular needs and preferences of ESL learners when it comes to mastering persuasive writing. Learning objectives, assessments, and instructional materials can be modified to address the highlighted obstacles and attitudes of ESL learners by incorporating insights from the findings, where interviewees shared various challenges they faced such as external distractions, workload issues and many more into the curriculum design process. In comparison to the research conducted by Beyreli and Konuk (2018), the perspectives of students regarding the thorough assessment of student texts demonstrate the applicability of the rubrics utilised as instruments for assessing writing abilities. The aforementioned strategy facilitates the creation of various learning pathways and tailored instruction to meet the varied requirements and backgrounds of ESL learners. As a result, it improves the support provided by ESL programmes for learners to build persuasive writing abilities and meet learning objectives. The curriculum's academic writing modules can be improved in the following areas, according to insightful information and data from the previous study.

The results of this study will give curriculum designers recommendations on what components are essential and required for ESL students (Januin & Osman, 2021).

Moreover, ESL training programmes can benefit from the findings. These findings can be used to inform targeted teaching techniques that prepare ESL teachers and educators to deal with a variety of settings, like teaching students at different skill levels and addressing different attitudes. Based on Peng (2019), the teacher training programme can be modified in light of the findings and analysis derived from the ESL teaching modalities and ideas, with a particular emphasis on Teaching Ideas, Textbook Construction, and Teachers' Team Construction. Fostering a pleasant classroom atmosphere that supports ESL learners' positive attitudes towards persuasive writing is made possible by teachers and educators who can change their teaching tactics depending on feedback and assessment outcomes by encouraging reflective practices and offering ongoing assistance.

In conclusion, a comprehensive examination of ESL learners' perspectives on persuasive writing acquisition is summed up. It presents the main conclusions and examines how learners' perspectives and involvement are influenced by both internal and external factors such as language proficiency, cultural background, educational environments, and instructional styles. Along with outlining potential directions for further research, the chapter also addresses broader implications for ESL programmes as well as highlights the limitations that are found in the research itself. Hence, there are suggestions made for the limitations found in the research as these suggestions can ensure more accurate results which can used to enhance ESL instruction and curriculum. It is concluded that these findings are capable of laying a solid foundation for more research and improved methods of instruction in the education area.

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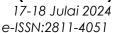
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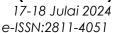
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