



**Ain Shams University**  
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**The Effectiveness of an EFL Program Based on  
Freirean Pedagogy in Developing Secondary  
School Students' Argumentative Writing Skills and  
Reflective Thinking**

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Requirements for the Ph. D Degree in Education  
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## **Abstract**

# **The Effectiveness of an EFL Program Based on Freirean Pedagogy in Developing Secondary School Students' Argumentative Writing Skills and Reflective Thinking**

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The present study aimed at developing the necessary argumentative writing skills and reflective thinking for Egyptian EFL second year secondary school students, through the use of a proposed program based on Freirean pedagogy. The study adopted the quasi-experimental pre-post test control /experimental group design. The participants consisted of 68 students from Sohag Public Secondary School for Girls in Sohag Governorate. Students of the experimental group received training through the proposed program based on Freirean pedagogy while students in the control group received regular instruction. Tools of the study included: argumentative writing skills checklist, a pre-/post-argumentative writing skills test, a reflective thinking questionnaire. The study results revealed statistically significant differences at 0.01 level between the mean scores of the control and the experimental groups on the post test in favor of the experimental group in overall argumentative writing skills as well as in each argumentative writing skill. There were also statistically significant differences at 0.01 level between the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre-administration and post-administration of the reflective thinking questionnaire in favor of the post-administration.

**Key Words:** Freirean pedagogy, problem posing model (PDDRAA model), argumentative writing skills and reflective thinking.

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## List of Contents

Title	Page
Abstract .....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iii
List of Contents .....	iv
List of Tables .....	v
List of Figures .....	vi
<b>CHAPTER ONE Background and Problem.....</b>	<b>1-17</b>
1.1 Introduction.....	2
1.2 Context of the Problem .....	6
1.3 Statement of the problem .....	10
1.4 The Purpose of the Study .....	11
1.5 Hypotheses of the Study .....	11
1.6 Delimitations of the Study .....	12
1.7 Significance of the Study .....	12
1.8 Definition of Terms.....	13
1.9 Organization of the Remainder of the Study .....	16
<b>CHAPTER TWO Review of Literature and Related Studies .....</b>	<b>18-80</b>
2.1 Paulo Freire's Philosophy in Learning.....	19
2.2 Freirean Pedagogy .....	21
2.3 Critical Pedagogy.....	24
2.3.1 The Origin of Critical Pedagogy.....	24
2.3.2 The Main Tenets of Critical Pedagogy .....	26
2.3.3 Critical Pedagogy and libratory Education.....	28
2.4 Freirian Problem Posing in EFL .....	32
2.4.1 A dialogical Relationship.....	36
2.4.2 Paulo Freire and Critical Consciousness .....	37
2.5.The Importance of Problem-Posing Model in EFL Classroom.....	39
2.6 Barriers to the Implementation of Critical Pedagogy in Egyptian EFL classroom .....	40

2.7 Argumentative Writing and Argumentation (AW).....	43
2.7.1 Features of Argumentative Writing (AW).....	45
2.7.2 Component of Argumentative Writing (AW).....	48
2.7.3 Argumentative Writing Types and Genres (AW).....	51
2.7.4 The Importance of Argumentative Writing (AW).....	53
2.7.5 The Relation between Argumentative Writing and persuasive writing .....	56
2.7.6 Assessment of EFL Argumentative Writing (AW) .....	58
2.7.7 Difficulties in Argumentative Writing (AW) .....	58
2.8 Reflective Thinking (RT).....	62
2.8.1 Definition of Reflective Thinking (RT).....	62
2.8.2 Ways of Promoting Students' Reflective Thinking (RT).....	62
2.8.3 Characteristics of Reflective Thinking (RT) .....	63
2.8.4 Models of Reflective Thinking (RT) .....	64
2.8.4.1 Reflective Thinking Pyramid.....	65
2.8.4.2 Reflective Thinking Model.....	66
2.8.4.3 Framework for Reflective Thinking .....	66
2.8.5 The Importance of Reflective Thinking.....	67
2.8.6 Types of Reflective Thinking .....	71
2.9. The Implications of Freirian Pedagogy and EFL Writing.....	74
2.9.1 Freirean Pedagogy and Argumentative Writing.....	77
2.9.2 Freirian Dialogic Problem Posing and Reflective Thinking .....	78
Conclusion .....	80
<b>CHAPTER THREE Method.....</b>	<b>81-107</b>
3.1 Design of the study .....	82
3.2 Participants of this study.....	82
3.2.1. Determining the equivalence between the control and experimental groups prior to the program's implementation in argumentative writing skills test. ....	83

3.2-2. Determining the equivalence between the control and experimental groups in reflective thinking questionnaire prior to the program's implementation .....	84
3.3. Instruments of the study .....	87
3.4 The proposed program. ....	96
Conclusion. ....	107
<b>CHAPTER FOUR Data Analysis, Results, and Discussion.....</b>	<b>108-130</b>
4.1. Statistical Analysis .....	109
4.2 Results .....	109
4.3. Measuring the effectiveness of the suggested program	118
4-4 Discussion of the results .....	120
<b>CHAPTER FIVE Summary and Conclusions .....</b>	<b>131-140</b>
5.1 Summary .....	132
5.2 Conclusions .....	136
5.3 Recommendations .....	138
5.4. Suggestions for further studies.....	139
<b>References .....</b>	<b>141-153</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>154-396</b>
Appendix "A" (The Pilot Study).....	154
Appendix "B" (Argumentative Writing Skills Checklist).....	162
Appendix "C" (Argumentative Writing Skills Pre-post Test).....	171
Appendix "D" The Analytic Scoring Rubric .....	191
Appendix "E" Reflective Thinking Questionnaire .....	194
Appendix "F" "The Program" .....	205
Appendix "G" The Program (Instructor's Manual) .....	209
Appendix (H) Student's Workbook.....	310
Appendix "I" Samples of Students' Works .....	379
Appendix "J" Samples of Students' Photos .....	392
Arabic Summary .....	i

## List of Tables

Table	Title	Page
2-1.	Difference between Critical Thinking and Critical Consciousness by Canagarajah, 2002, P. 98. ....	38
2-2.	Definitions of the elements in Toumlin model of argument structure as cited in Qin, 2009 p. 6).....	49
3-1.	Determining the equivalence between the control and experimental groups in argumentative writing skills test .....	83
3-2.	Determining the equivalence between the control and experimental groups in Reflective Thinking Questionnaire.....	85
3-3.	Specifications of the test.....	91
3-4.	Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient for reflective thinking questionnaire and its different dimensions .....	95
3-5.	Description of the lessons of the proposed program .....	103
4-1.	The significant differences between the mean scores of the study group in the post application between the control and experimental group in the argumentative writing skills test.....	110
4-2.	The significant differences between the mean scores of the study group in the post application between the control and experimental group in Habitual Action.....	111
4-3.	The significant differences between the mean scores of the study group in the post application between the control and experimental group in Understanding.....	112
4-4.	The significant differences between the mean scores of the study group in the post application between the control and experimental group in Reflection.....	114
4-5.	The significant differences between the mean scores of the study group in the post application between the control and experimental group in Critical Reflection .....	115

4-6. The significant differences between the mean scores of the study group in the post application between the control and experimental group in Total Reflective Thinking Questionnaire .....	117
4-7. Measuring the effectiveness of the program in developing argumentative writing skills.....	118
4-8. Measuring the effectiveness of the program in developing Reflective Thinking and its components .....	119



## List of Figures

Figure	Title	Page
2-1.	The problem posing process.....	33
2-2.	Freire's problem posing.....	34
2-3	Wink's Model.....	34
2-4.	PDDRAA Model as suggested by the researcher.....	35
2-5.	Main theories of argumentation.....	52
2-6.	Reflective Thinking Pyramid as adapted by the researcher .....	65
3-1.	Comparison of the mean scores of the two groups in argumentative writing skills.....	84
3-2.	Comparison of the mean scores of the two groups in pre application of reflective thinking questionnaire .....	86
4-1.	Comparison of the mean scores of the two groups in post application of the argumentative writing skills.....	110
4-2.	Comparison of the mean scores of the two groups in post application of Habitual Action.....	112
4-3.	Comparison of the mean scores of the two groups in post application of Understanding.....	113
4-4.	Comparison of the mean scores of the two groups in post application of Reflection.....	115
4-5.	Comparison of the mean scores of the two groups in post application of Critical Reflection.....	116
4-6.	Comparison of the mean scores of the two groups in post application of Total Reflective Thinking Questionnaire .....	117

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **Background and Problem**

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## **Background and Problem**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The educational system in Egypt should prepare students to keep pace with economic, political and cultural challenges of today's world especially after some Arab revolutions have broken out. As we are on the threshold of a democratic society, expressing opinions and stating reasonable arguments either orally or in writing have become one of the aims that education should seek to achieve.

Writing is a valuable tool for communicating one's thoughts to others. It helps to promote a sense of ownership and to express inner feelings. Writing is the commonest way of assessing students' performance in English especially in Arab countries (Anderson et al as cited in Bahgat, 2011). Ismail (2001) emphasized that through writing, students can share ideas, arouse feelings, and convince other people. They are able to discover and articulate ideas in ways that only writing makes possible.

Argumentative writing is one of the writing modes that promotes reasoning and critical thinking skills which are often figured in the democratic society where different viewpoints are criticized, analyzed and supported. To give this point more emphasis, Tag and El-Dabarki (1995) stated that when students in writing an argumentative composition consider diverse points of view and accurately reconstruct them, they are thinking critically.

The importance of argumentative writing both for academic success and for general life purposes has been considered and validated in many disciplines. For example, Benetos (2006) stressed that argumentative writing is a valued genre in a range of disciplines and curricula because it requires that writers develop logical relationships between ideas and build a deep and multi-faceted understanding of the

topic. Similarly, Yeh (1998) stated that in school settings, critical thinking is often assessed by asking students to identify an issue, consider different views, defend a viewpoint, and respond to counterarguments. Moreover, the importance of using arguments in writing can be clarified as follows:

Arguments make us rational: In this regard, Kuhn (1991) stressed that by only participating in argumentative discourse; students can give evidence to justify their theories and their thinking by using the argumentative frame work of alternative theories counterargument and rebuttal.

Arguments sustain communities: When arguments seem consistently sound, one earns the lasting reputation of someone who thinks well. In every argument made, one projects an image of his/her character or personality, a quality that some call ethos. Arguments define academic, professional and democratic communities.

Yoshimura (2003) found that argumentative writing skills remain underdeveloped among Japanese students and this constitutes a serious handicap for many Japanese students. Mark and Suzanne (2004), in their study proved that 55% of students' scores were below "sufficient" on a persuasive writing task. Their persuasive essays lack the basic elements of argumentative writing.

Secondary school students should be prepared to challenge ideas, critique them, argue with them, express their own points of view and convincingly support these views in writing. Zaidah (2006) administrated interviews with EFL teachers which proved that they seldom teach argumentative writing in class and prefer students to choose either narrative or descriptive writing. The interviews also showed that there were no specific methods of teaching in their argumentative writing class.

To Ali (2011, p.2), the most commonly used methods of teaching

argumentative writing, as any mode of writing, can be represented in the following points:

- 1- Presenting a topic,
- 2- Discussing possible key words,
- 3- Discussing ideas,
- 4- Writing, and
- 5- Correcting grammar and spelling errors.

Therefore, difficulties in writing well-polished argumentative composition may result from a lack of appropriate instruction in argument, or from misunderstanding the nature of argumentative writing prompts and appeals which should be addressed in teaching this specific genre of writing, or both. Therefore the teacher should use the appropriate type of instruction that helps students develop their argumentative writing skills and avoid, or at least delimit, the traditional methods, procedures and techniques that hinder this development.

As modern society is becoming more complex and information is becoming available and changing more rapidly, it is increasingly important to help students develop some reflective thinking capabilities during learning. This has been highlighted by many researchers such as Kovalik & Olsen (2010) who assert that the ability to think reflectively is a valuable habit of mind. It improves learning and decision making, and enhances performance. Likewise, Cennama, Ross and Ertmer (2010) see that:

*"Reflective thinking helps students make connections between their learning goals, the processes they use to achieve those goals, and the content they are learning. It also helps them to better understand processes and explanations so that they can apply them beyond the immediate problem they are solving. It forces them to think about what they are learning and how it*

*applies to the current situation as well as other issues and problems". (p.270)*

Despite the urgent need for reflective thinking in this age that is full of changes, this area is not given due attention in the English language courses. Reflective thinking cannot be promoted unless traditional ways of teaching are changed and safe environments are created to allow students to be independent learners and foster their reflection. This has been advocated by Koszalka, Song and Grabowski (2002) who asserted that student-centered environments which have a more flexible atmosphere and provide many opportunities for social learning may have a stronger impact on learners' perception of reflective thinking.

A proposed solution for these problems is to adopt a new ideological approach that can provide students with opportunities to practice argumentative writing and think reflectively on their learning. The problem posing model that reflects Freirean pedagogy might be an appropriate teaching approach.

According to Eliana (2000), critical pedagogy is considered one of the results of many educational changes that took place during the 20th century. Such changes were triggered by historical facts, social movements, political agendas and human rights. Thus, the critical pedagogy brings a new sociopolitical view of linguistics and language teaching that is beginning to influence the teaching of English. In his forward to Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Richard Shaull summarizes the political perspective of critical pedagogy:

*There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men*

*and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (Shaul as cited in Freire 2002: 34).*

Freire (as cited in Scales, 2009) proposed education through praxis, where students' knowledge is included and construction of knowledge is shared between the teacher and student. The assumption here is that the student's application of his/her material and social knowledge will be liberating and allow the student to reflect and practice critical literacy.

Many researchers (Auerbach,1993,Wink,1997, Apple,1999 as cited in Eliana,2000) stated that Freirian pedagogy has received different names, such as, “ critical pedagogy” , “ critical work,” , “ transformative pedagogy”, “ emancipator literacy” and other names.

For example, transformative pedagogy is an umbrella term which refers to pedagogies which seek to transform the student by teaching him/her to question the world around him/her and asks the students to bridge the gap between school and home. This emancipates the individual from the status quo and causes him/her to become transformed as thinker and a whole individual who feels accountable for his/her actions. In this respect, it can be said that Freire's theory connects with Mezirow's transformative learning theory. The points of similarities between Mezirow's and Freire's theory are evident in the reality that both of them name the criteria for the full development of human potential to which adult educators are dedicated as values such as freedom, equality, tolerance, social justice, civic responsibility and education (Rugirrello,2005).

Analyzing the different names of critical pedagogy, it can be deduced that it started out of the need of reforming education in a way that it would acknowledge the influence of the social and political elements existent in each and every educational context. However, critical pedagogues share one common goal to fight against imperialism and