Theme Development Methods/ Techniques employed By EFL Majoring Students in Their Expository writing

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Abstract: recent research in English language is descriptive, evaluative and analytical. It is quantitative and qualitative in nature, which aims at investigating theme development methods/ techniques employed by Palestinian tertiary level EFL learners in performing written discourse. The study is an attempt to analyze the written product of 120 Palestinian EFL tertiary level learners majoring in English language and selected purposively from three different national universities in Gaza Strip; namely, Al-Quds Open University, Al-Azhar University-Gaza and the Islamic University of Gaza.

The instrument used to collect the data for the present study is a writing test in which the students were asked to write a three- paragraph topic on a current issue, which is familiar to all members of the sample of study. And frequencies, percentages, T-test and Pearson correlation were the major statistical tests used in the present study. The results were also presented in graphic forms.

The major results this study reached were; Palestinian English foreign language tertiary level majors are not competent in using different theme development methods in their expository writing. They almost used one or two of those methods. The results also show that the most frequently used two methods are cause/ effect and comparison/ contrast whereas the least frequent methods are question/ answer and definition. Regarding the demographic variables, it was found that gender has a partial impact on using these methods. Similarly, university variable has an impact on this area in terms of preferring using some methods by a particular group than others.

Key Words: expository writing, theme development techniques

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing is not an easy task, as some people may think; it is rather a sophisticated skill, if compared with other language skills, which may need less effort. Since it is referred to in some contexts as transformation of one's thoughts into language, it combines many interrelated components. It involves different mental activities before being performed in their final written form. It needs that you should think, compose and create ideas, check their relatedness to each other and to the main idea of the topic, memorize and recall lexical items thought to be more relevant than others, sift and discard irrelevant ideas, organize these ideas according to their importance in a way to develop the main idea i.e. theme of the topic. In addition, it needs that the writer should link his ideas to each other, perform them verbally on paper as a first draft and then revise and finalize them to get the final draft. Raimes (1984) categorizes the components of writing as content, organization, grammar, syntax, mechanics, word choice, the targeted audience and the writer's process. Thus, writing requires conscious mental effort (P. 335).

Writing product of Palestinian English foreign language learners who are exposed to a variety of language and linguistic courses amongst which are writing ones is the focus of this study. This is not to undermine the other courses, which certainly contribute to increasing the learners' proficiency in using English. Syntax and semantics courses, for example, are necessary attributes of writing skills.

However, to come to composing discourse that is the concern of the present study, the history of English language teaching ELT did not deal with it on the same level as other language skills. For example from the 1920s until the 1940s the emphasis was on reading skill as part of the communicative approach which was dominatingteaching/learning process. In the 1950s, and early 1970s audio-lingual approach dominated the teaching/learning process so speaking and listening skills were always emphasized in that era. The writing skill was completely neglected as it was regarded as a secondary skill, which was confined to classroom activities and taught through the oral activities. Freedman et al. (1983) argue that writing was considered as an auxiliary practice that would reinforce classroom activities (P. 187). Rivers (1981) further points out that during the

audio-lingual era, writing skill was neglected to a secondary position of other skills, which must not take precedence as a major skill to be developed (P. 241). He added that other skills such as listening, speaking and readingwere considered as a service activity rather than an end in itself (ibid: 258)

Writing was taught as an independent skill in the mid-1960s where it gained more attention and attracted scholars and researchers interested in this area. Their endeavors came in order to develop this skill and to enable English language learnersimprove their proficiency in English language. They also aimed at eradicating composing skill deficiencies, overcoming bad English habits and establishing good English ones.

Generally speaking, composing any piece of writing starts with abstract ideas, which need to be organized and developed to convey the intended message.

Theoretical Framework:

Any piece of writing mainly starts with immature ideas, i.e. thesis which needs to be organized, supported and developed. Those ideas cannot convey the complete message of the writer, therefore the writer is required to present them in an approved form in order for the reader to perceive the message conveyed. This necessitates that the author use the appropriate method(s) of development to make it clearer to his audience.

To develop any piece of writing, there are usually different methods and techniques: the most frequent among which are definition, classification, comparison and contrast, description, cause and effect and narration. There are, of course, many others which are less common such as question/ answer, exemplification, argumentation, analysis. Those methods are very crucial in making the ideas comprehensible.

A question is raised in this respect: How much supporting detail and what method of development is needed for an adequate paragraph development? Mattlabi and Shedifat (2009) stated that each paragraph is judged independently and the amount of supporting details and the method of development are determined by the scope of the topic sentence (P. 150). They maintainedthat supporting details should be arranged logically and cohesively.Moreover, the basic patterns for paragraph development are enumeration, equal-pair, unequal-pair, the simple chain and the dividing chain or the leapfrog (ibid: 157-158).

Malenab-Temporal (2016) assessed the performance of Philippinese sophomore college EFL learners' performance in developing ideas using seven methods, i.e. details, cause and effect, comparison and contrast, definition, process, examples, and classification. The results revealed that of the seven methods of paragraph development, definition is the easiest for students to master and organize since it is a common method usually employed in developing an idea followed by definition. Cause and effect is also an easy method for students to develop writing their paragraphs. Similarly, examples, details, and process are easy methods for students to develop which respectively come after.Nevertheless,classification and comparison and contrast turned out to be the most difficult methods for students to use.From my point of view, this can be attributed either to some cultural reasons tied with the students' mother tongue or to the instruction in which the skill of writing is presented.

In addition, Ellis (1967)intended to determine the extent to which the currently taught methods of paragraph development are actually used in contemporary expository writing of English native speakers. For this purpose, a hundred paragraphs were analyzed from each of three sources: letters to a newspaper editor, articles from a professional journal, and articles from a magazine. The analysis indicated that (1) eight of the nine textbook methods of paragraph development were used at the following rates: examples (24%), details (22%), reasons (8%), chronology (6%), contrast (1%), definition (1%), repetition (1%), and cause-effect (1%);

A third study concerned with the topic is that of Ghabanchi and Alavi (2011) which sought to examine the types of topic progression techniques used in 120 paragraphs written by 40 Iranian undergraduate students. Each student was asked to write three types of paragraphs; namely, those of comparison and contrast, cause-effect, and chronology. The present study investigates the relationship between the types of paragraphs and types of topic progression techniques used in them. As the results of the Chi-square test show, there is a relationship between types of paragraphs and types of topic progression techniques. In paragraphs of comparison and contrast, sequential progression was (38.44%) whereas in paragraphs of cause-effect, sequential progression came next with a percentage of (34.72) and in paragraphs of chronology, extended parallel progression ranked third, i.e. (35.52%). It is obvious that the results here mismatch with those of Ellis who experimented on English native speakers, which may confirm the assumption of cultural background influence.

Statement of the problem:

During the period I have been teaching English at Al-Quds Open University and other national institutions in Gaza Strip, I noticed that a number of my students majoring in English experience a lot of troubles in writing. The piece of writing they produce still needs organization in developing the main ideaor rather the theme. Their writing seems to be monotonous since they overuse simple tenses and simple grammatical constructions. Careless choice of vocabulary was also noticed. The students are also noticed to

think in Arabic and translate their thoughts and ideas into English often in a grammatically incorrect way and as a result; they fail to produce the meaning they intend to.

The concern of the present study is to investigate the theme development techniques of Palestinian EFLLs who attended a variety of college courses aiming at improving their performance in language skills among which is writing courses along with grammar and syntax courses that aim to enhance their written performance. It intends to assess and evaluate the extent to which these students have benefited from the courses they attended during their study course. More specifically, it attempts to identify paragraph development techniques or methods they use to develop the theme they are composing. This is an attempt to check the most frequent techniques they use and if they are appropriate ones for the nature of expository writing.

Objectives of the Study

This study is undertaken as an attempt to identify the extent to which Palestinian English foreign language learners are successful in developing the expository paragraph when composing a piece of writing. The prime goal of this study is developing and improving Palestinian English foreign language learners' composing abilities. Other objectives and aims emerging from this study are:

1. Investigating the composing activities of Palestinian English foreign language learners in order to identify the paragraph development methods/techniques, they employ in composing a piece of writing.
2. Checking whether the used methods are appropriate for the nature of the topic they are composing,
3. And realizing to what extent demographic factors may affect the area in question.

Significance and Rationale of the Study

The present study is not the only one, which tackles this area of research; many others attempted to deal with the topic from different angles. The present study benefited, to some extent, from the previous ones in identifying the shortcomings in paragraph development experienced by Palestinian English foreign language learners. The choice of the topic reflects the researcher's belief that composing is a complex task and may be the most problematic area that English foreign language learners face. Other reasons for carrying out this study are abundant with the hope that some ideas which hold implications for teachers, instructors and course material designers whose main concern is to help students to become good writers , could be drawn from it.

My speculation and observation were that the main difficulties, which face Palestinian EFL learners in paragraph development, is that they think using their mother tongue and then they translate their thoughts in the other language, i.e. English on the one hand. On the other hand, it was expected that these students would make errors with semantic relatedness in addition to developing the main theme or idea of the topic by means of supporting details, coherence and cohesion. Then,the significance of this study stems from the fact that it is suggesting modifying the current approaches of teaching writing to Palestinian EFL learners in the Palestinian national academic institutions, which constitutes the rationale of the present study.

Research Questions

As mentioned earlier, this study attempts to investigate the written performance of Palestinian university students majoring in English aiming at realizing the paragraph development methods they frequently use in their expository writing. Taking samples of university students in Gaza strip, the results will be generalized. From displaying and investigating the problem of the study, the following major question, which includes sub-questions each of which needs to be answered within the pages of this research, emerged.

How successful are Palestinian EFL learners in paragraph development?

1. What are the most frequent paragraph development methods they use in their written product? Are the methods they use appropriate for the nature of their expository writing?
2. Are institution and sex significant variables at the level (0.05) in this area?

Hypotheses of the Study

In the light of the problem of the present study and the research questions raised and after studying the literature related to this area, the researcher hypothesizes that:

1. Despite the fact that Palestinian EFL learners were exposed to different writing courses, they may not use different methods of developing the theme of the topic and hence paragraph or essay development is improperly stated.
2. Institution variable may not be a significant factor at the level 0.05 in the subjects' paragraph development.
3. Palestinian female students are expected to use paragraph development techniques more frequently than their male counterparts.

Limitations of the Present Study

The present study is not a complete or perfect one for it has some limitations. Therefore, its findings could be generalized though with some reservations. This is an appeal for other research to be carried out in this area, assessing and analyzing Palestinian EFL majors' written discourse. The following are some of the study limitations:

1. Because of the impossibility to reach to the other parts of Palestine   particularly, the West Bank and East Jerusalem due to the apartheid   policy, the researcher limited carrying out his study only to three national universities in Gaza Strip.

2. The subjects of the present study were all from the thirdlevel; however, other research should compare the writing of other university levels and compare them together in order to give a clearer depiction of Palestinian English foreign language learners' writingabilities.

3. The study used the test as a principal tool of data collection; however, other results could have been reached if the researcher had augmented the data with some observational information.

4. The present study is also limited in scope since it does not relate the writing skill to other language skills, particularly reading.The results of many studies proved that languageskills are interrelated and inseparable.

II. METHODS

1. Subjects

Compositions written by 120 Palestinian university students were collected. The sample of the study was drawn from third year students studying English in the second term of the academic year 20015/2016. The subjects were chosen from the faculties of Arts and Education in three national universities in Gaza Strip ; namely, Al-Quds Open University QOU, Islamic University of Gaza IUG and Al-Azhar University - Gaza AUG. Students who were not exposed to writing courses at university, for one reason or another, were excluded.

The subjects who were all English majors have studied English for at least twelve years. Forty students were randomly chosen from each of the three universities. Table (1) below shows the distribution of the subjects, according to university and sex as two independent variables.

Table (1): Distribution of Subjects according to University and Sex

Criteria	No.	Male	%	Female	%	Total
AL-QUDS OPEN UNIVERSITY	40	20	16.65	20	16.65	33.3
ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY	40	20	16.65	20	16.65	33.3
AL-AZHAR UNIVERSITY	40	20	16.65	20	16.65	33.3
Total	120	60	50	60	50	100

The rationale behind choosing these universities in particular was that each follows a different educational system. Al-Quds Open University QOU adopts a distance-learning educational system, the Islamic University of Gaza IUG adopts uni-sex educational systemand Al-azhar University - Gaza AU adopts a co-educational system. Furthermore, unlike other universities in the rest parts of Palestine, these three universities are possible to reach easily without any constraints.

Differences in the educational systems adopted in these three universities are expected to have impact on the students' performance. Thus, university is considered as an important variable. Accordingly, the researcher expects the Islamic University of Gaza students to be the best performers in their writing. This is because the admission systems and policies adopted differ from university to another. Whereas The Islamic University accepts students in the English language department with at least GPA 75, Al-Quds Open University, which adopts a broader and a more flexible policy towards admission, accepts students with a GPA 60 on condition that the student should pass English Language 1 and English Language 2, two general English language courses, with overall grade 70. Al-azhar University –Gaza stands in between where students are accepted at the English language department with a GPA 70. It is worth mentioning that these GPAs may differ from one year to another. The GPA may be higher in the case of Islamic University of Gaza and Al-azhar University-Gaza due to the increasing flow of secondary school graduates. Thus the higher the GPA, the more competent the students are expected to be.

The sample of subjects was drawn from third level students studying English as a major subject in the faculties of Arts and Education because they are expected to have completed the required writing courses and by now are aware of writing rules and principles. The subjects are also expected to have acquired the thinking skill and can express their thoughts and ideas clearly. All courses contribute to developing students' different skills.

From the researcher's experience as a lecturer at different academic institutions for the courses of writing, thinking skill is highly reinforced and stressed at the third level at least in the classroom.

The subjects of the present study also share other characteristics; all of them are FL learners whose native language is Arabic and are majoring in English. The majority of the subjects attending these universities are from the governorates of Gaza Strip. Thus, almost all the subjects share the same cultural background.

2. Instrumentation

Since the nature of the present study is analytical and evaluative, data were collected from the written compositions of the subjects. This study used the test, which was prepared by the researcher as its instrument. The rationale for choosing such a type of instrument is that the subjects can compose freely without any pressure or constraints.

The test, which was designed for the purpose of the present study, consists of only one essay type question. It asks the subjects to write on one of the common issues i.e. the situation in Gaza Strip in the past, in the present and the subjects' expectations about the situation in the future. The researcher's decision to adopt an achievement controlled -essay test, according to Abu Allam (1998:338-339), was more advantageous though time-consuming and tiring. In this test, all subjects were asked to respond to the following test item.

In a three- paragraph essay (at least) write about the situation in Gaza Strip under the Israeli Occupation, the present situation under the auspices of the Palestinian National Authority PNA and your future expectations.

The subjects were instructed to write not less than two hundred words on the topic above and to fill in some information about their sex and if they took any writing courses at university. The subjects were informed about the purpose of the study and the importance of their cooperation in responding seriously to the test, which constitutes an integral part of the present study.

3. Procedures

Because the subjects of the present study belong to three different universities, the test was administered to each university students separately in different dates. Thus, administering the test took four successive sessions. The first was on May 13, 2016 at QOU, the second on May 27, 2016 AU and the third and fourth on May15 and 16, 2016 in IUG to males and the other to females respectively. The conditions under which the test was administered were good. It was administered during the first forty minutes of the English class. The researcher himself with the help of lecturers at the three universities distributed the test to the subjects and informed them about the purpose of this test. He also gave them instructions on how to deal with the test and the maximum time allowed which was 40 minutes.

4. Validity

Validity according to Brown (1988) is defined as "The degree to which the study instrument and its results lead to support exactly what is claimed." Different types of validity are identified amongst which are content and face validity. Both validity types are adopted in this study in order to achieve a high level of validity. After having been prepared, the test was given to a group of referees in order to judge its suitability to the purpose and objectives of the present study. The referees were selected from different positions on the basis of their teaching experience at university and the field of specialization (P. 29).

The judges agreed that the test was appropriate to measure what it was designed to, except for some modifications and advice, which were taken into consideration in the final version of the test. Modifications were mainly in the first page concerning personal information about the subjects, in addition to specifying the topic into three paragraphs only.

Another type of validity, namely content validity was also refereed in order to test the consistency of the data collection instrument. Two types of consistency were used i.e. the internal consistency and the structure consistency. To test the internal consistency of the data collection instrument, the researcher distributed the test to a sample of thirty male and female students. Pearson correlation coefficient was used to check the internal consistency of the test items. Students' scores in the test items were correlated with each other. Table (2) below shows the internal consistency of the data collection instrument with Pearson correlation.

Table (2): The internal consistency of the test

Criteria	Correlation Coefficient
Comparison/contrast	0.768
Cause/ effect	0.862
Definition	0.871
Classification	0.748

Exemplification	0.700
Question/ answer	0.622

R table value at (df=28) and sig. level (0.05) = 0.361
R table value at (df=28) and sig. level (0.01) = 0.463
Table (2) above shows that there is a statistically significant correlation at the levels (0.01) and (0.05) between all test scores and the total mark of the test, which assures that the latter is internally consistent, R at the level (0.01) = 0.463 and at the level (0.05) = 0.361.
Table (3) below elucidates the structural consistency of the test with Pearson correlation. The correlation between the mark of each criterion and that of other criteria in the test was calculated.

Table 3: The structural consistency of the test

Criteria	Comparison/ Contrast	Cause/ effect	Defini-tion	Classi-fication	Exempli-fication	Question / answer
Comparison/contrast	1.000					
Cause/ effect	0.527	1.000				
Definition	0.524	0.765	1.000			
Classification	0.375	0.504	0.644	1.000		
Exemplification	0.386	0.416	0.577	0.845	1.000	
Question/ answer	0.369	0.497	0.392	0.676	0.689	1.000

r table value at (df=28) and sig. level (0.05) = 0.361
r table value at (df=28) and sig. level (0.01) = 0.463
Like table (2), table (3) above reveals that there is a statistically significant correlation at the levels (0.05 and 0.01) between all the test items. This result asserts that the test is structurally consistent.

5. Reliability
For the present study, inter-rater reliability, seems to be the most suitable one since more than one rater are involved in assessing the written discourse of the subjects. Alpha scale was also used in order to assure the reliability of the test. The raters, as mentioned above, cannot be expected to give identical scores, so their collective decision would be more reliable than the one taken by a single rater. Therefore, inter-rater reliability has been adopted in the present study. Table (4) represents the reliability of data collection instrument. It shows the statistical methods namely, Pearson correlation and T-test Paired sample used to achieve test reliability.

Table (4): Pearson correlation & T. test to explore the differences between the two raters

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Pearson Coefficient	Sig. level for correlation	T	Sig. level for T
R1	30	57.033	12.925	0.947	Sig. at 0.01	0.792	Not sig.
R2	30	57.633	11.941				

T table value at df (29) and sig. level (0.05) = 2.045
T table value at df (29) and sig. level (0.01) = 2.756
Table (4) above shows that correlation between the marks assigned by the two raters was statistically significant at the level (0.01) whereas T value was statistically insignificant, which indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between the marks assigned by the two raters. The results obtained here are a foolproof that scoring process was reliable.

III. RESULTS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION
This part attempts to answer the first and the second research questions and to test the three hypotheses.
Research Question (1): What are the most frequent paragraph development methods the study subjects use in their expository writing? Are the methods they use appropriate for the nature of expository writing? This part explores the different methods or language functions that are preferred by the subjects for developing the theme of paragraph or essay. During their study course, the subjects studied at least two course materials i.e. Writing One and Writing Two, which deal with this area of the research. Accordingly, from this section one can determine the extent to which the subjects benefited from these two course materials in the area of developing the main idea of the topic.

Developing the theme of a paragraph or an essay is an uneasy task. It requires deep understanding of the topic and thinking over the ways and the methods through which it can be developed. There are a variety of methods or techniques, which can be used to develop the theme viz. definition, cause-effect, comparison and contract, exemplification, question and answer, process, classification, details. Now, before deciding on any of the previous methods, which fit the theme of the topic, the writer needs a great mental effort. Sometimes the writer may use more than one method in the same piece of writing. This, of course, depends on the nature of the topic and the decision of the writer. The results in this area will be discussed in the light of the first hypothesis.

Hypothesis (1): Despite the fact that Palestinian EFL learners were exposed to different writing courses, they may not use different methods of developing the theme of the topic and hence paragraph or essay development is improperly stated.

To make the matter clearer and more comprehensible, let us have a close look at the students' works. They undoubtedly willshow us the different methods preferable for the subjects and others that are disapproved. Table 5.12 shows the frequency of adopting each of the topic development methods. It indicates to what extent the subjects are able to develop the main idea of the topic they write on.

Table (5): Frequency, Means, Standard Deviations and Ranks of Theme Development Methods Used by the Subjects in their Writings

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Dev	Rank
Result	120	0	5	93	0.78	1.13	2
Cause	120	0	4	126	1.05	0.99	1
Classification	120	0	3	29	0.24	0.55	4
Question/answer	120	0	1	8	0.07	0.25	6
Exemplification	120	0	2	22	0.18	0.45	5
Definition	120	0	2	5	0.04	0.24	7
Comparison/contrast	120	0	3	30	0.25	0.54	3
SUM	120	0	8	313	2.61	1.61	

Note: As a theme development method, 'result' is referred to as' effect'

The table above shows the mean, standard deviation, frequency and rank ordering of the subjects' use of theme development methods in their compositions. According to the rank ordering, cause received the highest frequencies (M = 1.05 and SD = 0.99), followed by result (M = 0.78 and SD = 1.13) and comparison/ contrast (M = 0.25 and SD = 0.54). The use of classification, exemplification and question/answer ranked 4, 5 and 6 respectively. For classification (M = 0.24 and SD = 0.55), exemplification (M = 0.18 and SD = 0.45) and for question/ answer method (M = 0.07 and SD = (0.25). However, the use of definition method received the lowest frequencies and hence ranked 7; (M = 0.04 and SD = 0.24). In summary, the total mean of the subjects' use of theme development methods (M = 2.61 and SD = 1.61).

The results presented in this section indicate that the cause-effect method is, most probably, the most preferable one to the subjects. Nonetheless, they seem to disapprove question-answer method. This is, perhaps, because they practiced cause and result meaning relationships in their writings through the different levels of their study. Little practice seems to be experienced with question-answer method of developing the main idea of paragraph or essay in the students' writings. The reason is question- answer method is relatively a new method for the students who first experienced it at university level.

Cause-effect method is often most difficult to achieve in one's piece of writing since it is not easy to determine whether there is more than one result for the same cause or that the effect or effects are actually the consequence of the causes asserted in the paragraph or the essay. Leki (1998:275) states that the ability to determine accurately the causes of a given situation or the effects of another is an important intellectual ability to develop. Writing about them helps us to examine them more carefully.

In spite of its complexity, cause-effect method seems to be easier than other methods or, most probably, the subjects seem to be familiar with this type of developing topic methods. Cause-effect method is organized in different ways viz. a cause followed by an effect, an effect followed by a cause, a cause followed by a series of effects in which each effect is the cause of another (chain organization) and discussing all causes as a block, then discussing all the effects together as a block (block organization). Oshima and Houge (1999) identified only two types of cause-effect organization, namely block organization and chain organization. The following sample is drawn from a subject's composition as a representative example.

D1	*The situation in Gaza strip under the Israeli occupations was known to be so bad and it is worse- as I think- nowadays. There were a lot of barriers, people could not see each other. Also the political condition was so miserable because we had no country, no authority, no voice and no right's. Talking about people sociably they were united against one known enemy (the occupation).*

It is clear from the subject's writing, that the preferable and common way of organizing cause-effect is the second one (effect followed by cases). Other students developed their paragraphs mentioning the effect first and then its cause, which may be the cause for another effect and so on. Generally speaking, the most preferable cause-effect structure words used by students are: because, because of, so and therefore; whereas others such as for, since, as, due to, thus, hence, consequently… etc. are neglected or rarely used in the writings of the study subjects.

In this four-sentence paragraph, the writer used two different methods to develop the main idea i.e. comparison-contrast and cause-effect. The latter was used twice; whereas the former was used only once. It will be dealt with and discussed in the next section. From another angle, comparison-contrast method was the most frequent one after cause and effect method. This is one of the methods which can be used either separately or together to develop an idea or to relate two or more things; its content can vary. At the time, some paragraphs emphasize similarities, others emphasize differences or similarities and differences together can be discussed in one paragraph. For more explanation, let us consider the following sample:

D2	*The situation during the first uprising was much better than the following eras. People were more cooperated and helpful although there wasn't much freedom like today. For the economical condition it during the first uprising was better and easier because our worker were working in the occupied lands and they were very well paid.*

The sample drawn above is a proof that the subjects prefer using both comparison and contrast in one paragraph. A considerable number of comparison-contrast signals are generally used including sentence connectors, conjunctions, prepositions and other types of expressions. The samples provided above clearly show that the subjects prefer using 'too, and, like, similar to, on the other hand, but, although and while'. The rest comparison and contrast signals are very rarely used in the students' writings. This can be justified perhaps the signals the subjects used are more common than others in English and perhaps they have equivalents in Arabic. (You also, like your informants, excessively use the subordinator **because**)
Moreover, their structure in Arabic seems to be similar to that in English.

As motioned in the previous section, the subjects tend to use more than one method in the same paragraph to develop the main idea. For example, in sample D1, we saw that the writer used caparison-contrast and cause effect methods for the purpose of paragraph development. Similarly, two development methods were used in sample D2 i.e. cause-effect and comparison-contrast. The former was dealt with in the previous section. It seems that the subjects preferredusing more than one method at the same time. This is possible in the case they do not have much to say about the topic. The comparative form is the most obviously preferable way of caparison-contrast method.

Classification is another method of developing the theme; one way of writing a paragraph of classification is to analyze things according to their component parts that compose them. A good paragraph of classification has certain rules to follow. According to Sullivan (1980), classification of a complex subject can hardly be achieved in a single paragraph. However, whether it is short or long, the classification must follow these strategies:
1- Classification must be based on a single principle, that is to say, sorting out the parts of the subject according to one criterion.
2- It must be complete i.e. including all the parts of the subject in the paragraph of classification and not neglecting any of the parts or the subject constituents.
3- It must exclude one part from another which means that the categories the paragraph of classification includes must not overlap.

Table 5.12 above clearly shows that classification as a method of developing the theme has only been used 29 times in the subjects' writings. The number of times this method is used is to some extent fewer than **cause-effect and comparison-contrast** methods. It can be inferred that this method is either disapproved or preferred by Palestinian EFL majors who are unfamiliar with it though they studied it in their writing course materials or the nature of the topic does not require the use of such a method. The subjects seem to have used

the previous two methods than any other since they use them repeatedly in their writings and even in grammar. Sample D3 is representative of the use of classification as one of the methods of developing the topic.

D3	*Our Palestinian people suffered and still suffer from a lot of problems in all the aspects of their life. There are three of the most important problems which we are suffering from: the economy is weak. The checking points are closed almost the time and the psychological suffering of most of children and women in our land.* *First, the economy of our country is very weak. Frankly the economy is absent because of the control of Israeli soldiers in and out our country. They prevent the merchants are prevented to go outside and trade with the others in neighboring countries ....* *Secondly the checking points are closed everywhere. The Israeli soldiers prevent people to travel either for treating or educating most parents died on the checking points because of this ....* *Thirdly, a lot of statistics proved that there are large number of people suffer from psychological problems. A lot of children wake at night with horrible dreams or nightmares.*

It is clear that the subject in sample D3 above first included the main idea in the first sentence in paragraph one then started to develop this idea. The writer classified the problems into three aspects or types economical, transition and psychological. A colon was used in the first paragraph to introduce the three classes of problems. The second, the third and the fourth paragraphs were also development of the main idea. The writer introduced each with enumerating marker i.e. firstly, secondly, thirdly… etc. It is also clearly noted that the subject tended to use methods other than classification, namely cause-effect method for the same purpose. With reference to table 5.12 above, it can be noted that other methods of theme development are used in the students' writings. Exemplification is an instance, which was only used 22 times and ranked fifth. This method of theme development suggests giving examples of the concept that proposes the topic.

Jordan (1980) reported that through exemplification, which makes things more concrete, you develop the topical idea. Suffice to say, specific examples support the writer's assertions and allow him to communicate meaning to others. A number of devices are used to indicate an exemplification relationship of the sentence to the other parts of the paragraph. The most common devices are 'for example,forinstance, such as, e.g., an evidence … etc. However, exemplification is sometimes implicit which can be expressed by conditional sentence or punctuation marks. Here is another sample.

D4	*First, Gaza strip in the past passed serious events. For example, the people and the dwellers of Gaza strip suffered from the bad treatment that can be represented in assassination process. Also, Israeli occupation used in the past many humiliation instruments as punishing the people especially elderly people….*

From the sample drawn above, it can be noted that the writer mainly used exemplification method for developing the main idea of the topic. Exemplification is explicitly referred to with some signals such as, and for example, as, represented in … etc. The writer is seen to overuse exemplification method since it was used at least four times in one paragraph. It was also obvious that the writer did not use other methods of development in the same paragraph. It is also clear that Palestinian EFL majors preferred using explicit rather than implicit exemplification.

Question/ Answer method is also one of the methods used- though not frequently- by Palestinian EFL majors for the purpose of theme development in writing. This method suggests that a clause asks a question suggested by the preceding statement or vice versa. Of course, this method does not require any linking devices to join the two clauses.

With reference to table (6), it can be noted that question/answer method occurred only eight times in the subjects' writings. It ranked sixth among the other methods. Sample D5 is drawn here to be a representative instance for this method
.

D5	*In the past, the situation in Palestine wasn't good at all. The Palestinians were completely on their knees. They fighted only with stones. They offered all they had. How could they live under a bloody occupation? The answer is difficult, but they contributes and bear all the difficulties against them.*

In this five-sentence paragraph, the writer started stating the topic sentence as the first one. Exemplification is referred to in this sample implicitly since the writer tended to give examples of the bad situation. The writer used no exemplification signals. Then, another method of development was used before the termination of the paragraph. This method is question/answer. The question was stated in the fourth sentence and the answer followed in the fifth sentence. Thus, the writer used two different methods particularly, exemplification and question/answer.

Question/answer method, not only is used to develop the theme in writing, but it has a role in improving and enhancing the reader's comprehension in a reading text as well. In this area, Wang (2006) found that question/answer method had a clear effect on enhancing the reader's comprehension. In addition, Davey (1988) found out that this method improved the reader's ability to answer individual questions and their comprehension performance.

Similar to question/answer method, definition, which is the least frequent theme development method in the study corpus, is only used five times and ranked seventh. Definition is one of the commonest methods of developing a paragraph, though rarely used in the study subjects' writings by offering a definition of the concept or the thing: students do not always properly use definition since some definitions lack certain properties such as providing very detailed information or definition which discusses sub-ideas and ignores the main idea.

It can be inferred that this method, in spite of being known to the students, is notpreferable in their writings. Other methods such as comparison-contrast or cause-effect seem to be more preferable or easier to use. Sample D6 is drawn here to explore to what extent this method participated in developing the theme of the topic.
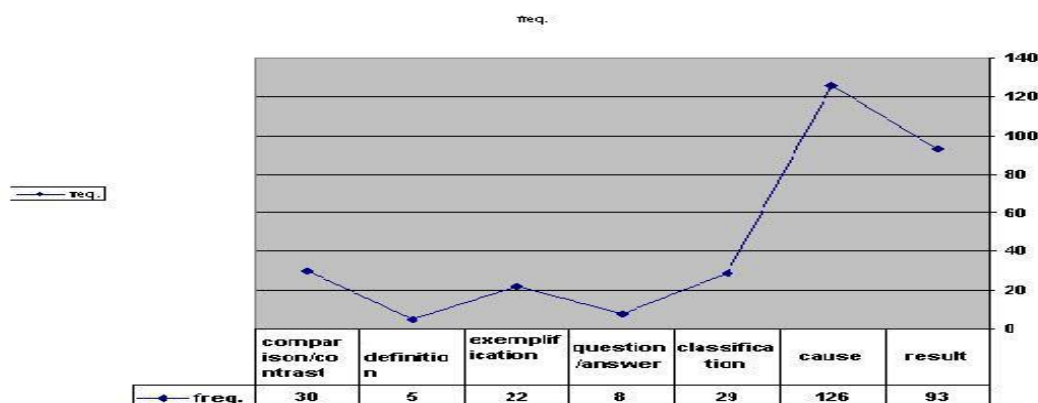
D6	*In 1994 the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) made what called Oslo Accord with Israel. What kind of peace is this? it is the only protected occupations under the name of peace, Although it is supposed to be is peace, the Israeli missiles attacked our country every day and killed many people.*

In the sample above, it can be clearly noted that the writer used two methods to develop the main idea. She used definition and question- answer methods of development. In the first sentence, the writer named the accord or agreement. It is obvious that the definition came in the form of a question. The rest of the paragraph supported the definition in the second sentence. One of the ways to support the definition is contrast. It is clear that the writer used a variety of methods and techniques to develop the main idea of the paragraph. Development seems to be circular rather than linear since the writer did not use the definition method independently but included it in a question form.

Tzung-yu (1993) came up with similar findings. In his study, Chinese students' patterns were not completely circular in developing a paragraph but they follow a pattern similar to that in English texts (linear). Circular or digressive patterns are most commonly found in the introductory and concluding paragraphs.

The results, which were previously presented, in this section will be represented in a graphic format. For more clarification, graph (1) shows the degree and the frequency of the different methods of theme development used by Palestinian EFL majors.

Graph (1) : Frequencies of Theme Development Methods Used by the Subjects

	compar ison/co ntrast	definitio n	exemplif ication	question /answer	classifica tion	cause	result
freq.	30	5	22	8	29	126	93

Graph (1) above summarizes the frequencies of the different theme development methods used by the subjects in their writings. It clearly states that **cause** and result methods are the most frequently used methods by the study subjects whereas question/ answer are the least frequent ones. Comparison/ contrast, classification and exemplification fall in between.

The results reached in the study mismatch those reached by Malenab-Temporal (2016) whose study revealed that definition is the easiest for Philippinese college students to master and organize followed by definition. Moreover, cause and effect examples, details, and process ranked third, fourth and fifth respectively. Nevertheless,classification, comparison, and contrast turned out to be the most difficult methods for students to use.

It is also obvious that there is discrepancy between the results of the current study and those of Ellis (1967) which indicated that eight of the nine textbook methods of paragraph development were used at the following rates: examples (24%), details (22%), reasons (8%), chronology (6%), contrast (1%), definition (1%), repetition (1%), and cause-effect (1%).Hence, this can be the international criteria against which the subjects of the current study's writing can be assessed.

Ghabanchi and Alavi (2011) also found that paragraphs of comparison and contrastsequential progression was (38.44%) whereas in paragraphs of cause-effectsequential progression came next with a percentage of (34.72). These results are also different from the results of the current study.

To my mind, the differences in results can be due to differences in materials presented in textbooks since the subjects of those studies belong to different countries, which adopt pedagogical systems and have pedagogical priorities different from those of the educational institutions in Gaza Strip.

Research Question (2): Are institution and sex significant variables at the level (0.05) in the area of paragraph development methods?
Hypothesis (2): Institution variable may not be a significant factor at the level 0.05 in the subjects' paragraph development.

To find out whether there are specific factors, which influence the use of development methods, the research will concentrate on two factors: institution factor and sex factor. To explore the impact of university factor on the subjects' use of theme development methods in their writings, let us consider table (6). It presents the number of times the subjects used the different methods of developing the theme pertaining to each university.

Table (6): The Impact of University Factor on the Subjects' Use of Development Methods

University	AL- QUDS OPEN UNIVERSITY				ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY				AL- AZHAR UNIVERSITY			
	Mean	Std. Dev	Sum	rank	Mean	Std. Dev	Sum	rank	Mean	Std. Dev	Sum	rank
Result	0.45	0.75	18	2	1.23	1.44	49	1	0.65	0.98	26	2
Cause	1.00	0.96	40	1	1.08	1.12	43	2	1.08	0.92	43	1
Classification	0.20	0.46	8	3	0.00	0.00	0	6	0.53	0.75	21	3
Question/answer	0.10	0.30	4	6	0.00	0.00	0	6	0.10	0.30	4	6
Exemplification	0.18	0.38	7	5	0.15	0.43	6	4	0.23	0.53	9	5
Definition	0.00	0.00	0	7	0.10	0.38	4	5	0.03	0.16	1	7
Comparison/contrast	0.20	0.46	8	3	0.18	0.38	7	3	0.38	0.70	15	4
SUM	2.13	1.20	85		2.73	1.74	109		2.98	1.73	119	

Table (6) above shows that the number of times Al-Azhar University students' use of development methods was the highest where Al-Quds open University students' use of these methods was the lowest. Al-Azhar University group used the different methods 119 times meanwhile, Al-Quds Open University group used them only 85 times and Islamic University group used these methods 109 times. Similarities and differences occurred between the three groups in using each of the different methods of theme development.

It is clearly shown that the three groups are similar in using cause-effect method. Though the number of times each group used this method differs from that in the other group; it ranked first and second among other methods used by each of the three groups. Classification ranked third in Al-Quds Open University and Al-Azhar University groups' writings, whereas it ranked sixth in Islamic University group writings. Comparison-contrast method was to some extent similar in the use of Al-Quds Open University group and Islamic University group. However, Al-Azhar University group used this method more frequently, which equals that of the two groups.
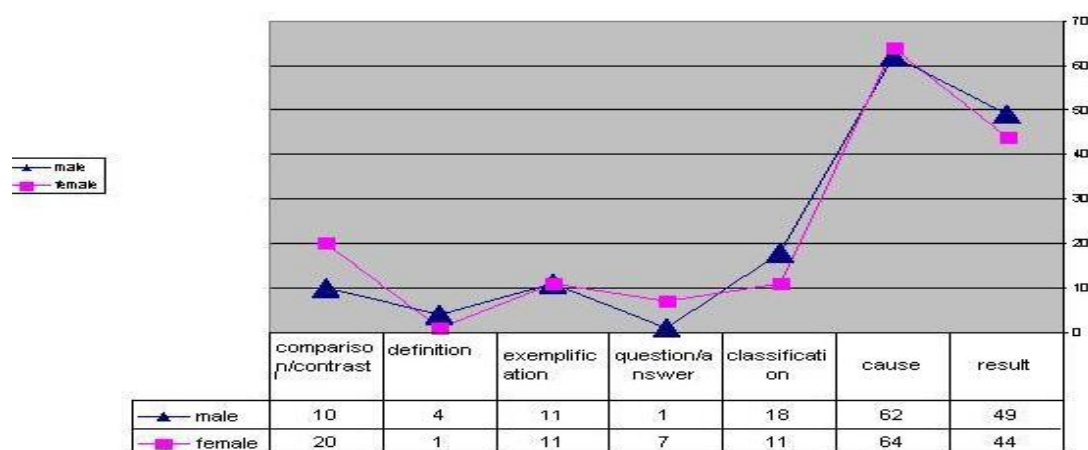
Another area of similarity between the three groups is the use of question/answer method, which ranked sixth in the three groups' written performance. For exemplification method, there is rough similarity between Al-Quds Open University group and Al-azhar University group. It ranked fifth in the two groups' use of development methods, whereas it ranked fourth in the Islamic University group's use of methods. Similarly, for

definition method both Al-Quds Open University and Al-azhar University groups' use of this method ranked seventh but fifth in the third group's use of methods. Then, it can be concluded that there is far more similarities than differences between the three university groups' use of development methods. Thus, the second hypothesis is confirmed.

Hypothesis (3): Palestinian female students are expected to use paragraph development techniques more frequently than their male counterparts.

For gender factor's influence on the use of development methods, let us consider graph (2), which shows the actuality of the two groups' use of development methods. It gives a clear idea about the methods preferable for each sex group.

Graph (2) : Graphic Depiction of Gender Differences in the Use of Theme   Development Methods

	compariso n/contrast	definition	exemplific ation	question/a nswer	classificati on	cause	result
male	10	4	11	1	18	62	49
female	20	1	11	7	11	64	44

It is clear that there are similarities and differences between the two gender groups in the use of development methods. It can be observed that the males and females' use of **ca**use-effect, classification and exemplification methods is relatively similar. There are no statistically significant differences between the two groups in using the previously mentioned three development methods. For question-answer and comparison-contrast methods, it can be noted that there is a significant difference between the two groups in favour of females. That is to say, females do prefer using these two methods than males do. On the other hand, male students prefer using definition method more than females do. In light of the results reached here, the third hypothesis is confirmed.

IV. CONCLUSION

To put it briefly, Palestinian EFL majors seem to use a variety of theme development methods particularly, cause-effect, comparison- contrast, definition, classification, exemplification and question-answer. However, from the discussion above, they seem to use some methods more frequently than others. In other words, they prefer using cause-effect and comparison-contrast methods more than the rest. Moreover, it was found that gender factor has partial impact on using these methods. Similarity, university variable has an impact in this area in terms of preferring using some methods by a particular group than others. Female students are observed to prefer comparison-contrast and question-answer methods more than male students do. Meanwhile, classification and definition methods are more approved by male students than by females.

On the whole, the results presented above confirm the hypotheses since only two or three methods were frequently used in the subjects' writings. Then, to answer the main research question, Palestine EFL majors are not very successful in developing the theme of the topic they compose on. They are observed to use two methods frequently and rarely use others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study main findings and limitations, the researcher wishes to make the following recommendation:
1. As shown in table (5), Palestinian EFL tertiary level majors are not very successful in using a variety of theme development methods in their expository writing. They frequently used two types only and neglected others though they are crucially needed for the nature of the topic on which they are composing. This low use of different techniques seems to be due to lack of practice; students rarely practice writing by their own

unless they are requested to. Therefore, a higher degree of importance should be given to academic writing to make it as an everyday activity. Writing cannot be acquired by mastering the rules of grammar, mechanics and spelling. Writing is learnt through practicing writing. Leki (2003) reports that the best way to learn to write is by writing.

2. The present study is mainly concerned with the students' expository writing. However, it has nothing to do with other genres of wring. Then, other genres of writing such as argumentative writing and free writing should be investigated. Investigating one genre of the students' writing is not enough to judge their achievement in writing since writing is the other major medium of communication after speech.

3. The present study dealt with the subjects' written product. The processes and the methods and the techniques students use in writing were neglected. Therefore, the processes, techniques and methods the students prefer in their writing should be investigated.

4. The research also recommends that English instruction syllabi and course materials taught at Palestinian national universities should be regularly evaluated and revised to meet the actual needs of Palestinian EFL learners. Importance should be given to topics that mainly concern the students' everyday life, nature and society in order to enable them to write about themselves, their social and environmental issues.

5. Two variables; namely, sex and academic institution were tested. Their influence on the students' theme development methods was discussed. It is recommended that other research should investigate other factors in the area of written discourse.

6. Course material designers should take in consideration theme development methods, providing the students with writing models indicating the use of the different development methods.

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