

**The Power of Rhetoric**

**How well are Students at the Department of English –Ibri College- aware of the Effectiveness of Rhetoric in their Writing?**

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***Abstract***

Rhetoric could be defined as the art of persuasion, whether in writing or speaking. The main purpose of using rhetoric is to convey a powerful message to a certain audience so as to inform, persuade, or motivate it in certain situations. In the old Greek era, Rhetoric was mainly used in politics and that is why students at that time were taught and trained to be excellent and outstanding orators. In order to provide the audience with a complete idea about the power of rhetoric, the researchers have distributed a questionnaire among (28) male and female students in the First year and Foundation Programme at Ibri College of Applied Sciences studying English as a mandatory course with much focus on the writing skill element. What the researchers have reached is that students do need to get more explanation and exercise on the art of Rhetoric in order to produce and introduce perfect pieces of writing that could –hopefully-be called “Masterpieces”. Recommendations, discussion, suggestions, and implications will be elaborated deeply throughout this paper.

**Keywords:** elaborate, Greek, motivate, orators, persuasion, politics, power, rhetoric

***Introduction***

Rhetoric is the art of persuasion and use of eloquent elements of language to introduce a meaningful speech, or piece of writing, to a specific audience. The orator, therefore, has to be well-equipped with a strong and powerful style to defend his/her topic. Some rhetoricians, especially politicians, use fake, empty, and misleading words and expressions as a trick, or trap, to convince the folk to elect them presidents, and later on, people discover that they were misled by those evasive and foxy orators. This paper highlights the bright and powerful side of Rhetoric in the academic arena—colleges, universities, schools, etc. The focus will be on guiding, preparing, assisting, and checking students' way of following certain styles that impress their audience- both, written and oral.

### *Literature Review*

The word “Rhetoric” has diverse meanings depending on the situation in which it is used. It could mean the possible way of introducing a certain content, or the proper way one behaves while delivering a speech. However, one of the most appreciated definitions of Rhetoric is: “the art of persuasion.”(Gagich, (n.d), Para. 1). This definition summarizes the whole process beyond using the content, whether written or oral, in an acceptable way. Human's speech is valuable since it conveys messages to people around. Whatever one utters, has a great importance and effectiveness. All the day people talk, talk, talk, and this could be categorized under the umbrella of Rhetoric.

The word “rhetoric” has few friends. But it's the right word to describe the daily chatter that emanates from us from morning until the end of the day. We are not fact machines, but rhetorical machines. We are not cameras, but practical artists: rendering in the brush strokes of our own world to perceptions.... . And because we usually do this to seek acceptance and agreement with others, we are-for good and ill-rhetorical (Boehner, 2014, Para. 3).

Rhetoric can have much power when the usage of words and expressions moves the audience. During war, shrewd leaders emerge and encourage soldiers to the extreme. “The right words can move people to take action. The right words can give life to an idea. The right words can inspire someone” (Moorhead, 2020, Para.2). Can images stir people's energy and emotions?

Well, anything that has the legitimate power to affect the audience is acceptable. Sometimes imagery plays a vivid role in sending important messages to others—teachers in classrooms tend to encourage students to guess the message of certain pictures, not by reading or listening, but by looking and admiring that image. This saves time and effort on one hand, and uncover the power of rhetoric used.

Imagery is thought to have power over other forms of expression, hindering us in listening, because we are too busy looking. Imagery is also thought to influence in a stronger way than other forms of expression. Social psychology and media studies argue

that our inferences and behavior much more influenced by vivid, concrete information, than by pallid abstract prepositions of substantially greater probative and evidential value. A picture, in short, is perceived to be more powerful than a text, but at the same time unable to work rationally and perform argumentation. (Kjeldsen, 2021, Para. 1).

In the political life, almost always, candidates deliver speeches as a way of promoting themselves and giving people a brief summary about their future programmes. This is a sort of competition and tournament between the candidates; everyone starts to promote himself, and devalue and attack his opponent. The one who wins-normally- is the one who can move the audience by the use of effective and powerful rhetoric and make them believe in what he is going to do in the future, although he might not follow what he has promised.

In the political sphere, rhetoric is used as a label to devalue an individual by suggesting that their words are empty or artificial. David Hogg and Emma Gonzalez were so effective at public speaking that they were accused of being “crisis actors” by the Conservative media. (Riddell, 2020, Para. 7).

As previously mentioned, the main aim of using rhetoric is persuasion which should be used in unifying efforts for the good of humanity. Though successful, sometime, rhetoric should not be used in destroying and deteriorating people’s lives. Ethics is required all the time, otherwise, the world might go into a disaster. Aristotle taught his students to appreciate ethics while studying rhetoric because it is a real power that could be both: destructive and constructive.

For Aristotle and his contemporaries, rhetoric-as reason in action- helps us move beyond the vagaries of power of coercion and seduction to reach a higher, transcendental plane of understanding and empathy. We must help students to recognize rhetoric in all its forms and harness the power of persuasion as a unifying force for good. (Riddell, 2020, Para. 9).

We are all human beings who boast honor and dignity, and expect to have mutual respect from others. Treating people like animals is not acceptable and utterly refused. Some leaders, or rhetoricians, use rhetoric to demean others- satire, for example- and think of them as animals and pull them wherever, or fill their brains with any stuff. Sometimes certain events happen in different places in the world, and the leader: president, king, etc. - plans to convince the audience to think of them the other way around. This happens when rhetoricians are haunted with hatred and extreme anger towards a certain nation, or individuals. Utilizing the power of rhetoric should be fair; not a tool of accusing innocent people, or spoiling their reputation by imposing fake information and treating them like a number of forlorn animals. Justice and fairness are the criteria of treating others.

In Angry Public Rhetorics, Distinguished Research professor in the department of Communication Studies Celeste Condit explores emotions as motivators and organizers

of collective action—a theory that treats humans as “symbol-using animals” to understand similar rhetorics in three ideologically diverse voices surrounding 9/11: Osama Bin Laden, President George W. Bush, and Susan Sontag (Flurry, 2018, Para. 1).

During the past years, the U.S. presidents used to set a good example of using rhetoric in their speeches—speeches that respect and unify all people as one class. The 45<sup>th</sup> president of the States—Donald Trump—has taken a new path in delivering speeches, and normally depended on the social media—Twitter, mainly—to be in touch with people. The way he used was odd. The confidence that the States had during the past years is now dismantled and blame goes for the institutions that allowed him—Trump—to rise. There is no power in Trump’s speeches nor strength, on the contrary; he made a crack in the policy followed in America regarding Muslims—he banned them from entering America and considered them suspects, even without trials. Trump’s speeches were a shame in the U.S. image as a leading power in the world. This made the new president—Biden—declare from the very moment that America is back, which is a stab in Trump’s policy.

The 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States has spent the last four years in office promoting the rhetoric that has invalidated educated communication. The impact that Donald Trump’s language has had on the political arena and the administration itself makes it clear that once highly regarded tact and precision that was associated with the American presidency can no longer be held as the standard... Trump’s one term in the White House has managed to dismantle the confidence that the U.S. once maintained as a world power and replaced it with a narrative that is at best distracting, and at worst may have caused irreparable harm to the institutions that allowed him to rise (Maechtle, 2021, Para. 1).

Addressing people is an art; respect and good treatment, sharing and caring. When looking at the way president Trump and Obama deal with certain events in the U.S. A, one feels convinced that there is a great gap in the way they behave. Obama shares his nation their sadness and feelings, and pours tears generously—whether real or not. This shows a strong and powerful effect of the rhetoric he uses, including body language.

Whereas Obama once stood on national television in tears to address the country after the Sandy Hook shooting in 2012, Trump responds to questions about the rising death toll due to the COVID-19 pandemic with “It is what it is.” Instead of rhetoric that represents the ideals of such a complex demographic as the United States, political language has deteriorated to a point that few could have anticipated. Where other presidents would convey a message that represents the people, Trump’s oratory has only highlighted his negligence towards many Americans. (Maechtle, 2021, Para. 4).

Bill Clinton and Obama have a sort of charisma and force of personality. Because of their background in law, both talk well and draw audience’ attention, and capture people’s hearts before eyes. Their speeches are so memorable, though their writing might lack that power.

“Presidents Clinton and Obama, by contrast, are riveting and often inspiring speakers, but typically their words aren’t so memorable when read” (Ross, 2015, Para. 6).

On the other hand, consider Churchill’s policy and use of powerful rhetoric. He has an astonishing way of delivering speeches that motivate his people. He cares about his country and ready to fight till the last moment, though America was rising at that time.

“Churchill was attentive to the long line of historical ideas. And his ability to conjure that tradition for support is another reason individuals setbacks were less crucial for him. Something larger was at stake. It wasn’t just a matter of opposition; it was a matter of what was being championed, even if the British Empire was in its twilight and the United States was beginning to bear the standard (Rothstein, 2012, Para. 16).

On another occasion, Churchill excelled at addressing his people by an amazing triplet. He was serious, and would apply what he had preached. So many decades have passed and the power of his words is still repeated by many people around the globe--their echo still stirs people.

Recall British PM Winston Churchill’s stirring triplet from the speech he delivered to Parliament on June 4, 1940: “We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing ground, we shall fight on the fields and in the streets.” (Chen, 2019, Para. 8).

Powerful rhetoric could be attained by using attractive figures of speech. The use of figurative speech elements is a sort of ornaments that polish speeches and introduce them as masterpieces. This way is widely used in the world of business—persuading customers to buy goods.

Modern social science research has proven that the figures of speech are indeed the keys to being persuasive and memorable. However, the proven sequence of being persuasive and memorable is not taught anymore, even though so much of our lives are about persuasion. Marketing and advertisements try to convince us to buy a product or try a service (Romm, 2018, Para. 2).

There are some characteristics of the effective persuasion and use of rhetoric as a powerful way in convincing the audience. “In fact, the right strategy to be persuasive is:

1. Use short words
2. Repeat yourself as often as possible
3. Be figurative and include an abundant amount of metaphors” (Romm, 2018, Para. 4)

Intimacy between rhetoricians and the audience is so effective and fruitful. Turkish president Erdogan uses this policy to create a sense of warm feelings, and bridges the gap between him and his audience, which is different from Trump’s, as Trump used to be, to some extent, “aggressive”, especially with journalists who were part of the audience.

The speech is most repetitive in its use of the word “nation/ national” and the term of address “valuable brothers and sisters”. The term creates familiarity between the speaker and the audience, expressing his respect for them. The repetition indicates their importance to the speaker. Erdogan’s use of repetition intensifies the connection between him and the audience, creating a space in which he can shape their thoughts (Azzinaro, 2018, Para. 5).

## Methodology

In order to get a full and complete idea about the power of rhetoric, the researchers have distributed a questionnaire among (28) students at Ibri College of Applied Sciences. This questionnaire contains five Multiple-Choice, and five Agree-Disagree questions. The students were fully briefed about this questionnaire and told they “don’t have to write their names”, as the research is planned for academic purposes.

## Population

All participants- 28 male and female students- are Omanis, and come from diverse regions in the Sultanate of Oman. They are taking a mandatory English module that focusses mainly on the writing skill. They study at Ibri College of Applied Sciences, aged between 19-22 years old.

## Questionnaire Analysis

In order to gather more information about the topic, a survey was conducted among (28) Foundation Program and First year students, enrolled at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences- Ibri College of Applied Sciences. The study is conducted by means of a questionnaire that consists of (10) items. The first part contains (5) (Multiple Choice) questions, while the second consists of (5) (Agree/ Disagree) questions.

The analysis of the results for the first part of the questionnaire, (Multiple Choice) questions, shows that (71.4%) of the participants believe that “Rhetoric” is the art of persuasion which is exactly what rhetoric is. It has been stated earlier in this research paper that the art of persuasion and the use of elegant linguistic features to present a relevant speech or piece of writing to a specific audience is referred to as **Rhetoric**. In addition, most of the participants, (89.3%) believe that the best rhetorician is the one who moves the audience—attracts attention, and captures people’s hearts. It is also noticed that the majority of the students, (85.7%), realize the importance of rhetoric to them as students and conclude that students need more exercises and explanation about Rhetoric in order to be persuasive in both: writing and speaking. Moreover, (85.7%) of the students trust that when they excel at Rhetoric, they will be able to produce masterpieces in their writing.

Moreover, with regard to the second set of the questions, (Agree/ Disagree) questions, the results are as follows. A significant percentage of the respondents, (96.4%) agree that powerful rhetoric should contain some useful figures of speech such as metaphor and simile and (89.3%) of the respondents have no doubt that creating familiarity between the speaker and audience—calling them brothers and sisters- gives the audience a peace of mind and trust, and bridges the gap between them. Furthermore, (100%) of the participants believe that our **prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, is the Greatest Rhetorician ever**. Finally, (67.9%) of the students presume true that rhetoricians with no ethics are failure people.

Figure 1

Multiple choice questions

1. I believe that "Rhetoric "is: هي " البلاغة " هي: في رأيي ان

28 responses

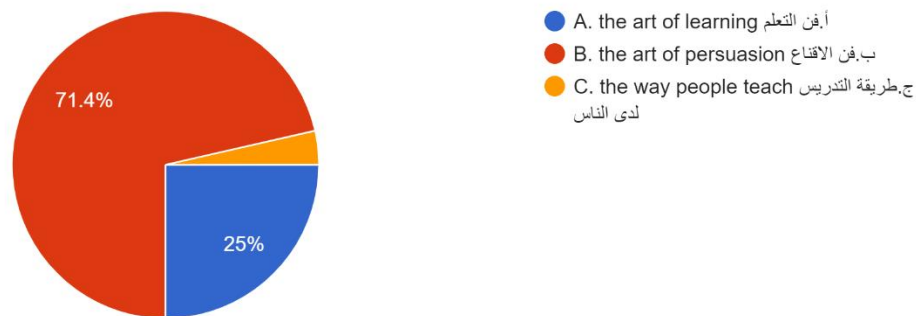


Figure 2

2. The best rhetorician is the one who: إن افضل البلاغاء والفصحاء هو الذي:

28 responses

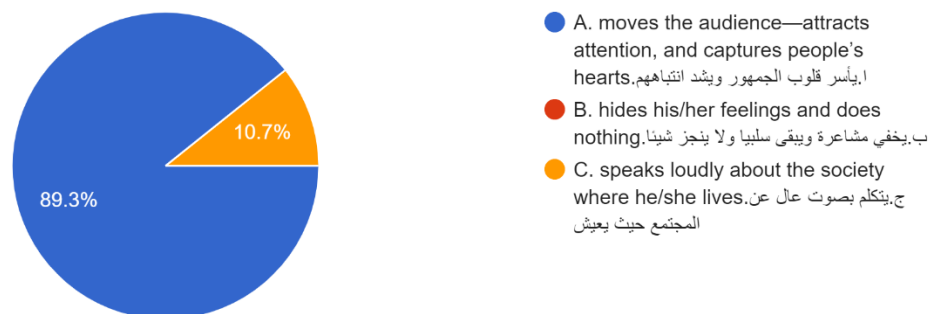
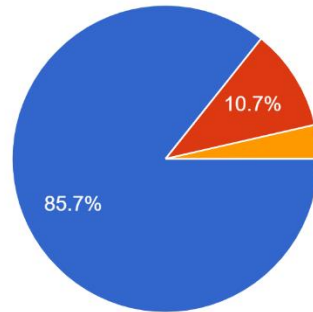


Figure 3

3. As a student, كوني طالب

28 responses

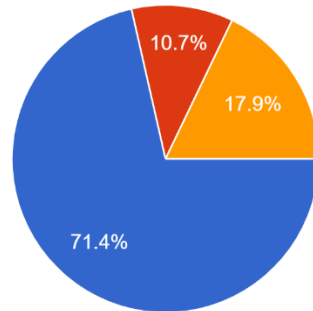


- a. I need more exercises and explanation about Rhetoric in order to be persuasive in both: writing and speaking  
ا. يلزمي الكثير من التمارين والشروحات في كتاباتي وكلماتي عن البلاغة لآكون مقنعا في كتاباتي وكلماتي.
- b. I dislike rhetoric because it is complicated  
ب. أكره البلاغة لأنها معقدة.
- c. I admit that I am so weak at writing  
ج. أعترف بضعفي في مهارة الكتابة.

Figure 4

4. Politicians need rhetoric: السياسيون بحاجة للبلاغة

28 responses

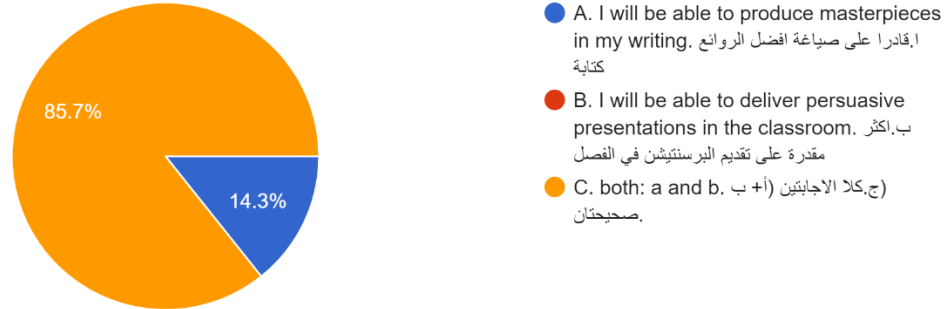


- A. to promote their future programmes so as to get support from their audience.  
ا. لأجل الترويج لبرامجهم المستقبلية لأجل ان يلقوا الدعم من جمهورهم
- B. to teach at schools.  
ب. لأجل التدريس في المدارس
- C. for travelling.  
ج. لأجل اسفارهم

Figure 5

5. When I excel at rhetoric, سأكونُ، فصاحةً، حينما أصبحُ بارعا في مهارة البلاغة والفصاحة، سأكونُ

28 responses



Agree/ Disagree questions

Figure 6

6. Powerful rhetoric should contain some useful figures of speech such as metaphor and simile. لأجل

بلاغة مؤثرة، يستحسن ان تحتوي على استخدامات مجازية كأدوات التشبيه والتشخيص وغيرها

28 responses

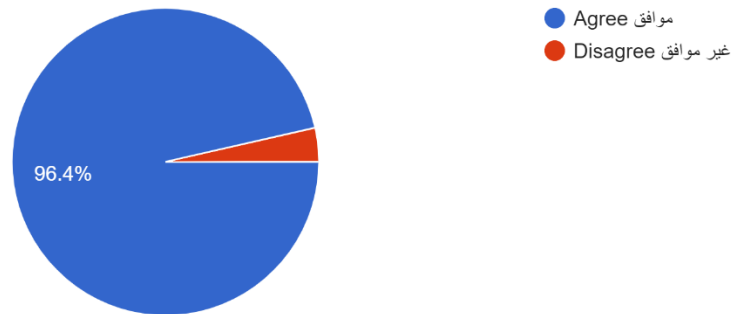


Figure 7

7. Strong, plain, short, and repeated words are characteristics of a powerful rhetoric. نحصل على بلاغة مؤثرة وقوية حين نستخدم كلمات واضحة وبسيطة وقوية بنفس الوقت، ثم لا ضير من تكرار بعض الكلمات لتصل الى الجمهور بسلاسة ويسر  
28 responses

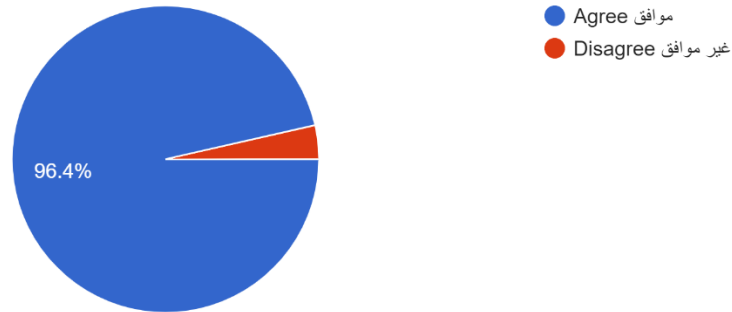


Figure 8

8. Creating familiarity between the speaker and audience—calling them brothers and sister gives the audience a peace of mind and trust, and bridges the g... ويناديهم ب "اخواتي واخوتي" فهذا يريحهم ويشدهم اليه اكثر...  
28 responses

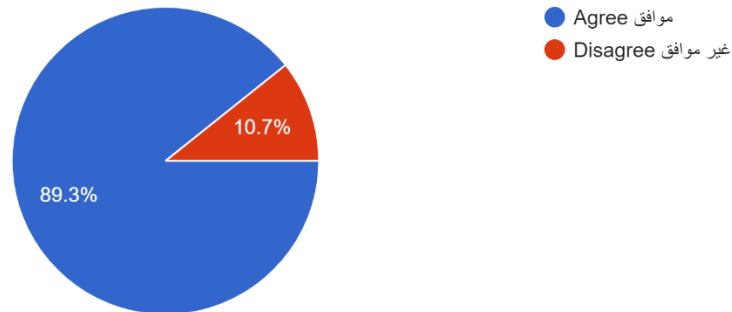


Figure 9

9. Our prophet Mohammed peace be upon him is the greatest rhetorician ever. يعتير سيدنا محمد عليه

افضل الصلاة وأتم التسليم هو اعظم خطيب بليغ على مر العصور والدهور

28 responses

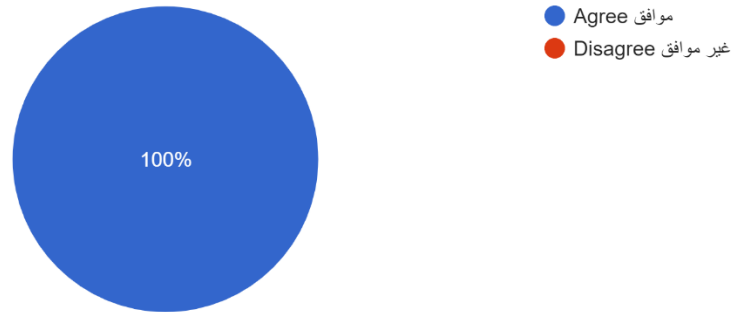
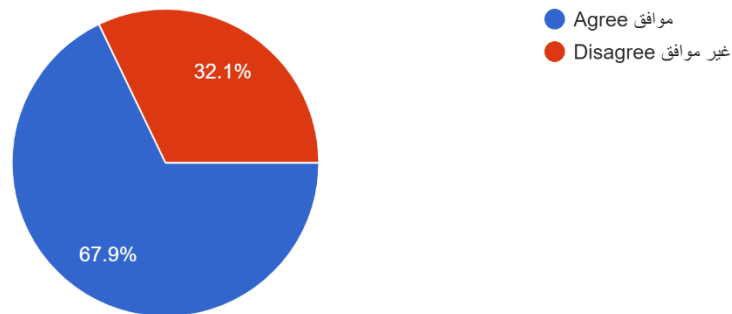


Figure 10

10. Rhetoricians with no ethics are failure people. البلغاء والخطباء دون وازع اخلاقي هم فئة فاشلة

28 responses



### Recommendations

-when writing or delivering a speech, one should use a clear language with clear expressions and utterances.

-there is no harm if the orator repeats some words so that the audience can understand all the speech.

-utilizing emotional words and expressions helps draw the audience' attentions and can secure support for the topic at hand.

-rhetoric should be reflected in the social media i.e., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc., mainly if the writer is a public figure—president, king, Emir, actor, professor, etc.

-writers and, or, speakers should take some Figures as models in the field of rhetoric-- Winston Churchill, John F. Kennedy , Barack Obama etc.

-to be an aspiring speaker, one's words should be so memorable when read or listened to.

-an affective and persuasive rhetoric depends mainly on the strength and power of diverse figures of speech.

-for rhetoricians, to be persuasive, they should avoid long and complicated words and expressions; short and repeated words do work properly.

-rhetoric could be learned and be more affective and memorable.

### ***Conclusion***

The aim of this paper is to show the power of rhetoric, whether in writing or communication. It has a great and affective role in conveying messages to the audience in a smooth and clear way. The most successful type of rhetoric is the one that strongly captures the hearts, emotions, and minds of the audience. Normally, smart future presidents use rhetoric in their campaigns to promote themselves. Some do strongly, while others fail.

### ***Acknowledgement***

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### ***About the researchers***

Dr Mohammed Al Ghafri is a full-time lecturer of English at Nizwa University- Oman. He holds a PhD in teaching English (TESOL) from the University of Leeds where he also got his MA in Education. He has had different positions: Assistant Dean, English supervisor, Head of follow-up and training in Oman, and Head of the department of English at Ibri College. His research interest is classroom interaction and participation, identity, classroom context and teachers' supervision.

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## Appendices

### Questionnaire

Hello all,

The following is a questionnaire that highlights an important issue that you need to be aware of in the writing part of your English courses; the **Power of Rhetoric**. This questionnaire is conducted for one group in the First year Information Technology majors, and Foundation

Programme, (28 male & female students), at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences- Ibri College- Sultanate of Oman. This questionnaire consists of two kinds of questions (**Multiple- Choice /Agree/Disagree**). You don't have to write your names.

### Multiple choice questions

**1. I believe that "Rhetoric "is:**

- A. the art of learning
- B. the art of persuasion
- C. the way people teach

**2. The best rhetorician is the one who:**

- A. moves the audience—attracts attention, and captures people's hearts.
- B. hides his/her feelings and does nothing
- C. speaks loudly about the society where he/she lives.

**3. As a student,**

- a. I need more exercise and explanation about **Rhetoric** in order to be persuasive in both: writing and speaking.
- b. I dislike rhetoric because it is complicated
- c. I admit that I am so weak at writing

**4. Politicians need rhetoric:**

- A. to promote their future programmes so as to get support from their audience
- B. to teach at schools

C. for travelling

**5. When I excel at rhetoric,**

A. I will be able to produce masterpieces.

B. I will be able to deliver persuasive presentations in the classroom

C. both: a and b

**Agree/ Disagree questions**

**6. Powerful rhetoric should contain some useful figures of speech such as metaphor and simile**

1. Agree

2. Disagree

**7. Strong, plain, short, and repeated words are characteristics of a powerful rhetoric.**

1. Agree

2. Disagree

**8. Creating familiarity between the speaker and audience—calling them brothers and sisters gives the audience a peace of mind and trust, and bridges the gap between them.**

1. Agree

2. Disagree

**9. Our prophet Mohammed peace be upon him is the greatest rhetorician ever.**

1. Agree

2. Disagree

**10. Rhetoricians with no ethics are failure people.**

1. Agree

2. Disagree

