Providing a Model for Teaching Rhetoric to Arabic Language Students in Iraqi Universities Based on Ausubel's Theory

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to qualitatively analyze the educational experiences of Arabic language instructors in Iraqi universities and to examine the current status of rhetoric instruction within these institutions. This research adopts a qualitative approach and utilizes semi-structured interviews with 18 faculty members from departments of Arabic language and literature in both public and private Iraqi universities. Based on David Ausubel's theory of meaningful learning, the study identifies three main dimensions in rhetoric instruction: cognitive organization, interactive and motivational strategies, and the transfer and application of rhetorical knowledge. Thematic analysis results revealed that the teaching of rhetoric in Iraqi universities faces several challenges, including the persistence of traditional teaching methods, limited integration of modern technologies, the lack of effective linkage between theoretical concepts and students' prior experiences, and the absence of practical connections to real-life applications. The instructors emphasized the need for structured and gradual presentation of rhetorical concepts and for establishing meaningful connections between these concepts and students' lived experiences in order to enhance instructional quality. The study proposes an instructional model based on Ausubel's meaningful learning theory, which aims to transform rhetoric education from a purely theoretical process into a practical, engaging, and dynamic learning experience. Ultimately, the research recommends the adoption of innovative instructional models in Iraqi universities—particularly in the field of rhetoric education—that emphasize cognitive organization, interactive and motivational strategies, and the practical use of rhetorical knowledge.

Keywords: Arabic language education, rhetoric, Iraqi universities, meaningful learning, Ausubel's theory

Introduction

The instruction of Arabic rhetoric (balāghah) within university curricula plays a central role in the cultivation of linguistic, aesthetic, and critical competencies among Arabic language students. In the context of Iraq, a nation with a rich rhetorical heritage and a complex sociolinguistic landscape, the effective teaching of rhetorical sciences faces both historic and pedagogical challenges. These challenges have prompted educators and researchers to explore more meaningful and contextually appropriate models of instruction that transcend traditional rote-based methods. One of the most promising frameworks for this endeavor is David Ausubel's theory of meaningful learning, which prioritizes cognitive structure, conceptual anchoring, and experiential integration in instructional design (1-3).

Rhetoric in the Arabic tradition is a multidimensional discipline that encompasses three interrelated branches: meanings (maʿānī), rhetoric proper (balāghah), and stylistics (badīʿ) (4-6). While its foundational concepts remain consistent, the methods used to teach rhetoric have evolved in response to modern educational demands. Yet in Iraqi universities, rhetoric instruction often remains embedded in abstract definitions, static textbooks, and non-contextualized literary examples (7, 8). Consequently, students struggle to connect rhetorical principles to real-world communication scenarios or to deploy them in writing and speech.

This disconnect between theory and application calls for instructional strategies that align with learners' prior knowledge, stimulate cognitive engagement, and encourage practical usage. According to Ausubel's cognitive view of learning, new information becomes meaningful only when it can be subsumed under relevant existing concepts in the learner's cognitive structure (1, 9). This perspective has been increasingly applied in diverse educational fields to bridge the gap between abstract knowledge and functional understanding (10). In the context of Arabic rhetoric, meaningful learning theory offers a powerful heuristic for designing instruction that supports deep comprehension, personalization, and contextual adaptation of rhetorical forms.

In the Iraqi educational context, where Arabic diglossia presents additional layers of complexity in language instruction, rhetorical training must take into account the linguistic tension between colloquial and formal Arabic (11). Students are often more fluent in spoken dialects than in fusha (Classical/Modern Standard Arabic), which remains the medium of rhetorical texts. This disjuncture reinforces the necessity of constructing meaningful learning pathways that explicitly connect rhetorical phenomena to students' lived linguistic experiences and communicative needs (12). Indeed, when learners can recognize rhetorical forms in advertising, media, politics, or social discourse, their motivation and analytical ability increase (13).

A growing body of research has explored how educational psychology and instructional design can enhance the learning of rhetorical content through interactive and applied methods (14, 15). These innovations are especially critical in higher education settings where students are expected to move beyond memorization and engage in critical production and deconstruction of texts. Iraqi universities, however, face systemic constraints—including outdated curricula, limited digital resources, and reliance on passive lecturing—that hinder the application of such models (16). Given these structural and pedagogical barriers, the meaningful learning model can provide a viable framework for revitalizing rhetoric education.

A key feature of Ausubel's model is the use of advance organizers—cognitive structures or guiding concepts presented before the learning material—to scaffold student comprehension and enable the assimilation of complex material into existing cognitive schema (2). In the context of rhetoric, this could involve presenting familiar rhetorical instances from contemporary media before introducing classical definitions or taxonomies. For example, showing how metaphor and hyperbole function in political speeches or advertising slogans can prepare learners to understand their formal features in canonical texts (17). Such strategies have been shown to increase retention, transferability, and learner engagement across disciplines (3).

Furthermore, meaningful learning encourages educators to design instruction that prioritizes the integration of conceptual understanding with real-world relevance (9). In rhetorical instruction, this translates into a model that combines theoretical

exposition with applied tasks such as rewriting assignments, rhetorical analysis of multimedia content, classroom debates, and oral presentations (18). These tasks allow students to actively construct meaning, not merely consume information passively. Research conducted in Iraq has confirmed the efficacy of this approach, demonstrating that students trained through meaningful learning models show higher proficiency in rhetorical expression and critical reading (12).

Technology also plays a vital mediating role in implementing a meaningful learning framework, particularly in contexts marked by limited instructional time or diverse student abilities. Integrating digital tools—such as interactive learning platforms, mobile applications, and rhetorical analysis software—can support differentiated instruction and create more engaging, student-centered learning environments (19, 20). Studies in both Iraqi and broader Arab educational systems have highlighted the potential of e-learning and blended models for expanding access to rhetorical content and enabling more frequent formative assessment (17, 19).

Additionally, cultural sensitivity and the role of tradition must be considered in rhetorical pedagogy. While the incorporation of new strategies and technologies is essential, rhetoric must still be taught in a manner that respects the historical integrity and literary sophistication of the Arabic tradition (4, 13). A hybrid instructional model—one that links classical knowledge with modern methods—has been suggested by scholars as an effective strategy for preserving authenticity while fostering innovation (8). This aligns with Ausubel's emphasis on anchoring new content in pre-existing knowledge, particularly when teaching culturally laden or abstract material.

From a methodological perspective, applying meaningful learning theory to rhetoric instruction requires a comprehensive understanding of student needs, course objectives, and assessment design. Recent studies in applied linguistics and instructional science have demonstrated that successful implementation of Ausubel's theory involves not only content reorganization but also the use of collaborative learning structures, formative feedback, and contextualized assessment (7, 10). These components must be embedded systematically within the instructional model to ensure cognitive integration and motivational engagement.

In sum, the adoption of Ausubel's meaningful learning theory offers a viable and evidence-based path toward enhancing rhetoric instruction in Iraqi universities. The model responds to multiple pedagogical needs: it promotes active engagement, facilitates the transfer of theoretical knowledge to practical settings, aligns with technological advancements, and respects the cultural richness of the Arabic rhetorical tradition. The objective of this study is thus to develop a theoretically grounded, contextually adaptable, and pedagogically effective instructional model for teaching Arabic rhetoric to university students in Iraq.

Methods and Materials

This study is applied in terms of purpose and qualitative in nature, adopting a thematic analysis approach. The qualitative approach was chosen to deeply examine the lived experiences of instructors and to understand the contextual challenges associated with teaching Arabic rhetoric in Iraqi university settings. In such research, the focus is on understanding the phenomenon from the perspective of participants, uncovering hidden themes, and extracting meaning through narratives and personal experiences.

The research population included all faculty members in Arabic language and literature departments at public and private universities in Iraq who have experience teaching rhetoric at the undergraduate or postgraduate level. Purposeful sampling was employed, and based on criteria such as teaching experience in the field of rhetoric, geographical diversity of universities, and willingness to participate in interviews, 18 distinguished faculty members were selected. To adhere to the principle of theoretical saturation, interviews continued until new data became repetitive and no new themes emerged.

The data collection instrument used in this research was semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were designed based on the theoretical literature on rhetoric instruction and the theory of meaningful learning, allowing for both open-ended responses and guided conversation aligned with the research objectives. The interviews were conducted either in-person or online, with each session lasting between 45 to 60 minutes on average. All interviews were recorded with the participants' consent and then fully transcribed.

For data analysis, the thematic analysis method was employed. This process followed the six-phase framework: familiarization with the data, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up the final analysis. Through open and axial coding, the research sought to identify major themes related to challenges, strategies, successful and unsuccessful experiences of instructors in teaching rhetoric.

To enhance the credibility of the research, member checking and peer debriefing techniques were utilized. For analytical reliability, the coding and theme extraction process was conducted with the participation of two additional researchers, and intercoder agreement was assessed. To ensure transferability, sufficient contextual information was provided regarding the instructors, their university settings, and educational environments, allowing readers to make informed judgments about the generalizability of the findings.

As the study involved real human participants, ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and respect for participants' privacy were strictly observed. No names or identifying information were included in the final research report.

Findings and Results

In this study, the qualitative section was conducted through semi-structured interviews with 18 experts and instructors in Arabic language and rhetoric from various Iraqi universities. The examination of demographic characteristics of the participants indicated that their composition in terms of gender, age, educational level, and work experience was sufficiently diverse to provide rich and valid data.

In terms of gender, 60% of the participants were male and 40% were female. This distribution is largely consistent with the general faculty composition of Arabic language departments in Iraqi universities, indicating that perspectives were obtained from both gender groups. Regarding age, 40% of the participants were aged between 30 and 40, and 50% were between 40 and 50 years old. This suggests that most participants were in midlife and in the phase of professional consolidation, possessing both substantial teaching experience and active engagement with modern educational developments.

With respect to educational level, 60% of the participants held doctoral degrees, while 40% had master's degrees. This academic background indicates that the interviewees had strong foundations in Arabic language and were capable of critical and theoretical analysis of rhetoric instruction. Concerning work experience, the largest proportion belonged to those with 5 to 15 years of teaching experience (a total of 65%). This range of instructors was familiar with both traditional teaching approaches and exposed to contemporary theories and methods, making them suitable sources for assessing the application of meaningful learning theory in rhetoric teaching.

In this study, the qualitative data analysis employed thematic analysis based on the six-phase model by Braun and Clarke (2006). In the first phase, semi-structured interviews with 18 experts and Arabic language instructors were read line by line, and initial (open) codes were generated. These codes, derived directly from key statements, recurring concepts, and participants' instructional experiences, laid the foundation for the final themes and the proposed instructional model.

In total, 321 open codes were extracted from the interview transcripts. These included diverse concepts such as "rhetorical analysis of promotional texts," "use of modern teaching methods," "advance organizers," "application-based instruction,"

"collaborative learning," and "design of online educational platforms." Many of these codes aligned conceptually with David Ausubel's theory of meaningful learning and particularly emphasized the need for linking theoretical concepts with students' lived experiences, cognitive organization of content, and enhancement of rhetorical analysis and application skills.

Based on concept frequency and thematic depth, elements such as "strengthening analytical skills," "teaching rhetorical styles in sentence restructuring," "designing interactive and analytical activities," and "applications of rhetoric in real-world domains such as media, politics, and marketing" were among the most frequently cited and emphasized in the data. Additionally, a word cloud was developed to display the most frequently mentioned codes, providing a clear visualization of instructors' shared concerns and priorities regarding rhetoric instruction. This tool helped the researcher identify and categorize main themes with greater accuracy and coherence in subsequent analysis stages.

In the next phase, these initial codes were integrated and synthesized through open and axial thematic analysis and organized into higher-level concepts. The outcome of this process was the formation of 15 sub-codes, each representing a key aspect of rhetoric instruction within the framework of Ausubel's meaningful learning theory.

In the third phase, these sub-codes were conceptually and structurally categorized into three overarching main codes. These core codes represent three foundational dimensions in designing a rhetoric instruction model for Arabic language students in Iraqi universities and are as follows:

1. Cognitive Organization
2. Interactive and Motivational Strategies
3. Transfer and Application of Knowledge

In the presented table and tree diagrams, the conceptual relationship among the initial, sub, and main codes is clearly illustrated, demonstrating the process of data distillation from raw to theoretical and applied levels. Table 1 presents the main themes, sub-themes, and subcomponents related to each theme.

Table 1. Main Themes, Sub-Themes, and Subcomponents Derived from Faculty Interviews

Main Themes	Sub-Themes	Subcomponents
Knowledge Transfer and Application	Rhetorical presentations and speeches	Use of rhetorical devices in speeches and debates
		Use of rhetorical devices in formal discussions and debates
		Practicing persuasion techniques and rhetorical influence
		Rhetoric applications in politics, marketing, and public culture
	Multimedia analysis	Teaching rhetoric in professional and media environments
		Use of digital tools
		Examining the role of rhetorical devices in persuasion
	Use of rhetorical skills in speech and writing	Providing practical writing samples
		Practicing rhetorical writing
		Analyzing poetry and contemporary texts
	Increasing practical exercises	Application-based instruction
		Integrating theoretical and practical training
		Enhancing analytical skills

	Rewriting texts based on rhetorical principles	Teaching rhetorical styles in sentence transformation
		Conducting practical and analytical workshops
		Designing rewriting assignments
	Rhetorical text analysis	Structural analysis of rhetorical texts
		Teaching rhetorical analysis instead of theoretical definitions
		Analyzing rhetorical media advertisements
		Analyzing rhetorical speeches in class
Interactive and Motivational Strategies	Meaningful assessment	Use of skill-based assessments
		Use of online tests
		Designing practical projects for assessing rhetorical skills
		Creating analytical and applied exercises
	Increasing learning motivation	Using games and role-playing
		Applying modern teaching methods
		Motivational teaching strategies
		Designing competitive activities
	Continuous feedback for learning improvement	Providing explicit feedback
		Analyzing students' strengths and weaknesses
		Designing real-time feedback systems
	Content interactivity	Creating educational games
		Developing online learning platforms
		Teaching classical texts with modern sources
		Combining traditional and digital resources
	Collaborative learning and classroom interaction	Using interactive methods
		Group analysis of rhetorical texts
		Instructor–student interaction
		Designing participatory class activities
Cognitive Organization	Advance organizers in instruction	Connecting new concepts to students' prior knowledge
		Mentally preparing students
		Linking rhetorical concepts to everyday life
		Teaching complex topics by reviewing prerequisites
	Thematic categorization	Distinguishing theoretical and applied topics
		Structured and explicit presentation of rhetorical devices
		Presenting categorized material
		Preparing updated instructional resources
	Knowledge structuring	Presenting rhetorical concepts from simple to complex
		Using real-life examples of rhetoric
		Applying practical examples in instruction

		Explaining concepts in relation to the overall lesson
		Clear instructional structure for rhetorical concepts
Gradual learning		Balanced presentation of content
		Segmenting lessons into smaller, manageable parts
		Step-by-step exercises
		Designing a phased learning roadmap

1. "Cognitive Organization" in Rhetoric Instruction

One of the main themes extracted from the qualitative interviews with university professors in Iraq was the component of *Cognitive Organization*. Data analysis revealed that faculty members believed that mastering rhetorical concepts cannot be achieved solely through theoretical content but requires a precise, gradual, and continuous structuring of instructional material. This component comprises four key dimensions: advance organizers, thematic categorization, knowledge structuring, and gradual learning.

In the first dimension—use of *advance organizers*—participants emphasized the importance of linking new concepts to students' prior knowledge. One professor stated:

"Students learn faster and more deeply when they can connect new ideas to what they already know. But if the teacher doesn't make those links clear, each topic remains isolated."

Examples provided by participants suggest that even complex topics like metaphor or ambiguity can be introduced through familiar everyday linguistic experiences. One interviewee noted:

"Before teaching metaphor, I ask if they've heard someone say, 'He is a lion.' This helps them make a mental connection before introducing the scientific definition."

The second dimension, *thematic categorization*, addressed the necessity of providing a structured classification framework for teaching rhetorical concepts. Many faculty members criticized the fragmented and uncoordinated delivery of course content and called for a well-structured instructional path. As one participant explained:

"One of the main issues in teaching rhetoric is that the topics are taught sporadically, and there's no clear roadmap for learning them."

The third dimension, *knowledge structuring*, focused on the importance of a staged, progressive approach to rhetoric instruction—moving from simple to complex concepts. According to participants, students only grasp rhetorical principles when first exposed to accessible, relatable examples and then guided toward deeper levels of analysis. One professor remarked:

"Learning rhetoric should be like climbing stairs, not jumping over a wall!"

The use of real-world examples from contemporary texts or media was also cited as an important tool for enhancing comprehension and student engagement. Another instructor noted:

"Using rhetoric in everyday speech and advertising makes learning more appealing. When we say, 'This shampoo brings your hair back to life,' students instantly understand the concept of ambiguity."

Finally, the fourth dimension, *gradual learning*, referred to the need to divide content into smaller, comprehensible units for students. Professors unanimously agreed that delivering excessive material in compressed sessions leads to confusion and a decline in learning quality. One participant emphasized:

"We can't teach all rhetorical topics in just a few intensive sessions and expect students to master everything."

Stepwise exercises and a phased learning map were among the emphasized strategies. One professor stated:

"When students practice step by step and gradually, the concepts stick better."

The theme of *Cognitive Organization*, as one of the core components of the proposed rhetoric instruction model based on Ausubel's theory of meaningful learning, highlights the need for a structured, incremental, and real-world-connected instructional design rooted in students' prior knowledge. The findings suggest that adhering to these principles can enhance the effectiveness of rhetoric instruction in Iraqi universities.

2. "Interactive and Motivational Strategies" in Rhetoric Instruction

The code *Interactive and Motivational Strategies* represents a key pillar of the proposed instructional model for rhetoric. This code emphasizes the role of engagement, participation, motivation, and feedback in enhancing learning quality. Given the specific characteristics of rhetoric and challenges such as its abstract nature, there is a critical need for active and meaningful teaching approaches. These methods should encourage students' participation and facilitate the understanding of complex content.

Based on data analysis, the *Interactive and Motivational Strategies* code includes five subcodes that clearly explain how to improve engagement and motivation in the learning process. These five subcodes are:

1. Meaningful assessment
2. Enhancing learning motivation
3. Continuous feedback for learning improvement
4. Collaborative learning and increasing classroom interaction
5. Content interactivity

One of the most significant dimensions of this code is *meaningful assessment*. Many instructors emphasized that assessments should be designed in a way that helps students not only memorize the material but also apply it in real-life situations. As one interviewee stated:

"Assessments that focus more on students' skills and analytical abilities create greater motivation for learning. It's not just about getting a grade—they genuinely enjoy the process of real learning."

Regarding *enhancing learning motivation*, participants referred to various methods for stimulating student interest in the rhetoric course. One professor noted:

"Sometimes I ask students why they enjoy attending this course. When I see they're genuinely interested in rhetorical concepts, I know I need to present the material using more engaging methods to maintain that motivation."

Continuous feedback for learning improvement also emerged as a key strategy within this code. Instructors emphasized that timely and constructive feedback can have a profound impact on students' comprehension and academic progress. One of the interviewees stated:

"I always try to give continuous feedback to students. This feedback isn't just in the form of grades or symbols—it reflects their actual progress in rhetorical analysis."

In relation to *collaborative learning and increasing classroom interaction*, interviewees mentioned several methods that help create a participatory classroom environment. As one professor explained:

"Using small groups and team-based activities allows students to share their ideas and analyses with others. This interaction transforms learning from an individual task into a collective experience, which increases students' motivation."

Finally, *content interactivity* refers to the use of modern technologies and interactive methods to enhance learning. One instructor highlighted the importance of using media and online platforms, stating:

"Using online resources, videos, and educational games—especially for a subject like rhetoric—makes learning more engaging and interactive. These methods help students better understand the material and make the classroom atmosphere more dynamic."

Tree Diagram 7 visually represents the structure of the main code *Interactive and Motivational Strategies*. This diagram clearly illustrates the relationships among the various subcodes and how each strategy influences students' learning processes. Upon examining the diagram and the collected data, it becomes evident that this code serves as a central axis in transitioning from traditional, memorization-based instruction to active, interactive, and meaningful learning approaches.

The *interactive and motivational approach*, particularly in the teaching of rhetoric, enables students to experience learning not merely as a passive obligation but as an engaging and practical process. Through the use of continuous feedback, meaningful assessments, and collaborative learning strategies, this approach enhances the quality of learning and increases student motivation. Consequently, it enables rhetoric instruction to effectively respond to contemporary needs and challenges in the field.

3. "Knowledge Application and Transfer" in Rhetoric Instruction

The code *Knowledge Application and Transfer* is one of the key components of the proposed instructional model for teaching rhetoric. It emphasizes transforming theoretical learning into practical and transferable skills applicable in real-world contexts. This code comprises six core subcomponents: use of rhetorical skills in speech and writing, increased practical exercises, rhetorical presentations and speeches, rhetorical text analysis, multimedia-based analysis, and rewriting texts in accordance with rhetorical principles. The focus of this code is to enhance students' ability to apply rhetorical concepts in writing, speaking, analysis, and content production. The aim of this model is to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical performance so that students can apply what they have learned in real-life social, cultural, and professional environments.

Interview data analysis revealed that many professors and students believe rhetoric should become a dynamic skill integrated into daily life, media, advertising, and social interactions. One professor commented: *"Students should live rhetoric—not just recall it for exams."*

The first significant subcomponent in this area is the *use of rhetorical skills in speech and writing*. Professors emphasized that students should be able to incorporate rhetorical elements such as metaphor, irony, or paronomasia in formal writing and public speaking to make their expression more elegant, professional, and persuasive. One participant stated: *"We've shown students that rhetoric isn't just for ancient texts—it's used in advertisements, speeches, and even social media posts."*

Another notable subcomponent is the *increase in practical exercises*. Many instructors stressed that merely teaching theoretical concepts is insufficient; students must engage in ongoing practice to gain deep understanding of how rhetoric functions. Suggested strategies included text-rewriting workshops, analyzing rhetorical structure in public speeches, and applied projects. One instructor shared: *"Once we designed a project where students took a simple news report and enhanced it using rhetorical devices. The results were truly impressive."*

Rhetorical presentations and speeches were also identified as a practical and interactive component of rhetoric instruction. Exercises in public speaking, debate, and the use of rhetorical devices in oral communication help students develop persuasive speaking skills. As one professor noted: *"When students engage in classroom debates and try using simile or repetition, that's when they really grasp what rhetoric means."*

Another crucial element is *rhetorical text analysis*. Instructors suggested that analyzing textual structure, advertising slogans, and real-life speeches could strengthen students' critical and analytical thinking. One interviewee said: *"When we analyze an ad or a political speech, students finally realize the techniques embedded in each sentence."*

Multimedia-based analysis was also highlighted as a novel and valuable practice. Participants recommended using tools such as educational platforms, rhetorical analysis software, podcasts, and instructional videos to create a more engaging and authentic learning experience. One instructor remarked: *"We should use technologies that show how rhetoric lives and breathes in media and the digital sphere."*

Finally, the subcomponent of *rewriting texts using rhetorical principles* focuses on hands-on rewriting exercises that train students to transform simple sentences into more impactful ones through rhetorical devices. One professor explained: *"One of the most effective exercises I use is to give students a plain sentence and ask them to rewrite it using simile or metaphor."*

The code *Knowledge Application and Transfer*, as the backbone of a pragmatic approach to rhetoric instruction, plays a central role in translating theoretical knowledge into real-world competencies. Interview findings suggest that without providing practical opportunities for analysis, writing, speaking, and the use of modern technologies, rhetoric education cannot be effectively internalized or sustained in students' minds and language. Integrating this component through practice, presentations, rewriting, and multimedia analysis facilitates the transfer of rhetorical knowledge from memory to skill, turning it into a functional tool for students' everyday and professional lives.

The final proposed instructional model for teaching rhetoric is grounded in David Ausubel's theory of meaningful learning and is designed to improve the quality of rhetoric learning and teaching in Iraqi universities. Thematic analysis of the interviews revealed that the model consists of three main themes, 15 sub-themes, and 56 indicators. The model encompasses three core dimensions that simultaneously address cognitive organization, interactive and motivational strategies, and knowledge application and transfer.

The first dimension, *Cognitive Organization*, emphasizes the structured and staged presentation of rhetorical concepts, progressing from simple to complex. It also facilitates the connection between new knowledge and students' prior knowledge through advance organizers and conceptual categorization.

The second dimension, *Interactive and Motivational Strategies*, focuses on active student participation and increasing motivation through modern methods such as educational games, group activities, and the integration of digital technologies. This component, using continuous feedback and meaningful assessments, enhances students' cognitive engagement and learning motivation.

The third dimension, *Knowledge Application and Transfer*, explicitly targets the practical use of rhetorical concepts in real-world situations such as professional writing, public speaking, contemporary text analysis, and digital media. Through practical exercises, rhetorical analysis, and applied projects, this dimension elevates learning from theoretical to applied and experiential levels.

Overall, the model aims to transform rhetoric instruction from a theoretical experience into a dynamic, practical, and meaningful learning process tailored to the needs of students and the existing educational challenges in Iraqi universities.

To assess the validity of the proposed conceptual model in this study, a set of established methods and approaches were employed to ensure the trustworthiness, transferability, confirmability, and internal validity of the findings. First, the analyses and coding were reviewed by faculty members and researchers in the fields of language education and instructional design. This process not only enhanced interpretive validity but also reduced researcher bias.

Additionally, to verify the accuracy and precision of the results, the findings were shared with several participants to confirm the correctness of interpretations from their perspectives. In the next step, to strengthen the transferability of the model, detailed descriptions of the participants' characteristics and the educational context of Iraqi universities were provided, enabling applicability in similar settings.

Moreover, all stages of the research, including tool design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation, were meticulously documented to allow other researchers to evaluate and replicate the study. To enhance confirmability, the researcher engaged in ongoing self-reflection and adhered to neutrality in drawing conclusions, analyzing all data using reasoned and systematic approaches.

These measures ensured that the research findings were presented scientifically, rigorously, and objectively, thereby validating the proposed instructional model for rhetoric instruction in Iraqi universities and confirming its reliability and credibility.

Final Instructional Model for Rhetoric Based on Ausubel's Theory
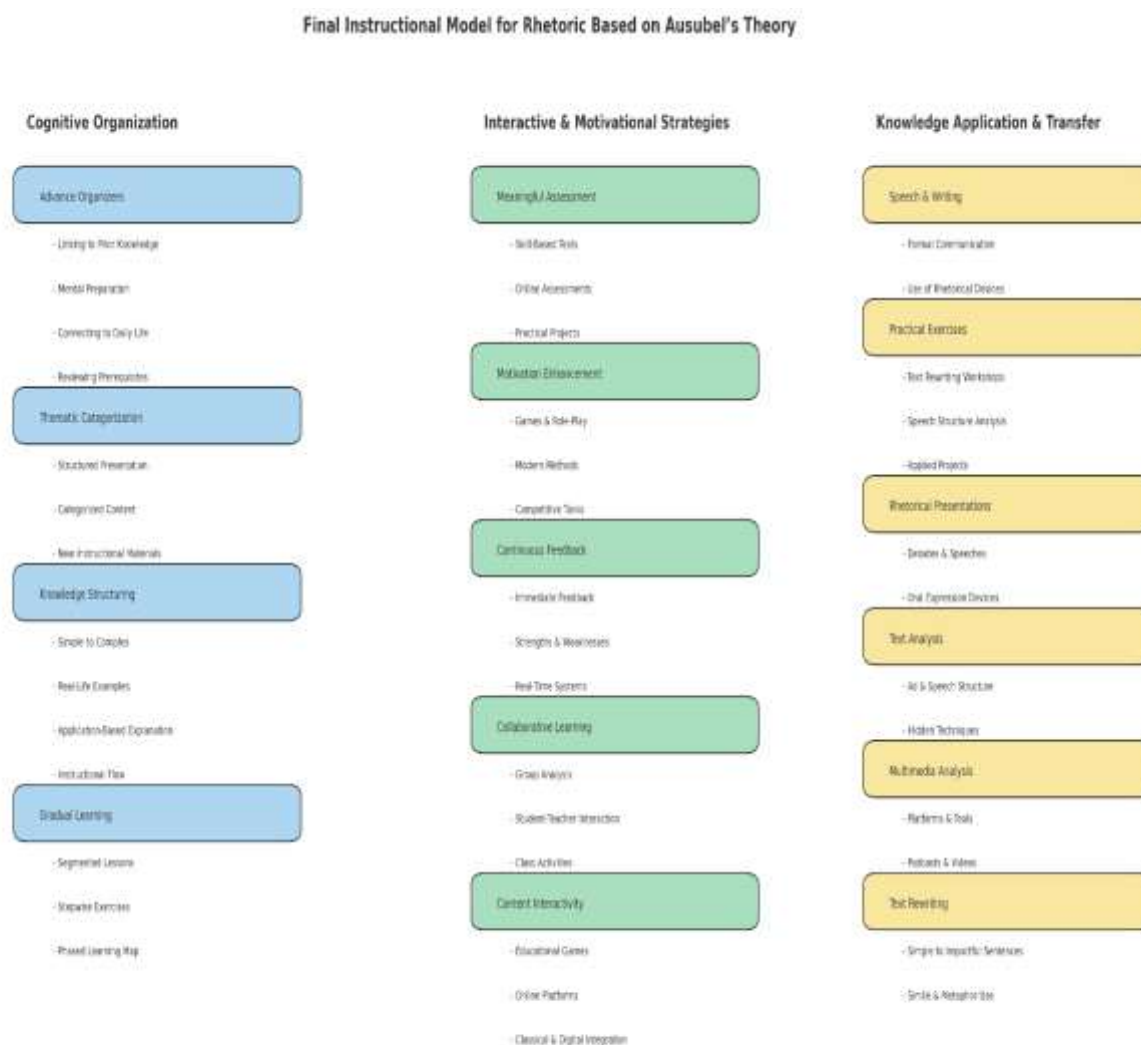
Figure 1. Final Model of the Study

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to develop and validate an instructional model for teaching Arabic rhetoric to university students in Iraq based on Ausubel's theory of meaningful learning. The findings, drawn from a comprehensive thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with expert faculty members, revealed a clear conceptual structure consisting of three core dimensions: *cognitive organization*, *interactive and motivational strategies*, and *knowledge application and transfer*. This triadic structure was further articulated through fifteen sub-themes and fifty-six operational indicators. These findings not only

confirm the relevance of meaningful learning theory in the context of rhetoric education but also offer a tailored pedagogical model adapted to the unique linguistic, cultural, and technological conditions of Iraqi higher education.

One of the most important outcomes of this study was the identification of *cognitive organization* as a foundational element in rhetoric instruction. Participants emphasized that presenting rhetorical concepts in a hierarchically structured, logically sequenced, and progressively scaffolded manner significantly enhances comprehension and retention. Advance organizers, thematic categorization, and phased instructional planning were frequently cited as mechanisms that facilitate the assimilation of new content into students' existing cognitive frameworks. This aligns closely with Ausubel's original proposition that meaningful learning occurs when new information is anchored to prior knowledge through clear conceptual connections (1, 2). The importance of sequencing content from simple to complex and supporting it with real-life examples is also emphasized in related literature, suggesting that such structuring is essential for abstract and conceptually dense domains like rhetoric (3, 9).

The study also revealed that *interactive and motivational strategies* play a pivotal role in improving student engagement and learning outcomes. Faculty members highlighted the need to shift away from static, lecture-based instruction toward more dynamic, participatory pedagogies. Techniques such as group discussion, peer collaboration, competitive learning games, continuous feedback, and formative assessments were frequently cited. These strategies align with previous findings that suggest learner-centered instruction increases students' motivation and deepens cognitive processing (10, 20). The integration of modern educational technologies—such as e-learning platforms, multimedia tools, and mobile applications—was particularly emphasized as a way to revitalize rhetoric instruction and meet the evolving expectations of digital-native students (14, 15, 19). This corroborates the findings of studies in both Arab and non-Arab contexts that stress the pedagogical value of technology-enhanced learning in fostering student autonomy and interactivity (8, 17).

The third core dimension, *knowledge application and transfer*, emerged as the most action-oriented and transformative aspect of the instructional model. Respondents consistently asserted that students must not merely memorize rhetorical concepts but also apply them in real-world communication settings. The use of rhetorical devices in writing assignments, public speaking exercises, advertisement analysis, and social media content was emphasized as a necessary pedagogical shift. These insights are well-supported by research that stresses the practical utility of rhetoric in various cultural, political, and media contexts (12, 13). The development of applied competencies through task-based learning, rhetorical rewriting, and discourse analysis echoes recent calls for experiential and performance-based approaches in humanities education (4, 18). Indeed, by allowing students to "live rhetoric" rather than merely study it, the instructional model proposed in this research bridges the gap between theoretical abstraction and communicative practice.

The inclusion of multimedia and multimodal learning environments also reflects an emerging trend in rhetoric pedagogy. Participants reported that using podcasts, videos, social media content, and digital analysis tools made rhetorical structures more accessible and meaningful to students. This supports the arguments made by researchers who advocate for the use of interactive platforms and audiovisual content to foster deeper engagement and conceptual understanding (14, 19). Such integration not only increases students' motivation but also prepares them for the communicative demands of contemporary society. Importantly, this multimodal approach complements Ausubel's theory by offering diverse anchoring contexts through which learners can internalize new knowledge.

Moreover, the results indicate that a hybrid instructional model—one that synthesizes traditional rhetorical theory with contemporary teaching methodologies—is both feasible and effective in the Iraqi context. While some instructors acknowledged the cultural prestige and literary weight of classical Arabic texts, they also advocated for supplementing these materials with modern examples and applied activities. This dual approach ensures that the richness of Arabic rhetorical heritage is preserved while enhancing its relevance and accessibility for contemporary learners. Such perspectives are echoed

in the literature, which argues for the localization of educational models that maintain cultural authenticity while addressing modern pedagogical needs (13, 16).

Additionally, the model was found to be adaptable to different institutional conditions. Instructors from both public and private universities reported that the proposed instructional components—particularly those related to content organization, interactivity, and applied learning—could be integrated regardless of curriculum constraints. This supports previous research showing that meaningful learning frameworks can be customized to various educational settings with minimal resource requirements (10, 12). Importantly, many instructors highlighted that the greatest barrier to effective rhetoric instruction was not student aptitude but rather outdated teaching methods and materials. In this regard, the model offers a structured yet flexible approach that addresses these long-standing shortcomings.

From a theoretical standpoint, the results of this study confirm the central assumptions of meaningful learning theory in the context of language and rhetoric instruction. The three-dimensional model developed—focusing on cognitive, motivational, and applied domains—operationalizes Ausubel's abstract principles into a pragmatic instructional framework. It also complements recent reinterpretations of his theory that emphasize personalization, learner agency, and relevance in instructional design (2, 3). Furthermore, the alignment between this study's findings and previous empirical research validates the theoretical robustness and practical adaptability of meaningful learning in higher education (9, 12).

Despite the strengths of this research, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study was based on qualitative interviews with a limited number of university instructors, which may restrict the generalizability of findings. While efforts were made to ensure geographical and institutional diversity, the insights remain context-bound and may not fully represent all Arabic departments in Iraq. Second, the model's implementation and impact were not tested in a classroom setting, limiting its empirical validation. Without quantitative data or student feedback, the actual effectiveness of the model remains hypothetical. Third, the study did not include the perspectives of students, whose experiences and challenges could offer important insights into the efficacy and applicability of the instructional framework.

Future studies could explore several directions to deepen and extend the findings of this research. First, a quantitative study involving pre- and post-intervention assessments could measure the model's impact on student learning outcomes. Second, incorporating student perspectives through focus groups or learner diaries could enrich the understanding of rhetorical learning processes. Third, comparative studies between Iraqi institutions and those in other Arabic-speaking countries could help identify region-specific pedagogical innovations and obstacles. Fourth, longitudinal studies could examine how students' rhetorical competencies develop over time under the proposed model. Finally, digital platforms and AI-based rhetorical tools could be explored as mediators of learning within this framework.

From a practical standpoint, this study offers a concrete and context-sensitive model for enhancing rhetoric instruction in Arabic departments across Iraqi universities. Educators are encouraged to design curriculum materials and lesson plans based on the three core components of the model—cognitive organization, interactivity, and application. Teacher training workshops should incorporate Ausubel's theory, instructional design principles, and digital media integration. Institutional stakeholders should invest in infrastructure that supports multimedia instruction and collaborative learning. Most importantly, the model should be adapted flexibly to suit the specific needs of students and the institutional environment in which it is applied.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adheried in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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