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EFFECTS OF INTEGRATED FORM- FOCUSED INSTRUCTION ON STUDENTS' WRITING ATTITUDE, MOTIVATION, AND ACHIEVEMENT: GRADE 10 IN FOCUS

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at investigating the effects of form-focused instruction on students' writing attitude, motivation and achievement. A pretest-posttest nonequivalent group quasi-experimental research design was used. Two intact classrooms were taken and assigned to the control group (N = 45) and the treatment group (N =45) through simple random sampling technique. Writing achievement tests and Likert scale type questionnaires were used to collect data for the study. The data were analyzed through independent samples t-test. The Pearson correlation (r) and Cohen's *d* effect size statistics were also included in the analysis. Results from the first questionnaire on students' writing attitude indicated that there was statistically significant (t (88) = 6.975, $p < 0.05$) difference between the study groups along with large effect size (d = 1.47). Results from the second questionnaire about the students' writing motivation were also found to be significant (t (88) = 4.220, $p < 0.05$) along with a moderate effect size (0.88). Findings from the writing tests were also found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) in terms of all the identified measuring rubrics. The implication was that the new conditions carried out in the experimental group had played a significant role in improving the students' writing attitude, motivation and achievement.

Keywords: *Form-Focused Instruction, Intervention, Writing Achievement, Writing Attitude, Writing Motivation.*

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary digital era, it is not non-compulsory to develop writing proficiency through the English language. More specifically, in school contexts, writing is a highly required language aspect to be demonstrated by learners, at any levels, for it helps them determine their overall academic achievements. Supporting the point, Zeleke (2017) highlights that writing plays a significant role in determining students' academic successes. At large, it is an integral part of the learning process through which new concepts and knowledge are extensively communicated to a wider public within a short period of time, even, in the absence of a writer (Deghatkar, 2023). Therefore, developing a good command of the skill through the English language has come to be a prerequisite in schools because it decides learners' academic successes. Accordingly, the growing demand for the writing skills has progressively increased in schools and working environments in the Ethiopian contexts, the research site.

Notwithstanding, writing is the most difficult language aspect, especially when used in foreign language contexts (Deghatkar, 2023). Second language learners face serious challenges to adequately translate their ideas into a readable written text (Richard & Renandya, 2002). In Ethiopian school contexts, where English is used as a foreign language, students, at different levels, exhibit weak writing performance due to a number of reasons (Yigzaw, 2013; Abay, 2021). Hyland (2003), for his part, highlights that the ability to communicate thoughts commendably through the global digital network is importantly count on good command of writing skills. Therefore, since writing is an intricate language aspect, it requires second language (L2) learners to capably manipulate lexical resources and grammatical items (Trendak, 2015).

With the rise of the communicative language teaching approaches in the 1970s, grammar's previous prestige status has declined and lost its position in L2 teaching and learning processes (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). Since then, scholarly disputes have taken place among language professionals and theoreticians whether grammar should be taught explicitly in formally presenting items or implicitly through natural exposure to language input in a natural setting (Muncie, 2002). Since the beginning of language teaching, debates among academics have been recognized due to inefficiencies of both the traditional and the contemporary communicative language teaching approaches in meeting learners' need to develop language for a wide-ranging communicative competence (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). As a result, L2 learners failed to produce readable manuscripts along with appropriate language aspects such as grammar, lexical resources, mechanics, and cohesive devices that comprise the essential building blocks of written texts (Hyland, 2003). Specific to the research site in Ethiopia, students, at different levels, face challenges to express their ideas through writing skills using appropriate lexical resources, grammar, and other essential components that a text requires to comprise (Yigzaw, 2013; Fenta, Demissie & Negash, 2018; Abay, 2021). This resulted in students' failure in their academic work, which, in turn, has a negative impact on their future life in the working world after graduation (Taddesse, 2001). Therefore, it is undoubtedly recognized that writing through

English is a challenging academic work for L2 learners in general and the worst to the Ethiopian secondary school students in particular.

Cognizant of these gaps, a comprehensive language teaching approach termed form-focused instruction (FFI) was proposed in the 1990s (VanPatten & Benati, 2010; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). It is a pedagogical approach that calls for an integration of grammar and communication in L2 teaching (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). According to these scholars, the FFI was designed in a reaction to linguistic problems that usually occur during communicative activities. After years, different language professionals and researchers have expounded the concept of focus on form to include both explicit (preplanned) and implicit (incidental) instructional techniques in which form-meaning connection is practically realized (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). The instructional option, thus, provides ample opportunities for students to focus both on form and meaning in communicative contexts. The pedagogical choice is, indeed, more effective if it is integrated into communicative contexts (VanPatten & Benati, 2010). In the present study, the focus on form was designed to hold both input and output-based instructional options in order to make the intervention more comprehensive and wide-ranging.

A research by Abay (2021), for instance, advocates the application of grammar tasks through consciousness raising teaching method because it enables learners to pay attention to both form and meaning when performing writing activities in communicative classrooms. In sum, the form-focused instruction was given attention in the study with a supposition that the approach is important, particularly in a situation where the target language is given in a foreign context, as commented by (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). It is, therefore, learned from the related literature and researches that the form-focused instruction needs to be integrated into communicative pedagogy since the goal is to develop students' L2 communicative competence and enable them to employ the target language correctly and confidently for various reasons in real-communicative settings.

Apart from linguistic competency requirements to produce effective written texts for communications, psychological factors such as attitude and motivation need to be taken into consideration if learners are required to be successful in their writing performance. Students in Ethiopian secondary schools suffer from a negative attitude and low levels of motivation to perform writing activities eagerly and with maximum effort. In order to engage in L2 production activities willingly and with determination, learners need to psychologically be prepared (Liu, 2014). Hence, these constructions are the most prolific psychological variables required to be studied in the field of second language learning processes. It is demonstrated that students' attitude and motivation are the most significant determining factors in L2 learning and in their academic achievements (Fakeye, 2010). This was proved in a study by Nasihah and Cahyono (2017) that there is a cyclical relationship between students' motivation and achievements. This means that motivation affects learners' academic achievements, which, in turn, motivates them to perform L2 activities. It was also pointed out in a study by Troia, Harbaugh, Shankland, Wolbers, and Lawrence (2013) that

students with higher motivational levels can achieve more in producing effective and readable written texts than students with low levels of motivation in writing classrooms. Therefore, a mechanism is required to be implemented in learning classrooms to generate students' motivation if success in writing is to be sought. A study by Bedada (2018) also recommends that a mechanism needs to be designed to increase students' motivation to eagerly engage them in L2 productions. This implies that students will perform language activities if they are encouraged to endeavor tasks in relation to L2 learning.

Similarly, learners' attitude yields a considerable influence, for example, on their writing achievements through the English language. Supporting this, Nasihah and Cahyono (2017) declared in their study that there is a strong relationship between students' attitude towards L2 production and in their overall achievements. A negative attitude towards writing activities results in students' low levels of motivation, which, in turn, adversely affects their writing achievement (Bruning & Horn, 2000). The implication is that negative energy tends to generate poor attitude and low levels of motivation that hinder learners to endeavor writing tasks.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether or not form-focused instruction could improve students' writing attitude, motivation, and achievement.

THE RESEARCH DESIGN

To investigate the intervention, a pretest-posttest non-equivalent quasi-experimental research design was used.

PARTICIPANTS

This study was a quasi-experimental study. Ninety (90) Grade 10 students from Burka Harbu secondary school, in Central Oromia, Ethiopia, took part in the study. Two intact learning sections were taken and randomly assigned to the experimental group (N = 45) and the control group (N =45) to make the intervention effective.

INSTRUMENTS

Likert scale type questionnaires were used to elicit information on students' writing attitude and motivation. Writing tests were also used to examine the students' achievements based on the identified measuring rubrics such as grammar, lexical resources, unity, cohesion and coherence, mechanics, idea generating and organizing.

DATA ANALYSIS

Independent samples t-test was used to analyze data gathered through both questionnaires and writing achievement tests. The t-test was chosen because it helped compare the mean scores of the experimental group with the mean scores of the control group on the constructs under the study. The Pearson correlation coefficients and Cohen's *d* effect size were also included in the analysis procedures. A Pearson correlation was simply used to examine the inter-rater reliability of the scores by two independent raters, whereas the Cohen's *d* effect size was employed to estimate the magnitude of

differences of the mean scores of the study groups after the intervention. Issues of parametric tests were also considered before running the main data analysis procedures. Both Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality were used.

RESULTS FROM PRE-INTERVENTION QUESTIONNAIRES

Data obtained from the pre-intervention questionnaires in relation to students' writing attitude and motivation were analyzed using an independent samples t-test after converting the categorical raw data into continuous form on an excel spreadsheet. Prior to running the inferential statistic, the t-test, the internal consistency of items for both questionnaires was checked using the Cronbach alpha, as displayed in Table 1 below. According to Hinton, Brownlow, McMurray, and Cozens (2004), a higher correlation between the different items will show that they are measuring the same construct. Accordingly, an alpha level score above 0.75 is generally taken to indicate a scale of high reliability; while alpha levels ranging in between 0.5 to 0.75 are taken to indicate moderately acceptable reliable scale.

Table1: Reliability Test Results for Pre-intervention Questionnaires on Students' Writing Attitude and Motivation

Target Constructs	Group	Number of participants	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients
Writing Attitude	Control	45	13	0.804
	Experimental	45	13	0.889
Writing Motivation	Control	45	13	0.838
	Experimental	45	13	0.805

The internal consistency of the questionnaires, in Table 1, showed that there were strong correlations among the items for both target constructs. The observed coefficients were found to be greater than 0.75, indicating that the instrument had an acceptable degree of reliability in both cases.

Table 2: Results of the Independent Samples t-test on Students' Writing Attitude and Motivation (Pre-intervention)

Target construct	Group	Mean	Standard deviation	*t*	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Writing attitude	Control	2.78	0.560	0.791	88	.431
	Experimental	2.87	0.505			
Writing motivation	Control	2.87	0.625	0.709	88	.480
	Experimental	2.96	0.562			

*Significant at 0.05 alpha level (2-tailed)

As displayed in Table 2, the results of the computed independent samples t-test for both writing attitude and motivation constructs were found to be insignificant. Put specifically, the result of the independent samples t-test for writing attitude was obtained to be insignificant (t (88) = 0.791, p = .431), indicating that the students had negative attitude towards writing activities before the intervention. No difference was observed between the study groups in terms of preparedness to perform writing tasks before the intervention.

In a similar vein, insignificant result was obtained from the computed independent samples t-test for students' writing motivation. No significant difference (t (88) = 0.709, p = .480) was detected. This highlighted that the students in both the study groups had no motivation to perform writing activities with passion and strong commitment prior to the intervention.

RESULTS FROM POST-INTERVENTION QUESTIONNAIRES

The independent samples t-test was computed comparing the mean scores of the experimental group with the mean scores of the control group on both students' writing attitude and motivation. The results are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Results of the Independent Samples t-test on Students' Writing Attitude and Motivation (Post-intervention)

Target construct	Group	Mean	Standard deviation	*t*	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Effect size (*d*)
Writing attitude	Control Experimental	3.22 3.93	0.517 0.447	6.975	88	.000	1.47
Writing motivation	Control Experimental	3.36 3.93	0.743 0.539	4.220	88	.000	0.88

*Significant at 0.05 alpha level (2-tailed)

Results of the computed independent samples t-test on students' writing attitude and motivation were found to be significant (i.e., p < 0.05), as depicted in Table 3. This implied that statistically significant differences were detected between the experimental and the control groups in terms of writing attitude and motivation after the intervention. The implication was that the students in the experimental group had shown improvement both in writing attitude and motivation. It was, therefore, concluded that the intervention carried out in the experimental classroom had played a substantial role in enhancing the students' attitude towards writing activities to willingly perform writing tasks with passion.

RESULTS FROM WRITING ACHIEVEMENT TESTS

NORMALITY TEST OF THE PRE-TEST

Though many ways are there to determine the distribution of scores, both Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) and Shapiro-Wilk were preferred to be used in the study. A set of data or scores are said to have a normal distribution if values of both K-S and Shapiro-Wilk are greater than the conventional significant alpha level, 0.05 (Cohen, Manion, Morison, 2018). As displayed in Table 4 below, values of the normality test of both the K-S and Shapiro-Wilk, for each writing aspect between the two study groups, were found to be greater than the conventional significant alpha level, 0.05, revealing that the data were normally distributed. The implication is that our sample is quite representative of the larger population, as recommended by (Pallant, 2007).

Therefore, it was possible to conclude that results of both the normality measuring statistics assured us that the data scores were normally distributed and, thus, met the normality assumptions. On the other hand, confidence was secured that the sample was generated from the normally distributed population.

Table 4: Tests of Normality

Measuring Rubrics for each Group	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Control Group's Grammatical range & accuracy	.112	45	0.20	.100	45	0.31
Experimental Group's grammatical range and accuracy	.133	45	0.93	.236	45	0.20
Control Group's unity, cohesion & coherence	.219	45	0.46	.187	45	0.08
Experimental Group's unity, cohesion & coherence	.105	45	0.33	.265	45	0.35
Control Group's lexical resources	.142	45	0.21	.260	45	0.12
Experimental Group's lexical resources	.103	45	0.40	.142	45	0.16
Control Group's mechanics	.146	45	0.90	.159	45	0.32
Experimental Group's mechanics	.174	45	0.32	.160	45	0.30
Control Group's idea generating & organizing	.197	45	0.23	.118	45	0.41
Experimental Group's idea generating & organizing	.158	45	0.71	.207	45	0.22

INTER-RATER RELIABILITY OF THE PRE-TEST

Table 5: Pre-test Inter-Rater Scores

Measuring Rubrics	Control Group Rater 1 & 2 The Pearson coefficients N=45	Experimental Group Rater 1 & 2 The Pearson coefficients N= 45
Grammatical Range & Accuracy	0.688	0.746
Unity, cohesion & coherence	0.851	0.816
Lexical resources	0.877	0.820
Mechanics	0.762	0.800
Idea generating & Organizing	0.500	0.798

The Pearson correlation coefficients were computed using SPSS version 20 to describe the strength of the relationship between two scores by two scorers on each measuring rubric for both the study groups. The results depict that there is a meaningful relationship between the scores for each writing aspect. As of Cronk's (2008) recommendations, coefficients close to +1 or -1 represent a strong relationship; whereas coefficients between 0.30 to 0.70 are considered moderate. On the other hand, coefficients greater than 0.70 indicate strong relationship; as values less than 0.30 denote weak relationship between variables. Accordingly, the coefficients of all the measuring

rubrics for the experimental group are greater than 0.70, indicating that there is a strong relationship between scores of each writing aspect. The implication is that the marking of the exam paper by two raters is significantly consistent and stable. Except the moderate relationship detected for both grammatical range and accuracy (r=0.688) and idea generating and organizing (r=0.500) variables, results of the computed Pearson correlation for the other writing aspects of the control group are found to be closer to +1, suggesting that there are strong relationship between scores by two raters on each writing component. Generally, the researcher was confident enough about the reliability of the instrument and, thus, proceeded to use the advanced statistics to run the main data analysis.

RESULTS OF THE PRE-TEST

Table 6: Results of Independent Samples t-test in Terms of the Measuring Rubrics (Pre-test)

Measuring Rubrics	Group	Mean	Std.deviation	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Grammatical range & accuracy	Control Experimental	2.71 2.18	0.895 1.072	0.562	88	.312
Unity, cohesion & coherence	Control Experimental	2.00 2.62	1.168 1.230	0.461	88	.216
Lexical resources	Control Experimental	2.42 2.60	1.215 1.116	0.723	88	.472
Mechanics	Control Experimental	3.02 2.24	0.892 1.048	0.792	88	.290
Idea generating & organizing	Control Experimental	1.98 1.87	0.499 0.588	0.966	88	.337

*Significant at 0.05 (2-tailed)

The most important and relevant answer for each writing rubric is provided in the last three columns (i.e., *t*, df, & *sig*. values) of the table. As it can be seen from the table above, statistically insignificant differences between the study groups were obtained from the computed independent samples t-test on each writing aspect. In all writing aspects, the p-values were found to be larger than the conventional cut-off point, 0.05, revealing that the students in both the study groups were found to be homogenous in paragraph writing achievements in terms of the stated dependent variables.

RESULTS OF THE POST-TEST

Table 7: Results of Independent Samples t-test in Terms of the Measuring Rubrics (Post-test)

Measuring Rubrics	Group	Mean	Std.deviation	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Effect size (d)
Grammatical range & accuracy	Control Experimental	2.20 2.76	0.919 0.773	3.102	88	.003	0.70
Unity, cohesion & coherence	Control Experimental	1.22 2.18	0.850 0.886	5.220	88	.000	1.10
Lexical resources	Control Experimental	1.64 3.02	1.048 0.941	6.562	88	.000	1.00
Mechanics	Control Experimental	1.38 2.27	0.936 0.809	4.819	88	.000	1.02
Idea generating & organizing	Control Experimental	1.33 2.04	1.000 0.673	3.958	88	.000	0.60

*Significant at 0.05 (2-tailed)

Table 7 displays results obtained from the computed independent samples t-test comparing the mean scores of the experimental group with the mean scores of the comparison control group on students' writing achievement based on the evaluating rubrics indicated in the first column of the table. As it can be seen from the table, the p-values, under sig. (2-tailed) column are less than the conventional standard benchmark point, 0.05. According to Pallant (2011), and Cronk (2008), *t*-test results less than the 0.05 alpha level are considered significant. Therefore, statistically significant differences between the study groups were obtained in writing achievement in terms of all the writing attributes. This implied that students in the experimental group outperformed their counterpart, the control group, in writing achievement in terms of manipulating the linguistic components required to be included in an effective written text. On the other hand, it was learned from the results that the new conditions carried out in the experimental classroom played a substantial role in enhancing the students' writing achievement.

Since the statistical significance does not tell us the relative importance of the difference, it is always imperative to run Cohen's *d* effect size statistic to know how big or small the differences are in a study. The commonly proposed effect sizes range as 0.20 for small, 0.50 for medium or moderate, and 0.80 and above for large effect sizes (Cronk, 2008; Cohen et al., 2018). Based on these recommendations, large effect sizes were obtained for unity, cohesion and coherence (*d* =1.10), lexical resources (*d* =1.00), and mechanics (*d* =1.02) writing rubrics, whereas moderate effect sizes were gained in the case of grammatical range and accuracy (*d* =0.70) and idea generating and organizing (*d* =0.60) writing aspects. The implication was that the intervention carried out in the experimental classroom played a substantial practical role in improving the students' writing achievements in terms of maintaining unity, cohesion and coherence, and in using a wide range of lexical resources, and appropriate mechanics; whereas reasonable effect was seen on the students' appropriate use of grammar to generate and organize ideas when writing.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

In this study, emphasis was paid to both psychological factors (i.e., attitude & motivation) and achievement in relating to students' writing.

Findings from the post-intervention questionnaire of the independent samples t-test on students' writing attitude revealed that the new conditions carried out in the experimental classroom had supported the students to have a positive attitude towards writing activities. It was found to be statistically significant ($t(88) = 6.975, p = .000$), highlighting that students in the experimental group had developed positive attitudes towards writing activities. On the other hand, the treatment implemented in the experimental group had enhanced their linguistic aspects, which, in turn, improved their willingness to undertake writing activities with readiness. This coincides with the idea that learners with a positive attitude would likely conform themselves with the target linguistic aspects and actively engage in language production (Imsa-Ard, 2020). This shows that attitude plays a pivotal

role in improving students' achievements in writing if they have sufficient linguistic knowledge. For students to have a positive attitude there needs to be a sufficient exposure to the linguistic input and clear explanations on the target linguistic aspects to enable them to produce effective written texts.

Results from the post-intervention questionnaire on students' writing motivation disclosed that the motivation levels of the students in the experimental group increased and so inspired them to perform writing activities. Therefore, developing knowledge on grammatical aspects of a target language had come to be influential factors because they significantly helped improve the students' motivation to perform writing activities with passion. The findings, therefore, coincided with the results of the research work carried out by Lam and Law (2007) that students with certain motivations had better achievement in writing activities. According to these academics, better achievement in writing leads students to success in their general academic work. Alternatively put, since successful writing needs maximum effort and thoughtful attention, there is a need to find mechanisms that stimulate students' motivation to strive more to perform what is required of them (Bruning & Horn, 2000). Therefore, it is acknowledged that enhancing students' motivation to enable them to undertake writing activities has a positive impact on their overall academic success (Dornyei, 2003). As a whole, it is imperative to recognize the prominent role motivation plays in developing and enhancing students' writing performance, which, in turn, determines their success in second language learning (Lam & Law, 2007). In the current research, improving students' motivation through form-focused instruction has contributed a lot to the improvement of the students' writing achievement.

Pertaining to students' writing achievement, it was also observed that students in the experimental group outperformed those in the comparison control group. The implication was that the form-focused instructional intervention carried out in the experimental classroom had played a significant role in the improvement of the students' writing achievement in terms of all the measuring criteria. The findings of the current research have been brought into line with some academic literature and previous study findings. For instance, Nassaji and Fotos (2011), Swain (2005), Norris and Ortega (2000), VanPatten and Benati (2010), Spada and Lightbown (2008), Lee and VanPatten (2003), and Trendak (2015) have found that form-focused instruction is more effective than both traditional and the contemporary communicative language teaching approaches. Similarly, Ellis (2001) advocated that the form-focused instruction could help L2 learners use the target language both accurately and fluently during communications. The combination of both formal instruction to make the target linguistic features noticeable to learners and the manipulation of communicative language input followed by collaborative output activities to monitor where their linguistic problems lie has become effective in developing students' language proficiency (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). Hence, it is found to be a comprehensive pedagogical option with which students can recognize values in both linguistic forms and intended meaning during real-life

communication. On the other hand, the combination of both input-based and output-based instructional options, under the umbrella of form-focused instruction, is encouraged to be used by teachers because it makes language learning more productive and meaningful (Swain, 2005;Nassaji & Fotos, 2011).

CONCLUSION

It was learned from the pre-intervention questionnaires and writing test results that the students both in the study groups had a negative attitude towards writing activities along with low levels of motivation, which, in turn, revealed the poor writing achievements in terms of those writing aspects.

However, it was acquired from the findings that the experimental students' writing attitude and motivation were substantially changed and that they showed willingness to perform writing activities with passion after the intervention. This implied that the new conditions carried out in the experimental classroom had played a significant role in changing the students' attitude, which, in turn, helped them endeavor writing activities with interest and willingness.

Findings from the writing post-test also revealed that statistically significant differences were detected between the study groups in writing achievement in terms of all the writing components. The implication was that the form-focused instructional intervention implemented in the experimental classroom had brought change in students' writing achievement.

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