

**ROLE OF TARGETED INSTRUCTIONAL TEACHING AND EFFICIENT FEEDBACK ON ELLS' WRITING SKILLS IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT**Dr. Nighat Shakur<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Ayesha Asghar Gill<sup>2</sup>**Original Article**

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**Abstract**

*This research aims to highlight that ELL learners have gaps in their strategies of argumentative essay-writing skills. It hampers their capability to construct their declaration of argument successfully. ELLs stand at different points on the continuum of effective writing regarding the organization, elaborating, and using literary devices and conventions (Freeman, 2000). This study emphasizes that ELL learners' argumentative essay writing abilities may be progressed with explicit teaching techniques (Torgesen et al., 2007) and efficient, detailed feedback in a formative assessment perspective based on the constructivism Theory of Learning (Kim, 2015). Its goal is to file development in ELLs' developing an argument out of the entire range of generic writing skills with the assistance of specific instructional techniques and ongoing formative performance assessment with selected feedback pro forma. For that reason, ELLs are required to keep portfolios to broaden their insight with explicit instructions to judge their mistakes and monitor their track of improvement. A sample population of 15 undergraduate ELLs is selected out of 50 ELLs after a level screening test. Students' progress is computed using spearman's correlation among scaled scores on essays obtained using selected rubrics. Moreover, correlation among every point in a row is likewise calculated to uncover the development path of undergraduate ELLs. The promising outcomes of this research proclaim that a combination of explicit instruction, formative assessment, and detailed feedback can be used as a guideline for improving the argumentative writing skills of ELLs.*

**Keywords:** Formative assessment, Generic writing skills, portfolio, band descriptors

**Introduction**

In line with genre theory, writing is a "purpose-oriented social exercise" (Martin & Rose, 2003; Martin & Rose, 2007). This approach declares the underpinning of how the writing practices have been institutionalized in a social and political context (Martin & Rose, 2008). Argumentative essay display learners' "critical thinking and development of an argument". According to genre theory (Martin, 2007), an argument has three components: establishing a stance through the development of an argument, second is the logical placement of a proposition, and the third is to select relevant information from different resources and use it in the establishment of the particular stance in an essay. Swales (1990) argues that students need explicit and detailed guidelines to accumulate appropriate content and to construct a formal generic structure to come up with the expectations of argumentative essays. Unfortunately, Pakistani teachers do not play a satisfactory role in developing argumentative essay writing skills (Abbasi, 2011). They provide a general outline while teaching argumentative essays that should have an introduction, body paragraph,

and conclusion on the one hand and write succinct remarks on undergraduate ELLs' essays while giving them feedback on the other hand (Mutch, 2003). These teaching techniques are insufficient. It is observed that ELLs have problems incorporating teachers' succinct unclear suggestions in their particular written work (Lea, 1998). Whereas the formal schemata include rhetorical elements like unique communicative purpose, register, and appropriate structure moves to present the author's stance. It means that every ELL should be taught argument development explicitly through the usage of their preceding schemata (which they had used at school) after adjusting for the argumentative essay generic moves required at paragraph and text level in an academic context. For this purpose, this study is based on explicit Instructional teaching in the context of constructivism theory of learning and selected rubric for detailed feedback for the formative assessment of sample population. It has used British educationist Stephen Toulmin six steps model of developing argument to familiarize ELLs about the argumentative generic moves for a desired argumentative essay. Toulmin (1958) proposed that structure of an argument is usually based on six parts. He used following terms to describe the steps:

“Data: The facts or evidence used to prove the argument

Claim: The statement being argued (athesis)

Warrants: The general, hypothetical (and often implicit) logical statements that bridge the claim and the data.

Qualifiers: Statements that limit the strength of the argument or statements that propose the conditions under which the argument is [valid].

Rebuttals: Counter arguments or statements indicating circumstances when the general argument does not hold true.

Backing: Statements that serve to support the warrants (i.e., arguments that don't necessarily prove the main point being argued, but which do prove the warrants are true)” (Toulmin, 1958).

For improving argumentative writing, the researchers used explicit instructional teaching and detailed feedback pro forma of their performance and explicit marking scheme for their self-awareness to understand their level of performance, to work out their deficiencies, and monitor their progress to achieve the goal of efficient and effective argumentative essay writer. ELLs wrote their essays within 35 minutes with a required word restriction of 250-300 words. Then researchers provided detailed feedback on the errors present in their write-ups. After getting feedback, students wrote their essays again with new insights and added them to their portfolios. The researchers tried their best to ensure that ELLs practically understood the misconceptions and errors in their works. Furthermore, there was additionally open-ended feedback regarding two approaches: correction with reason and correction for a suggestion for improvement (Kim, 2015). It was done to make the learning development of ELLs visible to them.

### Literature Review

Knowledge has been a perpetual quest of the domain of getting to know. Constructivist learning Theory takes understanding to assemble knowledge through the active interplay of reasoning ability and experience (Kim, 2005). It leads learners closer to discovery, primarily based on negotiation with the outside world (culture wisdom) (Jonassen, 1991). Contrarily, Behavioral and cognitive learning theories stretch the acquisition of knowledge and problem-solving only at the level of reproduction and become inefficient for developing students' perceptions of new situations. Likewise, literature-based approaches for increasing reading abilities, process and product writing approach for enhancing writing talents (Moyles, 1988), and the latest philosophy at the back of

textbooks contents (O'Dell, 1990) in the twentieth century propose constructivism as the most recommended concept of learning (Archer & Hughes, 2011) at an advanced level (Jonassen, 1991).

Constructivism learning theory is based on the teaching and learning ideology proposed by Dewey (motivation and efficient experience of getting to know) and Piaget (acquisition of know-how because of the attempt of the learner at the same time as accomplishing mental equilibrium through resolving struggle among the current understanding and new information), Vygotsky 1978 (helping guidance of a mentor to reap some complicated talent successively) and Jerome Bruner 1966 (discovery studying). Constructivism isn't a self-exhaustive new idea; it takes its roots from behaviorism and cognitivism. Learning is shared meaning acquired through social negotiation and a mutual cognitive approach (Boud, 2000). Thus, knowledge acquisition for a brand new genre: argumentative essays, can be possible with the help of examination, questioning, analysis of the assignment, and experience. This research explored the impact of the constructive approach on mastering organizational competencies in argumentative essay learning with the assistance of explicit teaching techniques and detailed feedback in a formative assessment perspective in an undergraduate ELL classroom.

- What is the impact of a constructive approach in explicit teaching methodology on undergraduate ELL students' learning of organizational skills in writing an argumentative essay?

Martin and Rose (2016) claim that change may be added to the learning process by understanding the exact nature of knowledge acquisition. The learning process isn't only about storing information (behaviorism) or transmission (cognitivism). It is a "located cognition" of the social, cultural, and economic context of teaching and learning (Kim, 2015). ELLs are required to attempt to construct their meanings while going through new experiences of information. Subsequently, most constructivist theorists propose that ELLs are required to construct their learning by using previous knowledge, social interplay, and genuine learning task experience. They endorse extensive cooperative ventures and peer tutoring to communicate with one another to interpret new facts and problems. Similarly, they argue that for an efficient interpreter, one wishes to have intellectual competencies or generative learning strategies that can be taught with the help of a top-down or bottom-up approach of teaching or learners acquire via peer interaction or dialogue to broaden a stance or claim towards an argumentative prompt for a given essay writing task.

History has many process-product pieces of research comprised of observation, experimental methodologies (selection of varieties of instructional procedures, administering pre-post achievements), and even teachers have been trained with specific methods of coaching for correlational research to discover tremendous gains on native speakers and ELLs from 1973 to 1983 (Wittrock, 1986). It was discovered that ELLs had a better success during the maximum of the cases than a controlled group, who were taught explicit instruction techniques (Rosenshine, 2012).

Similarly, Jere Brophy and Thomas Good concluded their chapter entitled "Teacher Behavior and Student Achievement" in the book named "Handbook of Research on Teaching" (Archer & Hughes, 2011) after dozens of studies that "... students learn more efficiently when their teachers first, structure new information for them relate it to what they already know then they monitor their overall performance and offer corrective feedback..." (p.366). Likewise, various studies have supported that a structured, specific, and scaffolding coaching method has a nuanced impact on student academic learning and achievement (Glover, 2017; Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2018). It enables them to apply technical feedback while checking an assignment consistently. Various

studies have positioned the duty of teaching and monitoring of learning manner on the teacher. Sometimes the instructor is not always getting the desired result even after efficient coaching strategies because of a lack of student motivation and self-monitoring focus. These two factors are equally important for acquiring knowledge successfully (Crook, 1988). This study uses explicit instructions (systematic, relentless, engaging, and thriving) for addressing the learning gaps in ELLs in addition to a conceptual framework of constructivist studying concepts.

- How can undergraduate ELLs be made self-aware of their progress for effective learning?

History recommends the decisive role of feedback in formative assessment for diagnosis and development in the learning track of learners (Black and William, 2009; Crooks, 1988, Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Hattie, 2009). Shute (2008) defines feedback as “information communicated to the learner that is intended to modify his or her thinking or behavior for the purpose of improving learning” (p. 154). However, certain researchers have stated the poor impact of corrective feedback rather than positive (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). One should be careful in the usage of feedback considering learners' personality traits, as different learners interpret comments from various angles (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Feedback should not cross the affective filter of learners; otherwise, it will have an unfavorable instead of optimistic function on the developmental progress of ELLs.

Bondi (2008) investigated native learners' mindset toward feedback (Sadler, 2010) and made it clear that “unless students can use the comments to produce improved work, for instance, re-doing the same task, neither they nor those giving the feedback, will recognize that it has been powerful”. So, this study has attempted to discover the recipient's view of the feedback to make it more authentic and reliable.

- How do undergraduate ELLs react to the feedback practice?

For this purpose, this study takes Hattie & Timperley's recommendations (2012) discussed in his book “Visible Learning For Teachers” and Helen Timperley's contribution to “Feedback” chapter of the compendium “International Guide To Scholar Achievement, 2013” to improve the practical coaching and to ensure the fulfillment of learners in a classroom. This study used interactive consultation as part of the feedback to motivate ELLs “to speak and concentrate, read, write and replicate” on their deficiency and find their development. The researchers worked as a facilitator. They guide them to monitor their writing skills. Furthermore, this activity helped those ELLs who learn differently (Barren & Wolf, 1996). This interaction allows for “making connections” for mutual dialogue despite “solitary, person enterprise” (Lyons, 1998).

Feedback is a good source to document ELLs learning, what they have and have not executed, and to give an idea to ELLs what they can do to enhance their overall performance over time (Wiggen, 1998). Moreover, effective feedback techniques increase self-assessment competencies. Kramp and Humphrey (1995) define self-evaluation as “a complex, multi-dimensional activity wherein students observe and judge their overall performance in a manner that impacts and tells future learning and overall performance.

### Methodology

This research uses performance measures and portfolios for assessment because students learn better when they are engaged in active tasks.

**Sampling:** 50 students applied to get admission to writing skills classes. They were required to pass the level test. Fifteen students of graduate level got admission to writing skills development class.

**Reliability:** The most crucial issue in performance-based assessment is reliability in scoring students' performance. Hughes, Morris, Therrien & Benson (2017) rightly opined that "consistency" in profiling scoring through a detailed, clearly articulated scoring rubric in the light of the expected improvement in different cognitive sub-skills (Williamson & Hout, 1993) brings reliability to measuring instrument to carry out any research.

**Validity:** According to Crowl performance test has validity if the test has the capacity for "appropriate inference to be made about a specific group of people for specific purposes" (1996, p. 102). Similarly, the usefulness of feedback is further checked by comparing performance against a developed criterion for scoring and feedback. It ensures students' progress by comparing the obtained list against the given scoring list for a clearer idea of their assessment and their expected performance and target of learning.

**Timeliness for validity:** This research has carefully managed the available time of a session into teaching and feedback. As literature shows that the efficiency of formative assessment on the enhancement of students' performance depends on immediate response on the previous work before next work. This research has carefully estimated the time demand of developing, administering, and evaluating students' performances. Every student read out her composition and the rest of the students commented on it, and then final comments were given by the teacher in already prepared feedback proforma.

**Reason for Portfolio:** Students made a portfolio of their essays. Teachers, as well as students, can integrate what they have learned during the period of a course. It gives insight to the student to judge what is correct and incorrect, develop connections between the class and outside class learning experience, and come to know that learning is a cumulative process (Courts & McInerney, 1993). Likewise, every month, students report their experience of learning to get students' voices as firsthand knowledge about what they have learned and experienced in academic programs to judge whether the results obtained directly are consistent with the result obtained.

Similarly, a portfolio allows one to collect longitudinal information about individual students rather than looking only at the program's beginning or end. A portfolio gives information about what happens along the way, students' experiences, and their knowledge and skills (Schilling & Schilling, 1998).

### Discussion and Analysis

This research has used portfolios of students' work comprised of argumentative essays for assessment to record each ELL's learning progress. It has systematically recorded the pieces of evidence regarding selected parameters as standard for assessment. It aimed to monitor the improvement in the performance of ELLs regarding the effect of explicit instructional teaching on the student's overall performance change in argumentative writing skills (Ewell, 1991) to find the answers of the subsequent questions:

- What is the effect of the constructive teaching approach on ELLs' content organizational skills in writing an argumentative essay?
- How can ELLs be made autonomous in their progress for effective learning?
- How do ELL learners react to feedback practice?

Overall performance-based assignments involve multiple techniques to integrate content for efficient writing that cannot be defined by a conventional content-teaching-process-system matrix (Linn & Baker, 1996). This research has carefully selected an assessment rubric by focusing on ELLs' learning gaps after diagnostic evaluation. It can assist ELLs in achieving the target of developing selected writing skills. The assessment rubric consists of an assessment record based on 3 criteria: A: purpose and structure of text B: Development of argument across a paragraph, and C: Grammar and Expression and analytical rating scale. ELLs' essays were evaluated according to the rubric. It gave a detailed picture of the performance of the essay writer. For example, if an ELL receives a maximum rating on an assignment, then it means he has constructed arguments properly to develop her writing specimen, shape, and use of language and vice versa. Likewise, ELLs who were given low scores have various deficiencies as presented by feedback proforma. It provided a sufficient range of opportunities to offer diagnostic information for ELLs and teachers. It is per Mahboob's (2013) diagnostic study on ELLs writing skills. It helped to inform learning gaps comprehensively among the students during the targeted teaching period. It also clarified what the result suggests when it comes to selecting content for writing essays and the standard of assessment. In addition, it is planned carefully for the judgments of students' overall performance in a comprehensive manner so students can also understand to meet the desired standard of writing skills performance regarding constructive learning approach (Ewell, 1991).

On the very first day, the sample population was informed about the rubric (criterion of rating) of their written works. Set rubric aimed to develop an insight into ELLs of self-assessment, monitor the track of their improvement and have a better understanding of the researchers' remarks on their essays for future planning of their overall performance. The researchers scheduled five tests, besides the class work and take-home assignments, to track their performance's progress within twelve sessions of three months. It helped them to understand the strategic improvement of argument across the essay and the paragraphs for argumentative essay writing abilities and prepare them to write on any topic efficiently. There was 80% growth discovered in organizational abilities in ELLs' argumentative essay writing skills.

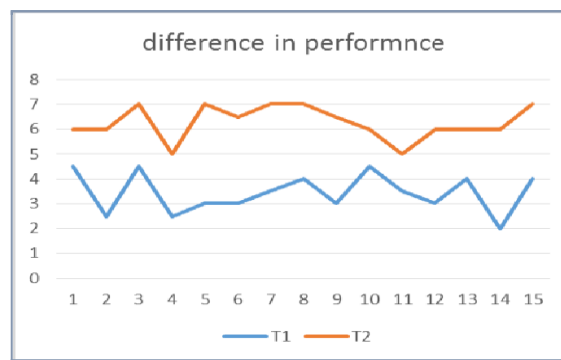
In explicit teaching techniques, the researchers used Toulmin's suggested six steps as a specimen to scaffold ELLs learning to write desired argumentative essays. It helped ELLs understand how to unfold a topic and build an argument using the six steps recommended by Toulmin's model (1958). Throughout the teaching session, Toulmin's model was consistently used with suitable examples as an important criterion for constructing the desired argumentative essay. It helped the students understand the six-step concrete framework of Toulmin's model. It gave them mastery in developing a claim (a selected viewpoint) after discussing in class, analyzing, and comparing different resources. They conquer the hassle of sequencing the reasons to support the claim after repeated practice in a rough draft to decide on a practical and systematic unfolding of their facts before writing their final draft. Likewise, detailed feedback endorsed them to consult different information resources to make their opinions more appropriate and applicable.

This study did not only use scaffolding. It has hands-on activities aiming to provide detailed feedback and get firsthand knowledge to design needs-based instructions to help inexperienced ELLs triumph over their deficiencies. The precise feedback exposes the learning gaps like the jumpy writing style, lack of contextualization of a topic, lift-up content used as their personal, weak development of argument, scattered thoughts, absence of endorsement for his or her viewpoint from other sources, lack of primary organizational competencies at paragraph and whole text stage, confusion of word classes (N, V, Adj) in lexical utilization, careless use of punctuation marks

(capitalization within a sentence without cause). These results follow Mohd Zin et al. (2014) work on ELLs. Targeted checking, detailed comments, and explicit target teaching with a principal focus on broadening an argument construction helped ELLs become self-aware of their deficiencies and emerge as independent writers who could display their progress to get the target of the learning course (Lea, 1998). It made the coaching steady and ensured tangible mastering outcomes. For steady teaching and learning of ELLs, performance assessment strategies were kept close to the criteria mentioned above for the whole course duration. It produced integration between teaching and evaluation (Palomba & Bania, 2018).

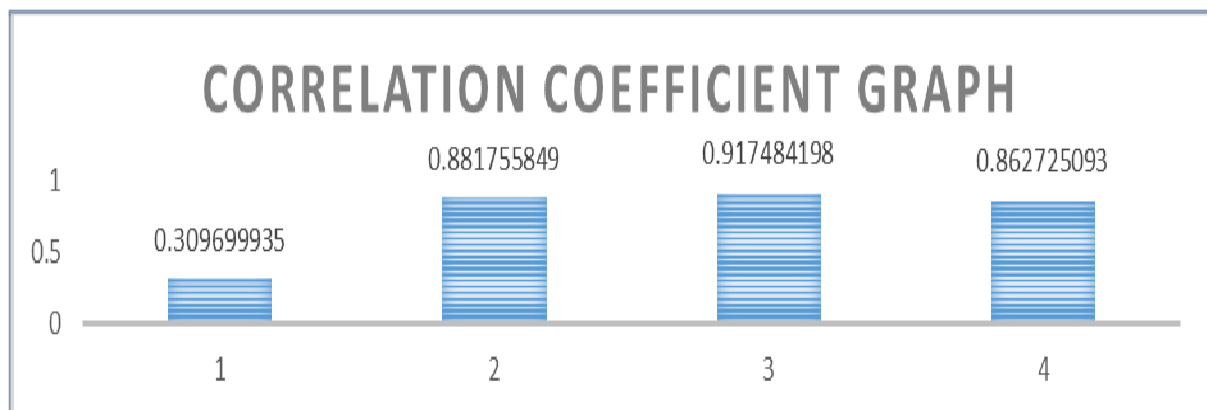
Various studies state that overall performance-based assessment is labour intensive and needs careful attention for designing appropriate tasks, specifying criteria for evaluating performance, dependable methods for rating performance, and trained raters to evaluate results to make desired changes in teaching techniques (Palomba & Bania, 2018) and rubric for assessment. This study developed a rubric to judge the performance for two purposes. First to ensure reliability and second, to enable students to develop self-evaluation to track their development for adequate progress. The following Table 1 efficiently sums up the impact of explicit instructional teaching and detailed feedback under the constructive theory of learning.

**Table: 1 Effect of Explicit Instructional Teaching and Detailed Feedback on ELLs**



Further, the test scores of ELLs were taken as variables. They were used to find the development in students' performance with the help of the Pearson correlation coefficient between test 1 and test 2. It became clear that there was a weak correlation coefficient at the start of the research among test 1 and test 2 ( $r=0.031$ ), but the overall performance of the learner kept on moving upwards ( $r=0.88$ ,  $r=0.917$ ,  $r=0.862$ ) as the exposure of learner and interaction with a teacher with the help of detailed feedback and explicated target instructions increased. This progress is shown in the Table:

**Table: 2 Relation between Feedback and performance of ELLs**



## Conclusion

This research is based on the results obtained from the sample population of 15 undergraduate ELLs.). It argues that explicit teaching techniques with detailed feedback can assist teachers in designing need-based teaching techniques for successive classes to achieve the desired objectives. It is endorsed with the statistical interpretation that this combination can produce a tangible improvement in the organizational skills and cognitive abilities of ELLs' argumentative essay writing abilities (Kim, 2015). It helped the learners to increase communicative competence constructively based on the prescribed framework (Toulmin version of argument) in the essay with autonomy to get detailed help in the form of feedback for further improvement (Glover, 2017). It enabled the learner to write logically on any given topic. This study recommends implementing this research on a large sample population before using it for future teaching in ELLs' classrooms.

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