Original Research

Impact of Form-Focused Grammar Instruction on Students' Writing Success

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Abstract	Article Information
The relationship between students' writing success and specific grammatical assistance was examined in this research. A quasi-experimental study design with a pre-posttest and no similar groups was used to examine how the intervention affected the learning results of the students. Using a simple random selection technique, two pre-existing learning portions were selected and allocated as a control and an experimental group (N = 45). To compare the two groups' means, an independent sample t-test was used. The measured variable exhibited a statistically significant variation across the groups. Further Pearson correlation (r) and Cohen's d effect size measure was used to investigate the association between the variables. These extra statistical analyses gave rise to a more thorough comprehension of the data and for a more sophisticated interpretation of the outcomes. The results showed statistical significance (p < 0.05), suggesting that the conclusions are trustworthy and applicable to a wider range of people. Grammar principles, such as vocabulary, mechanics, cohesion and coherence were the grammatical components that specifically interfered. Students in the experimental group did better in writing than students in the control group utilizing these accepted evaluation rubrics. Lastly, it was suggested that improving students' writing successrequires clear grammatical training.	*Corresponding Author: Tamiru Olana E-mail: olanatamiru58@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Since communicative language teaching approaches replaced explicit grammar teaching procedures in the 1970s, grammar has lost some of its respect (El-Dakhs, 2015). Since then, linguists and specialists have argued about whether formal object presentations or implicit exposure to language input in natural settings is the better way to teach grammar (Muncie, 2002). On the contrary, others have discussed how conventional and modern communicative language teaching approaches fall short of meeting learners' demands for language development (El-Dakhs, 2015). Others argued that since the inception of the communicative language teaching approach, EFL students have been unable to produce written texts that were adequate in terms of language usage,

including lexical resources, coherent devices, syntax, and mechanics, and that could be read (Hyland, 2003). More specifically, the main contention in the discourse has been whether the teaching of grammar forms has an impact on the teaching of other language skills, like writing. Crystal (2004) is one of the proponents of explicit grammar teaching. He strengthens his argument for explicit grammar teaching by asking crucial questions, asserting that all English speakers possess an implicit understanding of grammar, notwithstanding their inability to identify and elucidate the grammatical patterns and forms that comprise their texts and phrases. However, when it comes to teaching students to create various types of texts, should we as educators assume that they will depend solely on implicit grammatical knowledge? Are there agreed-upon grammatical instruction strategies that have been shown to support students' growth as writers? How well-informed about grammar do we need to be? Crystal has the intention that teaching writing and grammar should be done separately or in tandem to promote writing development.

On the contrary, the majority of research and reviews that have examined the effects of teaching writing and grammar independently on writing development have come to the general conclusion that teaching grammar has little bearing on the development of writing. Andrews et al. (2006) and Hinkel (2008), for instance, have come to the conclusion that teaching syntax has almost no effect on the accuracy or quality of writing produced by students between the ages of five and sixteen (p. 4). Jones et al. (2013) also claim that even though these two skills are taught independently, teaching grammar has little

bearing on the development of writing. Furthermore, Myhill et al. (2013) argue that teaching grammar and writing separately is unlikely to improve writing because of a lack of synergy between the two. Further studies indicate that form-focused instruction is a holistic approach to language training, which was created as a reaction to these limitations (VanPatten & Benati, 2010; Gumus, 2021). According to this method of teaching, FL training should cover grammar and communication (El-Dakhs, 2015). Over time, a number of language experts and scholars have expanded the idea of form-focused education to incorporate both explicit and implicit methods in order to facilitate the practical implementation of the form-meaning link (El-Dakhs, 2015).

To see the effects of form focused grammar on students' writing, several research works have been conducted. Internationally, a few comprehensive studies situate grammar education inside the writing environment, wherein the meaningful relationship between grammatical structures and the articulation of meaning and substance in writing is established. Myhill and her team (2012) conducted a thorough investigation to look at how teaching contextualized grammar affected students' writing skills. Their findings showed that students' writing development is positively benefited by explicit, contextualized grammar education within the framework of writing sessions when grammar is strongly related to writing requirements. Hudson (2001) also suggests that such a writing-centered approach to grammar instruction may be more beneficial for the development of writing.

Local researchers (Abay, 2021; Yigzaw, 2013; Temesgen, Mebratu, & Meshesha, 2024) contributed to this research area. Abay (2021) studied the effects of consciousness-raising grammar tasks (CRG) on EFL students' writing performance. The results revealed that teaching grammatical points through consciousness-raising grammar tasks significantly increased learners' writing performance. These findings support inductive grammar teaching rather than form-focused teaching. For his part, Abiy (2013) studied how high school students' writing abilities and English language competency are related to their English language writing performance. He found that all the independent variables significantly correlated with the dependent variable and recommended that special attention be paid to the students' grammar and vocabulary learning approach so that they will be able to apply them in their L2 writing. He focused on how language learning proficiency in general can be affected; indicating the importance of teaching grammar and vocabulary without identifying which type of grammar teaching has to be capitalized. Finally, Temesgen, Mebratu, and Meshesha (2024) investigated the effects of form-focused communicative grammar instruction on students' speaking fluency and their attitudes toward speaking lessons. The study's results demonstrated that integrating FFI with communicative grammar instruction improved students' speaking fluency as well as their cognitive and behavioral attitudes towards speaking lessons. Even though this study has relevance to the current study, it focused on the effect it has on students speaking fluency. Therefore, the objective of this study is different from the studies mentioned above in

that it focuses on the effect of form-focused incorporation of grammar teaching on students' writing performance. Thus, to address the research gap, the researchers have proposed the following research questions.

The research questions

The following research questions were the focus of the investigation:.

1. Is there a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups' writing success when using certain grammar rules?
2. Does the experimental group's writing successdiffer significantly from that of the control group in terms of creating appropriate cohesions?
3. Is there a discernible difference between the experimental and control groups' writing success in terms of word choice?
4. Is there a significant statistical difference between the experimental and control groups' success in applying the correct mechanics when writing?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study, a quasi-experimental pre-post-test non-equivalent group research design was used.

The study participants

The study involved ninety Grade 10 students from Welmera Secondary School, Sadamo, in West Shawa Zone, Ethiopia. To confirm the effectiveness of the treatment, two intact learning cohorts were chosen, and 45 individuals were randomly allocated to each of the two groups.

Instruments

The relationship between students' writing success and consciousness-raising grammar-focused instructional intervention was investigated through writing examinations. The evaluation criteria included writing features such as grammar, word choice, cohesion and coherence, mechanics, and coherence.

Procedure of the Intervention

As previously noted, the objective of this study was to investigate the interplay between explicit grammar intervention (the independent variable) and the students' writing success (the dependent variable). Pre-intervention, while-intervention, and post-intervention were the three successive phases that the study was designed to go through in light of this concept.

Before the intervention, a number of preparatory tasks were completed. Prioritizing their preparation of the intervention paper, the researchers first tried to examine pertinent literature. Despite the fact that a number of reading books focusing on grammar have been reviewed, the student textbook that is currently being utilized served as a foundation for creating the intervention material. At this point, a teacher who conducts the intervention was also chosen on the basis of his standing in the classroom, prior teaching experience, and readiness to carry out the intervention in accordance with protocol. Following the experimenter's identification, he received two days of intensive instruction on how to carry out the intervention. The teacher who was chosen to administer the intervention received training on how to keep it private. The intervention teacher and the study's corresponding author were the only ones who knew about the intervention process among both groups' students. Writing assessments were created to evaluate the target students' writing proficiency both before and after the intervention, after the preparation of the intervention material. For this reason, before the intervention's deployment, pre- and post-tests were created. The tests were created with comparable objectives, guidelines, time constraints, and degrees of difficulty. Because validity issues were the current researchers' top priority, the tests were produced in this manner. Two days before the intervention started, both groups completed a pre-test after completing all of these preparatory tasks. The purpose of giving the pretest to both study groups was to see if there were any prior variations in the study groups' writing proficiency based on specific measuring rubrics that had been developed for assessment. Additionally, two seasoned English language instructors were trained to assess students' writing proficiency using writing components such as grammar, word choice, coherence and cohesiveness, and mechanics.

After that, the intervention ran for sixteen weeks during the first semester of 2023–2024 school years. Put simply, the intervention lasted from the first week of January 2024 to the second week of September 2023. The intervention process was carefully designed to be managed by a single instructor. The teacher was told to give the same linguistic input to both study groups but to employ different teaching techniques. In other words, the control group typically received the same grammar elements through the conventional method of communicative language teaching,

whereas the experimental group received grammar aspects through integrated form-focused instruction. Validity concerns were voiced during the intervention's deployment. As soon as the intervention concluded, students in both study groups had to complete a post-test to determine their writing proficiency. This test was designed to determine whether the students' writing abilities were impacted by the intervention.

Data Analysis

A t-test was used to evaluate the data because comparing the mean scores of the experimental and control groups made assessing the research variables easier. A Pearson correlation was used to test the inter-rater reliability scores by two independent raters, and the Cohen's (1988) d effect size was used to quantify the degree of variance in

the study groups' mean scores after the intervention. An evaluation of temporary safety measures was done before starting the main data analysis processes. In order to evaluate the normality of the scores, the Skewness and Kurtosis measuring statistics were employed. It was found that, for all writing-related criteria, the values of the two statistical tests generally ranged between -1 and +1. As a result, the normality assumption was met because it was possible to conclude from the values that the normality of the data was appropriate. As the primary test for data analysis, the independent sample t-test, was conducted after taking into account other assumptions, such as Levene's test for equality of variance. The results of the computed skewness and kurtosis normality testing statistics are shown in the following table.

Table 1

Skewness and Kurtosis Normality Testing Statistics Values

Measuring Statistics	Control Group GA	Experi. Group GA	Control Group CC	Experi. Group CC	Control Group WC	Experi. Group WC	Control Group M	Experi. Group M
Skewness	0.62	1.00	1.03	0.55	0.31	0.97	0.76	0.97
Kurtosis	0.46	1.01	1.00	-0.53	-0.37	0.26	0.12	0.67

Key: **GA** = grammar aspects; **CC** = cohesion and coherence; **WC** = word choice; **M** = mechanics.

Table 1's skewness and kurtosis results both range from -1 to +1, indicating that the data are fairly regularly distributed. The general conclusion that the score distributions for both research groups were fairly regularly distributed and hence satisfied the normalcy assumptions was encouraging. After assessing the scores' normalcy, the inter-rater reliability of the data was also determined using the Pearson correlation.

Based on their qualifications, experience, and academic standing, two English language instructors were selected to grade the writing assignments. They received extensive training on how to assess students' writing proficiency using writing components chosen specifically for this function. Table 2 displays the pre-intervention inter-rater reliability results for the two study groups.

Table 2

Inter-rater reliability of the pre-test

Writing Aspects (Rubrics)	Control Group	Experimental Group
	First and second raters	First and second raters
	The Pearson coefficient (N =45)	The Pearson coefficient (N = 45)
Grammar Aspects	0.69	0.75
Cohesion & coherence	0.85	0.82
Word Choices (Vocabulary Usage)	0.88	0.82
Mechanics	0.76	0.80

For each measuring rubric, the degree of correlation between two scores was determined using Pearson correlation coefficients, which were calculated using SPSS version 24 for both study groups. The findings showed a strong link between the scores for each writing component. An intermediate link is indicated by a correlation coefficient between 0.30 and 0.70, although a value close to +1 or -1 denotes a substantial correlation (Cronks, 2008). Put otherwise, a coefficient of greater than 0.70 signifies a noteworthy association between the variables, whilst values below 0.30 suggest a feeble link. As a result, all of the experimental group's measuring rubrics have coefficients more than 0.70, indicating a strong correlation between the results of each writing component. Consequently, the test sheet was marked by the two raters in a highly dependable and consistent manner. With the exception of the modest association for grammatical elements (r = 0.69), the computed Pearson correlation results for the other writing features of the control group were closer to +1, showing that there is a substantial similarity between the two raters' scores on each writing element. All things considered, the instrument's reliability gave the researcher great confidence when using advanced statistics for primary data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
  Results of the Pre-test

The participants' prior writing successand explicit instruction knowledge and skills are evaluated in the following table.

Table 3

Findings from the pre-test independent samples t-test with respect to measuring rubrics

Writing Aspects	Group	Mean	Std.	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Grammar Aspects	Control G.	2.71	0.895	0.562	88	.312
	Experimental G.	2.18	1.072			
Cohesion & coherence	Control G.	2.00	1.168	0.461	88	.216
	Experimental G.	2.62	1.230			
Word Choice	Control G.	2.42	1.215	0.723	88	.472
	Experimental G.	2.60	1.116			
Mechanics	Control G.	3.02	0.892	0.792	88	.290
	Experimental G.	2.24	1.048			

Results from the Post-test

The following table displays each participant's post-test results. These ratings were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the implemented intervention.

Table 4

Outcomes of the post-test measuring aspects of the independent sample t-test

Writing Aspects	Group	Mean	Std.	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Effect size (d)
Grammatical Aspects	Control G.	2.20	0.92	3.102	88	.003	0.70
	Experimental G.	2.76	0.77				
Cohesion and coherence	Control G.	1.22	0.85	5.220	88	.000	1.10
	Experimental G.	2.18	0.89				
Lexical resources	Control G.	1.64	1.05	6.562	88	.000	1.00
	Experimental G.	3.02	0.94				
Mechanics	Control G.	1.38	0.94	4.819	88	.000	1.02
	Experimental G.	2.27	0.81				

Levene's test for equality of variances box was first examined for all measurement attributes in order to determine which row—the equal variances assumed or not assumed row—to use for the analysis. This means that, contrary to Pallant's (2017) recommendation, all Levene's values were found to be above the standard significant alpha limit of 0.05, indicating that equality of variance is not breached. Consequently, the first row or line of the independent sample t-test table showed the results (i.e., equal variances assumed).

The results showed that there was a statistically significant difference (t (88) = 3.1022, p = 0.003) between the two study groups. There had been a positive shift in this dependent variable in favor of the experimental group, as could be shown by comparing the mean scores of the two groups (M = 2.76, SD = 0.77) and the control group (M = 2.20, SD = 0.92) to the generated mean scores. Similar calculations were made using a t-test for independent samples for the variable "cohesion and coherence." A statistically significant difference is demonstrated at (t (88) = 5.220, p = 0.000).

For the same variable, the experimental group's computed mean score (M = 2.18, SD = 0.89) is higher than the control group's mean score (M=1.22, SD = 0.85). To find out if the intervention affected students' writing performance, the same statistical test was run for the variable "word choice". A statistically significant difference is shown by the data at t (88) = 6.562, p = 0.000. The experimental group's mean score (M = 3.02, SD = 0.94) is higher than the control group's mean score (M = 1.64, SD = 1.05). Lastly, to determine whether or not there had been improvements in students' writing success, the same process—that is, the same statistical test—was applied to the variable "mechanics". The computed t-test results are shown in Table 4, where they are deemed significant at (t (88) = 4.819, p = 0.000). When compared to the control group's mean score (M = 1.38, SD = 0.94), the experimental group's mean score (M = 2.27, SD = 0.81) demonstrated a positive shift in this dependent variable.

It is also noted that the variable effect sizes fall between 0.70 and +1, indicating significant effect sizes, in accordance with Cohen's (1988) guideline. Therefore, the

results imply that, when it came to utilizing the writing components that were the focus of this study's evaluation, the intervention with the experimental group played a significant role in enhancing students' writing skills. All of the measuring rubrics' combined results demonstrate that students who got the new treatment saw a notable increase in their writing success. The treatments offered in the experimental classroom may be the cause of these advantages.

As the findings indicate, the experimental group performed better than the control group. In line with the findings, Ellis (2001) claims that explicit training might assist L2 learners in using the target language appropriately and fluently in conversations. Researchers further argue that conventional and modern approaches to teaching language that explain concepts are not as effective as explicit instruction (Lee & VanPatten, 2003; Trendak, 2015; Spada & Lightbown, 2008; VanPatten & Benati, 2010; Swain, 2005). Accordingly, it could be implied that the particular instructional intervention implemented in the experimental classroom was primarily responsible for the students' improved writing across all evaluation categories. To improve students' language competency, formal teachings that emphasize the target linguistic traits are combined with manipulating communicative language input. The areas in which students struggle with language were then observed via collaborative output tasks, and the results indicated that explicit grammar input provides a thorough educational alternative that aids students in identifying values in spoken language and comprehending the intended meaning in discussions that occur in everyday life. The existing literature also argues for these findings, claiming that explicit instruction integrates input- and output-based instructional possibilities (Swain, 2005; El-Dakhs, 2015). As a result, current researchers suggest that using explicit instruction is critical because it increases the importance and productivity of language learning.

CONCLUSIONS

Students in both study groups demonstrated similar levels of writing success, as evidenced by the calculated independent sample t-test results and the pre-treatment writing test results. However, the findings demonstrated that the intervention had such a significant effect on the experimental students' writing achievement that it continued to have an effect on their writing success long after it ended. Because of this, the innovative intervention that was used in the experimental classroom might be able to raise students' writing proficiency in relation to the writing components that were intended for evaluation.

Ethical Consideration

The researchers brought an ethical clearance letter to the hosting university, from where the data were collected. The respondents' right to privacy was respected, and the researchers obtained permission or consent from the respondents. That is, the participants were not forced to provide information. In addition, the participants were made aware of their right to withdraw at any moment. The participants' identities and the privacy of their answers were preserved by the researchers.

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DECLARATION

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILTY

All data are available from the corresponding author upon request.

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