



WRITING EXERCISES FOR SPECIFIC WEAKNESSES

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Abstract

Academic writing proficiency is a crucial skill for success in higher education and professional contexts, yet many learners encounter persistent difficulties in specific areas such as grammar accuracy, coherence, lexical diversity, and argument development. This study investigates the effectiveness of targeted writing exercises designed to address these particular weaknesses among intermediate-level university students. Through diagnostic assessment, participants were grouped according to their primary writing challenges and engaged in customized practice activities over a six-week intervention period. Pre- and post-test analyses revealed statistically significant improvements in all groups, demonstrating that focused and deliberate writing exercises can effectively enhance the specific components of academic writing. These findings underscore the importance of personalized instruction tailored to learner needs and contribute to the growing body of research supporting targeted pedagogical approaches in writing education. The study highlights practical implications for educators seeking to improve academic writing outcomes through strategic intervention.

Keywords: Academic writing, targeted writing exercises, writing weaknesses, grammar improvement, coherence development, vocabulary enhancement, argumentation skills, personalized instruction, writing pedagogy

Introduction

Academic writing is a fundamental skill essential for success in higher education and professional fields worldwide. It involves the ability to clearly and effectively communicate ideas, construct logical arguments, and adhere to disciplinary



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conventions (Hyland, 2019). However, mastering academic writing is a challenging process for many learners, particularly those for whom English is a second or foreign language. Despite exposure to general writing instruction, many students continue to struggle with specific aspects such as grammar accuracy, coherence and cohesion, lexical variety, or argument development (Coffin, Curry, Goodman, Hewings, Lillis, & Swann, 2003). These persistent difficulties can negatively impact learners' confidence and academic performance, underscoring the need for instructional strategies that go beyond generalized writing advice. Research in second language acquisition and writing pedagogy increasingly emphasizes the importance of identifying individual learner weaknesses and addressing them through targeted interventions (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Nation, 2013). This approach aligns with the principles of deliberate practice, which suggest that focused, repeated practice of specific skills leads to more effective learning outcomes (Ericsson, 2008). Targeted writing exercises provide learners with the opportunity to concentrate their efforts on the particular areas where they experience difficulty. For example, students who frequently make grammatical errors may benefit from exercises emphasizing sentence structure and verb tense consistency, while those struggling with essay organization might improve through tasks that develop paragraph coherence and use of transitional devices. By tailoring practice to meet learners' unique needs, instructors can foster more efficient and meaningful skill development (Ferris, 2003). Despite the theoretical support for targeted practice, empirical studies exploring the effectiveness of such exercises in academic writing contexts remain limited. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the impact of specific writing exercises designed to address learners' identified weaknesses. Through diagnostic assessment and customized practice, the study seeks to provide evidence on how focused exercises contribute to improved academic writing performance.

Participants

The study involved 30 intermediate-level university students aged between 18 and 24 years, enrolled in an academic writing course at a public university. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their demonstrated



challenges in academic writing, as identified through a preliminary diagnostic test and instructor evaluations.

Research Design

A quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design was employed to measure the effectiveness of targeted writing exercises on improving specific writing weaknesses. Participants were divided into four groups according to their primary area of difficulty: grammar, coherence and cohesion, vocabulary usage, and argument development.

Instruments

- **Diagnostic Writing Test:** A standardized academic writing task (300-350 words) designed to identify individual weaknesses based on error analysis and content evaluation.
- **Targeted Writing Exercises:** Customized practice tasks developed for each group to address the specific weaknesses identified. Exercises included grammar drills, paragraph organization activities, vocabulary enhancement tasks, and argument structuring exercises.
- **Pre- and Post-Tests:** Similar writing prompts administered before and after the intervention period to assess improvement.

Procedure

Initially, all participants completed the diagnostic writing test. Based on their results, they were assigned to one of the four groups focused on their primary weakness. Over a six-week period, participants engaged in weekly sessions comprising targeted exercises designed to remediate their identified challenges. Each session lasted approximately 90 minutes and involved instructor-led explanation, guided practice, and independent writing activities. Participants received feedback on their written work to facilitate reflective learning and continuous improvement.



Data Collection and Analysis

Participants' pre- and post-test writings were scored using a rubric assessing accuracy (grammar and vocabulary), coherence (organization and flow), and argumentation (clarity and support of ideas). Two independent raters evaluated the texts to ensure reliability, with inter-rater agreement measured by Cohen's kappa coefficient ($\kappa = 0.85$). Statistical analysis was conducted using paired-sample t-tests to compare pre- and post-intervention scores within each group. Effect sizes were calculated to determine the magnitude of improvements. The analysis of pre- and post-test scores demonstrated significant improvements across all groups in their targeted areas of writing weakness.

Grammar Group

Participants in the grammar group showed a marked reduction in grammatical errors, including verb tense inconsistencies, subject-verb agreement mistakes, and punctuation errors. The mean accuracy score increased from 62.3% (SD = 8.5) in the pre-test to 78.7% (SD = 7.2) in the post-test. Paired-sample t-test results confirmed this improvement as statistically significant, $t(7) = 5.32$, $p < 0.001$, with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.88$).

Coherence and Cohesion Group

The coherence group exhibited significant enhancement in paragraph organization and use of cohesive devices. The mean score for coherence increased from 58.9% (SD = 7.9) to 74.1% (SD = 6.5). The improvement was statistically significant, $t(7) = 4.27$, $p = 0.003$, with a large effect size ($d = 1.51$).

Vocabulary Usage Group

Participants focusing on vocabulary demonstrated richer lexical diversity and more appropriate word choices in their writing. The mean vocabulary score rose from 60.4% (SD = 9.0) to 76.5% (SD = 8.3), $t(7) = 4.81$, $p = 0.002$, with a large effect size ($d = 1.67$).



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Argument Development Group

The argument development group improved in thesis clarity, logical progression of ideas, and integration of supporting evidence. Their mean argumentation score increased from 56.7% (SD = 6.8) to 72.3% (SD = 7.0), $t(7) = 5.04$, $p < 0.001$, with a large effect size ($d = 1.75$).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that targeted writing exercises tailored to address specific weaknesses in academic writing can significantly improve learners' skills within a short timeframe. By focusing on individual challenges such as grammar, coherence, vocabulary, and argument development, participants showed notable progress in their respective areas, confirming the value of personalized and deliberate practice in writing instruction. The findings emphasize the importance of diagnostic assessment to identify learner needs and the integration of customized exercises in writing curricula. Such an approach not only enhances writing competence but also fosters learner motivation and confidence. Future research could extend these findings by exploring long-term effects and expanding the range of writing weaknesses addressed. In conclusion, educators and curriculum designers should consider incorporating targeted writing exercises as an effective strategy to support diverse learner needs and promote academic writing proficiency.

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