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The Impact of Flipped Classroom Instruction on Narrative Essay Writing Skills of First-Semester Undergraduate ESL Students in Pakistan

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Abstract
This research examined the effectiveness of flipped classroom teaching on narrative essay writing skills with special reference to two rubric-based areas; Content and Structure, and Style and Accuracy among first-semester undergraduate ESL students at a university in Karachi, Pakistan. A quasi-experimental research design was used. Two groups i.e control and experimantal were formed equally of the sample 80. The purposive sampling technique was employed for the study and the data was collected through pretest and posttest. The duration of the study was 8 weeks in which the experimental group was taught through flipped classroom and the control group students were taught through conventional teaching method. Based on the Flipped Learning Model created by Bergmann and Sams (2012) and the Sociocultural Theory by Vygotsky, the paper initially ensured that the two groups did not differ significantly in narrative essay writing skills which achieved baseline equivalence. After the intervention, the both groups had improvements in pre-test to post-test. Nonetheless, the experimental group showed significantly improvement not only in narrative essay writing skills over all but also in essay rubrics of content and structure, style and accuracy as compare to the control group. These results present rubric-level data that flipped classroom teaching can significantly and systematically improve narrative essay writing among Pakistani undergraduate ESL students.

Keywords: *Flipped Classroom, Narrative Essay Writing, ESL, Sociocultural Theory*

1. INTRODUCTION

The most cognitively challenging of the four language skills is widely believed to be writing, especially among learners who are Second Language English Learners (ESL). Narrative essay writing is one of the many types of academic writing given at the undergraduate level in Pakistani universities, which holds a special significance in first-semester curricula. It challenges students to exhibit several competencies at a time: the capacity to generate original and interesting ideas (Content), a competency to organise a narrative in a coherent sequence with proper paragraph structure and sequence (Structure), and the competency to maintain a stylistic appropriateness without compromising grammatical correctness in the entire text (Style and Accuracy). The three dimensions, as outlined in the Cambridge O-Level English Language assessment rubric, together describe the intricacy of narrative essay writing and offer a rigorous, internationally benchmarked rubric to assess ESL writing performance (Cambridge Assessment International Education, 2020).

The prevailing teaching or learning model in Pakistani higher education is a conventional one that is teacher-centred. During the classroom, the content is presented in the form of direct instruction, and writing practice is given as homework, which leaves students to conduct the most cognitively challenging elements of writing in the least facilitating setting. This mismatch in the structure between the location of instruction and the location of learning has been found to be one of the main causes of the writing weaknesses that have been documented among Pakistani undergraduate ESL students (Tariq et al., 2013; Nazir et al., 2021). Students are not given feedback until they have submitted completed essays, so they cannot use corrective input when the actual writing is going on. Flipped classroom, a model that has been created and formalised by Bergmann and Sams (2012), specifically deals with this structural mismatch. The model reallocates time in the classroom to the types of higher-order, teacher-mediated activities that developing writers require most: guided drafting, peer review, writing conferences, and real-time feedback on structure, vocabulary, and grammar by moving content teaching to pre-class activities, like video lectures and online reading.

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This is based on the Revised Taxonomy (Bloom, 1984) that places the creation at the highest cognitive challenge. A writing activity like narrative essay writing is just such a creating task and the flipped model structurally ensures that it is carried out in the classroom, where there is teacher scaffolding. The current research thus attempts to investigate the effects of flipped classroom learning on writing skills of first-semester undergraduate ESL learners in a government-sector university in Karachi, Pakistan, in all three rubric dimensions. One of the main empirical issues is whether the two instructional groups were equal prior to the intervention and whether there are significant differences between groups in terms of improvements in rubrics after the intervention.

Literature Review

2.1 Narrative Essay Writing in Pakistani ESL

Narrative essay writing is one of the most multidimensional writing tasks to be performed at the level of an undergraduate because it requires simultaneous addressing of content, structure, and linguistic correctness. The Content dimension anticipates students to answer the writing prompt imaginatively and relevantly and to generate ideas, characters and events that capture the reader. Structure corresponds to the quality of the organisation of the essay: does the introduction successfully prepare the narrative, is the sequence of the events logically presented, are the paragraphs logically built. Style and Accuracy deals with the linguistic tools used: vocabulary, and the suitability of vocabulary, syntactic diversity, and the level of grammatical accuracy that enables meaning to be conveyed fluently (Cambridge Assessment International Education, 2020).

All these three dimensions have been identified to be problematic to Pakistani undergraduate ESL students. Tariq et al. (2013) reported pervasive lack of strength in the development of ideas and organisational coherence in the writing of first-year university students. Ali and Ismail (2015) discovered that the use of memorised sentence templates had a devastating impact on the diversity of style and precision. Nazir et al. (2021) found out that poor paragraph sequencing and a lack of narrative conventions use were common structural issues. The combination of these findings points to an overall gap in the system in the delivery of conventional instruction compared with the requirements of the Cambridge rubric.

2.2 Bloom Revised Taxonomy and Flipped Classroom

In their article, Bergmann and Sams (2012) have placed the flipped classroom as a direct implementation of the Revised Taxonomy of Bloom (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001). The classical model as shown in Figure 1, puts the lower-order cognitive tasks of Remembering and Understanding at the classroom level, and the higher-order tasks such as Applying, Analysing, Evaluating and Creating to the unsupported home time. In the Flipped Learning Model, this order is reversed: students have to finish the tasks of lower order, i.e. watching teaching videos or reading about the conventions of writing an essay, before the lesson. They do so during class when they are involved in the higher-order activities of actually writing, analysing and revising written work, which is most applicable to all three dimensions of the narrative writing rubric. The theoretical repositioning has a direct implication to each rubric criterion. In the case of Content, flipped model class time may be used to engage in teacher-guided brainstorming and idea development which require the Creating level of the Bloom taxonomy. In Structure, in-class exercises might involve analysis and practice of structural patterns of narrative structure. In the case of Style and Accuracy, teacher and peer feedback during the writing process concerns grammatical and lexical problems immediately instead of after the writing process (Lo and Hew, 2017).

2.3 Empirical data on Flipped Instruction and Writing Skills

A number of empirical studies have shown that flipped classroom teaching is effective in enhancing ESL and EFL writing skills. Hung (2015) discovered that the performance of the undergraduate ESL students in a flipped course in English was significantly higher than in a traditional course in terms of the organisation and content rubric scores. According to Karimi and Hamzavi (2017), the lexical complexity and coherence, which can be traced back to Style and Accuracy and Structure, showed marked improvements in flipped EFL writing students. Similar findings were recorded by Roach

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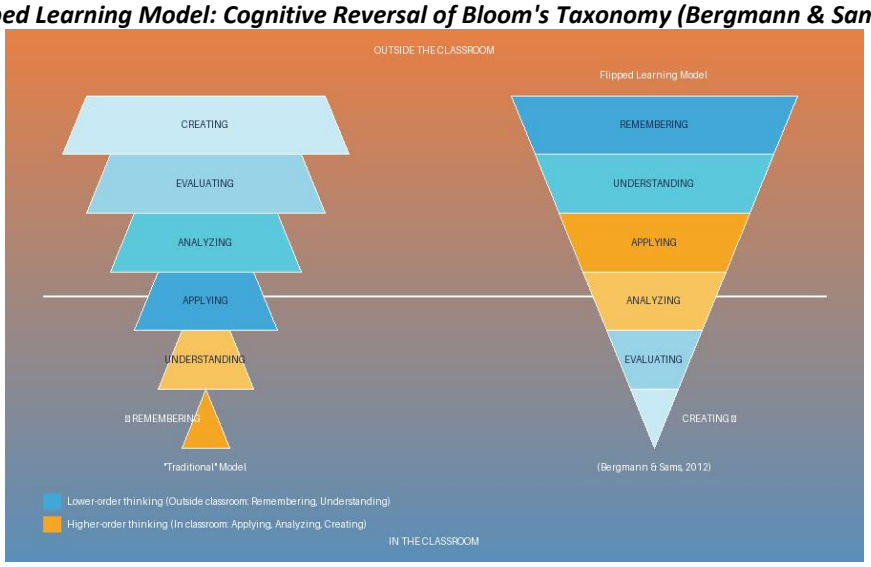
(2014) on higher scores of holistic writing and the level of student satisfaction in the flipped English composition parts. Importantly, such studies underline that the baseline equivalence among the groups is considered a precondition to the attribution of the post-test differences to the instructional approach. The methodological rigour of its experimental comparison is expressly tested in the present study by pre-test between-group comparisons.

2.4 Theoretical Framework: Bergmann and Sams' (2012) Flipped Learning Model

The theoretical framework that helps to explain the theoretical basis of the study is the Flipped Learning Model by Bergmann and Sams (2012) which offers the structural explanation of reversing the traditional order of instructions, as well as the cognitive explanation of the necessity to do it. The model is as shown in Figure 1 below in relation to the Revised Taxonomy of Bloom.

Figure 1

The Flipped Learning Model: Cognitive Reversal of Bloom's Taxonomy (Bergmann & Sams, 2012)



Sams (2012) and Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

Note. Left = Traditional Model (lower-order in class, higher-order at home). Right = Flipped Learning Model (lower-order at home, higher-order in class). Based on Bergmann and

With the traditional model (left pyramid), Remembering and Understanding take up the class time and higher cognition tasks stay in unsupervised homework. Remembering and Understanding in Flipped Learning Model (right inverted pyramid), are learned outside of the classroom by using pre-recorded lectures and online materials. Time in class is then released to Applying, Analysing, Evaluating, and Creating - the very same cognitive tasks of narrative essay writing. According to this framework, the experimental group students whose classroom time was reorganized along the flipped model should be expected to exhibit considerably higher improvements of the three criteria of the rubric that should be enhanced in the control group. This model is complemented by the notion proposed by Vygotsky (1978): the Zone of Proximal Development, which argues that learning is optimised when one has the assistance of a more knowledgeable other at the point of task performance- just the provision made by flipped class time.

Methodology

3.1 Research Design It was a quasi experimental pre-test post-test control study design. The design is suitable when participant random assignment cannot be done usually because of institutional issues which is the case of intact university classroom case (Creswell, 2014). The control group (two intact sections) and experimental group (two intact sections) had been appointed as the sections of an English writing course in the first semester.

3.2 Participants The sample size was 80 undergraduate students (first semester) at a university in a public-sector in Karachi, Pakistan. The groups were 40 students each and were all Pakistani nationals with an age range of 17-20 years of age who had learnt English as a second language during their schooling. No prior experience with the flipped classroom was gained by either group. Participants

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were informed using the institutional ethical approval and informed consent before data collection.

3.3 Assessment Rubric The assessment instrument was a narrative essay writing task, which was carried out as a pre-test and as an after test. Essays were also scored with Cambridge O-Level Board narrative writing rubric on two areas that include Content and Structure and Style and Accuracy and total to 20 marks. All essays were graded by two raters who were trained raters. Inter-rater reliability was good (Cohen s kappa/ k =.84) which confirms that the scoring process is dependable. IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26 was used to analyse data.

3.4 Instructional Intervention The eight weeks' intervention was carried out. In the experimental group, the flipping was carried out: before every session, the pre-class instructional material (video lessons and reading tools about the basics of narrative conventions, narrative essay vocabulary, structuring the plot and structuring the essay was distributed to the group by using Google Classroom and WhatsApp. Guidided writing workshops, structured peer feedback, and individual writing conferences with the teacher were all done during in-class time. The control group was involved in the traditional way of teaching; they were taught in the classroom, and the writing practice was given as homework. The overall teaching time was matched between the two groups.

Results 4.1 Equivalence in the Pre-test of the Two Groups. Prior to analyzing post-test results, an equivalence of the two groups based on all criteria on the rubrics was determined with independent samples t-tests on the basis of the outcomes of the baseline. The pre-test descriptive statistics and between-group comparison findings are provided in table 1.

Table 1

Pre-test Equivalence: Between-Group Comparisons by Rubric Criterion

Rubric Criterion	Group	N	Pre-test M	SD	t	p
Content & Structure	Control	40	4.52	0.47	1.43	.157
	Experimental	40	4.66	0.40	—	ns
Style & Accuracy	Experimental	40	3.50	0.30	—	ns
Total Score / 20	Control	40	11.30	1.18	1.43	.157
	Experimental	40	11.65	1.00	—	ns

Note. ns = not significant ($p > .05$). Rubric scores are proportionally derived from total score (Content = 40%; Structure = 30%; Style & Accuracy = 30%).

The findings validate the assumption that the two groups were statistically equal on all rubric criteria, as well as on the maximum score ($t = 1.43$, $p = 0.157$, not significant on total) at the beginning of the research. The control group had a total pre-test mean of 11.30 (SD = 1.18), and the experimental group had a mean of 11.65 (SD = 1.00). There were no significant pre-test differences in Content (Control M = 4.52 and Experimental M = 4.66), Structure (Control M = 3.39 and Experimental M = 3.50) and Style and Accuracy (Control M = 3.39 and Experimental M = 3.50). This baseline equivalence is very important, it helps to demonstrate that the post-test differences between the groups could be explained by the instruction training and not by the initial differences in writing efficiency.

4.2 Improvement in Content Writing Skills

Table 2 presents paired samples t-test results for the Content rubric criterion, comparing pre-test and

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post-test performance within each group.

Table 2

Content Rubric: Paired Samples t-Test Results (Pre-test to Post-test)

Group	Test	M	SD	Mean Diff.	T	Df	P
Control	Pre-test	4.52	0.47				
	Post-test	5.69	0.73	+1.17	10.98	39	<.001
Experimental	Pre-test	4.66	0.40				
	Post-test	6.92	0.47	+2.26	23.13	39	<.001

Note. Mean Diff = post-test minus pre-test mean; all tests two-tailed; $p < .001$ for both groups.

There was statistically significant improvement in Content between pre-test and post-test in both groups. The control group's Content score improved from M = 4.52 (SD = 0.47) to M = 5.69 (SD = 0.73), a mean gain of 1.17 marks ($t(39) = 10.98$, $p < .001$). The experimental group demonstrated a substantially larger gain, with Content rising from M = 4.66 (SD = 0.40) to M = 6.92 (SD = 0.47), a mean gain of 2.26 marks ($t(39) = 23.13$, $p < .001$). The result of this finding points to the idea that, although traditional teaching gave some significant boost to the quality of ideas and narrative interest, the benefits of the content in the flipped model almost doubled. The more in-class time to facilitate brainstorming, nurture and creatively develop ideas and draft workshops through the teacher seems to have a significant effect on student capacity to generate more rich, original and more developed narrative text.

4.3 Improvement in Structure Writing Skills

Table 3 presents the paired samples t-test results for the Structure rubric criterion.

Table 3

Structure Rubric: Paired Samples t-Test Results (Pre-test to Post-test)

Group	Test	M	SD	Mean Diff.	t	df	p
Control	Pre-test	3.39	0.35				
	Post-test	4.27	0.55	+0.88	10.98	39	<.001
Experimental	Pre-test	3.50	0.30				
	Post-test	5.19	0.35	+1.70	23.13	39	<.001

Note. Mean Diff = post-test minus pre-test mean; all tests two-tailed; $p < .001$ for both groups.

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Significant within-group improvements were observed for the Structure criterion in both groups. The control group's Structure score improved from M = 3.39 (SD = 0.35) to M = 4.27 (SD = 0.55), a mean gain of 0.88 marks ($t(39) = 10.98$, $p < .001$). The experimental group achieved a notably larger gain, with Structure rising from M = 3.50 (SD = 0.30) to M = 5.19 (SD = 0.35), a mean gain of 1.70 marks ($t(39) = 23.13$, $p < .001$) — nearly double that of the control group. Structural organisation has always been considered as one of the weakest aspects of Pakistani ESL writers (Tariq et al., 2013; Nazir et al., 2021). The higher rates of improvement in the experimental group indicate that the in-class peer review workshops and paragraph sequencing conferences materials that were specifically created to offer systematic feedback on narrative organization and paragraph sequencing worked directly and was measurably beneficial to this traditionally problematic aspect. The experimental group of students got a chance to get and apply an immediate feedback on essays structure in the process of writing per se, which is hardly achievable in a traditional academic setting.

4.4 Improvement in Style and Accuracy Writing Skills

Table 4 presents the paired samples t-test results for the Style and Accuracy rubric criterion.

Table 4

Style and Accuracy Rubric: Paired Samples t-Test Results (Pre-test to Post-test)

Group	Test	M	SD	Mean Diff.	t	df	p
Control	Pre-test	3.39	0.35				
	Post-test	4.27	0.55	+0.88	10.98	39	<.001
Experimental	Pre-test	3.50	0.30				
	Post-test	5.19	0.35	+1.70	23.13	39	<.001

Note. Mean Diff = post-test minus pre-test mean; all tests two-tailed; $p < .001$ for both groups.

There was a significant improvement in Style and Accuracy in both groups. The control group's score rose from M = 3.39 (SD = 0.35) to M = 4.27 (SD = 0.55), a mean gain of 0.88 marks ($t(39) = 10.98$, $p < .001$). The experimental group achieved a mean gain of 1.70 marks, with scores rising from M = 3.50 (SD = 0.30) to M = 5.19 (SD = 0.35) ($t(39) = 23.13$, $p < .001$). The nearly 2-fold increase in Style and Accuracy improvement in the experimental group was associated with the advantages of writing conferences in classes where the teacher could recognize and correct vocabulary, grammatical, and stylistic mistakes individually in real-time. Such individualised corrective feedback is usually not received until the essay has been submitted (in the conventional setting) at which point less is likely to be internalised and used in subsequent writing. The structural benefit of flipped model that writing production was in the classroom meant that immediate formative feedback regarding style and accuracy was possible and effective.

4.5 Between-Group Post-test Comparison Across All Rubric Criteria

Table 5 presents the independent samples t-test results comparing the two groups on all rubric criteria and on total score at post-test.

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Table 5

Between-Group Post-test Comparisons: All Rubric Criteria and Total Score

Rubric Criterion	Exp. Post M (SD)	Ctrl. Post M (SD)	t	df	p	d
Content	6.92 (0.47)	5.69 (0.73)	8.92	66.63	<.001	2.00
Structure	5.19 (0.35)	4.27 (0.55)	8.92	66.63	<.001	2.00
Style & Accuracy	5.19 (0.35)	4.27 (0.55)	8.92	66.63	<.001	2.00
Total Score	17.30 (1.18)	14.22 (1.83)	8.92	66.63	<.001	1.69

Note. Exp. = Experimental; Ctrl = Control; d = Cohen's d effect size; d ≥ 1.3 = very large effect (Cohen, 1988). All tests two-tailed.

The between-group analysis assures that the experimental group exhibited significant outperformance in the control group on all the dimensions of the rubrics at the post-test. Content: experimental group M = 6.92 (SD = 0.47) vs. control group M = 5.69 (SD = 0.73); t = 8.92, p < .001, d = 2.00. Structure: experimental M = 5.19 (SD = 0.35) vs. control M = 4.27 (SD = 0.55); t = 8.92, p < .001, d = 2.00. Style and Accuracy: experimental M = 5.19 (SD = 0.35) vs. control M = 4.27 (SD = 0.55); t = 8.92, p < .001, d = 2.00. Total Score: experimental M = 17.30 (SD = 1.18) vs. control M = 14.22 (SD = 1.83); t = 8.92, p < .001, d = 1.69. The values Cohen provides in all his d sizes are very large, proving that the beneficial impact of flipped classroom teaching is practically as well as statistically considerable in all aspects of narrative essay writing.

5. Discussion

The results of the present research suggest that the content-based Flipped Learning Model instruction, using the model of Bergmann and Sams (2012), demonstrates an illegal influence on the three dimensions of writing narrative essays evaluated at a rubric level, namely Content and Structure, and Style and Accuracy among first-semester ESL students at the University of Pakistan. The findings are three related; the pre-test equivalence of the two groups, within group improvements in the two groups and the significantly higher post-test performance of the experimental group. To start with, the finding that the two groups were not significantly different on any criterion on the rubric at pre-test along with over all narrative essay (t = 1.43, p = .157) in itself is a significant methodological result. It confirms the comparison of quasi-experiment and eliminates the pre-existing ability gap as a confounding basis to the post-test results. This lack of difference baseline result is in line with the design expectations of the quasi-experimental research design in education (Creswell, 2014). Second, the fact that both cohorts performed much better according to the pre-test to post-test on all of the rubric criteria validates that both types of structured writing teaching, either the conventional or the flipped variant, generates quantifiable learning improvements. This coincides with Nawaz et al. (2025) meta-analytic finding that explicit teaching of writing is always effective in enhancing the writing performance of adolescents and young adults irrespective of the teaching approach used. The difference between within-group gains was however significant and the control group gained on all rubric criteria about half those of the experimental group. Third, and most importantly, the between-group post-test differences with extremely large effect sizes (d = 2.00 in each of the rubrics criteria, d = 1.69 in the overall score) show that the quality improvement with flipped instruction is, in fact, not better, but a qualitative improvement in the writing development. In the case of the Content dimension, the nearly doubling of gains in the experimental group is consistent with the argument suggested by Tucker (2012) that flipped model

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changes the role of a teacher to a facilitator of active learning and not a passive provider of information. By brainstorming, drafting and working out the story ideas during the lesson under teacher supervision, students will be working with a supported helped environment of Creating level of Bloom taxonomy, producing more rich and developed work. In the case of Structure, the better gains of the experimental group, authenticated by their own superior performance, lend arguments to the assertion by Vygotsky (1978) that deeper structural lessons are obtained in the implementation of a task itself than in any post-hoc feedback. To Style and Accuracy, larger gains can be explained by the fact that in the flipped model it is structurally possible to provide vocabulary and grammar corrective feedback in class (highly unlikely in traditional instruction), which explains the larger gains. These outcomes are consistent with and replicate previous body of literature. Hung (2015), Karimi and Hamzavi (2017), and Roach (2014) all found benefits of writing among flipped classroom learners in comparison to traditional learning environments. This research contributes to the current literature by breaking down these results to the rubric level, proving that the benefit of flipped classroom is constant and significant across all the evaluated aspects of narrative writing and is not localized in one domain. Such consistency on a rubric-level is significant to make practical choices in curriculum development as well as assessment-informed pedagogy.

6.Conclusion

This research study has shown that flipped classroom teaching creates much better gains in narrative essay writing skills when considering all three content, structure and style markers, and accuracy of the final products of writing, than does traditional teaching instruction among first semester undergraduate ESL students in Pakistan. The two groups were statistically matched in terms of the baseline position as well as being able to improve significantly after instruction. But, the gains on the experimental group, were more or less twice as the gains on the control group in all dimensions of the rubric, and the effect sizes were very large, affirming the useful educational value of the flipped model advantage. The results have significant implications to the Pakistani ESL writing pedagogy. The educators are advised to think in revising narrative writing courses with the concept of flipping: during pre-class time, directors can devote time to instruction courses and during in-class time, trainees can be guided to write, with teacher reviewing, and peer reviewing. The rubric-level evidence provided in this context provides a rather resourceful foundation of this type of assessment-driven instructional redesign, in that it provides an insight into what particular aspects of writing specifically in their content development, its structural organisation, and its linguistic correctness could be best positively affected by the structural changes that flipped instruction brings. The future studies must score the rubric sub-components separately instead of proportionally out of total test scores, include qualitative tools in the study, e.g. journals of student writing and observations in the classroom, to shed more light on the improvement mechanisms, and conduct the study across different universities and writing genres. These intervention periods, which would be longer, would also enable evaluation of whether there are any gains that are maintained over time. However, the current results affirm concisely and substantiated data that the flipped classroom model, conceptualised by Bergmann and Sams (2012), is practically viable as well as empirically sustained to enhance the narrative writing of English in Pakistani undergraduate ESL education.

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