

The Effect of Explicit Instruction in Expository Text Structure on the Writing Performance of Arab EFL University Students

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Abstract

This action research study investigates the relationship between explicit instruction in the organizational patterns of comparison/contrast texts, regarded as a major type of expository English, and EFL writing performance. The study also examines whether students' metacognitive and cognitive knowledge of the text structures of comparison/contrast texts improves their in-class writing performance. 22 Palestinian EFL university students enrolled in an academic writing course participated in the study. The study spanned over three weeks during which the subjects received nine hours of explicit instruction in the organizational structures of compare/contrast texts. Data gained from pre- and post-test mean scores point to a direct correlation between explicit instruction in text structure and improved writing performance. The interviews with student participants provided evidence that students felt more comfortable and confident about writing when they are explicitly taught the organizational structures of expository texts. The pedagogical implications of this study are of significant value to EFL writing teachers and curricula developers who should make explicit instruction in text structure an integral part of EFL writing courses.

Key Words: text structure, comparison/contrast, explicit instruction, EFL Arab students, writing performance

Introduction

Writing is inarguably one of the most difficult skills EFL learners encounter when learning a target language due to that fact that “the concerns ESL students have about writing in English may be substantially different from those of native language users” (Gungle & Taylor, 1989, p. 245). EFL learners come from various cultural backgrounds and discourse traditions where they had learned to develop and organize their ideas and information differently in both spoken and written discourses. Consequently, they bring in these rhetorical conventions when writing in English. For that reason, learners almost always encounter difficulties in writing English, especially academic English, as they are always expected to adhere to the organizational patterns of English academic texts. Grabe and Kaplan (1989, p. 263) candidly put it that, “The effort to understand how writing in a second language (L2) is also influenced by the cultural and linguistic conventions of the writers’ first language (L1) is now recognized as an important element which must be accounted for in any approach to L2 writing research and instruction.” Some of the intriguing writing problems for EFL learners might not be grammatical knowledge, vocabulary, or even lack of ideas; it may rather be finding out a way “within the rhetorical conventions of the expository essay to acknowledge or articulate the conflict they experience as they move between the contradictory rhetorical practices of their native and adopted cultures”(Corbett, 1998, p. 2).

Since writing in the L2 is a challenging task for EFL learners, it is imperative that they should be equipped with the strategies and skills with which they are better capable of controlling their own learning and improving their writing. One important way to achieve this optimal goal is through explicit teaching of text structure and raising learners’ awareness of generic features such as rhetorical structures, discourse markers, the relation between the writer-reader, purpose of writing, voice, topic expectations, and medium of communication, and making these part of their schemata. Gordon (1990), for instance, holds that research suggests that students receiving explicit instruction in expository text structure are better able to use text structure when reading, writing, speaking, and sometimes in activities or events in everyday life. Indeed, students need to know how to write before they are asked to actually write.

Despite an avalanche of research on teaching text structure and L1 writing performance, little research seems to have been devoted to the relationship between explicit instruction in text structure and L2 writing performance. This action research study investigates whether explicit teaching of the rhetorical organization of one text type of expository English (comparison/contrast texts) improves students' writing performance. The study identifies the various cognitive and metacognitive processes learners go through when writing in the expository genre and how this correlates to better writing performance in this genre.

Theoretical Background

Not only does writing effectively, whether in L1 or L2, involve forming grammatically correct sentences, generating and organizing coherent content, and using a wide range of vocabulary and syntactic structures (Caudery, 1998), but it also entails making the right choices in creating appropriate texts for specific occasions and communicative purposes. Ploeger (1994) points out to the fact that “the text is created by the writer, who is a member of a discourse community, influenced by that community’s traditions, discourse conventions, textual and topic requirements and constraints” (p. 2). Unfamiliarity with the discourse and textual features

appropriate in one genre may constitute a serious obstacle for ESL writers in different academic settings (Hinkel, 2002). As a result, raising learners' awareness of the underlying elements that constitute writing encourages students to pay due attention to important factors in writing such as audience, context, purpose, and organization, which will increase their writing productivity (Burnett & Kastman, 1993).

Interest in genre theory and its pedagogical applications has increased significantly as evidenced by a substantial body of literature connecting genre research and classroom writing pedagogy (e.g. Bhatia, 2002; Caudery, 1998; Clark, 1999; Grabe, 2002; Hyon, 1996; Johns, 2002; Paltridge, 2002; Oliver, 1999; Reppen, 1995, 2002; Swales, 1990). In particular, theorists have been concerned with the extent to which familiarity with rhetorical patterns and organizational structures of different text genres can influence learners' academic writing performance. Pedagogically speaking, the term genre suggested "an emphasis on form, and to a certain extent, on form exclusively, because, in its most simplistic application, students were encouraged to pour content into formulaic text slots without questioning the rationale for doing so" (Clark, 1999, p. 8).

Current conceptualizations of genre have shifted away from a restrictive, exclusive, and static perspective focusing on form into a more social, communicative, and dynamic approach to genre. Genres are referred to as "inherently dynamic rhetorical structures that can be manipulated according to conditions of use, and that genre knowledge is therefore best conceptualized as a form of situated cognition embedded in disciplinary cultures" (Bhatia, 2002, p. 23). A thorough examination of the literature on writing pedagogy shows that learners need to be immersed in and have practice writing in different genres (Reppen, 1995). Thus, introducing genre-related writing activities is a crucial element in helping learners comprehend different genre texts and enabling them to construct their own texts. Reppen makes the point that getting learners to practice genre writing is "important for English L1 students and crucial for English L2 learners... simply allowing students to write a lot will not necessarily provide sufficient practice in the types of writing valued for academic writing" (p. 32). Moreover, learners' knowledge of genre offers them new ways to see writing as a social construction that ultimately moves beyond genre boundaries and in this way provides them with useful, practical possibilities of writing creatively (Clark, 1999). That is, equipping learners with the language to talk about texts enables them to understand how to write effectively and communicatively in different communicative situations.

Research on writing and reading comprehension has commonly dealt with expository writing as a more generic classification although there are more specific subgenres within the exposition (Cox, Shanahan & Tinzmann, 1991). Expository writing differs from narrative and descriptive writing in that it expresses an idea about a topic and uses supporting details to inform or explain to the reader that the idea is sound. While the narrative or descriptive modes attempt to evoke the reader's emotions or senses, the exposition mode resides in the realm of logic. Taylor and Beach (1984) postulate that a difficulty with expository writing may be attributable to students' lack of knowledge about the text organization used in comprehending and producing expository texts. As a result, one way proposed by Grabe (2002) to help learners to overcome difficulties in expository writing is by exploring the generic structures and organizational patterns used by writers to convey or explain information and that "a more coherent and focused

effort to teach expository writing and to practice such writing consistently would improve students' writing abilities"(p. 263).

Regarding the organizing structures of expository writing, Cox, Shanahan and Tinzmann (1991) hold that expository writing "relies heavily on hierarchical and logical relations among the ideas in a text." Raphael and Kirschner (1985) believe that knowledge of text structure helps writers in many ways: (1) explore the subject, (2) clarify the purpose, (3) make decisions about how to arrange ideas and information, and (4) revise the ways ideas are presented. Similarly, Taylor and Beach (1984) found out that "students who notice and use text structure to aid them in forming a macrostructure for what they have read may have a better understanding of the need for incorporating text structure into their own expository writing" (p. 137). Grabe (2002) argues that rhetorical instruction is advantageous and that there is strong evidence in research that students possessing better knowledge of the organizational structures in a given text (comparison/contrast, classification, cause-effect, problem-solution, argument for a position) are able to recall more information from the text and perform better on comprehension tasks.

A wealth of research has underscored the importance of explicit instruction as an effective methodology in teaching language skills (see, for example, Archer & Hughes, 2011; Bomer, 1998; Goeke, 2008; Price, 1998; Serafini, 2004). Explicit instruction often refers to the systematic sequencing of instructional procedures in a lesson. More importantly, it involves the degree of clarity in the learners' constructions and their deliberate use of a particular concept, strategy or procedure, calling to consciousness what is being taught and strives to clarify for learners the expectations the teachers have for their learning (Bomer, 1998; Serafini, 2004). According to Goeke (2008), explicit instruction can be provided when the goal is to teach a well-defined body of information or skills that all students must master, assessment data indicate that students have not learned the basic skills, strategies and content, and assessment data indicate that student progress towards mastering skills, strategies or content needs to be accelerated.

Several studies were conducted on the correlation between explicit instruction of expository writing structures and writing performance. A study by Raphael and Kirschner (1985), for example, revealed that students receiving instruction in expository text structure made significant improvement in their free writing, and made specific improvement in writing comparison/contrast text structures which have been found to be particularly difficult. Raphael and Kirschner hold that instructors should provide a scaffold to help learners improve their comprehension and production of expository texts. Such a scaffold should consist of four essential components:

1. Familiarizing learners with the structure of expository text they read to increase their access to relevant information of text,
2. supplementing this information by activating background knowledge,
3. equipping learners with skills to organize information, and
4. providing them with a structure that they could use to write about the information.

Grabe and Kaplan (1989) hold that students should be furnished with strategies for text organization that are appropriate for the rhetorical and coherence systems of English by raising their awareness of general organizational structures such as thesis statement, body, conclusion, logical relationships among parts of a text, and options available at hand for selecting and arranging their information in a text.

At first glance, the area of cognitive and metacognitive strategies that ESL writers engage in has spawned a vast literature of its own. Empirical research reveals a strong impact of increasing learners' cognitive and metacognitive awareness on language learning. Cumberworth and Hunt (1998) believe that increasing students' cognitive knowledge of useful strategies is necessary to improve their writing. By having students cognitively and metacognitively aware of features of different text types, "students learn the language needed to talk about texts, begin to understand how and why texts are organized in certain ways, and are able to evaluate their own writing and participate in peer editing sessions more effectively" (Reppen, 1995, p. 32). Schraw and Dennison (1994) hold that metacognitive awareness enables students to plan, sequence and monitor their learning which has a positive effect on writing performance.

In a related vein, Hamilton and Ghatala (1994, p. 400) define cognitive strategies as "mental processes for controlling learning and thinking. Using [cognitive] strategies appropriately enables students to efficiently manage their own learning, remembering, and thinking." Similarly, Vermunt (1996) sees these cognitive strategies as thinking activities that learners use to process learning content. Some of these cognitive activities include looking for relations among parts of the subject matter (relating), distinguishing major and minor points (selecting), thinking of examples (concretizing), and looking for applications (applying). In their study on the connection between young adolescents' motivational processes and their use of cognitive and self-regulating (metacognitive) strategies with expository texts, Mizelle and Carr (1997) found that there is strong evidence in research that teaching students cognitive and metacognitive strategies such as making inferences, mental imagery, summarization, use of text structure and question generation increased students' strategy knowledge and enhanced their understanding of expository texts.

Methodology

This study uses an action research design for the purpose of examining the role of explicit instruction in organizational patterns of comparison/contrast texts in improving writing performance. Berg (2001) holds that action research aims at two related tasks. First, it aims to reveal knowledge or information that will be directly useful to a group of people. Second, it is meant to empower the average person in the group to use the information collected in the research. Nunan (1992) identifies the key components of action research design as being initiated by a question, supported by data and interpretation, and carried out by a teacher in his/her own context. The key features of an action research design are that it is carried out by teachers themselves, uses qualitative or quantitative methods, for the purpose of teacher development, has no expectation for generalizability, seeks to improve classroom practice, and aims at the development of teacher theory (Griffiee, 2012; Harmer, 2007). Thus, action research ultimately aims to bring about a change or modification in how something is done or understood.

For purposes of the analysis, 22 EFL Palestinian university female students enrolled in a mid-intermediate writing course participated in the study. This writing course, which used a process-oriented approach to teaching writing, aimed to develop the students' writing abilities in

areas such as content, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, and grammatical accuracy. The participants in this study had not previously received explicit instruction in the text structure of comparison/contrast texts. They were in the second year of their study, ranged in age between 19-20 years, came from similar socio-economic backgrounds, and speak Arabic as their mother tongue. Their language proficiency is quite similar since all of them were enrolled in the university according to a fixed grade point average (GPA) in their general secondary school and studied the same English language courses. The students were also more or less homogenous in their language proficiency based on the results of their mid-term scores as they were studying the same course. The study focused on the following questions:

- (1) Is there a correlation between explicit instruction in text structure of comparison/contrast texts, as a major type of expository English, and improved writing performance as measured by post-instruction essay writing?
- (2) Does students' metacognitive and cognitive knowledge of the organizational patterns of compare/contrast texts improve their writing performance?

This research was carried out using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The experimental method was based on one group pretest-posttest design, where comparison of the mean scores is done within the same group (Hatch & Lazaraton, 1991). Two essay writing tasks served as pre- and post- achievement tests. Data were analyzed using the statistical package (SPSS). T-test for independent sample was used to measure statistical differences in the mean scores of the students' pre- and post-tests in order to determine the overall effect of instruction. It is hypothesized that in case there were statistically significant differences between both mean scores, we are in a better position to ascribe this improvement on the post-test to the role of explicit instruction and students' metacognitive and cognitive knowledge of comparison/contrast text structure and their ability to make use of this knowledge in constructing their own texts. Conversely, if no progress has been noticed in the subjects' writing abilities, we may argue that students' familiarity with expository text structure has no significant impact on their writing performance.

First, students were pre-tested with a one-hour compare/contrast essay on *the similarities and differences between our lifestyles and our grandparents' lifestyles*. The researcher-teacher, thereafter referred to as RT, asked the subjects to monitor the thinking processes and strategies, if any, they go through while writing the essay. Two experienced teachers graded the writing samples using a scoring rubric that is specifically designed to measure two writing categories, namely organization and coherence, on a scale of one-to-ten, with 10 being the highest score. Each rater assigned a combined score of both writing areas. In order to measure the test scores' inter-rater reliability, where data are independently coded by each rater and then compared for agreement (for measuring inter-rater reliability, see Hatch & Lazaraton, 1991, p. 533-535), all the ratings were correlated and a Pearson correlation matrix was produced and then an average of all the correlation coefficients was calculated. The inter-rater reliability of the ratings computed between both graders was reasonably high, about 76 percent.

Moreover, qualitative methods involved conducting semi-structured interviews with student participants to give a more complete picture on students' performance, attitudes, and mental processes as a result of the intervention. To illustrate, the RT interviewed the participants right after having students write the pre-instruction essay. Every participant was asked about nine questions in each interview, but some questions were formulated during the interview since the

RT intended the interview to be conversational and two-way communication. The purpose of these semi-structured interviews was twofold. First, RT sought to probe into cognitive and metacognitive processes students went through when writing a comparison/contrast essay, i.e., interview questions addressed whether students planned, brainstormed, monitored and/or revised their compositions. Secondly, RT wanted to probe into the subjects' own choices concerning organization and content and to know if the subjects were aware of the textual organization of comparison/contrast texts and the discourse markers appropriate in such texts. Equally important, the interviews asked students about their affective relationship with English writing and how they could improve their writing. To facilitate some students' ability to accurately verbalize the mental processes they undergo and to reduce the inhibitions and difficulty some may feel when speaking in English, RT asked each interviewee to speak in her first language, if she felt so.

Following the pre-instruction procedures, the students received 9 hours of classroom instruction that spanned over a period of three weeks; two sessions conducted a week with each session lasting for one and a half hours. During these sessions, RT explicitly taught students the organizational patterns of comparison/contrast texts using reading texts and consciousness-raising activities. RT intended to familiarize students with the two major organizational structures of compare/contrast texts, namely, block organization and point-by-point organization and to equip the subjects with the transition signals associated with such texts. During classes, students read compare/contrast texts and transferred information into tables about the similarities and differences between topics, identified patterns of text organization and applied the new information by constructing their own texts. The purpose of all these activities was to help students internalize this knowledge and apply it in their writing assignments.

At the end of the instruction period, students were asked to write a comparison/contrast essay in order to determine whether the intervention has resulted in a change in their writing performance. RT gave the students one hour to write about '*the similarities and differences between the roles of men and the roles of women in their society*'. The researcher thought the pre- and post-test essay tasks were more or less equivalent in that they represent the same level of difficulty and intend to elicit from the students the same kind of writing performance. RT utilized the same scoring procedures used in assessing the pre-teaching essays. Following the post-test essay, RT interviewed each participant about six questions that aimed to identify any change in attitudes and feelings about writing and the instruction, steps used in organizing compare/contrast texts, and any metacognitive and cognitive processes she may have used while writing the post-treatment essay.

A naturalistic and grounded perspective formed the basis of this classroom research study. That is, RT used statistical methods to gather data for the purpose of validating the hypothesis. Data obtained from the interviews provided the researcher with insights on the various experiences, responses and attitudes of the participants towards writing and whether they made use of certain strategies and skills while performing the writing tasks. The interview questions were tailored in a way that had the subjects verbalize and reflect on the various mental processes that they underwent during the process of writing as a result of direct teaching of organizational structures of comparison/contrast texts.

Findings and Discussion

In analyzing the mean scores of the pre- and post-tests, it is observed that there has been a reasonably significant increase on the post-test mean score compared with the pre-test mean score (see Table 1 below). The average pre-test mean score that started at 48.18 percent moved up to about 66.59 on the post-test with an increase of 18.41 percent on the post-test. The matched-pairs t-test performed showed statistically significant differences ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between the pre- and post-tests attributed to explicit instruction of text structures. Given the fact that the study lasted for three weeks during which students received only nine hours of classroom instruction, the researcher would hypothesize that this increase would have moved up quite significantly in case the study has lasted longer and the students were exposed to more instructional time and writing training practice.

Table 1. Mean scores of Pre-Test and Post-Test

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre_Test Gains	22	30.00	75.00	48.1818	11.39606
Post_Test Gains	22	45.00	90.00	66.5909	14.34161

The significant gains on all post-instruction essays provided statistical support for the pedagogical significance of explicit instruction of the rhetorical structures of comparison/contrast texts. This increase observed here, which is consistent with previous studies, indicates that explicit instruction of the rhetorical structure of texts can be a pedagogically useful source for improving writing quality. However, given the limitation of statistical design, one could argue that the sole reliance in this study on statistical findings to interpret the data may fall short of presenting a plausible explanation to the study findings. These findings will be qualitatively verified by conducting interviews with the participants in the study in order to provide a more complete picture of the study's outcomes.

Pre-Instruction Interviews

Results of the pre-instruction interviews show that the students had mixed feelings about writing, and feeling of and anxiety towards writing seem to predominate in the students' responses. To illustrate, in responding to a question about how they felt about writing in English, some students stated that they enjoyed writing in English. For example, a positive remark towards writing was expressed by Maha who pointed out:

I think it is good to try to write in English... I think I am making progress in writing in English.

On the other hand, other students either found writing English a difficult task to master or expressed a sense of anxiety and uncertainty towards writing stating that they still faced many

difficulties in writing English. To cite one example, Majida indicated that she still has some problems in writing:

According to my point of view, I want to develop writing strategies, I have a lot of problems in writing, I like to speak, but I don't not like to write because in Arabic also I don't have the talent of writing and to express ideas, because I don't have the style of creativity.

The range of problems and difficulties students had in writing as revealed by these interviews ranged from word choice, sentence structures and spelling to punctuation, prepositions, cohesive devices and organization.

Planning, Organizing and Revision

An important finding in these interviews revealed that students varied in their use of their metacognitive and cognitive processes, specifically strategies of planning, editing, and revising. For instance, six students pointed out that they often plan before they write. Fatima, for instance, said that she outlined her ideas and planned before she started writing about the topic:

Of course, okay, when you said you gonna write about similarities and differences some ideas just happened in my mind right away, and after started doing the outline and putting down some ideas, just what I have in my mind and then decide what I am going to write about.

The other students, however, were either unaware of planning as a pre-writing strategy or they thought of planning as simply activating their background knowledge about the writing topic. For example, one student noted that:

I think I have some knowledge about this topic because I think it's one part of my life...

In the same context, the initial interviews with students show that most students had no concept of time planning either before or during writing their essays. An illustration of students' lack of awareness of timing is best exemplified in the following excerpt from one student's interview:

Huda: I am bad with organizing time, so I started writing and said I am gonna be done in 15-20 minutes and found that I am over time. So that's I wanna know about myself, I do not organize my time.

In addition, interviews with the students showed that most students made use of reviewing and revision while and after they wrote their essays. However, most of them indicated that they focus on grammar and spelling in their revision rather than on text organization or content.

Knowledge of Compare/Contrast Text Structure

About organizing text structure of compare/contrast texts, some students had knowledge of general organizational structures such as an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. However, all students were unaware of specific compare/contrast text structures, namely, block

organization and point-by-point organization. In fact, the first interviews with the students revealed they had a difficulty organizing such texts. One student stated that:

In this compare and contrast topic, it's hard to organize ... how can I contrast/contrast, sometimes I first compare and make contrast and sometimes I mix them.

This student and others recognize that they lack the knowledge of how to write compare/contrast texts. Another student, for example, said that in writing compare/contrast texts she just listed down her ideas:

Hala: hmm, in this case, I just list

Similarly, another student, Tamarah, expressed the same notion of unawareness of text organization when asked about the way she organized her ideas in the essay:

I always found a big problem in similarities and differences, I don't have, I don't know how to begin and how to organize it, I don't know really.

Students also varied in their responses to a question about their knowledge and use of compare/contrast transition signals. To illustrate, five students pointed out that they were aware of and used transition signals in their essays though it was not clear that they have already had specific knowledge of transition words used in comparison and contrast texts. Conversely, other students indicated that they either did not use transition words in their writings or had a difficulty using them. A case in point is a question was put to one student regarding her feeling about writing comparison contrast essays, she pointed out the following:

Majida: Oh yeah, especially in using connectors in comparison contrast essays using the suitable connectors such as conversely, on the other hand, but, similarly, but, at the beginning, I don't have knowledge about them and I felt I was so confused when writing about a topic like compare and contrast, so yeah it definitely helped.

Post-Instruction Interviews

The post-instruction interviews aimed to identify the students' feelings and attitudes towards writing following the instruction period and whether they found learning about the text structure of comparison/contrast texts helpful in improving their writing. The interviews also got students to verbalize on how they made use of the information they learned and to report on any changes in their metacognitive and cognitive processes after the instruction period.

Organizing Text

Initially, all students believed that explicit instruction in the textual patterns of compare/contrast texts was very helpful and necessary in that it helped them better organize their ideas in such texts and use transition signals effectively. For instance, one student pointed out:

Maha: Yes sure, at first I learned the organization of comparison/contrast subjects and transition signals and it's good for the other writing...

Another student also indicated that she also learned a lot from taking these classes, especially how to structure her writing in compare/contrast texts:

Fatima: First of all, I did not know about compare and contrast, I thought they were both one thing, I thought that both meant the same, actually they didn't, and because of the block and point-by-point, I did not know about them, these are all new stuff, I was mixing both types together in my writing, now that I know how to differentiate the point-by-point or block organization, I can write the essays I want.

Another student said,

I had very little knowledge, but this activity has developed me a lot, you gave us a lot of essays to write about and practiced a lot, so now I can organize my ideas and how to write in a good way, so yeah I am developing the writing.

Cognitive and Metacognitive Knowledge

In other interviews with the students, RT found that all students were better able to talk about the text structure of their writings. The following excerpt from an interview with a student illustrates this:

Salma: I think I learned a lot concerning transition words and also how to organize, I saw the difference between block organization and also point-by-point organization and I think now I am really understand how to use those instructions.

In contrast to initial interviews with the students, the post-intervention interviews showed a conspicuous change in the students' use and articulation of metacognitive and cognitive processes such as brainstorming, outlining, organizing, editing and using transition signals. All students indicated that they brainstormed and outlined their essays before they started the actual writing. For instance, when Fedaa' was asked about the steps she took in writing her essay, she said,

First, I think about my topic, brainstorming, and then I choose ideas like U.S. and Palestinian education for the body then I think about my organization and I write down my essay by block organization.

It was clear from the post-instruction interviews that the students possessed the language to talk about their essay writing. Most students pointed out that they would apply what they learned in this study to other writing contexts and they could make use of this learned knowledge of text organization as well as cognitive processes in similar writing situations. In the following example, the student shows that she uses metacognitive and cognitive strategies when writing and this clearly indicates a change in her thinking processes in contrast to her first remarks in the initial interview.

I start with an introductory paragraph which has general statements and a thesis statement to make my paragraph interesting, I try to make my paragraphs either

by point by point or by block style, but I personally prefer the block style, then I try to make summary of the points in the conclusion.

Positive Attitudes to Writing

In the same vein, students' responses on how they felt about writing following the instruction were unanimously positive. The students pointed out that they became increasingly comfortable writing in English and especially in comparison/contrast types given the fact that text organization formed a challenging difficulty for them and that the instruction helped them better organize their texts. When asked by the RT about how she felt about writing after the instruction period, one student felt that she accomplished progress in writing English:

Majida: at the first recording I was fully persuaded that I am not one of those who have the talent of writing, that I believed that the talent of writing is a gift from God to some people, but now I change my mind, I start to believe that the talent of writing is given to every one of us, but you just need to discover it and the thing that makes this one a creative writer and this one not creative is he first discovered himself then he practiced a lot to be a creative writer

Finally, students have generally indicated that they liked the classes because these few classes helped them better their writing especially in constructing their own comparison/contrast texts and expanding their repertoire of discourse markers associated with such texts. For example, this student was able to articulate her ideas about writing clearly whilst expressing positive attitudes towards writing. She pointed out that she felt more secure in organizing her writing:

Salma: Before that I didn't know how to write essays or how to organize my writing, you helped us a lot. I feel more confident when trying to put two sentences together and I feel more confident when writing essays, I am not scared anymore... I am pretty sure what I am gonna do and I am pretty sure that I am gonna write a good essay and in case I did not know, I am gonna ask you [student and RT laughing].

To conclude, the results of researcher's intervention indicate that significant differences exist between pre- and post-intervention students' response clearly in favour of the latter. These results are consistent with theoretical and empirical research suggesting that explicit instruction is effective in improving writing performance. One can detect a noticeable improvement in the students' attitudes and feelings towards writing. Further, the students were conscious of metacognitive and cognitive processes that they would use in a way that will ultimately improve their writing performance.

Conclusions & Pedagogical Implications

This study that is designed as an action research study ties with my desire to improve EFL university learners' writing abilities and my conviction that an effective way to do so is by

explicitly teaching the rhetorical structures of English texts. While this research was carried out on an intact class and its statistical design precludes generalizing the findings, it is significant in its support of previous research that suggests that explicit teaching of text structure generally enhances students' comprehension and production of expository texts. Drawing on such research findings, the study has been conducted to illustrate that students receiving explicit instruction in the rhetorical structures of expository texts are able to construct their own expository texts effectively.

The qualitative data presented in this study have clearly shown that students feel more comfortable and confident about writing when they are explicitly given the tools and knowledge with which they could write effectively. In addition to the affective impact to this awareness of text structure, the data indicate that students' knowledge of text structure and how to organize texts greatly influence their sensitivity to and ability to reflect and self-monitor their own writing process. In other words, the students' responses provide a further illustration that sensitizing students' awareness to specific organizational patterns in expository writing correlates positively with improvement in EFL students' in-class writing. In the same way, the quantitative data analysis show tangible statistical differences in the writing performance of all students following the researcher/teacher's intervention.

The findings reported in this study underscore the need that text structure instruction should be systematically incorporated in ESL/EFL writing courses. They suggest that an instructional syllabus based on teaching explicitly the text structure of expository texts promotes EFL students' writing abilities. EFL writing teachers should therefore structure their instruction and curricula in a way that enhances students' awareness of text structure and in this way enabling them to become better writers. Another finding demonstrates that direct instruction of text structure and raising students' awareness of metacognitive and cognitive knowledge of how to organize texts can be intertwined to bolster students' ability to construct their own texts and that students' knowledge of text structure of compare/contrast text can be transferred to other text types.

In conclusion, the aim of this study has been designed to answer specific questions about the connection between text structure instruction and improving writing abilities. Grabe and Kaplan (1989) maintained that students' knowledge, in one way or another, of the preferred rhetorical patterns of English remains a principal goal of a general instructional writing methodology. In practical terms, this study supports the idea that one way to make EFL writing more effective comes through providing EFL student writers with the necessary information about the organizational structures of English texts.

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