

The Impact of a Discourse Technique on Learning Advanced Writing Skills by Jordanian EFL University Students

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Abstract

The main purpose of this experimental study is to investigate the impact of a discourse technique (DT) on learning advanced writing skills by Jordanian EFL university students. It also aimed to provide university instructors with suitable techniques to help them teach writing and enhance students' writing proficiency. The participants of the study consist of 40 EFL university students majoring in English language (20 male students and 20 female students) studying advanced writing (Writing 2: Essay Writing) course at the Department of English Language and Literature. The participants were divided into two groups: experimental and control groups. The experimental group was taught using the discourse technique, whereas the control group was taught using the traditional one. To test the significance of the means, the researchers used one-way ANCOVA. The results revealed statistically significant differences between the two groups, in favor of the experimental group for those who were exposed to the training program compared to the control group members. The results also indicated that there were statistically significant differences between the groups according to gender, in favor of female students in the experimental group because they were exposed to the training program. This study provides beneficial insights into using a discourse technique and effective teaching methods to enhance the writing proficiency of EFL students. The study recommended conducting similar studies investigating the impact of the discourse technique on EFL students' writing skills at other universities in Jordan.

Keywords: *Discourse Technique, Efl Students, Advanced Writing, Ajloun National University.*

Introduction

Writing is a very productive and communicative language skill. It is considered a conscious activity because learners think about the sentence. But it is not an isolated skill to be learned alone. It is left with the other main language skills: listening, speaking, and reading. Writing is taught to equip students to use their skills at a higher level of education or to join a future profession (Curricula for the Secondary Stage; MOE, 1993, p.6). When implementing writing process (WP) instruction worldwide, EFL instructors noticed the learning outcomes leaving a gap towards advanced composition. EFL students' final products did not represent the knowledge they acquired. Students bizarrely write with sophisticated grammar, vocabulary, and rhetorical devices containing empty ideas, unclear explanations, and disagreements with the prompt. Throughout the period, educators questioned the learning ability of the learners. However, the educators failed to recognize the influence of the sophisticated structure of the writing prompts they chose on the learners' outcomes. Consequently, the focal point was the learners' production, not the instructors' teaching (Rahimi & Fathi, 2021, p.3).

Toubat (2003) explains that foreign language learners suffer from weakness in writing, despite the effort exerted by teachers of English to overcome such difficulty. They use different writing strategies in teaching to help their students upgrade their level of writing. They also provide their students with different kinds of writing exercises and tasks to make the writing process easier, such as writing letters, emails, or reports. This can help students develop their writing skills in a practical context and give them a sense of purpose and motivation in their writing. Whiteman (1981) suggests that students are weak in writing skills because teachers concentrate on teaching grammar, vocabulary spelling, and punctuation activities more than engaging students in the writing process itself. Thus, writing is a language's main skill and can be used to

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express feelings and thoughts. It integrates all the other language's main skills. However, exposing students to sentence structure, which is the basic unit in the composition of text, is a step in the right direction toward continuous examples of language in use. It is not an end by itself, but a means to enable learners of a language to freely communicate with others in real-life situations.

According to Wattenmaker (1980), exposing students to linguistic patterns helps them understand how language works and improves language skills. Writing relies on a solid structural foundation, which is essential for effective communication in various situations. However, like any other skill, writing requires practice. Teachers can encourage students to practice writing by assigning regular writing tasks, providing feedback, and offering opportunities for revision. By doing so, students can develop their writing skills and gain confidence in their abilities. Broughton, et.al (1996) state, "A great deal of the writing that occurs in the foreign language classrooms is not primarily concerned so much with developing writing skills as with reinforcing the teaching of particular structure" (p. 117). Students may have, to some extent, an acceptable competence in English; however, when it is time to use language, they find themselves in trouble, and indeed, they cannot get started. This observation, of course, reflects the difficulty of composing either in spoken or written forms. By prioritizing writing development, students can gain the ability to effectively express themselves in writing and speech alike. (Özbek, 1995, p. 44).

A teaching technique is a relatively consistent performance method by an instructor in a teacher-student interaction in which both have well-defined roles. Discourse is a continuous development of language with linguistic and contextual meaning. Consequently, a discourse technique (DT) refers to coherent practices by an instructor in encouraging learners to express themselves freely in writing. Advanced writing is a composing process with the use of learned sophisticated grammatical structures, transition signals, complex syntax, idiomatic expressions, vocabulary, and English as a Second Language (ESL) rhetorical devices according to the purpose (Agili and Prabhashini, 2021, p. 452).

In Jordan, English instructors have expressed concerns about their students' writing abilities. While several research studies have been conducted on writing, there is a gap in studies focusing on using the discourse technique (DT) at the university level. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by designing a program to determine the impact of a discourse technique on learning writing. Additionally, the study aims to help instructors identify effective methods for teaching writing skills during lectures. Using the discourse technique can be an effective way to improve the effectiveness of writing skills. It can also help students understand how to structure their writing, organize their thoughts and ideas, and communicate more effectively. Using the discourse technique (DT) has the potential to significantly improve writing skill effectiveness and productivity among university students. This study aimed to answer the following questions:

- Are there any statistically significant differences in the ANU EFL students' learning of English writing skills between the control group and the experimental group due to treatment?
- Are there any statistically significant differences in ANU EFL students' learning of English writing skills due to gender?

Statement of the Problem

Throughout researchers' work as teachers, supervisors, and university professors, they noticed that students who learn English as a foreign language have weaknesses in writing skills. Batayneh (1986) states that secondary students who end up learning English as a foreign language and even those at the post-secondary level find difficulty producing authentic English communicatively. Al-Abed Al-Haq and Sharah (1997) believe that using discourse and rhetorical level may help university students learn and use language effectively and overcome their composing problem with English as a foreign language. The researchers think instructors can develop students' writing skills using the discourse technique (DT).

Significance of the Research

This research aimed to investigate the effects of a discourse technique (DT) on learning advanced writing skills. The researchers are interested in exploring the effectiveness of teaching writing. This discourse technique can also shift learners from a transactional to an interactional level, from an uncompromising position to building a community of writers, and from using basic words to form a series of sentences to expressing feelings, thoughts, and ideas of their work. Therefore, this study aims to investigate a discourse technique that may help university students develop their writing skills and overcome their composing problems. It also aims to provide university instructors with a suitable discourse technique that may help them in teaching writing and enhancing students' writing proficiency. The significance of the study stems from the following:

- Few studies were conducted to investigate the effect of a discourse technique (DT) on Jordanian university students learning writing skills.
- To investigate an instrument that may help university instructors and EFL students in teaching and learning writing skills respectively at the university level.

Definition of Terms

ANU: Ajloun National University in Jordan.

Writing skills: The ability to write sentences connected in an interrelated and cohesive way (Broughton et al. 1996, p120).

Discourse Technique (DT): A procedure for teaching writing that consists of the following: content (thesis statement, unity, exposition, relevance), organization (cohesion, coherence), vocabulary (wording), and language (grammar)

Limitations of the Research

The generalizations of the results are limited to:

ANU EFL students

Short essay writing (Three paragraphs argumentative writing)

Literature Review

This part presents an overview of the previous studies focusing on the effect of the discourse technique (DT) on enhancing writing skills and students' attitudes towards such technique, analyzes these studies to establish a point of view, and concludes by stating the implications of the literature review on the current study and recommendations for further research in this area. However, many studies have been conducted in the field of writing in the hope of enhancing students' performance in writing.

Al-Abed Al-Haq and Ahmed (1994) explored the discourse problems in argumentative writing. The sample consisted of 62 students from EFL Imam Ibn Saud Islamic University. The scale was the components and sub-components of the argumentative writing, the results revealed that the students' performance was low and discouraging. Al-Toubat (2003) investigated the effect of a discursal technique on the learning of English writing skills by academic eleventh graders. The sample consisted of (272) male and female students from two groups: (134) experimental group and (138) control group. The researcher used a pre-test and post-test instrument. The findings showed a significant difference in learning writing skills between the two groups in favor of the experimental group.

Al Zoubi (2005) conducted a study on the effect of a discourse technique on learning English writing skills by Emirati academic eleventh graders. The sample of the study consisted of (166) students distributed according to stream and gender into eight sections taken randomly from eight public schools in the UAE divided into an experimental group and a control group. For this study, the discourse technique in teaching writing skills was used with the experimental group. The findings showed statistically significant differences between the achievements of both groups in favor of the experimental group because the teachers adopted the discourse technique in teaching writing skills. There were statistically significant differences regarding the stream (literary and scientific) in favor of the scientific stream and statistically significant differences according to gender in favor of females in all discourse areas.

Aidinlon (2012) examined the effect of discourse markers (DM) instruction on EFL learners' writing. The sample of the study consisted of 20 learners of English divided into two groups, a control and an experimental from the English Institute in Tabriz, Iran. The two groups were required to fill the gaps with the best options from the DM suggested. The students were given a pre-test, and then a post-test. The findings showed that the effectiveness of teaching discourse markers to students enhanced their awareness and sensitivity of discourse consequently raising their writing levels.

Sineath (2014) investigated the effect of classroom discourse on high school students' argumentative writing skills. The sample of the study consisted of 11th and 12th-grade students in a Boston public High School. The researcher used a standardized assessment tool designed by the College Board to measure the student's growth in writing, using the discourse interventions that teachers should use in teaching argumentative writing. The findings showed that the mean of the students who experienced discourse was significantly higher than for those who received facilitation through traditional procedures. The findings also showed that using linking ideas and pressing for reasoning by teachers improves augmentative writing.

Al-Ghazo and Al-Zoubi (2018) carried out a quasi-experimental study to explore the impact of constructivist learning design on the writing skills of college students. The study involved two randomly selected sections, each consisting of 15 students from the English Language and Literature Department at Ajloun National University. The participants underwent a pre-test and a post-test in writing skills in both the control and experimental groups to achieve the study's objectives. The pre-test essays were submitted before the treatment, and the post-test essays were submitted after the treatment, which was conducted about five weeks later. The writing post-test essays were analyzed and scored. The study's results indicated that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of the EFL students in the experimental and control groups on the pre-test. However, the study showed differences between the mean scores of the EFL students in the experimental group in the post-test, which favored the experimental group.

Farrokhi, et.al (2018) investigated the impact of using a discourse-based grammar approach on the performance of Iranian EFL learners. The sample consisted of 50 upper-intermediate English language learners, who were randomly selected from two English language institutes in Iran. The participants were then divided into two groups: the experimental group, which was taught using discourse-based grammar techniques, and the control group, which was taught using the traditional method. ANCOVA was used in the analysis of the results, which showed a significant difference between the two groups in favor of the experimental group. The study found that using a discourse-based grammar approach improved the writing skills of the experimental group.

Liontou (2022) conducted a study that examines the progression of writing skills in the context of foreign language proficiency, particularly for middle and high school students. The study focused on identifying formative trends and effective interventions in the early stages of development. The research analyzed written responses from 800 international EFL students, aged 13 to 15, in response to a specific exam prompt. The results indicated statistically significant differences ($p \leq 0.05$) in the language features of essays produced by young EFL learners at various proficiency levels. These findings imply that advancement in second language (L2) writing is closely linked to the ability to generate more refined texts, incorporating

advanced vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and fewer cohesive elements as language proficiency increases.

Addressing this gap in the existing literature, the primary aim of this study was to investigate the impact of the discourse technique (DT) on learning advanced writing skills by Jordanian EFL university students. It also aimed at providing university instructors with suitable techniques that might help them in teaching writing and enhancing students' writing proficiency.

Research Methodology

Research Participants

The participants of the study consisted of 40 EFL students (20 male students and 20 female students) studying advanced writing (Essay Writing) course at Ajloun National students. *Table 1. shows the gender, frequencies, and percentages of the participants.*

Group	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Experimental	Male	10	25%
	Female	10	25%
Control	Male	10	25%
	Female	10	25%
Total		40	100%

Table 1 presents the distribution of participants in the study. There were 40 students in total, with 20 students in the experimental group (10 male and 10 female students) and 20 students in the control group (10 male and 10 female students). The experimental group was taught using the discourse technique, while the control group was taught using the traditional method. As part of the study, the participants were given a writing topic to complete as a pre-test and post-test. The writing topics were selected by two English instructors to ensure validity, and corrections were made accordingly. The grading system used was the same as that employed by the Department of English Language and Literature, and two instructors from the same department marked the written topics.

Research Instrument

The participants of the study were given a writing topic to write on as a pre-test at the onset of the study, and they were given the same topic to write on at the outset of the study. The topic was previously given to a group of instructors at the Department of English Language and Literature, ANU, to ensure its validity. Modifications were, of course, done according to their recommendations. Concerning the grading of the participants' writings, the researchers used the grading scale established by the teaching staff at the Department of English Language and Literature. Table (2) displays the grading scale.

Table 2 The Adopted Grading Scale (Grade out of 100 points)

Criterion/level	Content	Vocabulary	Language	Organization
Excellent Ideas, Excellent Structure (90 – 100)	20 – 30	20	20	20-30
Very Good Ideas, Very Good Structure (80)	20	20	20	20
Good ideas, Good structure (70)	20	10	20	20
Acceptable (60)	20	10	10	20
Poor ideas, poor structure (40 – 50)	10 – 20	10	10	10
Very Poor with Relevant Ideas (20-30)	10	10	0	0-10

Three to four Relevant sentences (10)	10	0	0	0
Irrelevant	0	0	0	0

Table 2 displays the grading scale used by the instructors, which is out of 100%. This grading scale includes content, vocabulary, language, and organization criteria. The researchers discussed the topic ideas with the students who wrote the first draft. The researchers checked the drafts and assisted where necessary. Then, the students wrote their final draft, which was collected for statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

This study used experimental design utilizing a quantitative approach with a pretest-posttest design. Means and standard deviations were calculated for the control and experimental groups to help the researchers answer all research questions. In addition, a t-test was used to answer the first questions to test the differences in the ANU EFL Students' learning of English writing skills between the control group and the experimental group due to treatment and to test the significance of the means, the researchers also used one-way (ANCOVA) to answer the second question concerning the gender.

Research Procedures

- The students were given the pre-test at the onset of the study.
- The post-test was given to the students at the end of the study.
- The experimental group was taught according to the discourse technique (writing on four topics), whereas the control group was taught by the traditional method, but they wrote on the same topics.
- The data from the pre-test and post-test were fed to the computer for statistical analysis.

Results of the study

This study tested two hypotheses to evaluate the effect of the impact of a discourse technique on learning advanced writing skills by Jordanian university EFL students:

Results related to the first question of the study.

Are there any statistically significant differences in the ANU EFL Students' learning of English writing skills between the control group and the experimental group due to treatment?

As for the initial analysis, the researchers calculated the means and standard deviations for the group variable. To find out the statistical differences among the means, the *t-test* was used as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Means and standard deviation of the group variable: Experimental and Control

Group	Mean	S. D	Modified mean	Standard error	No.
Experimental	68.80	9.356	69.381a	0.864	20
Control	53.90	10.141	53.319a	0.864	20

According to the data presented in Table 3, the average achievement score of the experimental group in the post-test was 68.80, which is significantly higher than that of the control group, which was 53.90. Based on these results, we can confidently conclude that the discourse technique was effective in enhancing the writing skills of the students in the experimental group compared to the control group. It is worth noting that the achievement level of the control group remained unsatisfactory and below the passing threshold.

In summary, there were substantial disparities between the achievement of the experimental and control groups.

Table 4 displays observational variance in means, standard deviations, and modified means due to the difference in groups (experimental, control). To test the significance of the means, the researchers used the one-way ANCOVA as shown in table 4.

Table 4: Results of the one-way ANCOVA

Source	Type II Sum of Squares	df.	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Group	2568.412	1	2568.412	172.281	0.000	0.823
Pre	3065.394	1	3065.394	205.617	0.000	
Error	551.606	37	14.908			
Corrected Total	5837.100	39				

Table (4) demonstrates that there are statistically significant differences ($\alpha = 0.05$) between the experimental and control groups. The F-value reached 172.281 with a statistical significance of 0.000, showing that the experimental group performed better. The researchers calculated the Eta square of (η^2) to determine the degree of effectiveness, which was found to be 0.823. This means that the experimental group showed an 82% decrease in their scores. Therefore, the treatment helped improve the writing abilities of even the weaker students, although some of their scores were still below the passing grade.

Results related to the second question of the study.

Are there any statistically significant differences in ANU EFL students' learning of English writing skills due to gender?

As for initial analysis, the researchers calculated the means, and standard deviations for the gender variable. To find out the statistical differences, the t-test was used as shown in table 5.

Table 5: Means and Standard Deviation of the group variable according to the two Scales of Gender

Gender	Mean	S.D	Modified Mean	Standard Error	No.
Male	60.85	11.704	61.193a	2.054	20
Female	61.85	13.027	61.507a	2.054	20

Table 5 shows the observational variance in means, standard deviations, and modified means due to the difference in groups (Male, Female). The researchers used the one-way ANCOVA as shown in table 6.

Table 6: Means and Standard Deviation of the gender variable according to the two Scales of the Experiment

Source	Type II Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F- value	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Pre	2987.982	1	2987.982	190.024	.000	.844
Group	114.266	1	114.266	7.267	.011	.172
Gender	.678	1	.678	.043	.837	.001
Group * Pre1	.534	1	.534	.034	.855	.001
Error	550.349	35	15.724			

Corrected Total	5837.100	39				
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Table (6) shows statistically significant differences at ($\alpha = 0.05$) in group effects, where F- value reached (7.267) with statistical significance (.011). The difference is in favor of female students in the experimental group. To find out the effectiveness degree the researchers calculated the Eta square of (η^2) which was (.172); this means that 17.2% of decrease in the experimental group. Thus, the results prove that females' means of achievement are better than those of the males in all discourse components.

Group	Post-hoc adjusted arithmetic mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Experimental	69.372	.889	67.567	71.176
Control	53.313	.888	51.509	55.116

Table 7: Adjusted means and standard errors according to gender in the experimental group and the control group

According to the data presented in Table 7, the mean score for the experimental group is 69.372, whereas it is 53.313 for the control group. Hence, there were significant statistical differences detected between the groups. This indicates that female participants in the experimental group, who received the training program, performed better than the members of the control group who did not receive the training program in the discourse technique.

Table 8: Adjusted means and standard errors according to gender in the experimental group

Gender Experimental Group	Post-hoc adjusted arithmetic mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Male	61.212	.887	59.411	63.013
Female	61.473	.889	59.667	63.278

The results in Table 8 indicate the mean score for male students is 61.212, while for female students is 61.473. This means there are no significant statistical differences between male and female students who were exposed to the training program in the discourse technique in the experimental group.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that the teachers' adoption of the discourse technique leads to better results than the traditional in-classroom method. The latter is discouraging for both instructors and students. The student achievement in the experimental group was significantly better than that of the control group due to the instructors' adoption of the discourse technique in teaching writing skills. However, the student's achievement in the experimental group was much better than that of the other students in the control group because the instructors adopted the discourse technique in teaching writing skills. Additionally, the discourse technique used in argumentative writing for EFL university students at ANU succeeded in enhancing writing skills level and achievement means. The results of this study conform with al-Abed-Haq and Ahmad (1994), Al-Toubat (2003), Al Zoubi(2005), Aidinlon and Mehr (2012), and Sineath (2014) that using a discourse technique enhances the students' level in learning the writing skills. Moreover, the results of this study agree with the results of Al-Ghazo and Al-Zoubi's (2018) study which showed clear differences between the mean scores of the EFL students in the experimental group in the post-test, in favour of the experimental group. Thus, the researchers think that the enhancement of the EFL students' level of writing skills may be attributed to the effectiveness of the discourse technique. The

students also felt satisfied, enthusiastic, and responsive to learning with the discourse technique, whereas the students of the control group felt some boredom and discouragement by learning writing skills traditionally.

The findings of the study reveal that there were no statistically significant differences between males and females in the experimental group who were exposed to the discourse technique. The mean for male EFL students was 61.2 and for female EFL students was 61.4. The researchers attribute this result to the reason that both groups were taught by the same instructor, with the same technique in the same teaching-learning environment. Both groups were responsive and cooperative. They work effectively to improve their writing proficiency. The findings of the study also reveal that there were no statistically significant differences between males and females in the control groups who were exposed to the traditional method. They felt that the methods they were taught were not encouraging and purposeful. The results of this question do not conform with Al–Abed Al–Haq and Ahmad (1994), Al–Toubat (2003), and Al Zoubi(2005). On the other hand, the findings of this study showed that gender was statistically significant at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) level of significance in favour of females in all discourse areas. According to statistical analysis, the experimental treatment was more effective for females than males. However, these findings contradict Burrige and Florey's (2002) claims that certain ages had unique discourse technique components and that gender differences were not significant in the acquisition of writing skills.

Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to examine how the discourse technique (DT) impacts the development of advanced writing skills among Jordanian university students learning English as a foreign language(EFL). The findings of the study indicated that there were notable differences between the two groups, with the experimental group benefiting more from the training program compared to the control group. Additionally, the results showed that there were significant differences between the genders, with female students in the experimental group benefiting the most from the training program. This study provides valuable knowledge on how the discourse technique and effective teaching methods can be used to improve the writing skills of EFL students in Jordan. The findings of the study could offer meaningful insights for EFL educators, materials developers, and exam designers concerning the discourse technique that EFL learners develop relative to their language proficiency levels, with potential implications for inclusion in EFL curricula, writing textbooks, and exam papers.

Implications

- Adopting the discourse technique in teaching writing helps improve EFL students' writing skills level.
- Teaching and learning writing should be based on the discourse technique.
- Directing EFL students' attention to the importance of structure level when they learn writing skills.

Recommendations

Conducting similar studies investigating the impact of the discourse technique on EFL students' writing skills at other universities in Jordan.

- Conducting similar studies investigating the effect of the discourse technique on secondary school EFL students' writing skills.
- Conducting similar studies investigating the effect of the discourse technique on EFL students' other language skills.

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