



THE USE OF SPECIFIC PROMPTS TO ENHANCE EFL WRITING SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of specific prompts in enhancing EFL learners' writing skills. Writing is often considered one of the most challenging aspects of language acquisition, especially for learners who lack motivation or struggle with idea generation. Specific prompts provide structured guidance, helping students organize their thoughts and develop coherent, well-structured texts. The study explores various types of prompts, such as narrative, argumentative, and descriptive, and their impact on fluency, accuracy, and creativity in writing. By analyzing students' written outputs and conducting qualitative interviews, the research identifies effective prompt-based techniques that foster critical thinking and linguistic competence in EFL learners.

Introduction: Writing in a foreign language is a complex process that requires a combination of linguistic knowledge, cognitive skills, and creative thinking (Hyland, 2003). Among EFL learners, writing often presents significant challenges due to difficulties in idea generation, organization, and grammatical accuracy (Kroll, 1990). One approach to overcoming these difficulties is the use of specific prompts, which serve as structured guidance to facilitate writing tasks. Research suggests that well-designed prompts can help learners produce more coherent and contextually relevant texts by providing a clear focus and direction (Raimes, 1983).

This study aims to investigate how specific prompts influence EFL learners' writing skills. It examines the impact of various prompt types on writing fluency, accuracy, and creativity by analyzing students' written outputs and conducting qualitative interviews. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of how structured writing tasks can enhance the overall writing competence of EFL learners.

Methodology: This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the effectiveness of specific prompts in enhancing EFL writing skills. A quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design was implemented to measure improvements in students' writing fluency, accuracy, and coherence. Additionally, qualitative data from student reflections and teacher observations provided insights into learners' perceptions of prompt-based writing activities.

Participants and Sampling: The study was conducted with intermediate EFL learners (B1-B2 CEFR) enrolled in an academic writing course at a university in Uzbekistan. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria:

- Enrolled in a writing-focused EFL course
- Had previous experience with free writing but limited exposure to structured prompts
- Volunteered to participate in the study

The participants were divided into two groups:

- Experimental group (Prompt-based Writing): Received structured writing prompts tailored to different text types (narrative, argumentative, descriptive).
- Control group (Free Writing): Engaged in writing activities without structured prompts, using open-ended topics instead.

Instructional Procedure: The intervention lasted for six weeks, during which both groups completed writing tasks twice a week.

Experimental Group (Prompt-based Writing)

- Week 1-2: Narrative prompts (e.g., "Describe a significant life event that shaped your perspective.")
- Week 3-4: Descriptive prompts (e.g., "Describe your ideal learning environment in detail.")
- Week 5-6: Argumentative prompts (e.g., "Do social media platforms help or hinder language learning? Support your argument.")

Control Group (Free Writing)

- Week 1-6: Students were given general topics and asked to write freely without structured prompts or guidelines.

Quantitative Data Collection

- Pre-test and Post-test: Students completed writing tasks before and after the intervention. Their essays were assessed based on fluency (word count), grammatical accuracy (error ratio per sentence), and coherence (logical flow and organization).
- Writing Rubric Assessment: A standardized rubric (Weigle, 2002) was used to evaluate key writing components.

Qualitative Data Collection

- Student Reflections: Learners wrote short reflections on their writing experiences after each task.
- Teacher Observations: Classroom observations recorded engagement levels and difficulties encountered.
- Semi-structured Interviews: Selected students were interviewed to gain deeper insights into their perceptions of structured prompts.

Quantitative Data Analysis

- Descriptive Statistics: Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated to compare pre-test and post-test results.
- T-tests: Conducted to determine statistical significance in writing improvements.

Qualitative Data Analysis

- Thematic Analysis: Responses from reflections and interviews were coded into key themes such as confidence, idea generation, and engagement.

Ethical Considerations

- Informed Consent: Participants were fully briefed about the study and voluntarily participated.
- Confidentiality: Personal data was anonymized.
- Academic Integrity: The study followed transparent and objective research procedures.

Results and Discussion: The pre-test and post-test results revealed a statistically significant improvement in the writing skills of the experimental group compared to the control group. The mean word count in the experimental group increased, indicating enhanced writing fluency. Additionally, grammatical accuracy improved, with fewer sentence-level errors in the

post-test. The use of structured prompts also contributed to better coherence, as students demonstrated more logical organization and smoother transitions between ideas.

T-test results confirmed that the improvements in fluency, accuracy, and coherence were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that specific prompts effectively supported the development of structured and meaningful writing. In contrast, the control group showed only minor improvements, with some students still struggling with organization and idea development. These findings align with previous research (Hyland, 2003; Nation, 2009), which emphasizes the role of structured guidance in improving EFL writing skills.

Qualitative Insights: Student reflections and interviews highlighted several key benefits of using specific prompts in writing:

- **Enhanced Idea Generation:** Many participants in the experimental group reported that prompts helped them generate ideas more easily. Instead of struggling with open-ended topics, structured prompts provided a clear direction, reducing writer's block. This supports the findings of Leki (1995), who argues that guided writing activities enhance creativity and engagement.

- **Increased Confidence:** Several students expressed greater confidence in their writing abilities after using prompts. They felt more capable of structuring their thoughts, which aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, emphasizing scaffolding in the learning process.

- **Improved Engagement:** Observations revealed that students in the experimental group were more engaged and actively participated in discussions before writing. In contrast, some students in the control group hesitated when starting their writing tasks, indicating a lack of initial direction.

Challenges and Limitations: Despite the positive impact of structured prompts, some challenges were noted:

- **Over-Reliance on Prompts:** A few students mentioned that they felt dependent on prompts and struggled with writing freely. This suggests that while prompts can be a useful tool, they should be gradually reduced to encourage independent writing skills (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2013).

- **Limited Generalizability:** Since the study was conducted within a single university setting, the results may not be directly applicable to all EFL learners. Future studies should explore the impact of prompts across different proficiency levels and educational contexts.

Overall, the results indicate that using specific prompts significantly enhances EFL learners' writing skills by improving fluency, grammatical accuracy, and coherence. However, educators should balance structured guidance with opportunities for free writing to foster long-term writing independence.

Conclusion: This study examined the effectiveness of specific prompts in enhancing EFL learners' writing skills. The findings revealed that structured prompts significantly improved students' writing fluency, grammatical accuracy, and coherence. The quantitative results demonstrated a notable increase in word count and reduced sentence-level errors, while qualitative data highlighted increased confidence and engagement among students.

Despite the benefits, some students exhibited over-reliance on prompts, suggesting the need for a gradual transition to independent writing. Future research should explore how prompts can be adapted for different proficiency levels and writing genres. Overall, incorporating structured prompts into writing instruction can serve as a valuable strategy to support EFL learners in developing stronger and more organized writing skills.

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