Integrating Form-Focused Instruction and Discovery Approach for Developing EFL Writing Skills of Saudi Learners

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Abstract—The current study investigated the integration of the Form-Focused Instruction and Discovery Approach termed Form Focused Discovery Approach (FFDA) for developing English Foreign language university students' writing skills through teaching novel. The study aims to shift from the teacher-centered approach to the student-centered one by discovering the literary text's form and meaning. Therefore, sixty female fourth-year students at King Khalid University in Saudi Arabia were randomly chosen and divided into two groups: an experimental and a control one taught for two months. The experimental group received instructions through the Form-Focused Discovery Approach (FFDA), examining various tasks ranging from exploring, anticipating, questioning, discussing, analyzing, reconstructing, and practicing writing and reflection. In contrast, the control group received instruction through the traditional mode. A pre-post writing test for measuring skills of grammar, word choice, mechanics, organization, coherence, and style was administered. Results showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in overall writing skills. However, for each skill, it is revealed that four primary skills have been significantly enhanced (i.e., grammar, organization, word choice, and mechanics). The other two skills (style and coherence) have been slightly improved but with no significant differences in the post-administration of the experimental group scores. More practice should be given to recognizing the text's unity and style when implementing FFDA to enhance EFL writing skills.

Index Terms—Form-Focused Instruction, Discovery Approach, writing skills, literary texts, Saudi EFL learners

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing is an essential skill for all learners, as it allows them to express their understanding, ideas, and perspectives to communicate effectively. It encourages individuals to gather, organize, and expand upon information. Additionally, it is valuable for assessing students' performance and demonstrating their academic achievement. However, EFL students rarely practice writing, especially outside class; they must write only when asked to submit assignments. Marzban and Jalali (2016) pointed out that most EFL learners struggle to write in a second language because their writing skills need adequate attention. However, writing in a first or second language requires considering the critical function of writing abilities and their importance in exhibiting students' learning capacity. Writing is not easy, especially for EFL learners in Saudi Arabia. Ansari (2012) argued that teaching English writing to EFL students in Saudi Arabia is challenging. It is a difficult job, and an EFL teacher deals with various issues. Over 50% of pupils lack the necessary writing skills in English. Huwari and Al-Khasawneh (2013) conducted a study to determine the causes of pre-year Saudi university students' weaknesses in writing in English. They discovered that the main themes contributing to students' writing weaknesses were grammatical weakness, knowledge and understanding gaps, lack of practice, and educational background. By implementing their studies, they claimed that the teachers could fix the issue and discover valuable solutions.

Alomrani (2014) pointed out the transformative potential of integrating reading into writing instruction, which has been shown to affect writing performance positively. Reading EFL literature enriches readers' minds by opening new insights, horizons, and possibilities for thinking and reflecting on what they read and transforming their understanding of the literary genre. This transformative experience allows students to be active agents, shaping their understanding and interpretation of the text rather than passive recipients.

Literature is an effective tool for helping students analyze the text orally or in Writing. According to Frantzen (2013), using excerpts from authentic cultural and literary texts can offer an authoritative written source that will enable students to analyze texts more deeply and intelligently, leading to a more appropriate application of grammar rules to convey more sophisticated messages. As Winch et al. (2006) pointed out, when students are immersed in a poem and given structured writing opportunities to respond, they produce new meanings to share with others and experience a personal journey of intellectual growth and achievement.

Analyzing the form of literary texts may help students produce enhanced written literary comments and profound analysis of such texts. The form-focused approach was designed to encourage second language learners to understand the gap in all the linguistic characteristics of the foreign language, exchange its forms, and correct the output. According to the latest research in second language acquisition, it was suggested that teaching based on psycholinguistic and cognitive factors is extremely valuable in second language teaching and learning. Ellis (2001) clarified that form-focused instruction refers to any planned or incidental instructional activity that stimulates language learners to pay attention to linguistic form; this form can be grammatical structures, lexical items, phonological features, and pragmatic features of the language. One key advantage of FFI in foreign language instruction is its ability to attract the learners' attention to the different repeated forms in a text, addressing both form and communicative meaning (Long, 2000).

Encouraging and helping students to discover the form of literary work through the discovery approach could provide significant benefits as students will be motivated to construct, discover, explore, and investigate new experiences by themselves. Schunk (2012) clarified that discovery implies establishing and testing hypotheses instead of simply reading a passage or listening to the teacher's explanations or other students' comments. According to Bicknell-Holmes and Seth Hoffman (2000), generating, synthesizing, and expanding knowledge through inquiry and innovative thinking is one of the three core elements of discovery learning. Rather than passively receiving information through conventional methods like lectures or recitation, students develop knowledge while discovering more profound uses for skills by participating in activities that demand a willingness to take risks, figure out solutions, and explore their individual experiences.

The study problem can be stated in the weakness of fourth-year Saudi female university students' writing skills, as it was revealed from the researcher's observations and evaluations that students' writings lack coherence and unity. More enhancement is needed as they make basic grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and word choice mistakes, especially in their comments on literary works. So, the current study attempts to employ a form-focused discovery approach to enhance students' writing skills through teaching Novel.

Research Questions

The current research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the effects of integrating form-focused instruction and discovery approach on Enhancing EFL Saudi university students' overall writing skills through teaching Novel?

2. What are the Effects of integrating form-focused instruction and discovery approach on developing each writing skill of EFL Saudi university students writing skill through teaching Novel?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Form-Focused Instruction

The Form-Focused Instruction (FFI) has long been investigated by researchers and teachers to enhance and test theories of second language acquisition and explore the effectiveness of its instructional practices (Ellis, 2001). The term form-focused was first introduced by Long (1991), who clarified that the focus on form in lessons often introduces linguistic elements, which are often incidental in lessons that primarily focus on meaning or communication. Long here discriminated between focus on form and focus on forms. He implied that focus on form is mainly concerned with communication while focus on forms is intentionally and directly presented to students by explaining specific instructional rules. From Long's definition, it is apparent that focus on form tries to fill the gaps in students' communication problems by negotiating meaning reactively and briefly without affecting the focus on meaning with the help of explicit and implicit instruction (Ellis, 2016). Therefore, FFI combines traditional approaches to teaching and communicative forms where attention to form is derived from meaning-based activities. Ellis (2001) pinpointed that phonological, semantic, syntactical, and pragmatic components of language are all included in the word "form".

Long and Robinson (1998) went beyond to differentiate between focus on form and focus on meaning. In focus on form, as a compromise between the focus on forms and meaning, students try to linguistically analyze the learning tasks, especially those they find difficult to understand. It proceeds gradually based on the learners' ability. Thus, it aids in their advancement to a better degree of linguistic competence and accuracy while focusing on meaning, which does not include task analysis and proceeds slowly, so it does not solely achieve students' proficiency and accuracy of language. Long recommended focusing on form as it is applied in a communicative context, and the accuracy of language is first triggered by concentrating on meaning by analyzing forms. Saeidi et al. (2012) compared the effectiveness of three types of form-focused instruction: (FoF) focus on form, (FoM) focus on meaning, and (FoFs) focus on forms on vocabulary learning. Their research result proved that learners in FoF achieved significantly higher scores than those in FoM and FoFs. In addition, learners in the FoM group outperformed those in the FoFs. The authors implied that the observed outcomes might be attributed to the essential components of form-focused learning, such as pushing output, observing, deep processing, discovery learning, raising awareness, negotiations, cooperation, and motivation.

Spada and Lightbown (2008) introduced two types of form-focused instruction: the isolated and the integrated. In isolated focus on form, the focus is mainly on separated linguistic activities away from the communicative context. It may be implemented in advance as an introduction to content-based instruction or after it as a way of feedback and practice. For the integrated, it is provided in a communicative context where the focus is on meaning. Instructors can

attract students' attention to some linguistic features while explaining and communicating. They clarified that both types are practical and beneficial as the isolation will help learners overcome their L1 problems in acquiring L2, and the integration will increase their proficiency and communication skills outside the learning situation. They maintained that choosing the best type depends on the learning situation and the learners' needs. Kemaloglu-Er (2021) conducted a study to evaluate a form-focused instructional program offered to university students, and the findings were explored based on Spada and Lightbown's (2008) form-focused instruction framework. She found that teachers implement isolated form-focused instruction as they rely on the coursebooks. She advocated employing a balanced curriculum that activates both isolated and integrated form-focused training and places a greater emphasis on meaning-based activities.

A study by Ansarin et al. (2015) examined the preferences of beginner and advanced learners regarding isolated and integrated Form-Focused Instruction (FFI). The researchers found that advanced learners preferred integrated instruction embedded in communicative tasks and activities, while beginner learners did not strongly prefer either type of FFI. They concluded that teachers should give different types of instruction to different learners. In essence, they suggested that neither integrated nor isolated FFI can be considered the optimal form of instruction for any given circumstance or learner. Another study on the types of FFI was conducted by Zaheer (2014), through which she examined the effects of FFI (implicit and explicit) on learners' accuracy of written production and the best model of instruction for promoting L2 language development. Results showed that ESOL teachers prefer and practice planning to focus on forms (FonFs) in their L2 classrooms and thought it was beneficial. This result suggests that ESOL learners benefit from explicit FFI, particularly if they get instruction on how to use the targeted language components in their L2 production.

Hence, focusing on form is a highly recommended mode of instruction as it could achieve a balance between form and meaning, mainly when it is utilized through rich content-based instruction, such as literary texts that engage learners in various types of discovery activities through seeking meanings and interpretations, building vocabulary, constructing forms, learning style, and writing. Literary texts are media for negotiating meanings and considering form, which could be achieved by motivating learners to discover these horizons through reading.

B. Discovery Approach and Writing Skills

Urging students to use their minds to analyze and discover the form of the provided texts could help them recognize the main structure of that text, improve their grammar usage, and increase their vocabulary repertoire. According to Ögeyik's (2011) research, form-focused discovery activities aid language learners in comprehending many aspects of a target language by utilizing explicit knowledge that has been discovered to contribute to implicit knowledge. Additionally, these exercises can assist students in recognizing and understanding the characteristics of the language they are learning.

Schunck (2012, p. 266) stated in his book on learning theories that discovery involves inductive thinking as students progress from analyzing instances to formulating broad rules, concepts, and principles. Hence, students can detect language rules and mechanics of writing by concentrating and discovering the form and meaning of the given texts. In their report, Bicknell Holmes and Seth Hoffman (2000, p. 313) highlighted that discovery learning is one of the most effective learning theories for improving student learning outcomes and instruction when simple memorization of definitions and an introduction to a particular set of resources are not enough to accomplish the instruction objective. According to Bernardini (2016), activities related to discovery learning are intrinsically learner-centered, encouraging autonomy and possessing significant transferability. She argues that discovery learning is a type of communicative learning or "situated" learning. In supporting this viewpoint, Yaiche (2021) pinpointed that through guided discovery, Students become more independent, consider what they have learned, and have favorable views about learning via exploration.

Writing is a complex skill that requires organizational form and deep thinking simultaneously to create logical messages. According to Hedge (1988), writing requires many elements, including the ability to develop ideas and information, the use of divergent grammatical structures, syntax, and vocabulary, and the level of accuracy to avoid misunderstandings. Kroll (1990) Pinpointed that there should be some qualities for writing an essay, such as focusing on the main topic, using paragraphs effectively, keeping a consistent viewpoint, arranging ideas in a logical sequence, and using the appropriate coherence and cohesion tools.

Alostath (2021) clarified that writing confined papers demands consideration of different ground rules and components. These elements include good grammar structure, understanding of writing mechanisms (e.g., spelling, capitalization, abbreviations), organization of ideas, and originality (e.g., non-plagiarized writing). Besides punctuation, vocabulary, structure, and spelling, teachers and their students must also learn about the features of a well-written essay (such as unity, support, coherence, and cohesion).

Writing involves higher thinking skills for composing ideas and considering form simultaneously. Students should consider various elements while writing. Otherwise, they may need help with writing. Teachers should encourage and provide engaging media and strategies for practicing and acquiring writing mechanisms, conventions, and techniques. Ankawi (2020) stated that students should have the opportunity to be more actively involved in language classes in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) since the method of teaching English is teacher-centered, not student-centered. So, this research involved students in active activities through discovering the form of literary written texts.

Although many studies investigate the use of form-focused instruction to develop different language skills, research is still needed to combine form-focus instruction with the discovery approach to cultivating language skills. Therefore, the current study attempts to investigate the efficacy of using a form-focused discovery approach to develop university students' writing skills.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study utilized an equivalent group design, a quasi-experimental approach. The researcher randomly assigned two classes to two groups: an experimental and a control group. The experimental group underwent instruction using a Form-Focused Discovery Approach, with specific tasks to enhance their writing skills, including grammatical structure, word choice, writing mechanics, style, organization, and coherence. The control group received traditional training. Both groups completed a pre-post writing exam before and after the treatment.

B. Participants

The study involved sixty female students in the fourth year (level seven) at King Khalid University in Saudi Arabia, randomly selected to participate in the study for two months in the academic year 2022. The students were then randomly divided into experimental (30) and control (30) groups. Based on their random selection, it is assumed that the subjects form a homogeneous group; they are equivalent in their age, education, social level, and level of achievement in writing skills. Therefore, they would share much in common, and their experience levels would be similar. Moreover, a condensed summary of the novel was introduced to both groups at the introductory session before the pre-conducting of the test to give them a general background of the novel. The study utilized an independent samples T-test to determine if there were any noteworthy differences between the mean scores of the experimental group (Exp.) and control group (Con.) in their performance on the pre-application of the writing test as a whole and in each sub-skill, as depicted in Table 1.

TABLE 1
T-VALUE OF THE CONTROL (CON.) AND EXPERIMENTAL (EXP.) GROUPS ON THE PRE-APPLICATION OF THE WRITING TEST AS A WHOLE AND IN EACH SUB-SKILL

Skills	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	df	t	p
Grammar	Con.	30	3.83	1.117	58	.348	.729
	Exp.	30	3.93	1.112			
Style	Con.	30	3.57	.858	58	.582	.563
	Exp.	30	3.70	.915			
Organization	Con.	30	3.93	.785	58	.913	.365
	Exp.	30	3.73	.907			
Word Choice	Con.	30	4.40	.814	58	.145	.885
	Exp.	30	4.37	.964			
Mechanics	Con.	30	3.90	.845	58	.428	.670
	Exp.	30	3.80	.961			
Coherence	Con.	30	3.57	.774	58	.162	.872
	Exp.	30	3.53	.819			
Total	Con.	30	23.2000	4.40533	58	.113	.911
	Exp.	30	23.0667	4.76288			

As shown in Table 1, the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in the pre-writing test application, both overall and for each subskill, do not exhibit significant differences. Therefore, the two groups are considered equal.

C. Research Procedures

The study consisted of 10 teaching sessions focused on the novel Robinson Crusoe, along with three additional sessions for testing and an introductory session. Each session lasted 60 minutes and covered two to three chapters. The study took place during the summer classes from June 2022 to August 2022. To accomplish the form-focused discovery tasks, the researcher utilized various activities in the different stages of reading: pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading. These activities included exploring, anticipating, questioning, discussing, analyzing, reconstructing, and practicing writing and reflection, as literature stimulates learners' thoughts and allows them to develop skills. The Form-Focused Discovery Tasks were consistently applied in the same order for each teaching session.

(a). Pre-Reading Stage: Preparing for Discovery

In this stage, the researcher prepared students for practicing discovery by posing questions related to the content of the literary text, encouraging them to anticipate its central theme, express what they know about, and refresh their previous knowledge about what they had taken before. Thus, they are learning by exploring where there is a reciprocal questioning session between the instructor and students and students themselves. Questions were about their knowledge of the literary work, their expectations of the chapter under discussion, how they would behave if they were in the character position, and the main incidents of the previous chapter at the beginning of each session.

(b). During-Reading Stage: Practicing Form-Focused Discovery Tasks

This stage took most of the class time as it focused on discussing the central theme and idea of the literary text in discussion, helping students to relate the previous incidents with current ones, urging them to understand the writer's style, discover and analyze the grammatical structure of the text such as the subject-verb agreement, the correct use of prepositions, pronouns, linking words, and the choice of appropriate adjectives. The researcher attracted students' attention to writing mechanics like capitalization, punctuation, etc.…, urging them to provide synonyms and antonyms for vague words and detect the writer's style so they can elaborate on the essential themes.

(c). Post- Reading Stage: Extending Their Discovery

In this stage, students tried to paraphrase, summarize, and reconstruct the selected literary text in a written way using their own words and style. They also shared their written comments with their colleagues in pairs or groups and finally with the teacher.

D. Instruments

A pre-/post writing test was constructed and administered to the two groups by the researcher. It was pre-used to ensure that students of both groups were at the same level before starting the implementation, then post-used to measure the effectiveness of using the Form-Focused Tasks in developing the experimental group students' writing skills. Based on the pre-prepared writing skills checklist given to 7 TEFL experts and Professors to determine the most appropriate ones for the students, six primary skills were measured through the given test, i.e., grammar, word choice, mechanics, organization, coherence, and style.

The test consisted of a prominent quotation from the novel about repentance with six open-ended questions related to the central theme. It allowed students to express their viewpoints and literary comments with details. A writing test assessment rubric was also prepared. The test was also sent to seven TEFL professors and experts to test its validity and to suggest any required modifications. They approved the test with a few amendments, which were considered. SPSS software was used to test reliability using Cronbach's alpha (Table 2).

TABLE 2
THE TEST RELIABILITY USING CRONBACH'S ALPHA

Reliability scale	Reliability scale	Value
Cronbach's alpha	The whole test (6 items)	0.913

IV. RESULTS

The study's results were statistically analyzed using SPSS (version 23.0), and the t-test formula for independent samples was used to answer the research question (Table 3).

TABLE 3
T-TEST RESULTS OF THE POST- ADMINISTRATION OF THE WRITING SKILLS COMPARING BOTH EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUPS

Skills	Group (Post Tre.)	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	df	t	P
Grammar	CONT.	30	3.87	.776	58	4.039	.000
	EXP.	30	4.67	.758			
Style	CONT.	30	4.20	.997	58	1.919	.060
	EXP.	30	4.67	.884			
Organization	CONT.	30	4.07	.828	58	3.479	.001
	EXP.	30	4.80	.805			
Word Choice	CONT.	30	4.47	.900	58	2.637	.011
	EXP.	30	5.10	.960			
Mechanics	CONT.	30	3.90	.885	58	3.187	.002
	EXP.	30	4.57	.728			
Coherence	CONT.	30	4.13	.819	58	1.690	.096
	EXP.	30	4.50	.861			
Total	CONT.	30	24.64	2.53642	58	5.321	0.00
	EXP.	30	28.30	2.85452			

To answer the first research question concerning the effects of FFDA on students' overall writing skills, the results above showed a statistically significant difference at the level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between the two study groups in favor of the experimental one. The mean score of the experimental group (28.30) exceeded the control score (24.64). This result proved that students' overall writing skills have been improved due to the use of the Form-Focused Discovery Tasks.

As for the second research question concerning the effect of FFDA on each writing sub-skill, it is revealed that four primary skills have been significantly enhanced (i.e., grammar, organization, word choice, and mechanics) ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) while the other two skills (style and coherence) have been slightly improved as it is apparent in their mean scores compared to the control group but with no significant differences in the post administration of the experimental group scores.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The result analysis showed that students' overall writing skills had improved significantly, which can be attributed to the Form Focused Discovery Tasks as they were actively involved in reading, analyzing the literary reading texts, and writing their reflective comments. They were not only involved in the traditional types of activities focusing on the plot succession, the theme, and the conflict, but also, they were encouraged to focus on the form of the grammatical analysis (the used tenses, pronouns, modal auxiliaries, conjunctions, gerunds, parallel structure, etc.…) their attention were also attracted to the variety of the used vocabulary, word family, collocations, synonyms, and antonyms. The mechanics of writing, the appropriate use of transitional links, and the organizational development of writing were highly considered through reading and writing, too. The result of this study is echoed in other research results (Ogeyik, 2011; Zohrabi & Rezaie, 2012), which indicated a direct correlation between discovering the form and giving feedback to students and their writing enhancement. The writers maintained that when students consider the linguistic elements of texts, they confidently manage to create their texts, and the accuracy of their writings is empowered.

The grammatical structure of students' written texts and their appropriate selection of vocabulary have been improved as they scrutinize the form and meaning of the texts. They learned about different grammatical rules and usage in meaningful contexts and discussed the various interpretations of the literary text, tackling the alternative synonyms and various expressions. Integrative Form-Focused Instruction through discovering the form of the literary texts stimulated their abilities in a communicative context instead of learning the grammatical items in an isolated way or as discrete points. The result of the current research is consistent with other research results concerning the role of the Form -Focused Instruction in developing grammar and vocabulary (Çelik, 2015; Bataineh et al., 2017; Xu & Li, 2022), which indicates a positive effect of FFI whether integrated or isolated, focusing on form or meaning, on the increase of vocabulary and grammar learning. The authors recommended applying a mixed approach for FFI, focusing on form and meaning and an integrative one, which may be helpful for learners by connecting form and meaning. The integrative approach focusing on form and contextual meaning was adopted in the current research.

The skills of keeping coherence and adopting a specific style in writing have been slightly improved for the experimental group, as is apparent in their mean (4.50, 4.67) compared to the control one (4.13, 4.20), but with no significant differences. This result may return to the time limit when applying the research. If more time were assigned to the experiment, those skills might be improved. In addition, students were more concerned with discussing and keeping meanings, vocabulary, grammar, mechanics, and organization while writing rather than keeping coherence or adopting a specific style, which may be partly responsible for outperforming the earlier skills than the latter. More attention, focus, and practice would be given to the text's unity and writing style.

To conclude, the current research utilized the Form-Focused Discovery Tasks to develop university students' writing skills. Form-focused instruction combines focusing on form and meaning in an interactive communicative context where the main interests are negotiating meanings and analyzing texts. Both explicit and implicit FFI were implemented as in the implicit, students can infer and discover the grammatical forms and hidden meanings through inductive reasoning. Therefore, the literary text was chosen as it is a rich medium for reflecting and interpreting meaning, acquiring vocabulary, learning about the organization and the mechanics of writing, refining the learning styles, and confining the text coherence.

The researcher used the equivalent experimental and control group design and a pre-post writing test tackling the skills of grammar, word choice, mechanics, organization, coherence, and style. The results showed a significant outperformance of the experimental group in terms of their overall writing skills compared to the control group. For each sub-skill, it was revealed that grammar, word choice, organization, and mechanics skills have been significantly improved, while the other two skills of coherence and style have been improved but with no significant differences. The treatment's limited time and the focus on discussing meanings and vocabulary and analyzing grammatical structures may be reasons behind that result. So, it is recommended that more focus, attention, and practice should be given to how to keep coherence and adopt a specific style through writing.

The enhancement in students' writing skills returned to students' engagement in analyzing the reading texts, identifying different structures and usages as they dug deeply into the form of sentences, recognizing the use of different tenses, prepositions, pronouns, modals, and other helpful structures, acquiring new vocabulary as they learned through an interactive context, exploring the organization of the text through recognizing logical consequences and different transitional links. They checked how ideas correlate logically and detected the writer's adopted style in different situations.

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