

Pedagogical Implication of Clause Expansion Mastery through E-Learning Instruction to Improve Academic English Writing Skills

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Abstract

The current study investigated the pedagogical implication of Clause Expansion (CE) mastery to improve academic English writing skills. Fifteen students participated in the study. A two-cycle action research design was used to justify how the mastery of clause expansion contributed to the development of academic writing skills. Prior to intervention, they were assigned to write academic texts based on IELTS writing test. Then, they were given a three-week task-based e-learning instruction on CE., based on Systemic Functional Linguistic Framework of Clause Expansion. In the process of Explicit Instruction (EI) of CE, they were exposed in academic writing exercises to apply their knowledge on CE in various grammatical contexts in which it is required as Input Flood (IF). Another test was administered to see how it progressed from the pre-test. Then, another three-week task-based e-learning module, was given for their second online learning activities. A post-test was administered to see how it contributed to their overall writing skills. It turned out that CE mastery under e-learning special instruction did significantly improve their writing skills. They become more confident in writing academic texts. It is highly recommended that CE be taught as an integral part of a writing course.

Keywords: pedagogical implication, E-learning instruction, English writing skills.

INTRODUCTION

Of the four language skills in English as a foreign language (EFL) [1], writing used to be least paid attention to as the primary goal of EFL teaching was to develop reading comprehension skills. However, the paradigm has changed [2]. Nowadays, not only does EFL teaching focus on the reading skill but also on the other three language skills. In other words, the four language skills are equally treated to develop better English proficiency. The shift of EFL teaching paradigm is actually an immediate response to the need of English as a means of international communication in the global era, more particularly to welcome the emergence of industrial revolution 4.0 where things are digitalized [3].

Researches on English Language Teaching, nevertheless, mostly reported the inadequacy of the writing skills when students try to embark on writing academic texts [4]. The central issue is that most of the students tend to produce 'created English' in the sense that they are not ready with the grammatical features to realize complex ideas required by the academic field in good and acceptable English [5][6]. Besides, they are also faced by the difficulty in the registers as used in particular disciplines of science [7].

One of the grammatical features that may have blocked the students from writing a good academic text [5] deals with ‘clause expansion’ (CE) in Halliday’s terms, which includes ‘elaboration, extension, and enhancement’ [6][8][9] (three E’s) in order to be able to express more complex ideas [10]. To be exact, a clause can be elaborated, extended and or enhanced in order to facilitate the production of complex ideas in a correct and acceptable form [11].

1.1 Theoretical Highlights

In Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as outlined in Halliday’s Functional Grammar, CE theoretically belongs to one type of relationship between clauses, namely **logico-semantic relation** [12]. To highlight the theoretical framework, it may be beneficial to have a glimpse of clause complexation in a macro sense. A clause divides into three types in the system of clause complexation, namely (1) **Taxis**, (2) **logico-semantic relation**, and (3) **recursion** [10].

1.1.1 Taxis

Taxis refer to degrees of interdependency between two clauses. There are two different degrees of interdependency [12]. One is termed as ‘**parataxis**’ in which two clauses may be joined by a conjunction ‘and’ (addition) or ‘but’ (contradiction), and are considered of equal status, one initiating and the other continuing [13]. In traditional grammar, it is called ‘coordinating clause’ or ‘compounding clause’. The other one is ‘**hypotaxis**’ in which two clauses are joined either by cohesive devices (that/ who/ which) to mark one independent clause and the other dependent clause or by cohesive sequences in which two clauses mark two events happening one after the other, constructed as independent clause + dependent clause [14] as in *Tony went home after he had finished having lunch*; the other may be reversed as dependent clause (,) independent clause as in *After he had finished having lunch, Tony went home*.

1.1.2. Logico-Semantic Relation

Logico-semantic type of relation, despite the presence of a wide range of logico-semantic relations [15][16], can be grouped into two types (1) expansion and (2) projection. In **clause expansion(CE)**, as has been previously touched upon, a clause is expanded by means of elaboration, extension and enhancement. In other words, a clause may be elaborated, extended, or enhanced to give more flavours in order to accommodate the intended meanings as required by the idea that a writer wants to express.

If a clause is **elaborated**, it is restated in other words, specified in greater detail, commented, or exemplified [17]. Sometimes, symbols, like *i.e.*, *e.g.*, *viz.*, are used to indicate clause elaboration. If a clause is **extended** [18], it is extended beyond; by adding some new element, giving an exception to it, or offering an alternative. Conjunctive devices [19] like ‘and’, ‘or’ may be used to indicate clause extension. Finally, if a clause is **enhanced** [20], it is further qualified with some circumstantial features of time, place, cause or condition. Conjunctive devices, like ‘so, yet, then’ may be used to indicate clause enhancement.

The above three E's (elaboration, extension and enhancement) can be illustrated below:

Figure. 1. *Clause Expansion (CE)*

	Elaboration, giving more information, example, detail (e.g., i.e., viz.).
Clause expansion	Extension, adding some new elements or giving / offering an alternative
	Enhancement, giving more circumstantial elements of time, place, cause or condition

In clause projection, another type of clause relation, there are only two possibilities, namely whether someone says or thinks. The projected clause of both "say" and 'think' is normally put in quotation marks [21]. It is used to indicate what someone says or thinks, such as in a dialogue. For example, *Tono said, "I don't think I will join the trip."* Or *The girl thought to herself: 'For sure, I really love him.'*

1.1.2 Recursion

The third category of clause complex [22] is **recursion**, which is actually an intersection of **taxis**[23] and **logico-semantic** relation as a basic set of clause nexuses. Or that a clause may be expanded further and further without limit as far as it is logically constructed. In traditional grammar, it is termed as 'compound-complex clause' in which one sentence constitutes taxis and logico-semantic relation [24]. As exemplified in [22], clause expansion consists of elaboration, extension, and enhancement, each of which may be realized in both paratactic and hypotactic constructions. Similarly, clause projection consists of locution and idea which may also be realized in both paratactic and hypotactic constructions.

1.2 Focus of the Current Study

The current study focused on clause expansion (CE), including its possible realization in both paratactic and hypotactic constructions as it is mostly used in academic writing. However, a study [25] concluded that most students still required intensive training on grammatical awareness. They needed intensive instructions on clause complex and automatic realization of finite and non-finite clauses in written English. In particular, they needed regular writing exercises to improve their academic writing skills in their free time outside the classroom setting

From this point, it is assumed that e-learning-based writing assignments to develop the students' grammatical awareness with respect to grammatical features of Clause Expansion can be of invaluable learning intervention outside the formal academic writing course [26].

The e-learning package with extensive instruction (EI) on clause expansion along with a variety of writing exercises in a wide range of situation as input flood (IF) is assumed to positively contribute to develop the students' academic writing skills [27]. However, this claim must be tested through an experiment to examine whether there is an improvement of their writing performance before and after the intervention.

1.2.1. Research Questions

Pertinent to the above issues, the grand research question can be stated, namely whether or not the intervention (e-learning-based academic writing assignments) proves effective to improve the

students' academic writing skills, especially the use of clause expansion. In a micro sense, the grand research question can be further developed into three research questions, namely:

- (1) To what extent does the intervention prove effective to improve the students' academic writing skills, especially the use of clause expansion in terms of elaboration?
- (2) To what extent does the intervention prove effective to improve the students' academic writing skills, especially the use of clause expansion in terms of extension; and
- (3) To what extent does the intervention prove effective to improve the students' academic writing skills, especially the use of clause expansion in terms of enhancement?

METHODS

2.1 *Research Design*

The current study attempted to investigate whether e-learning-based academic writing assignments prove effective to improve the students' academic writing performance in a pre-test—intervention 1—progressive test—intervention 2—post-test research design. In other words, it is called an action research employing two cycles of treatment. This design was used due to the fact that the study focused more on processes than products of investigation.

2.2 *Research procedures*

Fifteen students enrolled in Academic Writing Course of English Literature Study Program were asked to participate in the study. However, the study was conducted independently without any intervention in Academic Writing Class. First of all, they were assigned to write academic texts based on IELTS writing tasks. Their works were assessed using a specially-designed rubric for the use of clause expansion in terms of elaboration, extension and enhancement. Five assessors (Research Team Members) were rating the essays. The scores of the pre-test were obtained and saved for the next research process. The next procedure was that the participants were given a three-week task-based e-learning instruction on clause expansion (CE), which could be accessed and completed outside the formal setting of academic writing course; upon completion of which they were ready for the progressive test. In this case, they were assigned to write academic texts based on IELTS writing tasks. Similar assessment procedures were conducted to obtain their scores. Another three-week task-based e-learning instruction on clause expansion (CE), was given to the participants to access and complete all the tasks prior to the final test (post-test). The essays were scored accordingly by five assessors. The results of the three tests were compared on the basis of score ranges to see how the learning treatments worked.

2.3. *Data Analysis*

The participants' scores were tabulated in interval range to classify how many participants fell within a particular range of scores. There are four tables—for the pre-test, the progressive test, the post-test, and comparison of the three tests. Based on the four tables, increases were identified to justify the effectiveness of the treatment (intervention). The findings would be discussed to explain the phenomena of interest concerning the increase of scores (if any), including some unique features of essays produced by the participants. To further justify the findings, five participants with relatively high scores were selected for an interview [15] regarding the e-learning instruction of clause expansion and to see how much how much it contributed to the development of their academic writing skills.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

On the pre-test, the students were assigned to write an academic essay on a topic adopted from one IELTS sample of essay writing as follows:

Some people believe that children are given too much free time. They feel that this time should be used to do more school work.

How do you think children should spend their free time?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your knowledge or experience

Write at least 250 words

The essays were scored using a special rubric that highlights the use of clause expansion. The score ranged from 0—9 as adopted from IELTS. See Table 1 below:

Table 1 Scores of Pre-Test

Score Range	Total participants	%
9—		
8—8.5		
7—7.5		
6—6.5	1	7
5—5.5	9	60
4—4.5	5	33
3—3.5		
2—2.5		
1—1.5		
0—0.5		
Total Participants	15	100

Table 1 above shows that most of the students (60%) fell within the ‘moderate users’ of writing proficiency according to IELTS scoring system of 5—5.5. Only one participant (7%) managed to get within the score range of 6—6.5 which was ‘**competent users**’. The rest of the participants falls within the ‘limited users’ score range of 4—4.5. Thus, it was a good starting point to see how far they developed upon completion of the six-week online treatment.

The next step was to administer the online treatment. The research instrument was developed in an Application called “Question Writer” Software (QW4.2) in which it was possible to create a variety of exercises, such as multiple choice, partial credit, matching, sequencing and essay writing. Thus, the research instrument intended to develop the students’ academic writing skills was well-designed in accordance with QW4.2 features. Each participant worked on his or her own, to complete all types of exercises designed to improve the academic writing skills.

The treatment (intervention) consists of writing exercises of various kinds aimed at updating the participants’ mastery of clause expansion (CE). Once the link was clicked on by each participant, the treatment for improving the writing skills can be seen as follows:



Figure 1. *Display of Treatment 1*

The first cycle of the study lasted for three weeks—each week, the participants were assigned to complete all the tasks which consists multiple choice, partial credit, matching, sequencing and essay writing types of exercises. Thus, it started from sedimentary elements of writing to really writing academic essays. On completion of the online assignment (as treatment 1), the participants were supposed to write an academic essay, adopting IELTS model of essay writing as follows:

Nowadays we are producing more and more rubbish.

Why do you think this is happening?

What can the government do to help reduce the amount of rubbish produced?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your knowledge or experience

Write at least 250 words

The participants were supposed to do the above task within a period of time as specified in the task (40 minutes). They did the test in the classroom to ensure the exact time of task completion. Otherwise, they might think that the task could be completed any time without any specific period (40'). Upon being scored, the results of the writing task as the progressive test are tabulated as follows (Table 2).

Table 2. Scores of Progressive Test

Score Range	Total participants	%
9—		
8—8.5		
7—7.5		
6—6.5	1	7
5—5.5	12	80
4—4.5	2	13
3—3.5		
2—2.5		
1—1.5		
0—0.5		
Total Participants	15	100

Table 2 above shows a sort of improvement of the participants' academic writing skills in relative comparison with Table 1 as the pre-test. As seen, 80% of the participants managed to get the 'moderate users' level of writing proficiency. Thus, there was an increase in the number of participants with the 'moderate users' level (from 60% to 80%). Positively, the participants classified as '**limited user**' level of proficiency got decreased (from 33% falling to 13%).

On completion of the progressive test, another three-week module of writing assignment was administered online, employing the same software (QW4.2), which looks like:



Figure. 2 Display of Treatment 2

At the end of the online assignment (Treatment 2), the time and venue of the final test were set up. The participants were supposed to write an academic essay, adopting IELTS model of writing test as follows:

A person's worth nowadays seems to be judged according to social status and material possessions. Old-fashioned values, such as honour, kindness and trust, no longer seem important.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this opinion?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

The participants' essays were scored employing a special rubric of writing assessment, focusing on the use of Clause Expansion. Accordingly with results as shown below:

Table 3 . Scores of Post-Test

Score Range	Total participants	%
9—		
8—8.5		
7—7.5		
6—6.5	4	26
5—5.5	11	74
4—4.5		
3—3.5		
2—2.5		

1—1.5		
0—0.5		
Total Participants	15	100

Table 3 above clearly justifies the contribution of online instruction on Clause Expansion. Their scores improved especially in their confidence of using clause expansion, such as ‘elaboration’, ‘extension’ and or ‘enhancement’ in anywhere possible in paragraphs they made to form good essays. They used clause expansion naturally in the sense that there were not any special instructions in the assignments (pre-test, progressive test, and post-test) for the use of clause expansion. Thus, they employed clause expansion due to the need to do so to write good essays—not because of the test requirement. More interestingly, the participants managed to write unique clause expansion in their essays. Table 4 below compares the scores (Pre-Test, Progressive Test and Post Test)

Table 4 Comparison of Scores (Pre-Test, Progressive Test, Post-Test)

Score Ranges	Pre-Test		Progressive Test		Post-Test	
	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%
9—						
8—8.5						
7—7.5						
6—6.5	1	7	1	7	4	26
5—5.5	9	60	12	80	11	74
4—4.5	5	33	2	13		
3—3.5						
2—2.5						
1—1.5						
0—0.5						
Total	15	15	15		15	

It is true, therefore, that writing is difficult even in one’s own native language, let alone English as a foreign language in Indonesia. Extra efforts have to be made in order for one to be able to achieve Score at least 7 on IELTS, as ‘**good user**’. An ‘**expert user**’ (Score;9) probably only belongs to a highly educated native speaker of English.

The current study indicates that only four participants got scores of 6—6.5, who were of ‘competent’ users in the post-test preceded by online training on clause expansion (Treatment 1 and Treatment 2). It was, however a good thing that there was an increase of participants as competent users as compared with the pre-test, who was only 1 participant as ‘competent user’.

Most participants (pre-test, progressive test and post-test) occupied a level of modest user proficiency. There was an increase from 9 participants (60%) to 12 participants (80) in the progressive test. However, in the post-test, the participants, classified as ‘**modest user**’ level, decreased to 11 or 74%. Positively assumed, they increased their level up to good users as there was an increase of 4 individuals. Still, it is justified more firmly that most participants were in modest user level of writing proficiency—progress, however can be identified through the online training of

clause expansion. It is understandable that mastery of clause expansion helps much in writing a better essay.

With respect to the unique sentences, employing clause expansion, listed below are samples of expanded clauses made by the participants in the final test (post-test).

Rubbish can only be handled by good waste management; something that has been in Australia (elaborating)

Best of all, children should not be given more free time unless their rules of conducts have been carefully observed; regrets come much later (extending)

Nowadays, youth has gone beyond the old tradition; instead of visiting their parents on Christmas, they prefer to call or to text (extending)

People on earth need healthy environments though it remains a daydream without proper waste management (enhancing)

The four samples of sentences above may represent how mastery of clause expansion contributes positively to the writing skills. More practice on the part of the learners is still required without which it is hard to imagine how difficult it is for them to develop their writing skills. There are quite a number of free programs offered online for the development of writing skills. The link <https://takeielts.britishcouncil.org/take-ielts/prepare/free-ielts-practice-tests/writing/academic/task-2>, for example, gives free access to anyone who wants to improve their writing skills—based on IELTS.

The current study simply gives a sort of justification that mastery of clause expansion is a must for the learners to develop their language skills—not limited to writing skills. It is logical, therefore, to assume that there is a dire and pressing need to formulate a model of teaching clauses (clause complex) to further help the learners acquire the four language skills in a much easier way.

Finally but not least importantly, the interviews with five selected participants of relatively high scores indicate that they like doing online assignments as they could get access to the materials at anytime and anywhere, without limit to time and place. The mastery of clause expansion has, as they said, made them more confident in writing academic essays. The presence of digital technology coupled with sufficient computer literacy really does support the current

CONCLUSION

Writing involves a complex skill—even termed as a skill of skills. Therefore it is logical to assume that writing is difficult even in one's own native language, let alone in a foreign language. This, however, shall not discourage the students of English as a foreign language to develop their writing skills apart from the other three language skills. The current study has proven that through extensive practice, the students managed to improve their writing skills. They have become more confident to write academic essays.

One of the ways, as employed in this study, is to use a kind of e-learning-based writing exercises on clause expansion which has proven effective to improve academic writing skills as justified by the significant increase of scores from the pre-test to the progressive-test and the post-test. It is therefore highly recommended that clause complex, particularly clause expansion be more intensively taught as an integral part of the academic writing course. More importantly, the use of online teaching media, such as e-learning (Moodle) should be made more extensive and intensive in

response to digital industrial revolution 4.0 or computer literacy in the digital era. Students nowadays prefer to have independent modes of learning.

To respond to the limitation of the current study whether the participants' progress of writing skills was caused by the online writing exercises or their formal academic writing course, it is necessary to conduct experimental researches involving both experimental and control groups.

Appendix

RUBRIC FOR SCORING ESSAYS FOCUSING ON THE USE OF CLAUSE EXPANSION

Score	Criteria
9	The overall essay showed a clear and logical presentation of the topic discussion with sound arguments toward the conclusion. Each paragraph at least contains clause expansion of all types correctly distributed in sentences in each paragraph throughout the essay, nicely embedded in each sentence according to the purpose of clause expansion. No grammatical errors were spotted throughout the essay. In short, the essay was written in a native-like style .
8	The overall essay showed a clear and logical presentation of the topic discussion with sound arguments toward the conclusion. Each paragraph at least contains any of the clause expansion types correctly distributed in sentences in the paragraph, nicely embedded in each sentence according to the purpose of clause expansion. No grammatical errors were spotted throughout the essay.
7	The overall essay showed a clear and logical presentation of the topic discussion with sound arguments toward the conclusion. Each paragraph at least contains at least two types of the clause expansion types without any grammatical errors, nicely embedded in each sentence according to the purpose of clause expansion.
6	The overall essay showed a clear and logical presentation of the topic discussion. At least two of any clause expansion could be spotted throughout the essay. Very few grammatical errors were still found throughout the essay.
5	The overall essay showed a clear and logical presentation of the topic discussion. At least one clause expansion (any type) could be spotted throughout the essay. Very few grammatical errors were still found throughout the essay.
4	The overall essay showed a clear and logical presentation of the topic discussion. At least one clause expansion (any type) could be spotted throughout the essay. Some grammatical errors were still found throughout the essay.
3	The overall essay showed a clear and logical presentation of the topic discussion. No clause expansion (any type) could be spotted throughout the essay. Very few grammatical errors were still found throughout the essay.
2	The sentences in any paragraph violated most grammatical features and but still showed a logical relation to one another
1	The sentences in any paragraph violated most grammatical features and did not show any logical relation to one another
0	The test was not taken

Note: Scores in half, such as 5.5, 6.5 are possible for the test takers who fall in between.

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