

# Improving Writing Skills in Academic English Through Explicit Instruction and Process Writing

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## Abstract

Reaching proficient literacy levels is a universal goal in an academic world that is becoming increasingly text-oriented. This objective is challenging, especially for PhD students demanding practical techniques to improve one of the most essential skills: writing. This study aims to provide research-based techniques to enhance writing skills in academic English. For this purpose, the effectiveness of two distinct pedagogical approaches (i.e., explicit instruction and process writing) is considered by implementing them in a collaborative writing framework. A mixed-methods approach is adopted to refer to a class of 16 Ph.D. students in educational sciences enrolled at the University of Catania (Italy) during the academic year 2023-2024. The class first received explicit instruction targeting specific writing skills, grammar rules, and writing conventions. During the second part of the module, the class engaged in process writing progressing through prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing stages to enhance self-expression and creativity. This study confirms that explicit instruction combined with the process writing approach significantly enhances EFL learners' ability to produce coherent, accurate, and impactful academic texts. Based on these findings, this study offers valuable insights for educators, curriculum designers, and researchers in the field of English as a Foreign Language writing instruction.

**Keywords:** Academic English, Collaborative writing, Explicit instruction, Process writing, Writing skills

## 1. Introduction

English is essential as the most widely spoken language in today's globalised world. As a Lingua Franca, it facilitates communication in diplomacy, business, science, and technology. Blasi et al. (2022) note that one in six people speaks a variety of English. This extensive use of the English language is made by over 350 million individuals who are native speakers, and an estimated 1 billion people use English worldwide, which confirms its dominance (Ilyosovna, 2020). Furthermore, English serves as the official language of 53 countries and is the most studied second language (Shrishthy, 2022). Such widespread use emphasizes the significance of English as both an international and global language (Romah, 2005).

English has become indispensable in education, especially at the university level. English-medium instruction (EMI) has gained importance as universities strive to attract international students and enhance their global standing (Dearden, 2014). Proficiency in English opens access to the academic literature, fosters international collaboration, and supports employability (Macaro et al., 2018). With approximately 90 percent of academic articles in linguistics written in English (Crystal, 1997), and 85 percent of scientific journals published in English (Rao, 2019), it is clear that English dominates science and academia. In non-native English-speaking countries, the prevalence of English as the primary language of instruction emphasizes its critical role in higher education (Romah, 2005). Therefore, this study focuses on the improvement of English at the university level.

In the context of Italian universities, the role of English is twofold. It has been taught as a foreign language since the late 20th century. It has also been serving as the global language of communication, and functioning as the medium of instruction due to European internationalization strategies in higher education. This shift aims to facilitate the mobility of international students, enhance the international profile of institutions, and strengthen Italy's position in the global knowledge society. Some universities have adopted English as the main language for teaching and research following the recommendations of the Italian Ministry of Education that specifically emphasizes the introduction of academic courses and publication of research material in English. This emphasizes the improvement of English for academic purposes for Italian students at the university level.

As the population of foreign language learners grows, the need for educational research to support these learners becomes increasingly apparent. A significant challenge faced by English as Foreign Language (EFL) students is writing. Writing is a basic component of language, particularly in higher education, where proficiency is essential for academic success and effective communication. However, many students perceive writing as more complex than listening and reading (Berman & Cheng, 2010), and it is often considered the skill for which they have to struggle more than any other skill (Nesamalar, Saratha, & Teh, 2001). Due to the complexities such as spelling, grammar, and the demand for a high level of formality, writing is often considered the most challenging and, consequently, the final domain acquired in learning English (Bialystok & Ryan, 1985).

Given this challenge, this present study aims to provide evidence-based approaches to improve the writing skills of university students, with a particular focus on PhD candidates who are at a pivotal stage in their academic journeys. Among the various pedagogical strategies, two prominent ones (i.e., explicit instruction and process writing) have gained substantial attention in language education. The explicit instruction emphasizes direct and structured teaching (Goeke, 2009), whereas the process writing guides learners through the stages of writing, including prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing (Harmer, 2006). This present study seeks to investigate and compare the effectiveness of these two approaches on a class of PhD students at the University of Catania, who are engaged with English both as an EMI and as an EFL.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 Evolution of Writing Pedagogy*

Historically, writing instruction in both first and second-language classrooms was based on the mastery of grammatical rules. Therefore, writing instruction before the 1970s focused on the rules of grammar and emphasized prescriptive exercises to ensure accuracy in the writing (Pour-Mohammadi, Zainol Abidin, & Cheong Lai, 2012). The supporters of this type of writing instruction believed that the correct application of grammatical rules would ensure proficient writing. However, the results were otherwise, that is, the strict application of grammar rules in writing compromised creativity and expression of ideas. That is why the writing instruction trends after the 1970s started shifting away from the strict following of grammatical rules. As a result, writing researchers (e.g., Shaughnessy, 1977) started arguing for the importance of creating an environment that encourages students at all levels of education to take risks in their writing, which meant less concentration on conventional rules and more on the expression of ideas.

The shift from grammatical rules to the expression of ideas marked the beginning of the process approach (see Harmer, 2006) in writing instruction. The process approach to writing instruction emphasizes the stages of prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing. This approach promotes learners' engagement in the writing process and encourages them to develop their ideas progressively. Studies by Hedge (2005) and Raimes (1983) supported the effectiveness of this approach, stressing that it nurtures creativity, critical thinking, and self-evaluation among EFL learners. Additionally, Hyland and Hyland (2019) highlighted that this approach enhances learners' awareness of audience, purpose, and rhetorical structure, contributing to more authentic and coherent written texts. Thus, the process approach to writing instruction integrated critical thinking and creativity by shifting from the mechanical application of grammar rules to a commitment to content and structure.

Furthermore, the process-writing approach to writing instruction proved beneficial, particularly for the EFL learners who often have to struggle with different linguistic and cognitive demands of writing in an L2 (second language). In this way, the process approach to writing instruction gained extensive acceptance, particularly in the EFL writing instruction. Prior research consistently proved that the process approach to writing instruction is more

effective than conventional methods that focus on writing as a final product and ignore creativity, and the expression of ideas.

For example, Martínez, López-Díaz, and Pérez (2020) explored the usefulness of the process approach in paragraph writing. For this purpose, they engaged the learners in different stages (e.g., drafting, editing, revising) of writing while providing them instruction on paragraph writing. As a result, they observed the EFL learners producing more coherent as well as organized paragraphs. Afterwards, in a quasi-experimental study, Tariq, Ali, and Khan (2021) compared the writing proficiency of the two groups of undergraduate-level students of English as a Second Language (ESL). The first group of students was taught through the process writing approach, whereas the second group of students was taught through the lecture-based traditional method (explicit instruction). Results revealed that the students who received instruction through the process writing approach significantly outperformed in writing competence and quality than their peers who received instruction through the traditional methods. In addition, the results indicated that different stages (e.g., brainstorming to editing) involved in the process of writing facilitated the development of a deeper understanding of the content and structure of the written texts. These results offered profound implications for a shift from the traditional product-oriented writing instruction to the process-oriented writing instruction.

## *2.2 Explicit Instruction*

Explicit instruction involves the direct teaching of specific writing skills, grammar rules, and vocabulary through structured lessons (see Swales, 1990). This approach provides learners with clear guidance and rules, enabling them to apply these elements in their academic writing tasks, which are often complex and challenging for non-native speakers. Thus, this approach is specifically useful for EFL learners who lack the knowledge of the grammar and syntax of the English language. Previously, the study by Ferris (2003) demonstrated the positive impact of explicit instruction on the writing accuracy and language proficiency of EFL students. Similarly, the study by Rassaei (2012) showed that explicit grammar instructions significantly improve the sentence complexity and overall quality of the essays written by EFL students.

Furthermore, in a recent study, Tsiriotakis et al. (2020) investigated the impact of explicit instruction on the writing skills of Greek EFL learners employing the WWW (what, who, and where), and POW (plan, organize, and write) strategies of the narrative writing. Their results revealed significant improvement in the length and quality of the narrative writing produced by the learners of grades 5 and 6, identified as average, above average, and below average EFL students. Specifically, the learners in the experimental group (who received explicit instruction) outperformed the learners in the control group (who received traditional instruction). The results of this study highlight the practical benefits of the improvement of narrative writing skills in EFL contexts. Similarly, a more recent study by Arlius and Jufrizal (2024) examined the impact of explicit instruction on collocation awareness as well as the writing skills of Indonesian 9th-grade EFL learners. The results showed dramatic enhancement in the learners' collocation awareness and writing skills, with writing scores increasing from 55.73 to 82.37. These results suggested the effectiveness of explicit instruction for the

enhancement of learners' writing proficiency as well as the development of a deeper understanding of language use regarding the collocations.

### *2.3 Process Writing*

Many studies suggest that integrating explicit instruction for grammar, vocabulary, and specific writing conventions within the context of the process writing approach can provide learners with a balanced and holistic writing experience. This type of integration can help teachers in addressing both creative as well as mechanical aspects of the writing pedagogy. This aspect of the integration of explicit instruction with the process writing approach has been confirmed by Bakhtiyarovna (2023) in her study aimed at investigating the effectiveness of the said approaches in enhancing the writing competence of EFL learners in Uzbekistan. The results of her study revealed that both approaches help enhance EFL learners' writing competence. These results offered valuable insights for curriculum designers, educators, and researchers in the field of EFL writing instruction. Additionally, Bakhtiyarovna (2023) suggested EFL instructors integrate explicit instruction and process writing approaches to create a comprehensive teaching methodology to address the learners' issues related to the understanding of writing and the theoretical application of the writing process.

Thus, the findings (as reported in Arlius & Jufrizal, 2024; Ferris, 2003; Rassaei, 2012; Tsiriou et al., 2020) suggest that explicit instruction is a key component of writing pedagogy specifically for EFL writers despite the trend toward process approach (see Hedge, 2005; Hyland & Hyland, 2019; Raimes, 1983) to the writing instruction. On the other hand, the findings reported in Bakhtiyarovna (2023) suggest the integration of both explicit instruction and process writing approaches for the enhancement of academic writing skills among EFL learners. These studies guide this present study to confirm the usefulness of explicit instruction and process writing approaches for the enhancement of writing skills of the EFL writers in Italy, where mastering academic writing is imperative for university students (see Section 1). Refer to Section 3 for further discussion on the research gap and objectives.

## **3. Research Methodology**

The above-reviewed studies (see Section 2.2) show that EFL writing instruction is developing, shifting from a focus on grammatical correctness towards a focus on the process approach. Several studies (see Section 2.3) support the integration of these approaches for effective teaching as well as the enhancement of EFL writing. However, it is not yet clear which approach can be useful for improving the writing produced by EFL learners in Italy. To address this gap, a research project was administered during the academic year 2023-2024 within a 36-hour course in English for Academic Purposes to investigate the validity of the explicit and process approaches to writing instruction. For this purpose, 18 hours were dedicated to written comprehension and production, that is, 9 hours for the practice of explicit instruction and 9 hours for process writing.

The main objective was to have Ph.D. students practice with the main genres in writing (i.e., note-taking, summary, essay, abstract, PPT, research article, and book review). Therefore, each assignment was based on the syllabus of the textbook (Abbamonte & Petillo, 2015),

which covered the fields of cognitive psychology, cognitive linguistics, dynamic and clinical psychology, neurology, psychiatry, social psychology, and social sciences.

Collaborative writing was also practiced in this process as Harmer (2006) and Raimes (1983) point out that group work increases student talking time, opportunities to use the target language to communicate with one another, and cooperation among students. In addition, Hedge (2005) emphasizes that collaborative writing in the classroom generates discussions and activities that encourage an effective process of writing, and even weaker students are enabled to experience success and feel that they have contributed some effort to the group's work.

The group writing tasks provided students with the freedom to create their own expressions for their products. These tasks also provided a good context for generating ideas and vocabulary, as well as identifying sources of information. In a group, a person's idea stimulates ideas from other students. This also resulted in considerable communicative activities in the form of making suggestions, agreeing and disagreeing on viewpoints, and negotiating.

### *3.1 Procedure*

During the first lesson, after discussing the plan for their writing tasks in groups and deciding on the overall formats and appropriate vocabulary to be included, students began to write, and their tasks lasted throughout the module. Following the method used by Rassaei (2012), explicit instruction was given first to produce notes, a summary, an essay, and an abstract. Each product was based on the following 4 steps:

**Step 1:** Concept introduction, or introduction of the specific writing concepts or structures that were going to be taught. This could involve discussing topics like grammar rules, sentence structures, paragraph organization, and vocabulary usage.

**Step 2:** Modelling, or providing examples of well-written texts that demonstrate the targeted writing concepts. These examples were analysed highlighting the key components, organization, and style.

**Step 3:** Guided practice, or guided exercises, where students worked through writing tasks under guidance. Immediate feedback and correction during this phase were provided to reinforce the proper application of the concepts.

**Step 4:** Independent practice, that is, writing tasks were assigned that incorporated the concepts taught. Learners were encouraged to apply what they had learned independently, while still being available to provide support and feedback as needed.

After about 9 hours of group work, the process writing approach was implemented to produce a presentation and a letter of appreciation based on the following steps:

**Step 1:** Pre-writing activities, aimed at guiding students through brainstorming, mind mapping, and outlining their ideas before starting to write. The importance of planning and organizing thoughts effectively was emphasized.



**Step 2:** Drafting, in which students drafted their writing, focusing on expressing their ideas without worrying about perfection. The goal was to get their ideas down on paper.

**Step 3:** Peer review and revision, where learners exchanged their drafts and provided constructive feedback. They also made necessary revisions to improve clarity, coherence, and overall quality.

**Step 4:** Teacher feedback and editing, where students received feedback on the revised drafts; areas for improvement were highlighted in terms of grammar, vocabulary, and overall writing style.

**Step 5:** Final draft. Once revisions and edits were complete, students were guided through producing a polished final draft. Their progress and growth in the writing process were celebrated.

## 4. Results and Discussion

Within the limits of this paper, we cannot copy and/or attach the compositions analysed. Instead, we will comment on the selected extracts after explaining the content of each step.

### 4.1 *Application of the Explicit Instruction Steps*

#### 4.1.1 Step 1: Concept Introduction

This step intends to present concepts and structures pertinent to writing involved in the writing of a formal letter of praise. Concepts discussed include grammatical rules like the subject-verb agreement, the right use of conjunctions, and sentence structure to establish clarity and accuracy. It also entails mastering sentence structures - especially complex and compound styles to produce coherent and smooth texts. Besides paragraph organisation, logical flow of thoughts, use of topic sentences, and a closing remark are all considered in structuring a good letter. Last but not least, vocabulary is discussed with attention to precise, and formal language which should be used when writing to a dignitary such as Ms. Gruwell.

Applying the concepts in this letter shows how a formal tone is necessary as the letter addresses a dignified person. In teaching the rules about using commas, which include the usage after introductory phrases and lists, punctuation mistakes are avoided. The accurate selection of words can be taught to the students. For instance, instead of saying "*affection*", and "*gratitude*" will be used to express the desired feeling appropriately. Further, the letter structure is explained to students, pointing out that an introduction should clearly state the purpose, body paragraphs dealing with single ideas, and a conclusion to summarise the main points and show appreciation. This step ensures the students understand the essential elements of writing a polished and meaningful letter.

#### 4.1.2 Step 2: Modelling

The purpose of this step is to give students some examples of well-written texts that show the targeted writing concepts. The model of a well-structured letter of admiration, like the sample but error-free, is provided. This one contains a concise introduction stating the purpose of writing the letter, body paragraphs consisting of topic sentences, supporting details, and a

smooth transition into the next paragraph, and a concluding paragraph that presents a summary of the main ideas and gratitude. Moreover, proper grammar, punctuation, and vocabulary in usage are presented within the model letter.

During the analysis of the example, the use of complex sentences highlights how detailed thought is presented effectively. The running of ideas from one paragraph to the next shows how each section builds on the last one into a cohesive narrative. This section covers the importance of accurate word usage, as demonstrated by changing "*affected me a lot*" to "*deeply moved me*" to add an emotional impact to the letter. Proper punctuation is also crucial. For instance, using commas after introductory phrases is important for improving readability and avoiding ambiguity. By analyzing the model, one can make sense of his or her usage of writing concepts in the practical work.

#### 4.1.3 Step 3: Guided Practice

The purpose of this step is to give students the guided writing tasks such that they use the immediate response to reinforce concepts learned. Under this activity, students are provided with a sample letter and charged with rewriting one of them: correcting errors in clarity and grammar. Supporting them, there is a checklist, which gives out some instructions on some matters: fixing grammar errors such as changing "*However of seeing*" to "*However, instead of seeing*"; including the missing commas after introductory phrases; replacing vague phrases with concrete diction, such as "*affected me a lot*" by "*deeply moved me*"; and proper organization of paragraphs and logical flow.

In this way, while students revise their papers, they receive instantaneous feedback from the instructor, with emphasis on how changes need to be made, as well as the reason for those changes so that the students can understand where their improvement should come from. For instance, the original sentence: "*However of seeing these kids as a problem you saw them as people with traumatic.*", but guided correction is: "*However, instead of seeing these kids as a problem, you saw them as people with traumatic*", showing how one could correct grammar mistakes and how to improve sentences. This step will allow students to practice the application of concepts in a structured manner, which builds their confidence and skills before moving on to independent practice.

#### 4.1.4 Step 4: Independent Practice

This step aims at making the students independently apply everything they have been learning to eventually come up with a refined draft of the last paper. Through this, a student is tasked with creating a new letter of admiration by writing to any inspirational figure to another inspirational person such as a teacher, an activist, and even an author. They are taught to use proper grammar and punctuation, exact and formal word use, logical paragraph structure with flow, and a structured paper that has an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. To assist them in their task, the teacher has pre-structured a self-assessment rubric that provides the criteria of grammar and punctuation, word choice, and organization so they may check their paper. The instructor gives the final draft of the students some feedback on the areas to improve and the areas that they have improved upon.



For example, a student might write a letter to Malala Yousafzai, applying the same structure and concepts used in the sample letter to Ms. Gruwell. An excerpt from such a letter could read: *"Your courage in standing up for education, despite the dangers you faced, has deeply inspired me. You have shown that even in the face of adversity, one person can make a profound difference"*. This step allows students to demonstrate their ability to independently apply the writing concepts by reinforcing their skills and preparing them for future writing tasks. Table 1 summarises and gives examples of what has been explained so far.

Table 1. Outcomes of the Application of Explicit Instruction Steps

Step	Application to Sample	Outcome
<b>Step 1: Concept Introduction</b>	Taught grammar, sentence structure, paragraph organisation, and vocabulary usage.	Students understood the foundational concepts needed to write a formal letter.
<b>Step 2: Modelling</b>	Provided and analysed a well-written example of a letter.	Students saw how the concepts were applied in a polished text.
<b>Step 3: Guided Practice</b>	Students corrected errors in the sample letter with guidance and feedback.	Students practised applying the concepts and received immediate feedback.
<b>Step 4: Independent Practice</b>	Students wrote a new letter independently, applying the concepts learned.	Students demonstrated their ability to use the concepts in a new context.

Applying the four explicit instruction steps (Table 1) to the sample letter allowed students to achieve several of the key outcomes. First, they got a clear idea of the most important writing concepts, such as grammar rules, sentence structures, paragraph organization, and vocabulary usage. First, they heard the concepts and applied them well in an illustrative example with a model on how to word and refine theirs. Thirdly, through this guided practice the students were made to correct the errors and improve their sample letter. Structured Support with immediate feedback reinforced on what had been learned. Finally, they were able to use the concepts individually to write a final draft. This indicates that they can employ the skills that they have gained in a novel setting. Thus, the well-structured exercise is consistent with the recommendations from Rassaei (2012) and other similar studies (e.g., Ferris, 2003; Martínez et al., 2020).

#### 4.2 Integrating Explicit Instruction and Process Writing

This discussion emphasizes the importance of explicit instruction and process writing in EFL learners' writing improvement. Explicit instruction provides the structured base for accuracy as noted by Goeke (2009), while process writing fosters creativity and self-expression, as noted

by Hedge (2005) and Raimes (1983). The examples (Table 2) with their revisions clearly show how these approaches address the unique problems of EFL learners, which include grammatical complexity, coherence, and organization.

For example, explicit grammar and syntax instruction was shown to be useful in Rassaei (2012) and Tsiriotakis et al. (2020). On the other hand, process-oriented tasks were shown to be effective in Martínez et al. (2020) and Tariq et al. (2021) for facilitating critical thinking and the generation of coherent text. Together, these approaches give rise to a resilient framework for dealing with all the issues of academic writing. Table 2 shows some extracts of PhD students' writing tasks where the second approach (i.e., process writing) was used.

Table 2. Identification of Errors in the Sample Texts

Step	Error Type	Incorrect Version	Correct Version	Discussion
Step 1: Pre-writing	Clarity/Flow	"You believed in a class that many had already thought was lost."	"You believed in a class many others had already written off as lost."	The original phrase is ambiguous and lacks specificity. "Written off as lost" is idiomatic and clearer, as it stresses that others had abandoned the class. This strengthens the emotional effect of the sentence.
Step 2: Drafting	Grammar	"However of seeing these kids as a problem you saw them as people with traumatic..."	"However, instead of seeing these kids as a problem, you saw them as people with traumatic..."	The expression "However of seeing" is grammatically wrong and uncommunicative. Including "instead of" gives it a contrast and makes it easy to read coherently. This concurs with Ferris (2003) on grammatical correctness in writing.
Step 2: Drafting	Punctuation	"I am a student attending the University of Catania, I write you after watching..."	"I am a student attending the University of Catania. I write to you after watching..."	The original sentence contains a comma splice, combining two independent clauses improperly. This makes it read better as two separate sentences, rather than one sentence with a punctuation error. In fact, according to Raimes (1983), proper punctuation is essential for making the writing readable.
Step 3: Peer Review	Word Choice	"Impressed me how much you managed to show your students..."	"I was impressed by how much you managed to show your students..."	The sentence "Impressed me" is incomplete and has no subject. Adding "I was" completes the sentence, making it grammatically correct and more formal. This is the letter that should be written to a person with respect. This agrees with Hyland and Hyland (2019), who consider the role of accurate word selection in academic writing.
Step 3: Peer	Punctuation	"However, with your tenacity and human	"However, with your tenacity and human	The sentence with the introductory phrase does not use a comma; hence, it is harder to

Step	Error Type	Incorrect Version	Correct Version	Discussion
<b>Review</b>		approach you managed to earn their trust..."	approach, you managed to earn their trust..."	read. A comma is needed after "approach" to separate the introductory clause from the main clause. This further supports Hedge (2005), who emphasises that punctuation is important for readability.
<b>Step 4: Teacher Feedback</b>	<b>Grammar</b>	"You have shown that the key to change is love, compassion and a desire never to give up in the face of difficulties."	"You have shown that the key to change is love, compassion, and a desire to never give up in the face of difficulties."	The positioning of the phrase "never to give up" is clumsy and awkwardly placed. Rephrasing improves readability and sounds more natural in English. This corresponds with Shaughnessy (1977), who points out that grammatical and syntactical errors are widespread in student writing and need specific feedback.
<b>Step 4: Teacher Feedback</b>	<b>Clarity/Flow</b>	"Your ability to learn from your students, grow with them has affected me a lot..."	"Your ability to learn from your students and to grow with them has deeply moved me..."	The phrase "affected me a lot" is vague and not emotionally deep. Replacing it with "deeply moved me" brings precision into words and emotional content, in how the feeling is portrayed. This is aligned with Berman and Cheng (2001), who note that, in academic writing, word choice is essential for making communication effective.
<b>Step 5: Final Draft</b>	<b>Word Choice</b>	"With affection and admiration, Ludovica Di Bennardo"	"With gratitude and admiration, Ludovica Di Bennardo"	"Although 'affection' is not incorrect, 'gratitude' might be more appropriate given the context of the letter, since the letter thanks Ms. Gruwell for her contribution. This fits well with the letter's intention and message. According to Romah (2005), it is crucial to use language in ways that respect the culture and emotions of users.

### 4.3 Key Findings

The results from the textual examples (Table 2) demonstrate the progressive improvements achieved through explicit instruction and the process writing approach.

#### 4.3.1 Explicit Instruction

Teaching grammar explicitly with the help of punctuation and sentence structure improved learners' production skills of grammatically accurate and coherent texts (Ferris, 2003; Rassaei, 2012). Examples at all stages, including introduction to concept, teacher feedback, and teacher editing, emphasize foundational knowledge through clear, detailed feedback where learners

have incorporated essential skills in writing. Improved sentence clarity and conciseness in the corrected examples validate the structured nature of explicit instruction (Tsiriotakis et al., 2020).

#### 4.3.2 Process Writing

This process writing approach fostered creativity, self-expression, and thinking skills that comprise brainstorming, drafting, and revising (Hedge, 2005; Harmer, 2006). Improvements from the examples drafted during the peer review and revision stages indicate the way teamwork and several iterative revisions made the writing cohesive and emotive.

#### 4.3.3 Collaborative Learning

Peer feedback stimulates the learners into productive conversation where they can even draft their assignments with each other (Hyland & Hyland, 2019). Examples in the peer review and revision stage show benefits from peer interaction about the restructuring of sentence structure, coherence, and general organization.

#### 4.3.4 Holistic Development

The final drafts portrayed the ability of learners to internalize comments from different stages into texts, which were finally clear, concise, and full of emotion. Hedge (2005) further observed that this cycle showed the significance of learning and learner growth.

### 4.4 *Implications for EFL Pedagogy*

The findings indicate that explicit instruction combined with process writing can be a solution to common problems that EFL learners encounter, including grammatical complexity, coherence, and organization. Implications for EFL pedagogy are:

#### 4.4.1 Balance Between Accuracy and Creativity

The combination of explicit instruction with process writing helps learners achieve linguistic accuracy while promoting creativity and self-expression.

#### 4.4.2 Role of Feedback

Peer and teacher feedback are vital in the improvement of learners' drafts, making it clear that collaboration and detail in guidance are the keys.

#### 4.4.3 Adaptability in Higher Education

The approach can be employed to reach the diverse learners of internationalized higher education, the crossroads of which Italian universities will become.

## 5. Conclusion

This study confirms that explicit instruction combined with the process writing approach significantly enhances EFL learners' ability to produce coherent, accurate, and impactful academic texts. It supplements the dual demands of language acquisition and academic writing as learners seek to address the linguistic and cognitive demands of higher education in an

increasingly globalized world. Future studies may examine the long-term implications of this integration on learners' academic and professional success to validate its effectiveness across diverse educational environments.

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**Authors' contributions**

The primary author contributed to the Abstract, Introduction, Research Questions and Methodology, Results and Discussion, as well as the Key Findings and Conclusion, while the co-author was responsible for the Literature Review section, and proofreading.

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