

Structural Analysis of Opinion Essays by Second-year EFL Teacher Training Students

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Abstract:

This study examines the structural analysis of opinion essays written by second-year EFL teacher training students. In an era where written communication in second languages (L2) is indispensable across various fields, the demand for writing skills has become increasingly central to school and university curricula. Among different types of academic essays, mastering the genre of opinion essays is essential for students. This study assesses how effectively second-year EFL teacher-training students have learned to write opinion essays. Following a qualitative approach, opinion essays written by 40 undergraduate students were analyzed. The findings indicate that most students could effectively structure their opinion essays according to the prescribed format. Students successfully provided general statements followed by a thesis statement in the introduction, developed well-structured body paragraphs with clear topic sentences and supporting details, and offered practical conclusions. The study highlights the importance of teaching academic writing skills and provides educators with insights on effectively teaching opinion essay writing to EFL students. This research contributes to understanding how second-year EFL teachers train students to develop their skills in writing opinion essays. The findings underscore the importance of structured academic writing instruction and offer valuable insights for educators seeking to enhance the teaching of opinion essay writing to EFL students.

Keywords: an introduction paragraph, body paragraphs, a conclusion paragraph

Introduction

Researchers in the area of second language writing highlight that L2 written communication has been extensive and essential in many fields, including education, business, and technology and in the daily life of L2 writers thanks to the advanced development of information and communication technology in the era of globalization

(Weigle, 2014). There are several purposes for using L2: 'transacting business, interacting on social networking sites, or pursuing academic degrees' (Weigle, 2014, p. 223). Following the widespread need for writing in our private and professional lives, the skill of writing has placed a more central role in school and university curricula (Reid, 2001, as cited in Weigle, 2014). The more extensive use and need of writing and L2 writing bring out more responsibilities to L2 writers and L2 teachers.

As with all university students, second-language students must produce a range of written genres during their academic studies (Paltridge, 2004, p. 98). Moore and Morton (1999, as cited in Paltridge, 2004) found out in their research that the academic essay was the most common genre at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels of disciplines where second language learners were highly enrolled. Like the complicated task of writing in L2, learning to write academic essays in L2 or EFL is challenging for both teachers and students. Students often need a more fundamental understanding and the skill to write academic essays (Martinez, Lopez-Diaz & Perez, 2020). Among various academic essays, students need to learn to write the opinion essay genre. Students are required to express their ideas, opinions, and arguments through their ability to write opinion essays. To write the genre effectively, students need to learn to write the essay according to its structure: an introduction paragraph, a body paragraph, and a conclusion paragraph.

The core problem addressed in the study is the challenge second-year EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teacher training students face in mastering the structure of opinion essays. Writing in a second language is inherently difficult, and for students aiming to become language educators, the ability to write structured and coherent essays is critical. Studies have shown that EFL students often struggle with organizing their essays according to academic standards (Martinez, Lopez-Diaz, & Perez, 2020). This struggle is more pronounced in genres that require clear argumentation and structure, such as opinion essays.

Considering all the above situations, the study aimed to do a structural analysis of opinion essays written by second-year EFL teacher training students and evaluates how effectively these students are learning to construct opinion essays, focusing on their ability to follow the standard structural components: introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion. The study hypothesis for the study is that the second-year EFL teacher training students will demonstrate a significant improvement in structuring their opinion essays, specifically in effectively constructing introduction paragraphs with general statements and thesis statements, developing coherent body paragraphs with clear topic sentences and supporting details, and concluding paragraphs that restate the thesis or summarize the main points. This study is significant for several reasons. Understanding how well students grasp essay structures can help educators refine their instructional strategies. The findings can inform writing teachers about the areas where students struggle and excel, guiding the creation of more targeted writing curriculum that address specific student needs.

An opinion essay and its structure

Many sources have defined and described an opinion essay. It is determined that "an opinion essay is a written work in which the writer expresses an opinion and supports that opinion with facts and examples" (<https://www.languagehumanities.org/what-is-an-opinion-essay.htm>). The source noted that the opinion essay differs from other types of essays in that it should rely on the writer's opinion and not on hard facts. The critical point is that "the writer can support his or her opinions with compelling arguments." Thus, it continued that the opinion essay has three parts: an opening paragraph with a [thesis statement](#), supporting paragraphs, and a closing paragraph with an effective conclusion to the essay.

Oshima and Hogue (2014) pointed out that people express their opinions every day about everything, and college students are requested to write an academic essay that "expresses a well-supported opinion" (p. 223), in which they need to provide their opinions and support their ideas formally and strongly. As they stated, the opinion essay consists of three parts: an introductory paragraph, a body paragraph, and a conclusion paragraph. The introductory paragraph has two parts: "several general statements and one thesis statement" (p. 226). In the body paragraphs, students should support their opinions with reasons. Each reason should be developed into a separate paragraph. There are two ways to write a conclusion paragraph: restating the thesis statement in different words or summarizing the reasons provided. They emphasized the importance of acquiring the skills of quoting and documenting sources using information from outside sources and suggested several activities related to quotations in their textbook. The teacher/researcher aims to follow the textbook of Oshima and Hogue (2014) to design the syllabus, including a variety of activities on writing introductory, body, and conclusion paragraphs, developing supporting details, using quotations and statistics, writing different sentence types, using transition signals, and applying lexico-grammatical resources.

Research methodology, results, and discussion

This study applies a qualitative method of analyzing the structure of opinion essays written by undergraduate students. The study involves about 40 second-year undergraduate EFL teacher training students who study at the English-German language department of the School of Social Sciences and Humanities of the Mongolian National University of Education (MNUE). The students attended the 64-hour writing skills course to learn how to write an opinion essay on its structure. Students practice writing several opinion essays in a group and individually. Each student wrote about three essays. The study collects about 70 opinion essays. Most of the essays (70 percent) show satisfactory assessment. A few sample essays are analyzed, demonstrating how students wrote each part of the essays.

The following opinion essays show a satisfactory assessment. The topic is "Do you prefer studying individually or in a group." The sample opinion essays provide general statements in two or three sentences and a one-sentence thesis statement satisfactorily in the introduction paragraph.

Opinion essay-1

Students have many learning styles. Most students prefer studying individually because they think that studying individually is more effective than studying in a group during class. However, studying in a group has two practical advantages.

General statements: Most prefer studying individually because they think it is more effective than studying in a group during class.

Thesis statement: However, studying in a group shows two compelling reasons.

Opinion essay-2

Everyone has their own way of learning. All of the people like studying individually. Some people study individually, and they focus on their lessons well. However, people have to study in a group for several advantages.

General statements: Everyone has their own way of learning. All of the people like studying individually. Some people study individually, and they focus on their lessons well.

Thesis statement: However, people must study in groups for several advantages.

Opinion essay-5

Students have different opinions about studying individually or in a group. Some students accomplish their tasks alone at home while others study lessons in a group. Most students believe that studying individually is effective, but I think that studying in a group has several benefits.

General statements: Students have different opinions about studying individually or in a group. Some students accomplish their tasks alone at home while others study lessons in a group.

Thesis statement: Most students believe studying individually is effective, but studying in a group has several benefits.

The sample opinion essay expresses the body paragraphs satisfactorily. The student wrote topic sentences at the beginning of two body paragraphs and supported the main points with examples and details, as shown in the sample.

Opinion essay-1 Body paragraphs:

First of all, studying in a group is creative for students. For example, students share their opinions when they write an essay in a group. Furthermore, students talk about many great ideas in essays, and they find the best ideas. Therefore, they can write an essay more creatively than writing an essay individually.

Second, studying in a group improves students' knowledge. For instance, if some students need help understanding some English grammar rules, others can explain the grammar rules to them during their group work. Moreover, students can prepare for their exams in a group. They share their well-known lessons, and they can get high scores.

1st body paragraph topic sentence: *First, studying in a group is creative for students.*

1st body paragraph supporting details: *For example, students share their opinions when they write an essay in a group. Furthermore, students talk about many great essay ideas, and they find the best ideas. Therefore, they can write an essay more creatively than individually.*

2nd body paragraph topic sentence: *Second, group study improves students' knowledge.*

2nd body paragraph supporting details: *For instance, if some students do not understand some English grammar rules, others can explain the grammar rules to them during their group work. Moreover, students can prepare for their exams in a group. They share their well-known lessons, and they can get high scores.*

Opinion essay-5 Body paragraphs:

The first advantage is that students acquire communication skills from collaboration. For example, students' listening skills are enhanced while group students speak. Furthermore, students learn to communicate in sequence and respect each other.

The second advantage is that students achieve effective work and processes by cooperating with others. For instance, when students complete their assignments together, their assignments are better. They gather and analyze enormous amounts of information with group members, and they finish productive projects together.

1st body paragraph topic sentence: *The first advantage is that students acquire communication skills from collaboration.*

1st body paragraph supporting details: *Students' listening skills are enhanced while group students speak. Furthermore, students learn to speak in sequence, and they learn to respect each other.*

2nd body paragraph topic sentence: *The second advantage is that students achieve adequate work and processes by cooperating with others.*

2nd body paragraph supporting details: *For instance, when students complete their assignments together, their assignments are better. They gather and analyze a lot of information with group members, and they finish productive projects together.*

The sample opinion essay includes a satisfactory conclusion that was written in two ways: restating the thesis statement in different words or summarizing the reasons provided. The student added her suggestion sentence, which is one way of writing a conclusion.

Opinion essay-1

To summarize, studying in a group has several benefits. It allows students to be creative and acquire knowledge. I wish that more students would try to study in a group to be effective in their learning.

Restating the thesis statement in different words: *To summarize, group study has several benefits.*

Summarizing the reasons provided: *It allows students to be creative and acquire good knowledge.*

Providing a suggestion: *more students try to study in a group to be effective in their learning.*

Opinion essay-3

In conclusion, studying in a group is very important for students because of several advantages. When students study in a group, they can improve their communication skills and use time effectively. Knowing these two opportunities can help students be successful students.

Restating the thesis statement in different words: *In conclusion, studying in a group is very important for students for several advantages.*

The reasons provided are summarized below: *When students study in a group, they can improve their communication skills and use time effectively.*

Providing a suggestion: *Knowing these two opportunities can help students become successful.*

Opinion essay-4

In summary, studying individually is suitable for students for several reasons. Students use their time effectively and become more independent when they study individually. Students should study individually if they want to study effectively.

Restating the thesis statement in different words: *In summary, studying individually is suitable for students for several reasons*

Summarizing the reasons provided: *Students use their time effectively and become more independent when they study individually.*

Suggesting: *students should study individually if they want to study effectively.*

Conclusion

Written communication in second languages has become widespread and indispensable across various fields. As the demand for writing skills grows in personal and professional domains, writing has become increasingly central to school and university curricula. Students frequently require a deeper understanding and proficiency in academic essay writing. Mastering the genre of opinion essays is essential among various types of academic essays. Students must articulate their ideas, opinions, and arguments effectively through the composition of opinion essays. The findings of this study provide insight into the structural analysis of opinion essays written by second-year EFL teacher training students. The analysis focused on how effectively students learned to write the academic essay genre, specifically opinion essays. The results indicate that most students could effectively structure their opinion essays according to the prescribed format. In the introduction paragraphs, students successfully provided general statements followed by a thesis statement. Moreover, the body paragraphs were well-developed, with clear topic sentences and supporting details. Students demonstrated the ability to present compelling arguments to support their opinions. In the conclusion paragraphs, students effectively summarized their main points and either restated the thesis statement in different words or summarized the reasons provided. Additionally, some students offered suggestions or recommendations, demonstrating a deeper engagement with the topic.

**Англи хэлний багшийн 2-р ангийн оюутнуудын үзэл бодлоо илэрхийлсэн
эссэний бүтцэд хийсэн дүн шинжилгээ**

Лхагвын Энхбаяр

Монгол Улсын Боловсролын Их Сургуулийн Нийгэм, хүмүүнлэгийн ухааны сургуулийн Англи,
Герман хэлний тэнхимийн багш, Магистр, Улаанбаатар, Монгол Улс

Хураангуй: Оюутнууд үзэл бодлоо илэрхийлсэн эссэг бичиж сурах нь зайлшгүй байна. Тус судалгаа нь Англи хэлний багшийн 2-р ангийн оюутнууд үзэл бодлоо илэрхийлсэн эссэг бүтцийн дагуу хэр үр дүнтэй бичиж сурч байгааг үнэлэх зорилготой. Тус судалгаа нь эссэнд бүтцийн анализ хийх чанарын аргыг ашиглаж англи хэлний багшийн 2-р ангийн 40 оюутны 70 эссэнд бүтцийн дүн шинжилгээ хийж үзэхэд ихэнх оюутнууд (70%) бүтцийн дагуу үзэл бодлоо илэрхийлсэн эссэг бичиж сурсан байна. Тус судалгаанд цөөн тооны жишээ эссэг харуулсан. Дийлэнх оюутнууд эссэний удиртгал цогцолборт сэдвийн талаарх ерөнхий мэдээлэл, гол санаа агуулсан мэдээллийг хангалттай үнэлгээтэй гаргасан байна. Мөн дэлгэрүүлэгч цогцолборт хөтөч санаа түүнийг дэмжсэн жишээ өгүүлбэрүүдийг мөн хангалттай үнэлгээтэй бичсэн байна. Дүгнэлт өгүүлбэрийг мөн заасны дагуу 2 аргаар бичиж сурсан байна. Үүнд гол санааг өөрийн үгээр илэрхийлж бичихээс гадна хөтөч санааг дурдаж бичсэн байна.

Түлхүүр үг: удиртгал цогцолбор, дэлгэрүүлэгч цогцолбор, дүгнэлт цогцолбор

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