

Enhancing EFL students' writing performance through inquiry based learning

Migliorare negli studenti le performance di scrittura dell'Inglese come lingua straniera attraverso l'apprendimento basato sull'indagine

Bantalem Derseh

Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Woldia University, bantalemd@gmail.com

The aim of this study was to examine the effects of inquiry-based learning on students' argumentative essay writing performance. A quasi-experimental design which employed time series design with single group participants was used. A total of 20 EFL undergraduate students were selected using comprehensive sampling method. Tests, focus group discussion, and student-reflective journal were used to gather data on the students' writing performance. The participants were given a series of three argumentative essay writing pretests both before and after the intervention, inquiry based argumentative essay writing instruction. While the quantitative data were analyzed using One-Way Repeated Measures ANOVA, the qualitative data were analyzed through narration. The findings of the study revealed that using inquiry based argumentative writing instruction develops students' writing performance. Therefore, inquiry based instruction is suggested as a means to improve students' writing performance because the method incorporates activity oriented learning, logical arguments, and collaboration.

Keywords: Inquiry based learning; Argumentative essay; Writing performance; EFL Writing instruction; Time series design.

Lo scopo di questo studio è di esaminare gli effetti dell'apprendimento basato sulla ricerca sulle performance argomentative degli studenti nella scrittura di saggi. È stato utilizzato un disegno quasi sperimentale a serie temporali con gruppo unico costituito da un campione di 20 studenti universitari. Test, focus group e diari degli studenti sono stati usati per raccogliere informazioni sulle performance di scrittura. Per i dati quantitativi è stata eseguita un'analisi della varianza multivariata (ANOVA); le narrazioni sono state analizzate con metodologie qualitative. I risultati dello studio hanno mostrato come l'utilizzo di istruzioni basate sulla ricerca di argomentazioni scritte migliora le prestazioni di scrittura degli studenti. In tal senso, l'istruzione basata sulla ricerca è suggerita come metodologia efficace per migliorare le prestazioni di scrittura degli studenti perché la metodologia unisce l'Activity Based Learning (ABL), l'argomentazione e la collaborazione.

Parole chiave: Apprendimento basato sulla ricerca; Saggio argomentativo; Performance di scrittura; Istruzione di scrittura EFL; Disegno quasi sperimentale a serie temporali.

Enhancing EFL students' writing performance through inquiry based learning

1. Introduction

Inquiry based learning is the act of gaining knowledge or/and skills through asking for information. It is a discovery method of learning which starts learning by posing questions, problems or situations rather than presenting facts directly to students. It involves students in making observations; posing questions; examining sources; gathering, analyzing, interpreting, and synthesizing data; proposing answers, explanations and predictions; communicating findings through discussion and reflection; applying findings to the real situation, and following up new questions that may arise in the process. In the process of inquiry based learning, students themselves identify and research issues to develop their knowledge, and the teacher facilitates the learning process (Sandoval, 2005; Hardin, 2009 & Marshall, 2013).

It is a language learning method under the umbrella of communicative approach which drives learning through inquisition and investigation. Lee (2014) stated that inquiry based learning is an analogy for communicative approach. It is an advanced version of Communicative Language Teaching, and it is an expansion of Task Based Instruction. The principles of inquiry based learning are compatible with Communicative Language Teaching because communicative approach focuses on communicative proficiency rather than mere mastery of structure to develop learners' communicative competence as to inquiry-based learning. Inquiry based learning is, therefore, a form of Communicative Language Teaching which serves to bring down the general principles of communicative approach, and implement in language classrooms in an inquisitive and discovery manner (Lee, 2014; Qing, 2007; Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Inquiry based learning is helpful towards the improvement of English language learning in general and argumentative writing in particular since the method follows a discovery approach where students themselves discover knowledge. Particularly, in inquiry based writing instruction, students engaged in writing tasks through generating ideas;

discovering and clarifying a writing topic; exploring information on their writing topics from various sources; explaining their discoveries or concepts gained from the exploration, and elaborate their thinking through transforming their understanding into their real world situation (Marshall, 2013). When students come up through this distinct writing process in manipulating such tasks, their ability to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate issues can be empowered because this process can develop students' argumentative writing skills.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *The Process of Inquiry Based Learning in Academic Writing*

The process of inquiry based learning method, specially the 4E X 2 inquiry model, consists *engagement, exploration, explanation, elaborate, assessment* and *reflection* (Marshall, 2013). In this learning model, *Assessment* and *Reflection* are regarded as integrated elements to be implemented in each of the following four phase. It means, students evaluate their performance and way of learning at each four step, and reflect to colleagues, teachers, experts, and parents.

The first stage of this model is the “*Engagement*” phase which sets out to generate students' interest and share their prior experience. This initiation-phase includes activating students' prior knowledge or probing students' pre-conceptions. The teacher facilitates students to brainstorm possible questions, ideas and issues, to keep asking themselves, each other, and the teacher. The role of questioning is to arouse students' interest and encourage responses which reveal what students know or think about their writing issue (Llewellyn, 2002; Owen, 2006; Marshall, 2013). Students visualize the whole inquiry process; determine topic areas for inquiry; discover possible sources of information; identify audience and writing format; assess their engagement, and reflect on it.

In the process of learning argumentative writing using this model, at the *engagement* step, students engaged in prewriting tasks using topic discovery Writing Process Sheets (WPS) which help them to activate their prior knowledge, and open up questions for writing topic discovery. Writing Process Sheet is a technique of writing with serious of questions that focused on discovering a writing topic, discovering supportive information, discovering arrangements of thoughts, discovering stylistic choice to write introduction and conclusion, and using style to promote unity, specificity and coherence (Edward, 1983). Thus, in

the *engagement* phase, students get started the learning process through generating ideas, narrowing and clarifying their argumentative writing topic using WPS which guides to *discover, choose, and clarify* their topic.

In *exploration*, students think about the information they have and the information they need, and actively search for information from different sources related to their writing topic. They manipulate materials, make interviews and observations, etc; gather evidence, and discuss with colleagues. Students gather information on their argumentative writing topics from various sources with the help of WPS which guide them to discover and incorporate personal, social, and library sources (Edward, 1983). The teacher provides scaffolding to students by observing, questioning, and guiding. The students, then, think about the relevance of the information, evaluate it, and select the relevant information gathered on their argumentative essay writing topic.

In the *explanation* phase, students are provided opportunities to write their understanding, process skills, or behaviors. They write out their discovered concepts gained from the exploration using their own words. In their writing, students interpret and analyze data, provide evidence, communicate ideas, and justify conclusions. That means, students organize the information gathered and produce their written texts considering their audiences. They thoroughly write drafts by evaluating, selecting, combining, and synthesizing their collected data. The inquirers compare, contrast, organize and sort, make connections of ideas, and draw inferences from their findings (Alberta Learning, 2004). They revise and edit their written product to make their creation clear, concise, consistent and appropriate for the audience. Students revise their drafts for unity, coherence, and completeness, and proofread for mechanical problems (Edward, 1983).

In doing so, students work with peers, teachers, and experts to enhance their written text with feedback. The teacher provides feedback about the strengths and weaknesses of their drafts; comment on what things would further enhance the text and why (Alberta Learning, 2004). The teacher introduces relevant concepts, principles, and theories to help students develop deeper understanding (Llewellyn, 2002; Dawit, 2013). By incorporating the feedback gained from others, students complete their final written essay.

In the *Extension* stage, students are provided opportunities to elaborate their thinking, transfer learning to their own real world situations beyond the school settings (Marshall, 2013, and Alberta Learning, 2004). The extension phase helps students to set their conceptual understanding and develop a more permanent mental repre-

sentation. Students; thus, identify alternative explanations; create connections between new concepts, principles, and theories to the real-world experiences, and apply them into new situations. The teacher facilitates the extension process while students extend their learning into real world situations.

The application of this new knowledge provides an opportunity for students to move beyond memorization to deeper understanding of what they have learned, and be lifelong learners. The assessment in the Extension phase is both summative and formative because students are required to assess the whole process of the inquiry learning, and at the same time they need to think more deeply about their argumentative writing and address weaknesses seen in the application of the new knowledge into the real life situation. In this extended stage; therefore, students need to produce sound argumentative essays on their own real life situations like what researchers and/or professional writers produce argumentative texts.

2.2 Why Inquiry Based Learning for EFL Writing Instruction?

Mastering the fundamental ideas of a certain field (including English language) incorporates grasping general principles, attitudinal development toward learning and inquiry, and solving problems on one's own competence (Bruner, 1961). However, various studies in English language instruction reveal that most students are less effective in their English language academic achievement generally and argumentative writing competence specifically (Mohamed, 2015; Harris, 2015; Abdullah, 2014; Muhaimeed, 2013; Mesfin, 2013; Dawit, 2013; Bekele, 2011; Hamid, 2011, & Hamid, 2010).

Writing is a demanding task that challenges students to set goals, generate and organize ideas, and produce texts with appropriate language considering their readers (MacArthur, Philippakos & Graham, 2016). Likewise, Hamid (2011) and Hamid (2010) also reveal that planning, organizing, revising, and editing are the main problems of English language students. Students encounter cohesion and coherence problems, faced difficulties in writing introduction, thesis statement, topic sentence, and conclusion. Mohamed (2015) also find out that English as a foreign Language (EFL) students have various problems including usage and mechanical mistakes, like spelling, punctuation and capitalization, and lack of several writing development skills.

According to Heather (2015) students' common pitfall in writing argumentative texts is the attempt to write a thesis statement before sear-

ching for information. At times, students become unable to present solid arguments due to lack of sufficient evidence for the proponent and opponent arguments. When students attempt to begin by writing a claim rather than gathering data as a part of an inquiry process, they often use claims that are based on hunches. This in turn creates problems for students as they attempt to substantiate their claims with no adequate evidence. Students also confuse to identify claim and evidence. While a claim is an arguable statement, evidence is the information that supports the claim. However, when students work through the inquiry process, they primarily identify what they know and what they want to know, and search for information on their writing topic rather than focusing on claims. Singman (2017) states that though the recent view of language learning has focused on how student-centered approaches can be applied in foreign language classes, the knowledge base for inquiry based learning is not firmly established in foreign language settings.

Daniel (2004) stated that conventional teaching methods are still in use though teachers are expected to use active learning methods. The lecture method which is considered as the conventional method of teaching is used in colleges that teachers usually focus on giving lectures, and students depend primarily on lecture where discovery or inquiry is not that much encouraged. The product approach to teaching writing, specifically, did not mostly invite students to observe their environment critically, inquire or question things, investigate problems, and create new knowledge (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2013; Graham, MacArthur; Fitzgerald, 2013 & Yen, 2014).

This is to imply the need to promote inquiry based writing instruction which is based on a discovery approach that mostly involve students in seeking, collecting, analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating information based on students' interest. This is because using inquiry based writing instruction can enhance students' argumentative writing performance and make students active, problem solver, autonomous, and lifelong learners. However, it seems to have been a missing feature of the conventional method of English language teaching in general and argumentative writing skills in particular.

EFL students face difficulties in writing due to several factors including poor writing instruction. Academic writing researchers including Harris (2015); Mesfin (2013); Dawit (2013); Bekele (2011); Alamirew (2005); Alemu (2004) and Italo (1999) show that college students' writing test scores are very low, and students are not able to meet expectations in writing tasks because of different reasons including poor writing instruction. Harris (2015) revealed that there are English language proficiency problems in English language students

ranging from their ability of English language to their view of the language. In support of this claim, Dawit (2013) notes that university students' level of English is plummeting very dramatically.

More specifically, Bekele (2011) notes that most university teachers mainly “give notes, and sometimes models, and ask students to read the notes and produce a written text in line with the notes or the model given. They do not seem to be familiar with emerging techniques and approaches that could make students more active, responsible, confident, and eventually successful” (p.16). Thus, the literature shows existing teaching writing methods do not seem to be able to address the challenges of argumentative writing tasks that students are facing.

The researchers' teaching experience also shows that most students have argumentative essay writing pitfalls in writing thesis statements, provide evidences, and identify claims and evidences. They were also in difficulty to produce effective argumentative written texts that fulfill adequate content, organization, language usage or accuracy, vocabulary or diction, and mechanics. However, the students are not that much learning to improve their performance in writing argumentative texts. This is because the students mostly did not engaged to discover their own writing topics, search for information, evaluate the collected information, write up their texts based on the information they gathered, discuss with colleagues and experts, and to produce their final text considering the given comments. In order to alleviate this problem, using the inquiry based writing instruction is helpful because students can gather the necessary information from different sources on their writing topics before directly beginning to write their drafts.

Inquiry based learning improves students' argumentative writing performance because the method focuses on the process of knowledge discovery that involve students in seeking, collecting, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information; creating ideas, and solving problems through communication, collaboration, deep thinking, and learner autonomy, and ultimately helps them to improve argumentative writing performance. Therefore, this study was designed to examine the effects of inquiry based learning on students' argumentative essay writing performance.

3. Research Question

The study was guided by the following research question: What are the effects of inquiry based learning on EFL undergraduate students' argumentative essay writing performance?

4. Research Methodology

4.1 *Design of the Study*

The research design of this study was quasi-experimental which employs a time series design with single group participants. For the purpose of this study, the participants were given a series of three argumentative essay writing pretests before the intervention, inquiry based argumentative writing lessons, and other three similar series of argumentative essay writing posttests after the intervention.

4.2 *Participants*

In this study, a total of 20 EFL second year undergraduate university students who were enrolled for advanced writing skills course were selected using comprehensive sampling method. The students took the “*Advanced Writing Skills*” course as a final remark of writing courses in their university stay after taking three consecutive prerequisite courses including *Communicative English Skills*, *Basic Writing Skills*, and *Intermediate Writing Skills* courses. All of the participants took the pretests, the intervention, and the posttests.

4.3 *Data Gathering Instruments*

The data on the students’ argumentative writing performance were gathered through tests, focus group discussion, and student-reflective journal.

4.3.1 *Tests*

The tests that comprise both pretests and posttests were used to gather data on students’ argumentative essay writing performance. Both the pretests and posttests were prepared by the researcher considering the students’ background information to write essays. Three consecutive argumentative essay writing pretests were given to the participants to understand their existing argumentative essay writing performance before the intervention. Likewise, other similar three consecutive argumentative essay writing posttests were also given to the students after the intervention to determine whether students’ argumentative essay writing performance was improved.

The writing performance rubric used to evaluate the students' argumentative essays was adopted from British Council International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Writing Task descriptors (2018) public version. The IELTS writing task descriptor has four scales under nine bands. The four scales are *Task Achievement*, *Coherence and Cohesion*, *Lexical Resource*, and *Grammatical Range and Accuracy*. The achievement of each scale is taken out of nine points. In other terms, the whole four scales are taken out of 36 points. Thus the students' argumentative essays were evaluated out of 36 points considering task achievement, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, and grammatical range and accuracy. Two experienced EFL university teachers marked students' argumentative essays independently based on the given criteria. Training on the use of the rubric was given to the raters. Inter-rater reliability was calculated with Pearson's correlations (Pearson's, r).

4.3.2 *Focus Group Discussion*

The focus group discussion was needed to gather qualitative data on students' argumentative essay writing performance from the students' voice. The students were asked to forward their views on the relevance of inquiry based learning to enhance their argumentative essay writing performance.

4.3.3 *Student-Reflective Journal*

The student-reflective journal was employed to collect data on the effectiveness of inquiry based argumentative writing from the students' perspective. Accordingly, the participants repeatedly reported their feelings on the effectiveness of inquiry based learning method and their improvements in writing argumentative essays.

4.4 *Procedure and Data Collection*

In the whole process of data gathering, teaching material was prepared; pretests, posttests and intervention were given to the students. Accordingly, before the actual data collection, first, a teaching material used to teach argumentative essay writing was prepared using the literature in accordance with inquiry based learning. The teaching material was developed in the way that enable the students to make observations; pose questions; examine sources; gather, analyze, interpret, and syn-

thesize data; propose answers, explain and predict; communicate findings through discussion and reflection; apply their findings to the real situation, and follow up new questions that arise in the process because these are the focuses of inquiry based learning.

Next to the preparation of the teaching material, three consecutive argumentative essay writing pre-tests were administered to the students to understand their baseline performance on argumentative essay writing before the intervention. Following the pre-tests, the intervention was given.

The intervention was an inquiry based argumentative essay writing instruction delivered for four consecutive weeks using the aforementioned teaching material. In the teaching-learning process the students were engaged in writing tasks including argumentative essay writing topic discovery, discovering supportive information, discovering arrangements of ideas, discovering stylistic choice to write introduction and conclusion, using style to promote unity, specificity and coherence, and producing the final draft of their essays. The students performed various essay writing tasks in small groups, pairs, and individually. They mostly use the Think-Pair-Share active learning technique to think individually, work in pairs, and discuss in small groups. Accordingly. The students practiced argumentative essay writing tasks individually using the inquiry based learning techniques. They also performed some other argumentative essay writing tasks in pairs. In the same manner, the students have done argumentative essay writing activities in small groups. Side by side, the teacher facilitated the learning process in assisting the students to do the writing tasks. When the intervention was given, the student-reflection journal was collected from the students.

Next to the completion of the teaching-learning practice, the participants were given three consecutive argumentative essay writing post-tests which were identical with the pre-tests. The post-tests were needed to determine whether the inquiry based argumentative essay writing instruction make improvements on students' argumentative essay writing performance. By the completion of the post-tests, the focus group discussion was conducted with the participants.

4.5 Data Analysis Methods

The data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative data which were gathered through pretests and posttests were analyzed using *One-Way Repeated Measures ANOVA*,

through Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23 software program. The analysis of *One-Way Repeated Measures ANOVA* was used to examine whether there were differences on students' argumentative essay writing scores before and after the intervention. On the other hand, the qualitative data which were collected through focus group discussion and student-reflective journal were analyzed qualitatively through narration.

5. Results

5.1 Essay Writing Tests

The students were given three pretests and other three posttests in order to measure their argumentative essay writing performance before and after the intervention. Accordingly, this section presents the students' test results gained from the pretests and posttests which were analyzed using *One Way Repeated Measures ANOVA*.

Tests	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Pretest-1	40.55	3.137	20
Pretest-2	40.60	3.409	20
Pretest-3	40.70	3.147	20
Posttest-1	72.75	5.014	20
Posttest-2	72.45	5.094	20
Posttest-3	72.60	5.062	20

Tab. 1: Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows, the students' pretest and posttest results. It indicates that the students' *Mean* scores in *Pretest-1*, *Pretest-2*, and *Pretest-3*, were 40.55, 40.60, and 40.70 respectively. The table also indicates that the students' *Mean* scores in *Posttest-1*, *Posttest -2*, and *Posttest -3*, were 72.75, 72.45, and 72.60 respectively. From these results, it can be seen that the students' *Mean* scores in the pretests were similar. Likewise, their *Mean* scores in the *Posttests* were also similar. However, when the *Mean* scores in the pretests and *Posttests* were compared, they have differences. As it can be seen, the students' *Mean* scores in the posttests were greater than those of the pretests. It indicates that the intervention made the differences on the students' pretest and posttest *Mean scores*. In sum, it can be understood that the inquiry based argumentative essay writing instruction given to the students has positive effects on the students' argumentative essay writing performance.

Source		Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Time	Sphericity Assumed	5	6137.828	589.564	.000
	Greenhouse-Geisser	1.211	25342.119	589.564	.000
	Huynh-Feldt	1.249	24569.421	589.564	.000
	Lower-bound	1.000	30689.142	589.564	.000
Error(Time)	Sphericity Assumed	95	10.411		
	Greenhouse-Geisser	23.009	42.984		
	Huynh-Feldt	23.732	41.674		
	Lower-bound	19.000	52.054		

Tab. 2: Tests of Within-Subjects Effects

Table 2 depicts the Within-Subjects Effects of the tests. In the table, the *Sphericity Assumed* indicated that 5 with-in subjects *df*, and 95 errors *df*. The Mean Square is 6137.828 with 589.564 F, and Significance value is .000. $F(5, 95) = 589.564, p < 0.001$. It means that the students test scores have differences based on time, but the differences in all times are not the same.

In order to identify the difference among each of the test scores, Post Hoc analysis was run. The Post Hoc analysis for a repeated measures variable is a paired sample t-test.

Paired Differences							
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Pre-test 1 - Pre-test 2	-.050	.759	.170	-.295	19	.772
Pair 2	Pre-test 1 - Pre-test 3	-.150	.489	.109	-1.371	19	.186
Pair 3	Pre-test 1 - Post-test 1	-32.200	5.699	1.274	-25.266	19	.000
Pair 4	Pre-test 1 - Post-test 2	-31.900	5.839	1.306	-24.432	19	.000
Pair 5	Pre-test 1 - Post-test 3	-32.050	5.680	1.270	-25.235	19	.000
Pair 6	Pre-test 2 - Pre-test 3	-.100	.968	.216	-.462	19	.649
Pair 7	Pre-test 2 - Post-test 1	-32.150	5.706	1.276	-25.199	19	.000
Pair 8	Pre-test 2 - Post-test 2	-31.850	5.896	1.318	-24.157	19	.000
Pair 9	Pre-test 2 - Post-test 3	-32.000	5.731	1.281	-24.972	19	.000
Pair 10	Pre-test 3 - Post-test 1	-32.050	5.698	1.274	-25.153	19	.000
Pair 11	Pre-test 3 - Post-test 2	-31.750	5.812	1.300	-24.432	19	.000
Pair 12	Pre-test 3 - Post-test 3	-31.900	5.684	1.271	-25.100	19	.000
Pair 13	Post-test 1 - Post-test 2	.300	2.515	.562	.533	19	.600
Pair 14	Post-test 1 - Post-test 3	.150	2.207	.494	.304	19	.764
Pair 15	Post-test 2 - Post-test 3	-.150	1.348	.302	-.497	19	.625

Tab. 3: Paired Samples Test

Table 3 depicts that there were no differences between pretest-1 and pretest-2 (.772); pretest-1 and pretest-3 (.186); pretest-2 and pretest-3 (.649). In the same manner, there were no differences between posttest-1 and posttest-2 (.600); posttest-1 and posttest-3 (.764); posttest-2 and posttest-3 (.625). In contrast, there were differences in all of the remaining combinations (.000). It indicates that the differences were made due to the intervention given to the students. Thus, it can be concluded that the inquiry based argumentative writing instruction improves the students' argumentative essay writing performance.

5.2 Focus Group Discussion

The students' focus group discussion result revealed that the use of inquiry based learning method in argumentative essay writing classes enhances students' argumentative essay writing performance. Most of the focus group discussion participants reported that they did not write effective argumentative essays before they used inquiry based learning. However, after using this method of learning, they have developed their argumentative essay writing performance. For instance, one of the participants voiced:

Before learning through inquiry based learning, I used to write argumentative essays, but I did not know the ways and techniques that used to write argumentative essays. However, after learning in this method, I know how to write argumentative essays because it helps me to know more about argumentative essay such as how to write it, and how to persuade my audiences using various techniques. So, learning through inquiry based learning really supported me to write effective argumentative essays.

In the same manner, another student also mentioned that "I have been writing different argumentative essays since last year, but they were not persuasive. But, after I learned in this method, I could come to identify the opponents' ideas, and how to counter attack my opponents' point of view. As a result, this method highly enhanced my argumentative essay writing performance". In the same way, one of them mentioned that before she used inquiry based learning, she did not know how to write and evaluate argumentative essays, but, after learning through inquiry based learning, she know the clue about how to write and analyze argumentative essays. Likewise, the other focus group

discussion members also reported that the inquiry based learning methods helps them to know different techniques such as how to discover writing topics, gather relevant data on their topic, evaluate the collected data, and write up argumentative essays by incorporating feedbacks from colleagues and experts.

The results gained from the focus group discussion, in general, revealed that using inquiry based learning in argumentative writing class enhances students' argumentative essay writing performance. This is because the method enhanced their performances to discover writing topics, generate ideas, gather and evaluate information from different sources, write up drafts with evidences, discuss with colleague and subject area experts, and write up sound argumentative essays.

5.3 *Student-Reflective Journal*

The results gained from the students' reflective journal indicate that students' argumentative essay writing performance has been improved from time to time while using the inquiry based writing instruction. The students reported that the method is very essential to become good writers because it provides them responsibility to do writing tasks, and guides how to write argumentative essays using rich data. One of the students stated: "The way I am learning argumentative writing is effective compared to the ways I used before this time, because now I get opportunities to discover relevant information from different sources".

The students like the teacher's ways of teaching because the techniques of inquiry based learning used by the teacher help them to ease their argumentative writing problems. The teacher gave them chances to ask questions themselves, and teaches writing by activating the students' knowledge and effort. As a result, the students' argumentative writing skills were improved when they used inquiry based learning.

One of the students note: "Compared to the previous teachers' method of teaching writing skills, I feel comfortable with the current teacher's method of teaching because it guides me to improve writing skills". The students reported that their capability to accomplish writing tasks has been improved because they were learning essay writing skills differently than before. Consequently, they were good to do writing tasks.

Another student also wrote: "Before learning through this method, I just wrote whatever comes on my mind, but now I start using different techniques and my own capacity of generating new ideas to write

better. The strategies that I used in the teaching learning process are effective to improve my argumentative essay writing skills because I have got many things in the lessons”.

As the students reported in the student-reflective journal, the writing tasks given to the students were important to them because the tasks were helpful to know more about how to write argumentative essays. They mentioned that the writing tasks given in the lessons inspired them because the tasks guide them to discover ideas, gather and organize information, discuss with colleagues and experts, and write up good essays. The students mainly stated that the tasks used in the inquiry based writing instruction helped them to improve their argumentative writing skills.

In sum, the results gained from the students-reflective journal showed that the inquiry based leaning method enhances students’ argumentative essay writing performance. This is because inquiry based writing instruction engages students to discover writing topics, gather, evaluate and organize information, discuss with colleagues and experts rather than directly writing drafts.

6. Discussion

Using inquiry based learning in EFL classroom enhances students’ writing performance. In line with this research finding, there are previous research works that show inquiry-based learning has positive impacts on students’ academic achievement. For instance, Boudreau (2017) revealed that inquiry based learning positively affected students’ English language learning because the process of inquiry and self-discovery are the central part of the educational endeavor. As a result, students need the inquiry strategies and heuristics which help them on how to write effective texts, and to grow up as writers. Similarly, a study conducted to assess students’ feedback on the effectiveness of inquiry based learning in second language pedagogy at Whittier College shows that the method enhanced students’ understanding of the course material (Lee, 2014).

The findings of this study imply that inquiry based learning has enhanced EFL students’ argumentative essay writing performance. This is because the method enhanced their performances to discover writing topics, generate ideas, gather and evaluate information from different sources, write up drafts with evidences, discuss with colleague and subject area experts, and write up sound argumentative essays. In line with this research finding, an action research conducted to improve students’

ability in writing through inquiry based learning reveals that inquiry based learning improved students' writing ability. Inquiry based writing instruction has positive effects on students writing performance because the method stresses 'learning writing by doing' with little explicit instruction contrary to lecturing students on how to write. The results also indicates that the students see themselves as writers with real audiences beyond the classroom, learn the processes of posing and responding to questions, and connect academic with everyday concerns (Godbee, 2016).

Inquiry based writing instruction enhances the students' performances to discover writing topics, generate ideas, gather and evaluate information from different sources, write up drafts with evidences, discuss with colleagues and subject area experts, and write up sound argumentative essays. Escalante (2013) also find out that inquiry based learning has positive impacts on EFL students' linguistic skills in general and writing skills in particular. Students who used inquiry based learning techniques in their language learning are better achievers because they have an active role in choosing their own writing topics, and developing the outcomes of their own investigations. The method enhances to acquire vocabulary, explore grammatical structures, and engages in the negotiation of meaning. In sum, using inquiry based writing instruction enhances EFL students' argumentative essay writing performance.

7. Conclusion

The findings of the study revealed that using inquiry based learning in argumentative writing instruction can enhance students' argumentative essay writing performance. The results showed that the use of inquiry based learning techniques in foreign language learning can enhance students' argumentative writing proficiency because the method provides active roles to the students to choose their own writing topics, investigate necessary information, and write up sound texts with appropriate feedback. The students, in inquiry based learning, see themselves as writers with real audiences beyond the classroom, learn the processes of posing and responding to questions, and connect their education with everyday concerns.

In inquiry based writing instruction, students engaged in prewriting tasks through generating ideas; discovering writing topics; exploring information on their writing topics from various sources; explaining their discoveries or concepts gained from the exploration, and elaborate

their thinking through transforming their understanding into their real world situations. Thus, when students come up through this distinct writing process in manipulating such tasks, their argumentative writing skills can be enhanced because this process can develop their ability to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate various arguments. Using inquiry based learning in argumentative writing class can enhance students' argumentative essay writing performance because the method enabled them to discover writing topics, generate ideas, gather and evaluate information, write up drafts with evidences, discuss with colleague and subject area experts, and produce sound argumentative essays.

Therefore, inquiry based learning is suggested as a means to improve students' argumentative writing performance because the method incorporates activity oriented learning, logical arguments, and collaboration. This is to imply the need to promote inquiry based learning which is based on a discovery approach that mostly involve students in seeking, collecting, analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating information based on student interest. It is because using inquiry based learning in writing classes promotes students' academic performance and makes students active, problem solver, autonomous, and lifelong learners.

Finally, the number of participants and the time given to the intervention were relatively small. However, it does not mean that the findings of the study are not representative since the selected participants have similarities with other students. Similarly, it does not mean that the intervention is completely inadequate since the students practiced the whole inquiry process repeatedly. It is to mean that the findings of the study would have been more representative and convincing if a greater number of participants had been included, and more time to the intervention had been used. In addition, it would have been more convincing if a control group had been used in addition to the experimental group. As a result, such future exploration would have contributed to the current study, and is certainly an area ripe for future research. Furthermore, future studies should be also conducted on the effects of inquiry based learning on students' narrative, descriptive, and expository essay writing skills to widen the use of inquiry based learning in EFL writing instruction.

References

- Abdullah, T. S. (2014). Developing Critical Thinking Skills through Writing in an Internet-Based Environment. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 4(1).
- Alamirew, G. M. (2005). *A Study on the Perception of Writing, Writing Instruction, and Students' Writing Performance*. (PhD. Thesis). Addis Ababa University.
- Alberta Learning (2004). *Focus on Inquiry: A teacher's Guide to Implementing Inquiry-based Learning*. <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/0778526666>
- Alemu, H. A. (2004). *An Evaluative Study of ELT Practices in Secondary Schools in Ethiopia 1994 2004*. (PhD Thesis). Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages. India.
- Bekele, B. A. (2011). *The Relationships of Self-esteem and Gender to Writing Performance: AMU Year I students in Focus*. (MA Thesis). Addis Ababa University.
- Boudreau, N. S. (2017). A Principled Revolution in the Teaching of Writing. *English Journal*. 106(5): 70-75.
- British Council. (2018). *IELTS Task 2 Writing Band Descriptors: Public Version*.
- Bruner, J.S. (1961). The Act of Discovery. *Harvard Educational Review*, 31(1): 21-32.
- Daniel, D. (2004). Observations and Reflections of the Higher Education Teachers on the Quality of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in Ethiopia. *The Ethiopian Journal of Education*, 1(1): 63 81.
- Dawit, A. (2013). Enhancing students' writing skills through the genre approach. *International Journal of English and Literature*, 4(5): 242-248.
- Edward, H. (1983). Writing: Process and Convention. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 11.
- Escalante, P. A. (2013). Inquiry-Based Learning in an English as a Foreign Language Class: A Proposal. *Journal of Modern Language*, 19: 479-485.
- Ferris, D., & Hedgcock, J. (2013). *Teaching L2 composition: Purpose, process, and practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Routledge.
- Godbee, B. (2016). Why Inquiry Matters: An Argument and Model for Inquiry-Based Writing Courses. *The Wisconsin English Journal*, 58(2): 7-21.
- Graham, S., MacArthur, C. A., & Fitzgerald, J. (2013). *Best practices in writing instruction*. New York, NJ: Guilford Press.
- Hamid, A. (2010). Students' Problems with Cohesion and Coherence in EFL Essay Writing in Egypt: Different Perspectives. *Literacy Information and Computer Education Journal (LICEJ)*, 1(4).
- Hamid, M. (2011). *The EFL Essay Writing Difficulties of Egyptian Student Teachers of English: Implications for Essay Writing Curriculum and Instruction*. Doctoral Thesis. University of Exeter: Egypt.
- Hardin, C. (2009). *Effectiveness and Accountability of the Inquiry-Based Methodology in Middle School Science*. School of Education. Dominican University of California.

- Harris, D. E. (2015). The Status, Roles and Challenges of Teaching English Language in Ethiopia Context: the case of Selected Primary and Secondary Schools in Hawassa University Technology Village Area. *International Journal of Sociology of Education*, 4(2): 182-196.
- Heather, C. (2015). Teaching Argument Writing: An Inquiry Process. *Making the Common Core Come Alive*, 5(1).
- Lee, Y. H. (2014). Inquiry-based Teaching in Second and Foreign Language Pedagogy. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 5(6): 1236-1244.
- Llewellyn, D. (2002). *Inquire Within: Implementing Inquiry-Based Science Standards*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.
- MacArthur, C.A., Philippakos, Z.A., & Graham, S. (2016). A Multi component Measure of Writing Motivation with Basic College Writers. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 39(1): 31-43.
- Marshall, J.C. (2013). *Succeeding with Inquiry in Science and Math Classrooms. What Framework Supports Effective Inquiry-Based Practice?* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Mesfin, A. (2013). *An Exploratory Study on the Implementation of the Process Approach to the Teaching/Learning of the Course Basic Writing Skills: The Case of Hawassa University*. Doctoral Thesis. Addis Ababa University.
- Mohamed, I. (2015). University Students' English Writing Problems: Diagnosis and Remedy. *International Journal of English Language Teaching*, 3(3): 40-52.
- Muhaimeed, S. (2013). *Task-Based Language Teaching Vs. Traditional Way of English Language Teaching in Saudi Intermediate Schools: A Comparative Study*. (Doctoral Thesis). Kent State University.
- Owen, N. (2006). *The Effects of Inquiry-Based Teaching on Attitudes, Self-Efficacy, and Science Reasoning Abilities of Students in Introductory Biology Courses at a Rural, Open-Enrollment Community College*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Oklahoma State University.
- Qing, L. (2007). An Analysis of Language Teaching Approaches and Methods: Effectiveness and Weakness. *US-China Education Review*, 4(1).
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T.S. (2001). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sandoval, W. (2005). Understanding students' practical epistemologies and their influence on learning through inquiry. *Science Education*, 89(4): 634-656.
- Singman, C. (2017). Towards an Inquiry-Based Language Learning: Can a Wiki Help? *International Journal of Research in English Education*, 2(3): 32-46.
- Yen, P.H. (2014). *The Impact of PPP and TBLT on Vietnamese Students' Writing Performance and Self-Regulation*. Doctoral Thesis. KU Leuven University.