



# Practicing Dogme ELT to Enhance L2 Academic Essay Writing Skills

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# ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

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Conflicts of interest: None Funding: None English language has been a pressing need of people all over the world; so, the experts are making efforts for effective and successful teaching and learning of different language skills through innovations in teaching approaches and methods. As a new teaching approach, Dogme ELT was introduced in 2000, which claimed success and better outcomes in different language teaching areas. Focusing on the claim of this new teaching approach, this study was conducted to explore the effectiveness of Dogme ELT to enhance English language competence in academic writing skills. For this purpose, a Classroom Action Research (CAR) was conducted, and the data was collected through a diagnostic assessment test on the very first day and a final test after Dogme ELT treatment. The collected data was analyzed through qualitative and quantitative methods to record the results of the study. The research participants' performance in the diagnostics test and in the final test after Dogme ELT treatment shows that this new teaching approach is very effective and successful to enhance English language competence in academic writing skills.

Key words: Dogme ELT, Classroom Action Research, Academic Writing Skills

# **INTRODUCTION**

## Background

English language learning has been a demanding need of people in the world. Millions of people voluntarily make efforts to learn English for academic and professional purposes (Long & Doughty, 2009). Like all languages, learning of English is full of problems for foreign and second language learners (Reader's Digest, 1998). It creates difficulties in different areas not only for the advanced level students but also for the language teachers. That is why, most learners are not good at the basic language skills. Among these four basic skills, writing is the most important one for academic and non-academic purposes. In Pakistani government schools and colleges, academic writing is not taught as a subject. The teachers focus on teaching writing through grammar activities to help students pass their examinations; however, academic writing is taught as a subject in many countries of the world. Therefore, the study gives much importance to all the innovative steps in teaching methodologies to enhance academic writing skills, and Dogme ELT is one of them, which claims better learning outcomes. The pedagogical practices for students to enhance academic writing skills have been hotly debated, and the experts of L2 writing have lamented the lack of a coherent writing theory (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2004). The available models of teaching L2 writing

are not bringing better learning outcomes. Some address L2 writers' processes (Sasaki, 2000), whereas others focus on the knowledge that writers bring to the writing tasks, and what they share with the readers in a discourse community (Matsuda, 1997). This research study has tried to fill the gap in language teaching methodologies and contributed to the existing knowledge on the subject by exploring the effectiveness of Dogme ELT to enhance English language competence in academic writing skills through a Classroom Action Research (CAR).

# Significance and Objectives of the Study

Most of the English language learners are not good at academic writing skills, and the educationists, psychologists and linguists are making efforts to find better teaching approaches and methods, and Dogme ELT is one of these language teaching approaches. This study focuses on teaching academic writing skills through exploring the effectiveness of Dogme ELT treatment. Academic writing in L2 has been one of the important research topics. Tarnopolsky (2000) stresses on how to make teaching of L2 writing more enjoyable without referring to its implication for second language learning (SLL). Because of the learners' incompetence in academic writing, the students may obtain low grades or fail their academic and competitive exams as well as unable to

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qualify for higher education. The objective of this Classroom Action Research (CAR) is to explore the effectiveness of Dogme ELT to enhance intermediate level learners' English language competence in academic writing skills in an unplugged classroom.

## **Research Questions**

To achieve its objectives, this study has focused on the following research questions:

- How Dogme ELT can be better practiced for enhancing English academic writing skills?
- How do various writing activities in a Dogme ELT class help learners enhance their academic essay writing skills?

# **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

According to Mercer and Swann (2001), there was no English teaching, in Britain at least, until about 700 AD, but King Alfred (849-901) developed an education system with a role of Old English. The teaching goal was literacy in Latin, and learning English was only a step forward of it. Languages were taught through the same old methodology of teaching Latin known as the Grammar-Translation Method. In the mid and late 19th century, opposition to the GTM developed in Europe known as the Reform Movement, which ultimately led to the development of the Direct Method. After this, a popular teaching approach and method appeared known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Situational Language Teaching and Audio-lingual were no longer felt to be appropriate methodologies. (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), but some of the popular teaching approaches and methods of this century are still in use after some modifications. They include the Audio-lingual Method, Content-based Instruction, Task-based Language Teaching, Computer Assisted Language Learning and the Eclectic Approach. The new trends in technologies have supplemented the teaching of foreign languages, and classroom practices are changing every day. Web-based technologies, powerful Internet and educational technology are the most popular fashion in ELT. It includes E-mail, Blogs, Online Tests and Quizzes, Instant Messenger, Skype, iPods, WhatsApp, Google Duo, Online Translators, Imo, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn and others. Many brandnames of teaching approaches and methods have been introduced for effective teaching of L2.

In 1995, a group of Danish filmmakers created and signed the "Dogme 95 Manifesto" and their objective was to purify filmmaking by refusing special effects, unnatural post-production and modification. Thus Dogme-type principles were also applied to the ELT classrooms where we can see the quantity of the coursebooks, an embarrassment of complementary videos, course related CDs, photocopiable resources, word lists, website references for online practice, workbooks, teachers' books, downloadable materials and software packages for the learners of different levels (Thornbury, 2000). Therefore, the name Dogme, the philosophy and teaching principles came from that filmmaking when Scott Thornbury's article *A Dogme for EFL* was

published in IATEFL in 2000. Thornbury (2005) wrote an article "Dogme: Dancing in the dark" that provoked some sympathetic mutterings, and these mutterings evolved into the Dogme on-line discussion list where over 300 members triggered about 7000 comments. Out of this long conversation, a number of principles have emerged that dogmetists seem to hold in common. These principles include interactivity, engagement, dialogic processes, scaffolded conversation, emergence, affordances, voice, empowerment, relevance and critical use. In Teaching Unplugged, Luke Meddings and Scott Thornbury state the precepts that lay the foundations of Dogme ELT and establish grounds for an unplugged classroom activities and procedures (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009). They are: (a) Dogme Approach is conversation-driven, (b) Dogme Approach is materials-light and (c) Dogme Approach focusses on emergent language: (Zakime, 2018). Dogme ELT shares characteristics of different ELT approaches, so it claims to produce better results. Dogme and CLT; for example, focus on interaction between learners and teachers and the learners themselves. In TBLT, the context of language use is developed naturally, and there is no control on students' language. Dogme ELT also derives learning outcomes from learners' emergent needs (Zakime, 2018).

Dogme ELT has similarities with other teaching approaches and methods that focus on natural learning in real-life situations. It is believed that Dogme ELT is a combination of approaches, methods and techniques, and it is undoubtedly reinventing the *pedagogical wheel*, so it also won 2010 British Council award for innovation (Sherriff, 2012). Despite all that, there has been much criticism on different aspects of Dogme ELT which positively encourages its proponents to justify their beliefs and recount their classroom practices (Thornbury, 2013). Sherriff (2012) discussed 20 Steps of teaching unplugged and how Meddings described the lesson as a positive starting point by asking a question that the learners could respond. Xerri (2012) also developed monthly Dogme ELT lessons in an academic year and obtained data through each lesson she taught, learners' feedback and interviews about their new learning experience. She states that Dogme principles of interaction and language emerging can also be used to prepare for examination. Bryndal (2014) also designed a Dogme lesson to practice household vocabulary problems, and her data analysis showed that students liked the lesson more than the traditional material-based lessons. According to Rahul (2015), Dogme ELT advocates teaching of English without prescribed materials focusing on learners' needs through interaction, and this helps language to emerge from learners' intellect. Bekaryan (2016) wrote an article "Experimenting with Dogme" focusing on the communicative approach not reliant on coursebooks and advocating conversation-driven communication in the classroom. Coskun (2017) conducted a study in which three university teachers developed and presented a lesson. The participants expressed their opinions positively. In 2018, another research was conducted in the Kurdistan region of Iraq focusing on the learners' ability to speak English, and it was recommended how 'Dogme Lite' type curriculum might be

applied at regional level schools (Rion, Kakamad, & Fatah, 2018). It is now obvious that Dogme ELT encourages teachers to plan their lesson carefully to consider the emergent language. A few critics state that this approach is only for lazy teachers who cannot prepare their lessons, but it is not so because a lazy teacher can do nothing in an unplugged classroom based on the following principles (Figure 1).

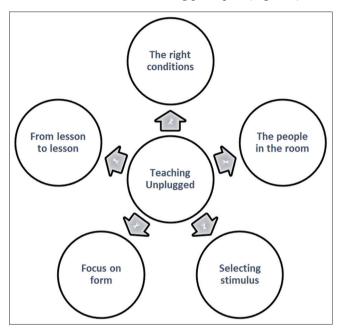


Figure 1. Principles of Dogme classroom

Dogme ELT can be very effective to enhance English language competence in academic writing. It is all because of teaching without coursebooks, three core principles related to the practical and psychological aspects of human life, the empowerment and freedom of teachers and students in the classroom. Academic writing cannot be taught and developed by sticking to the coursebook contents; it is a continuous process, which required the teachers' focus on learners' individual writing problems, and Dogme ELT can do it in a better way. The present study was conducted to explore its effectiveness to enhance English language competence in academic writing at intermediate level in Pakistan. The study will open a new intellectual window to explore the effectiveness of Dogme ELT in other related areas or test its effectiveness in comparison with other modern teaching approaches and methods to improve teaching and learning of different language skills.

# MATERIAL AND METHOD

To conduct this Classroom Action Research (CAR) successfully, the study followed a well-defined and thoughtfully selected research plan that focused on organised steps, and the data was collected through a diagnostic assessment test and a final test after Dogme ELT treatment. These tests focused on relevant points related to the rules and techniques of academic writing skills, and the study focused on these points during the treatment in this unplugged classroom. The data was analyzed through qualitative and quantitative methods using SPSS 23 and MS Excel 2013. The study focused only on enhancing Pakistani students' academic essay writing skills through Dogme ELT Approach at intermediate level.

The participants of this CAR were only the twenty male students of intermediate level who willingly joined this Dogme ELT class to enhance their academic writing skills. The research participants' learning behaviors and the level of motivation were different because of their family backgrounds and the environments of the public and private schools where they studied. Moreover, there are many reasons and factors, which force and bond the researchers to delimit their research studies such as time factors, available resources and some requirements. Therefore, the researchers delimited this research study as stated below:

- a) The students of first year at intermediate level were selected for this research.
- b) All the students were the boys from 18 to 20 years of age.
- c) All the students were the classmates at Aspire Academy Samanabad, Faisalabad, Pakistan.
- d) Only five students got their secondary education from the private schools, and other fifteen studied at the gov-ernment schools.
- e) Only eight students got their secondary education from the schools of rural areas of Faisalabad district.

Focusing on the participants' errors and mistakes in the diagnostics assessment test, they were taught academic writing skills through Dogme ELT treatment using different teaching and learning activities including the class-talks, freedom to ask as many questions as they could ask to understand the lessons, empowerment to write course contents and teaching-learning activities for each learning item.

#### **DATA ANALYSIS**

To explore the effectiveness of Dogme ELT treatment to enhance English language competence in academic writing skills, the collected data was analyzed in qualitative and quantitative forms to understand the research participants' performance and learning outcomes.

### Quantitative Data Analysis of the Diagnostic Assessment Test and the Final Test

The following results of the quantitative data analysis of the diagnostic assessment test and the final test help us understand the research participants' better understanding and gradual enhancement in academic writing skills through Dogme ELT treatment.

The Table 1 shows the results of the Diagnostic Assessment Test (DAT) which was conducted on the very first day of this action research class, and it focused on all the important areas of academic writing skills and techniques. The mean score of this test is 5.45; the median score is 5.5 and the mode score is 6. These results show the research participants' poor knowledge and performance in academic writing skills, and it was all because they never learnt academic writing skills as a subject.

In the Figure 2, the first bar on the left shows the mean score of the diagnostic test that is 5.45; the second one shows

| ~         |                       |          | - /        |
|-----------|-----------------------|----------|------------|
| Serial no | Research participants | Marks-20 | Percentage |
| 1         | Participant: 1        | 6        | 30%        |
| 2         | Participant: 2        | 2        | 10%        |
| 3         | Participant: 3        | 3        | 15%        |
| 4         | Participant: 4        | 5        | 25%        |
| 5         | Participant: 5        | 4        | 20%        |
| 6         | Participant: 6        | 2        | 10%        |
| 7         | Participant: 7        | 6        | 30%        |
| 8         | Participant: 8        | 7        | 35%        |
| 9         | Participant: 9        | 11       | 55%        |
| 10        | Participant: 10       | 6        | 30%        |
| 11        | Participant: 11       | 4        | 20%        |
| 12        | Participant: 12       | 5        | 25%        |
| 13        | Participant: 13       | 6        | 30%        |
| 14        | Participant: 14       | 2        | 10%        |
| 15        | Participant: 15       | 8        | 40%        |
| 16        | Participant: 16       | 5        | 25%        |
| 17        | Participant: 17       | 6        | 30%        |
| 18        | Participant: 18       | 9        | 45%        |
| 19        | Participant: 19       | 7        | 35%        |
| 20        | Participant: 20       | 5        | 25%        |
| Mean      | 5.45                  |          |            |
| Median    | 5.5                   |          |            |
| Mode      | 6                     |          |            |

 Table 1. The results of Diagnostic Assessment Test (DAT)

the median score of the test that is 5.5, and the last bar shows the mode score of the test that is 6. The digits of this result prove that the participants knew little about academic writing because they had never studied this subject before. Most of them did not even know the basic terminology used in academic writing.

The Table 2 shows the results of the diagnostic test and the final test of the research participants of this Classroom Action Research (CAR). The mean score of the diagnostic test is 5.42, but the mean score of the final test is 15.4. The median score of the diagnostic test is 5.5, but of the final test is 15.5, and the mode score of the diagnostic test is 6, but the mode score of the final test is 16. Thus, the mean, median and mode scores of the results show a great differ-

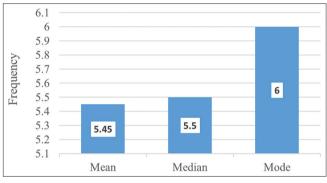


Figure 2. Graphic representation of the results of the diagnostic assessment test (DAT)

| Table 2. The results of the diagnostic assessment tes | t (DAT) | ) and the final | test (FT) |
|---|---------|-----------------|-----------|
|---|---------|-----------------|-----------|

| The Diagnostic Assessment Test (DAT) |                |          |            | The Final Test (FT) |                |          |            |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|----------|------------|---------------------|----------------|----------|------------|
| S/N                                  | Participants   | Marks-20 | Percentage | S/N                 | Participants   | Marks-20 | Percentage |
| 1                                    | Participant:1  | 6        | 30%        | 1                   | Participant:1  | 16       | 80%        |
| 2                                    | Participant:2  | 2        | 10%        | 2                   | Participant:2  | 13       | 65%        |
| 3                                    | Participant:3  | 3        | 15%        | 3                   | Participant:3  | 13       | 65%        |
| 4                                    | Participant:4  | 5        | 25%        | 4                   | Participant:4  | 14       | 70%        |
| 5                                    | Participant:5  | 4        | 20%        | 5                   | Participant:5  | 15       | 75%        |
| 6                                    | Participant:6  | 2        | 10%        | 6                   | Participant:6  | 14       | 70%        |
| 7                                    | Participant:7  | 6        | 30%        | 7                   | Participant:7  | 17       | 85%        |
| 8                                    | Participant:8  | 7        | 35%        | 8                   | Participant:8  | 14       | 70%        |
| 9                                    | Participant:9  | 11       | 55%        | 9                   | Participant:9  | 18       | 90%        |
| 10                                   | Participant:10 | 6        | 30%        | 10                  | Participant:10 | 16       | 80%        |
| 11                                   | Participant:11 | 4        | 20%        | 11                  | Participant:11 | 14       | 70%        |
| 12                                   | Participant:12 | 5        | 25%        | 12                  | Participant:12 | 16       | 80%        |
| 13                                   | Participant:13 | 6        | 30%        | 13                  | Participant:13 | 17       | 85%        |
| 14                                   | Participant:14 | 2        | 10%        | 14                  | Participant:14 | 12       | 60%        |
| 15                                   | Participant:15 | 8        | 40%        | 15                  | Participant:15 | 18       | 90%        |
| 16                                   | Participant:16 | 5        | 25%        | 16                  | Participant:16 | 15       | 75%        |
| 17                                   | Participant:17 | 6        | 30%        | 17                  | Participant:17 | 16       | 80%        |
| 18                                   | Participant:18 | 9        | 45%        | 18                  | Participant:18 | 18       | 90%        |
| 19                                   | Participant:19 | 7        | 35%        | 19                  | Participant:19 | 17       | 85%        |
| 20                                   | Participant:20 | 5        | 25%        | 20                  | Participant:20 | 15       | 75%        |
| Mean                                 |                | 5.45     | Mean       |                     | 15.4           |          |            |
| Median                               |                | 5.5      | Median     |                     | 15.5           |          |            |
| Mode                                 |                | 6        | Mode       |                     | 16             |          |            |

ence in research participants' knowledge and performance in the final test of academic writing skills. These results prove that teaching academic writing through Dogme ELT was a very effective and successful teaching experience. The research participants memorized and understood the rules and techniques of academic writing through the class-talks and many other class activities in an unplugged classroom. They answered most of the academic writing questions in the final test, which they could not answer in the diagnostic assessment test.

The Figure 3 focuses only on the percentage of the results. The small bar shows that the results of the diagnostic test are 27%, and the large bar describes that the results of the final test are 77% after the Dogme ELT treatment. The difference in the length of bars describes the vast improvement in participants' knowledge and performance after learning academic writing through Dogme ELT. They successfully answered most of the questions in the final test, which they could not answer in the diagnostic assessment test. It showed their successful learning through Dogme ELT and effectiveness of this modern approach.

In the Figure 4, the small bars show the results of the diagnostic assessment test, and the large bars describe the results of the final test. The final test of the participants was conducted after the Dogme ELT treatment. The comparison of these results shows a great difference in the mean, median and mode, as already stated in Table 2, which describes the substantial improvement in research participants' knowledge

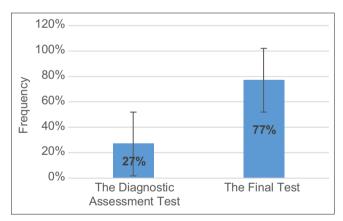


Figure 3. Graphic representation of the results of the Diagnostic test and the final test

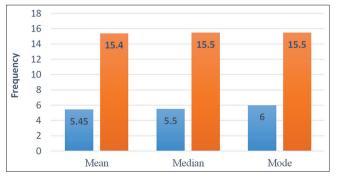


Figure 4. Graphic representation of the results of the diagnostic test and the final test

and performance after learning academic writing through Dogme ELT Approach. They successfully answered most of the questions in the final test, which they could not answer in their diagnostic assessment test.

## FINDINGS

The qualitative data analysis of the participants' diagnostic assessment tests shows their poor knowledge and performance in all the related areas of academic writing skills. It was all because they had never studied academic writing before coming to this class, and it was the first time they were learning this subject. They were trained to translate some sentences and paragraphs to do their exam questions. They learnt all this through GTM in their traditional school classes. Some of the participants chose correct answers randomly. They did not understand the rules and techniques applied in those questions, and the study confirmed it in the class discussions with the participants. The students knew nothing about Dogme ELT and teaching of academic writing skills as a subject.

The results of the final test showed participants' knowledge and better performance because of their learning through Dogme ELT treatment. The learners were better motivated to learn because they were coming to their classes without their coursebooks and without the fear of quizzes, midterm and exams. Moreover, the participants were very happy and energetic in their classes because they were learning everything through the class-talks as a fun. They could memorize most of the lessons in their classes without spending extra time and making extra efforts for memorization of their daily work, and it was all because of the interesting and motivational class-talks and freedom of asking questions until they fully understood the topic.

Based on analysis of the collected data, the study came to the findings as discussed below:

- a) The results of this research study show that the participants enhance their English language competence in academic writing when they had the opportunity to learn it through Dogme ELT The result of the diagnostic test was 27%, but then the result of the final test was 77% as shown in Figure 3.
- b) The learners were taught academic writing skills without a coursebook through the class-talks and step-bystep teaching-learning activities which increased their level of motivation as well as understanding of the subject.
- c) The findings of this research study also suggest that the infusions of Dogme ELT lessons to academic writing activities proved that they were of great help to enhance English language competence in academic writing skills.
- d) Learning academic essay writing through the class-talks helped the learners memorize most of the writing rules in a natural learning environment, and they did not spend extra time on cramming these writing rules.
- e) The learners' empowerment to write their own course contents according to their real-life need and interests made the learning process easier and faster.

- f) The freedom to ask questions during the class-talks is a great fun for the learners, and this harmless fun made their learning effective and competitive.
- g) The study also found that the effective learning of compound and complex sentences, linking words and academic writing rules and techniques were the positive results of the infusion of Dogme ELT lessons and learning activities through step-by-step handouts, drawings, the class-talks and learners' empowerment to write their own course contents.
- h) The findings of this research study also suggest that academic writing skills can be taught effectively and successfully in Pakistani schools and colleges through Dogme ELT Approach, but it cannot be done without the availability of competent and experienced teachers. For this purpose, the teacher training courses should be updated according to the needs of modern and unplugged classroom.

The positive results of this study affirm the findings of previous studies. For instance, Xerri (2012) found Dogme principles of interaction and language emerging very effective for exam purposes. Likewise, Bryndal (2014) reported a great success of designing a Dogme lesson to practice household vocabulary. Similarly, Rahul (2015) also advocated teaching of English without prescribed materials focusing on learners' needs through interaction. Bekaryan (2016) described his experiment focusing on the communicative approach and advocated conversation-driven communication in the classroom. Kim (2019) wrote about conversation-for-learning and this is what Dogme ELT says conversation-driven. Keeping in view the present situation of Covid-19, Miura stated "the pandemic brought about many new tools and resources never before seen or heard by the majority of the teaching community, and I came to the conclusion that Dogme is nowadays more recent, and perhaps, more relevant than it has ever been". All these researchers tried Dogme in different areas of ELT. In a similar study, Stones (2018) worked on Dogme ELT for IELTS essay writing and found it very effective. So, this study, like many previous studies, appreciates this modern teaching approach on account of its better learning outcomes.

#### **Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications**

The study concludes that Dogme ELT is an effective teaching approach that is helpful in enhancing the linguistic skills of L2 learners, especially their academic essay writing skills. This approach, in addition to influencing the performance of the learners, also creates interest and enhances class participation of the learners. In the post-method ear when the successful teachers are employing the eclectic approach combing the features of various L2 teaching methods, the Dogme ELT is a significant contribution providing the learners and the teachers a flexible and autonomous environment to adopt the teaching process as per learners and situational needs. In Dogme ELT, the different teaching and learning activities, learners' coming to the classes without any prescribed coursebook, learning through the class-talks, learners' empowerment, freedom and engagement in an unplugged classroom help to explore the effectiveness of this new teaching approach. The teacher in Dogme ELT classroom, may design many supportive tasks and discuss them in the class-talks with maximum opportunities of asking questions to enhance learners' motivation, understanding and performance in L2 learning, especially in academic writing skills. Finally, the study points out very clearly that Dogme ELT Approach has proved itself more successful, effective and result oriented to enhance English language competence in academic writing skills.

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