

Enhancing L2 Writing through Mastery Learning: Pedagogical Implications from a Case Study

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本稿は完全習得型学習に基づく第二言語ライティング指導の効果について検証することを目的とする。特に完全習得型学習の特徴である、明確な評価基準・目標の提示と形成的評価が学習者に与える影響について、ケーススタディを用いて調査した。結果から、目標を明示することがライティングにおける論理展開の基本的な理解を促すことが示唆された一方で、その表層的な理解が逆にライティングの妨げとなる可能性も明らかになった。また形成的評価について、学習者のレディネスが整わない場合、そして学習者が書き直しにおいて回避方略を好む場合は、必ずしも学習の促進にはならないことが示唆された。

キーワード : mastery learning, instructional alignment, formative feedback, readiness, formal reduction

1. Introduction

This paper explores the impacts of mastery learning on the improvement of second language learners' writing skills, with a particular emphasis on how presenting a model text and assessment criteria and giving formative assessment, vital components of mastery learning, facilitate their learning. This paper is not intended to show statistically verified evidence that can be generalised to other learners; rather its aim is to thoroughly examine a few individual cases, qualitatively analysing learners' progress over a series of writing instruction programmes drawing on mastery learning. Based on the results of the study, the paper suggests pedagogical implications for the application of mastery learning to second language writing instruction.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Mastery Learning

Mastery learning is a teaching approach proposed by Benjamin A Bloom (Guskey, 2022), which aims to help learners, regardless of their learning styles or abilities, achieve their learning goals through individualised, appropriate instruction (Guskey and Anderson, 2013). The key characteristics of this approach

are: 1) instructional alignment and 2) feedback, corrective, and enrichment process.

Instructional alignment refers to the consistency between learning goals, instruction and assessment. In a typical mastery learning programme, learners are presented with a clear description of the learning objectives at the start of the course, receive instruction aligned with the objectives and undergo assessments that reflect the above-mentioned learning objectives. In other words, learners are expected to fully understand learning objectives, engage in learning activities designed to help learners achieve the goals and confirm through assessment whether they have attained them.

The other key feature is feedback, enrichment and corrective process. Feedback is given as a formative assessment to identify what learners have learnt well and what they have not. If the assessment indicates a satisfactory level of achievement, learners proceed to enrichment activities, which are to encourage further learning. Meanwhile, if learners are found to have fallen short of the achievement standard, they engage in corrective activities, where they address their own difficulties identified by the assessment. Upon completing this individualised learning process, they undergo formative assessment again, whereby they confirm the mastery of learning targets.

The typical procedure and the key features of mastery learning can be summarised as follows:

1. Presenting clear learning goals and achievement standards (Instructional alignment)
2. Delivering instruction consistent with the learning goals (Instructional alignment)
3. Conducting formative assessments identifying areas for improvement (Feedback)
4. Assigning those who have showed 'mastery' extended activities as an encouragement for further learning (Enrichment)
5. Giving those who have yet to master the learning targets a focused instruction for overcoming learning challenges (Correctives)
6. Conducting a formative assessment again to see if learners have achieved the learning goals (Feedback)

2.2. The Application of Mastery Learning to L2 Writing Instruction

Classrooms in Japan typically have relatively large student numbers for language learning, and those in the author's school are no exception; there are 40 students per class, and, moreover, their language proficiency varies considerably. This environment underscores the need for a teaching approach that is feasible in a large class and also able to facilitate individual students' learning.

For this reason, the author has applied mastery learning to L2 language teaching. Nego (2024), for example, created a syllabus, materials and lesson plans for teaching argumentative essay writing, drawing on the mastery learning framework. In this programme, learners were presented at the start of the course with a rubric, created from a genre analysis of argumentative text, as an assessment standard and received instruction on how to write argumentative essays. After the instruction, they wrote an essay, on which a formative assessment was given. Subsequently, they revised the essay based on feedback, submitted it and received further feedback on it again.

Through the implementation of this teaching programme, the author gained several insights into the effects of mastery learning on L2 writing skills. First, the presentation of a model text and rubric assessment criteria, a key feature of mastery learning, appear to have immediate effects on learners' rhetorical skills. Specifically, learners seem to grasp the model rhetorical pattern and apply it to their writing within a relatively short period of time. This insight is, however, not verified yet as the author did not compare learners' texts before and after the instruction.

Second, formative feedback does not always seem to facilitate the learning of language use. For instance, errors concerning the usage of adverbs and conjunctions persisted among some learners' writing; they used an adverb 'however' as a conjunction (e.g. **Some may think it is difficult, however, it is actually easy*) while others corrected their errors soon after they had received feedback and did not repeat it again. Previous studies have investigated the effects of different types of feedback (Tono and Kanatani, 1995) and the effects on different kinds of grammar items (Itagaki and MacManus, 1998). However, other factors, such as learners' traits, may also influence these outcomes.

Considering the issues mentioned above, this paper explores the following questions:

1. Does the presentation of a model text, instruction and repeated practice improve learners' writing skills, particularly in terms of the rhetorical skills?
2. Does formative assessment help learners improve their writing skills with

regard to language use? If not, what factor(s) may influence learning?

3. Study

3.1. Participants

This study involved five junior high school students, all of whom voluntarily took part in the study. Two of them (hereinafter referred to as Student A and B) have already got Eiken 2nd Grade certificate preparing for the Eiken Pre-1st Grade test while the other three (Student C, D and E) were preparing for the Eiken 2nd Grade test. Student A, B, and C completed the learning programme given in this study while Student D and E did not. Therefore, data taken from Student A, B, and C were analysed.

3.2. Procedure

The participants undergo the following procedure shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The Procedure of the Experiment

1st essay	write the 1st argumentative essay	- Formative Assessment
	receive formative feedback on the essay and watch an instruction video as to how to write an argumentative essay	- Feedback - Instructional alignment
	revise the essay drawing on the feedback and the instruction	- Corrective
2nd essay	write the 2nd essay	- Formative Assessment
	receive formative feedback on the essay	- Feedback
	revise the essay drawing on the feedback and the instruction	- Corrective

3rd essay	write the 3rd essay	- Formative Assessment
	receive formative feedback on the essay	- Feedback
	revise the essay drawing on the feedback and the instruction	- Corrective

Initially, the participants wrote an essay before receiving any instruction, for this essay was later compared with the third essay to examine the progress through the programme. They received formative feedback on the essay and watched an instruction video (see 3.4.1. Instruction Video). The video was intended to teach a typical essay structure and frequently used expressions, as well as the assessment standard. Afterward, they revised the essays as a corrective activity. This procedure was repeated for the second and third essays.

3.3. Essay Topic

The essay topics were developed by the author, drawing on resources from National Association of Debate in Education (2024). Below are the topics given to the participants:

1. There are many world heritage sites in Japan. Some of them suffer from too many tourists. Some people say that the Japanese government should limit the number of visitors to world heritage sites. Do you agree or disagree with this idea?
2. Some junior high schools in Japan have studying-abroad programs and students there stay overseas at least one month. Do you think the number of this kind of program will increase in the future?
3. Today, many junior high school students have their own smartphones and use them every day. However, some people think that students should not use them and should limit the use of them. Do you think it is a good idea?

3.4. Teaching Materials

3.4.1. Instruction Video

After the 1st essay writing, the participants watched the instruction video showing a model text and an assessment rubric, which explains a typical argumentative essay structure, frequently used expressions and assessment standards. This video was intended to ensure instructional alignment, a critical aspect of mastery learning.

3.4.2. Model Text

The participants were presented with the model text, which exemplifies a typical structure and expressions frequently used in argumentative essays. This text was developed using genre analysis, an approach to examine text features of a target genre and thereby identify typical rhetorical moves and language use (Hyland, 2021).

One notable feature of this model text is that it shows the structure of the essay by numbers. By following these numbers, the participants could realise a typical rhetorical pattern, comprehend and apply common expressions and, moreover, check whether their essay has necessary elements or not. The material is presented in Appendix 1.

3.4.3. Rubric

There are three types of rubric scoring systems: holistic, analytical and primary trait scoring (Perkins, 1983). While each of them has strengths and weaknesses, this study adopts the analytical scoring rubric, for it can illustrate how well learners perform in each analytical criterion and therefore provide insightful formative feedback (Perkins, 1983). The components of the analytical rubric of this study were four fold: 1) Content, 2) Structure, 3) Vocabulary and 4) Grammar. These components are based on the framework described by Nihon Eigo Kentei Kyokai (2024). On the same page are several descriptions which illustrate the qualities of good essays. The author modified the descriptions to make them more approachable for the participants.

Table 2 : Rubric and Descriptors Based on Nihon Eigo Kentei Kyokai (2024)

Content	Structure	Vocabulary	Grammar
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clearly show one’s opinion on the topic • support one’s opinion with several perspectives • explain possible causes and effects • provide examples to illustrate reasoning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • display a clear structure • use appropriate expressions to signal rhetorical moves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use topic-appropriate vocabulary • use vocabulary correctly • avoid unnecessary repetitions of the same vocabulary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use various sentence structures • display grammatical accuracy

3.5. Feedback

The author gave formative assessment and feedback on each essay, using the rubric and annotating the essays to highlight areas for improvement. First of all, an overall evaluation was given to each component, either A, B or C:

A: almost all the elements of the component satisfied

B: one or a few elements missing or not satisfied

C: most elements not satisfied

The author indicated which elements are satisfied with a circle (satisfying) or a triangle (not satisfying) to each descriptor. Additionally, the aforementioned numbers (see 3.4.2. Model Text) were added to sentences to help the participants notice missing or not satisfying elements in Content and Structure. As for Vocabulary and Grammar, words and phrases requiring correction or replacement were highlighted in orange and yellow, for Vocabulary and Grammar respectively. A sample feedback sheet is included in Appendix 2.

4. Results and Discussion

The research questions of this study are 1) *Does the presentation of a model*

text, instruction and repeated practice improve learners' writing skills, particularly in terms of the rhetorical skills?; and 2) *Does formative assessment help learners improve their writing skills with regard to language use? If not, what factor(s) may influence learning?* To answer research question 1), the first and the third essays are compared in terms of rhetorical moves. The essays analysed are in Appendix 3. As for research question 2), the author analysed what errors the participants made and how they responded to them.

4.1. Research Question 1

Student A's first essay, even though it was written prior to the instruction, had the elements illustrated in the video (i.e. opinion, reason, example, effect and conclusion) and was structured almost the same way as the model essay. Therefore, the rhetorical moves did not considerably change from the first to the third essays, apart from the addition of the concession sentence in the beginning. All that said, there was another noticeable change; the insertion of the sentence 'I learned that students should not use smartphones'. This expression, 'I learned that', was introduced in the video as a way to conclude a personal experience, and yet Student A used this after a general example, which as a result slightly disturbed the coherence of the essay.

Unlike Student A, Student B's first essay lacked some elements such as concession, examples, effects and a conclusion. Perhaps due to the instruction and repeated practice, the third essay included these elements and improved in terms of contents and structures, though the example of the second reasoning did not fit in the context; although the second reason was about the relaxing effects of smartphones, the example maintained how his friend performed well though using smartphones, which apparently did not support his argument.

As for Student C, her first essay did not contain an example for the first reason, which made her argument less strong. In the third essay, she added general and personal examples and succeeded in making her writing more persuasive. Moreover, the third essay began with abstract reasoning and proceeded to a more concrete argument, making the essay easier for readers to understand. However, the last sentence of the first reason, 'This taught me that students should experience more things when they are young', is not connected well with the previous sentences. Perhaps what she meant by this is 'Seeing this, I felt that students should experience more things when they are young', and yet she used 'This taught me that' possibly because this expression is introduced in the instruction video.

In summary, the presentation of the model text, assessment criteria and instruction seems to help learners have a basic understanding of an argumentative essay structure, as shown in the essays of Student B and C. On the other hand, the introduction of typical expressions may confuse learners and direct them to write contextually inappropriate sentences, which diminishes the persuasiveness as in the essays by Student A and C. Furthermore, merely instructing learners to use examples as a support for their argument may not be enough; the instruction may want to illustrate what types of examples (e.g. general examples and personal experiences) there are available and in what context these types of examples are effectively used.

4.2. Research Question 2

Student A received 11 pieces of feedback on the usage of words and phrases in total, which can be categorized into five types: passive voice (e.g. ** visitors should be enjoyed*), object omission (e.g. ** we cannot enjoy well*), subjunctive mood (e.g. ** If I were limited in time, my eyes would not be worse*), unnecessary repetition (e.g. the frequent use of *I think that*) and vocabulary choice (e.g. the use of *good* instead of *beneficial*). The former three are grammatical errors while the latter two are not grammatically wrong, and yet the participants were instructed to avoid these in the video. Student A successfully replaced expressions of ‘unnecessary repetition’ and ‘vocabulary choice’, whereas she could not correct errors regarding ‘passive voice’, ‘object omission’ and ‘subjunctive mood’.

Student B got 12 pieces of feedback. They can be categorised into vocabulary choice, verb tense (e.g. the use of present progressive in an inappropriate context), conjunction (e.g. ** Even I have no money, I don't need to worry about it*), orthography (e.g. **japanese government*), and indefinite article (e.g. **it is program for students who study abroad*). Student B accurately corrected errors about ‘orthography’, and ‘conjunction’ and substituted words of ‘vocabulary choice’. However, with regard to errors about ‘indefinite article’ and ‘verb tense’, he failed to correct errors in some cases and, in others, rewrote the whole sentences instead of correcting errors.

Student C received nine pieces of feedback, which are categorised into vocabulary choice, verb tense, conjunction, parallelism (e.g. **I think protecting local people's life and keep the world heritage site are more important*) and part of speech (e.g. ** we can't understand the real*). She accurately corrected errors about ‘part of speech’ and yet failed to correct ‘conjunction’ errors. The errors she made (**If it is*

destroyed, never come back and **when people young have a big impact on the future*) imply she did not fully understand that a clause needs a subject and a verb. Regarding the other types of errors, like Student B, Student C also rewrote whole sentences instead of fixing part of sentences.

The observation of how the participants responded to feedback suggests some insights into the effects of formative feedback and how it should be conducted. First of all, merely highlighting or underlining expressions containing errors may not be sufficient for language learning. As Student A could not accurately correct grammatical errors (i.e. passive voice, object omission and subjunctive mood), which is probably because of the lack of the understanding of grammatical forms or the concept of voice or subjunctive mood, there seems to be a need for explicit instruction and exercises of particular grammar use as a corrective activity. Second, the difficulty in understanding feedback and correcting errors is likely to stem from learners' lack of readiness as well as the complexity of grammar items. Student B, for example, corrected 'conjunction' errors after receiving feedback indicating annotated parts had some errors, perhaps because he has explicit grammatical knowledge of the usage of conjunctions and skills to consciously apply the knowledge to writing. Meanwhile, Student C was not able to correct conjunction errors, suggesting she did not seem to have sufficient knowledge to accurately use conjunctions. In other words, she was not ready to learn the usage of conjunctions through feedback without explicit explanation. Third, learners' learning strategies may influence the effectiveness of formative feedback in L2 writing. As illustrated, Student B and C chose to rewrite whole sentences rather than to correct errors. This strategy is similar to what is referred to as 'formal reduction' in communicative strategies, an act to select reduced language forms over complex ones in order to avoid non-fluent or erroneous utterances (Færch and Kasper, 1983). This strategy may be effective to raise the quality of communication temporarily, whereas it may deprive learners of opportunities to learn and acquire certain language forms and hence hampers language learning in the long term (Lightbown and Spada, 2013).

5. Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

This study explored mastery learning in the context of L2 writing instruction, focusing on two key features: the presentation of learning goals and assessment standards at the start of the course and periodical formative feedback. The three junior high school students participated in the study and underwent the mastery learning based writing programme, and their essays were qualitatively explored. On

one hand, the results of the analysis suggest that the presentation of a model text and an assessment rubric is effective in helping learners understand the basic argumentative essay structure and apply it to their own writing. Regarding formative feedback, highlighting parts of essays and presenting the result of assessment with the rubric are likely to help learners in revising their essays. On the other hand, it is indicated that the mere presentation of a model text and frequently used expressions is not sufficient and may even confuse learners. Furthermore, if learners are not ready in terms of grammar knowledge to understand feedback, formative assessment is not likely to be as effective on language learning as expected. In addition, learners' communicative strategies may also affect the effectiveness of formative feedback; those who employ the formal reduction strategy may benefit less from the feedback on language use.

In conclusion, the following pedagogical implications can be suggested; 1) the presentation of a model text and assessment criteria are effective in helping learners have basic understanding of argumentative essay writing; 2) among essential components of argumentative writing, the use of examples should be taught with more time spent; 3) the usage of typical expressions should be explained explicitly; 4) learners' readiness should be carefully examined when giving formative feedback on language usages; 5) explicit grammar instruction and exercises should be given as corrective activities to those who frequently employ the 'formal reduction' strategy when revising their essays.

Last but not least, this study is of some value in that it sheds light on learners' traits and their learning strategies in researching the effects of a programme. Further research from this perspective will yield even more fruitful pedagogical implications.

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Appendix 1: The Text Material Used in the Instruction Video

Topic

There are many zoos in Japan, visited by a number of people. Some people say that zoos are not good for animals, and therefore all the zoos should be closed. Do you agree or disagree with this idea?

Example

①Some people may say that all the zoos in Japan should be closed. ②However, I believe that zoos should not be closed for several reasons. ③First, it is good for children. ④They can learn about many animals at the zoo. ⑤For example, when I visited the zoo near my house, I learned that elephants are dying out. ⑥I learned that it is important to help animals. ③Second, it is good for animals dying out. ④Zoos can preserve those animals. ⑤For example, the zoo near my house preserves elephants, gorillas and tigers. ⑥Zoos preserve diverse animal kinds. ⑦For these reasons, I believe that zoos should not be closed.

展開・表現

展開①～⑦	表現	意味
①対立する意見	Some people may say that～	「～という人もいるかもしれない」
②自分の意見	However, I strongly believe that ～	「しかし、私は～だと強く信じています」
③理由の提示 (抽象的)	First [Second], it is beneficial [harmful] for ～	「一つ目に(二つ目に)、それは～にとって 有益(有害)です」
④理由の説明 (具体的)	～ can [have to] ...	「～は…できる(しなくてははいけない)」
⑤具体例の提示	For example [For instance],～ When I was ～, I...	「例えば、～」 「～のとき、…した」
⑥良い結果の 説明	This taught me that～ From this, I learned that～ This helps ～	「このことは～だと私に教えてくれた」 「このことから、私は～だと学んだ」 「このことは～を手助けしてくれる」
⑦結論	For these reasons, I think that～	「これらの理由で、私は～だと考える」

Appendix 2: A Sample of Feedback Sheet

- ②I disagree with this idea. There are two reasons for this.
 ③First, Japanese government is for Japanese people. ④Some jobs in Japan are getting money from tourists. ⑥If the number of visitors to world heritage sites is limited by Japanese government, the Japanese people who are getting money from them will be poor.
 ③Second, this is just my opinion. I hope that the World Heritage sites in Japan are known by more people than now. ④They are too attractive like this.

	内容	構成	語彙	文法
	B	A	B	B
観 点	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○意見に対する理由が明確である ○複数の観点から論拠が述べられている △物事の原因や結果について述べられている △具体例が述べられている 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○文章全体の構成が明確である ○文章の展開が適切な語句で示されている 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> △課題に相応しい語彙が使われている ○語彙が正確に使われている △不必要な繰り返しを避けている 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> △多様な文のパターンが使われている ○多様な表現が正確に使われている

Appendix 3: The First and Third Essays

Student A

1st Essay

I agree that the Japanese government limit the number of visitors to world heritage sites. I have two reasons. First, all visitors should be enjoyed world heritage sites. World heritage sites are always very crowded. When I visited Itsukushima shrine, there were many people , and I couldn't enjoy it well . If there are limited visitors , we can move there smoothly and enjoy there well . Second , it is good for the environment . Some of the visitors throw away garbage in world heritage sites. If there are limited visitors , there are visitors who really want to visit only , so I think that they don't throw away garbage. These are why I agree the idea.

3rd Essay

Some people say students should use smartphones. However I think it is a necessary idea. I have two reasons. First, students spend too much time on their phone. They cannot study well. During test sessions students should study more, but they cannot study hard because of using smartphones. I learned that students should not use smartphones. Second, using smartphones is bad for their health. It makes your eyes worse. When I started using smartphones, my eyes became worse. If I had limited time, my eyes would not be worse. These are why I think it is an important idea.

Student B

1st Essay

I disagree with this idea. There are two reasons for this. First, Japanese government is for Japanese people. Some jobs in Japan are getting money from tourists. If the number of visitors to world heritage sites is limited by Japanese government, the Japanese people who are getting money from them will be poor. Second, this is just my opinion. I hope that the World Heritage sites in Japan are known by more people than now. They are too attractive like this.

3rd Essay

Some people may say that it is very good. However, I think it may be harmful for them. I have some reasons for it. First, smartphones have some useful points. I can ask others my questions. For example I didn't know when to arrive at school on Saturday. However I had a smartphone. Thanks for it, I didn't make mistakes. It is beneficial for everyone.

Second, smartphones can make students relax. Time ago, books and games were doing it. However, everything is changing. We can't stop to change it. If it is limited, many students will lose their amusement. For example, my friends love playing smartphone's game, however they are perfect as students. So, we don't have to limit it.

For these reasons, I don't think it is a good idea.

Student C

1st Essay

I agree with this opinion. I have two reasons. First, I think protecting world heritage sites is more important than economics. Because world heritage sites are special places. Too many tourists destroy nature. If it is destroyed, never come back. We must protect world heritage sites to the future. Second, local people getting trouble with traffic jams, a lot of trash, and the places are crowded. These are big problems for local people. If many people visit them, local places can get much more money. It's a good point. But, I think protecting local people's life and keep the world heritage site are more important. So I think Japanese government should limit the number of visitors to world heritage sites.

3rd Essay

Some people may say that adults don't have to control students' smartphones. However, I disagree with this opinion. I have two reasons. First, smartphones are harmful for students. If students have smartphones, they don't do anything. For example, many people always use smartphones. When eating time, in a train, in an office, school. They just watch it, and they don't get anything. It's bad for the young people. This taught me that students should experience more things when they are young. Second, they can't control their smartphone time.④Adults can limit their time, but students can't do that. For example when I was in elementary school, I got a smartphone. But at that time, I couldn't control my phone. From this, I learned that adults should limit the use of them. For these reasons, I think that think that students should not use them and should limit the use of them