

# Designing an instructional unit on “argumentative essay” for prep year students: An action research in a state university in Turkey

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## ABSTRACT

Writing is one of the productive skills for language learners. This study was conducted to design a unit for language students who were enrolled in the School of Foreign Languages in one of the most prestigious Turkish state universities located in Istanbul. These learners had been taught different academic essay types in this educational institution for which the researcher designed an instructional unit on “Argumentative Essay Writing”, which was highly needed for the learners taking English-medium-instruction to pursue their academic studies. For the purpose of this study, one prep class was chosen to implement the designed unit so that the efficiency could be evaluated in the end. As for the data collection tools, interviews were arranged with three students in the class where the design was implemented. Three junior students in different departments who had previously had a prep school experience before they took their departmental courses in their faculties were also interviewed as well as the instructors who gave the “academic writing” course by teaching the essay types for several years in this research context. Additionally, the writing tasks given to the students of the class where the research was conducted as well as their mid-term papers were also included in the data. All through these stages, observation protocols were also used by the “on-site” researcher. Results showed that an efficient and applicable unit for an “Argumentative Essay” is possible considering the students’ needs, entry characteristics, goals and objectives, instructional strategy, assessment, implementation and evaluation of the whole process.

**Keywords:** Academic writing, essay writing, School of Foreign Languages, argumentative essay, instructional unit.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Academic writing: “Argumentative essay”

Academic writing is one of the courses offered to the students in higher education who pursue their studies in English. Shokrpour and Fallahzadeh (2008) define writing as “a complex activity, a social act which reflects the writer’s communicative skills which is difficult to develop and learn, especially in an EFL context” (p.184). Zheng (1999) confirms that writing is more challenging than other skills. Therefore, White (1981) cited in Nunan (1994) urges the need to teach students “how to write”. Kolawole (1998) also states the necessity of teaching the

writers to express themselves in a logical and coherent way. Coffin (2004) elaborates on the issue by saying:

*“students’ academic writing continues to be at the center of teaching and learning in higher education, but it is often an invisible dimension of the curriculum; that is, the rules or conventions governing what counts as academic writing are often assumed to be part of ‘common sense’ knowledge students have, and are thus not*

*explicitly taught within disciplinary course” (p.3).*

Though academic writing might be neglected to some extent, the familiarity of the students with it and its different types will be to their advantage because the argumentative essay writing is one of the skills of which students enrolled in a university which offer English-medium-instruction are highly in need because they may use this style in their term papers or exams. However, Nippold and Ward-Lonergan (2010) warn that “argumentative writing is a challenging communication task that needs sophisticated cognitive and linguistic abilities” (p. 238). Though this is a difficult task (Chanie, 2013; Deane and Song, 2014), Crowhurst (1991) emphasizes that “it is important both for academic success and for general life purposes” (p. 314). Hence, it is the most difficult type of writing (Ferretti et al., 2007; Neff-van Aertselaer and Dafouz-Milne, 2008). However, Knudson (1998) stresses the importance of it by saying that “argumentation is one of the genres which is essential for full participation in society” (p. 211).

When students feel the need to know how to write an argumentative essay, they must know the format of it, as well. Chala and Chapetón (2012) claim that students must be creative and reflective writers after they are familiarized with the genre on which they are going to write. Therefore, Ka-kan-deea and Kaur (2015) claim that lecturers must know the needs of their students. In their study, it has been found that the learners are deprived of the knowledge of how to write an argumentative essay, the format of which they are unfamiliar with. Most importantly; as Díaz (2002) claims, an argumentative essay must be written on controversial topics. Additionally, a typical argumentative essay should have a beginning, a middle or ‘body’, and an ending (Batteiger, 1994). All these characteristic features of an argumentative essay were all kept in mind while the unit was designed for this study.

Considering the importance of the argumentative essay, many scholars have done some research on it. Most of the scholars (Crowhurst, 1990; Dickson, 2004; Dornbrack and Dixon, 2014; Ferretti and Lewis, 2013; Ferretti and Graham, 2019; Fluitt-Dupuy, 2001; Gleason, 1999; Newell et al., 2015) Rex et al., (2010) have focused on their studies the way to teach “argumentative essay” writing to guide and enlighten the practitioners in the field. There are also some studies that have focused on either the performance of the students on argumentative essay writing (Chanie, 2013; Yeh, 1998) or the effect of a certain methodology on the performance of the students (Hasani, 2016; Huang and Zhang, 2020; Lam, et al., 2017; Luna et al., 2020). The latter studies have introduced a technique or a methodology in the class setting to check its efficiency on the performance of students in terms of argumentative writing. For instance, Luna et al. (2020) tried to determine the efficiency of online teaching program which contributed to the writing performance of the students with respect to structural pattern and content

formation while Hasani (2016) determined the positive effects of critical thinking ability and contextual learning mode on the performance of the students. What is more, there are also some studies conducted to determine how teachers apply argumentative essay writing in their own classroom context (Lin, et al., 2020; Wahyudi, 2018). Additionally, Howell et al. (2018) and Awada et al. (2020) carried out studies to understand both perspectives: teachers and students in terms of teaching and learning argumentative essay writing at the same time. However, although there are several studies on argumentative writing whose focuses are on different sides of the issue, there is a lack of research on the efficiency of an instructional unit designed to teach argumentative writing considering the context in which both the research and teaching have been done. Therefore, this research has aimed at designing an instructional unit making both instructors and students part of the study along with the ones who had been taught this essay type with a different methodology so that this group would reflect their previous experiences on the design of a new instructional unit.

### **The principles of the theory behind the instructional unit**

One of the most significant things that should be considered while designing an instructional unit is to determine the learning theory on which the instruction will be based on and whether this selection will serve the needs of the students in a specific context (Nation and Macalister, 2010). The instructional unit for this research was designed in accordance with “constructivism”, which is mostly integrated in the instructional units as it is the latest trend in the field of education. More and more educational institutions and even the nation-wide curriculum base their instruction on the constructivist learning theory. According to Richey’s et al. (2011), in constructivist design theory “knowledge is individually constructed and often unique to each person” (p.129); so it is applicable for a writing lesson because the content of the writing must be constructed by the author who will base what s/he has written on his/her own experiences.

Cooperation and collaboration among the learners are also equally important in constructivist learning. Smith and Regan (2005) emphasize that “learning is collaborative with meaning negotiated from multiple perspectives” (p. 20). In an argumentative essay writing, students should be familiar with differing points of views so they should study in groups so as to share information that they have about the topic. This is important because some students find it difficult to come up with some new ideas to create the content of the writing so with the help of group work, they will be familiar with the basic concepts that can be discussed in terms of content composition. Zúñiga and Macías (2006) claim that instruction and peer feedback make a great contribution to knowledge of the writing process and improving writing

skills.

Another principle of the constructivist learning is that learners should be in the active part of the learning process so that they will benefit from this active learning process. Active learning requires learners to interact with information at a high level to elaborate on it and to interpret it by relating it to one's previous information and experience (Perkins, 1992). This necessitates learners to associate their background knowledge with the new information presented to them. This will both activate their previous knowledge with some new additions and elaborations from which learners will gain a lot.

Constructivist learning theory also emphasizes the importance of real-life contexts. Students should deal with real-life problems and they try to find solutions for them. This requires the use of authentic materials, as well. In a study conducted by Ahmed (2010), "university teachers have voiced their concern about their students' lack of reading authentic English texts resulting in considerable challenges with regards to topic prior knowledge, coherence, cohesion, style, range of vocabulary, and grammatical structures and punctuation" (p. 216). In an argumentative essay writing, students will write essays on real-life problems from the current issues and they will discuss the differing viewpoints about a specific issue (Lillis, 2001). They will do it with their own perspective. Duffy and Cunningham (1996) define a concept called "self-world" as "the worlds that organisms individually and collectively create and that serve to mediate their experience in the world" (p. 178). This means that students will write their essays basing their writing on their own self-world with the help of which they have the content of their own essay paragraphs.

Constructivist learning gives great importance to the variety in the language learning/teaching environment. This means that teachers should organize such a learning environment that every learner who might have different intelligence types should benefit from the teaching process, which requires the activity types to be versatile. This attempt will make the learning environment rich in sources and techniques used (Ahmed, 2010). Karagiorgi and Symeou (2005) describe a rich learning environment as a class which "encourages multiple learning styles and multiple representations of knowledge from different conceptual and case perspectives" (p. 20). Therefore, teachers' attitude towards teaching is considered a contributing factor to their success and effectiveness in teaching (Güneyli and Aslan, 2009).

The integration of the skills is also significant even though this unit was designed for writing skill improvement. Byrne (1981) defines skills integration as "linking them together in such a way that what has been learnt and practiced through the exercise of one skill is reinforced and perhaps extended through further language activities which bring one or more of the other skills into use" (p. 108). Thus, this was also taken into account while designing the unit for the students. For instance; after reading different but related texts about

medicine which show the controversial issues, students were also made to listen to a lecture about the theme of the module (medicine). Therefore, they became consequently familiar with certain concepts about the issue so they had the sufficient background information, vocabulary and grammatical structures to be able to write on the issue. Nanwani (2009) stresses the importance of reading before familiarity with the text structure. What is more, teaching reading and writing can be considered inseparable (Bell, 1998; Scarcella and Stern, 1990; Zamel, 1992). After reading texts and listening to a lecture, students were asked to state their own reactions or attitudes by sharing them with the whole class so that they could practice their speaking skills, as well. Then, they analysed a sample student essay which was previously written by a student who was among the most successful ones last year so that they would feel that they could write an essay as well as the one shown to them. The importance of sample student essays is prevalent (Morrison, 2010; Ka-kan-deea and Kaur, 2015). Hence, with integration of four skills, the instructional unit designed to teach to write an "argumentative essay" was thought to be more effective for the learners.

### **Statement of the problem**

Most of the students in prep schools who improve their academic English skills before they start their departments providing English instruction find it difficult to express themselves in a formal academic format which is one of the requirements of the courses that they will take in their Faculties. These students do not have any difficulty in writing an e-mail or an informal letter, both of which are the tasks for "Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills" (BICS), which will provide them with the ability to express themselves in the daily life language (Cummins, 1979). However, what these students need is to improve their "Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency" (CALP), which is the main focus of the language education in most of the universities in Turkey. Therefore, in terms of academic writing, essay writing is one of the components that has been integrated to the curriculums of the School of Foreign Languages, which prepare students for their departments giving English-medium-instruction and make them acquire the academic skills necessary to pursue their academic studies.

The argumentative essay is one of the essay types that is most frequently used by the students who are to submit a term-paper that requires them to present the contrasting ideas about a specific topic on which the lecturer of the course would like his/her students to come up with differing opinions. What is more, most of learners of academic English find the argumentative essay very challenging and often complain of having some difficulty in learning this essay style. Thus, it is significant to plan an instructional unit that teaches how to write an

“argumentative essay” both properly and accurately. Therefore, this research tried to determine these research questions:

1. What are the certain dynamics to consider while designing an instructional unit for an “argumentative essay” considering the level of their performance on this essay type?
2. How should these dynamics be dealt with to make an efficient plan for the instructional unit to influence their achievement in argumentative essay writing in a positive way?

## METHOD

### Research design

This study was planned as an action research because the researcher was the one who designed this research in his own teaching and researching context as Burns (2010) defines “action research” as “a self-reflective, critical, and systematic approach to exploring your own teaching contexts” because “a teacher becomes an ‘investigator’ or ‘explorer’ of his or her personal teaching context, while at the same time being one of the participants in it” (p.2). This means that the researcher acted as an “on-site” observer in the research context in which he worked as one of the academics who was totally familiar with the certain dynamics of the institution. Kemmis and McTaggart (1992) also justify that an action research must be “participatory”, which means that it is designed by the people who would like to improve the practices of their own teaching context. Thus, considering all the elements that should be taken into account, Zuber-Skerritt (1996b) defines an “action research” as:

*“critical (and self-critical) collaborative inquiry by reflective practitioners being accountable and making results of their enquiry public self-evaluating their practice and engaged in participatory problem-solving and continuing professional development” (p.85).*

It can be understood from this quote that the researcher was not all alone in his inquiry to design his action research; therefore, he cooperated with his colleagues and students as well as the previous students of the institution to come up with a solution for the problematic situation which was determined as how to teach to write an “argumentative essay” properly and accurately in this research context.

### Study group

This research was conducted in one of the classes in a

School of Foreign Languages in one of most prestigious state universities in Turkey, which is located in Istanbul. The education given in this School of Foreign Languages is carefully programmed because most of the faculties of this university are providing English-medium-instruction including Medical School and Engineering, Business Administration, Economics, International Relations and Politics Faculties as well as some of the departments in the Faculty of Arts and Science such as Sociology. Thus, the aim of this school’s curriculum is to prepare these students for the English-medium-instruction that they will get when they start to take their departmental courses. Consequently, they are supplied with Academic English integrating the four skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Students who started the program with A1 level of language proficiency were expected to write single and independent paragraphs during the first term and they wrote e-mails, letters... etc. These pieces of writings assigned for the first term were arranged to improve their BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) whereas the ones assigned for the second term were organized to improve their CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency). Consequently, these students were taught how to write an academic essay in the second term. They had been previously shown different essay types and the instructional unit for this project was designed to teach them how to write an “argumentative essay”. Thus, this research was conducted in the second term of the academic year, called “spring” term.

With respect to the learner profile of the class where this action research was conducted, they were between 18 and 23-year-old students coming from different high school types. They were above the average among their peers in their high schools where they graduated in terms of academic success. The program of the school was rather intensive because these students had to reach at least to B2 level at the end of the academic year. Therefore, the ones who did not have sufficient English background had serious problems with grammar and they had certain deficiencies in vocabulary, as well. Thus, writing an essay was a challenging task for these types of learners even if they learned the format and organization because they needed more than that. Furthermore, they were to be presented with the ideas that they should write. Otherwise, their content lacked any meaning and perspectives. Therefore, teaching writing means focusing on the pattern, different grammatical structures, vocabulary, and content.

Along with the students in the class where this action research was conducted, three students in this class as well as three other junior students in their departments were also interviewed to collect some more specific data. Table 1 shows the student participants’ profile.

Table 1 shows the profile of the students interviewed to collect more specific data for the purpose of this study. The first three students coded as PS1, PS2 and PS3

**Table 1.** The detailed information about the participant students interviewed.

Codes	Category	Department	Age	Language proficiency	High school graduation
PS1	Prep student	Sociology	18	A2	Anatolian High School
PS2	Prep student	Mechanical Engineer	19	B1	Private High School
PS3	Prep student	International Relations	19	A2	Anatolian High School
DS1	Junior	Mechanical Engineer	21	B2	Anatolian Science High School
DS2	Junior	Bioengineer	22	B2	Anatolian High School
DS3	Junior	Business Administration	23	B2	Anatolian High School

were the ones from the class for which the action research was designed so they were enrolled in the program of the School of Foreign Languages whereas students coded as DS1, DS2 and DS3 had all previously taken a preparation year in this research context but they were attending their departmental courses at the time of the study as they were 3<sup>rd</sup> year students in their undergraduate studies so they were put under the category of “junior” in the table. These students were included in the study on purpose because they were the ones who were able to reflect on their previous experiences in their prep year and to determine the efficiency as well as the weaknesses of the program considering the situation they were in at the time of the study because these students were the active users of the knowledge that they had acquired in their prep year studies as the requirements of the courses that they took because they had to make use of an “argumentative essay” type mostly so as to present their views on a controversial issue that must be both formally and academically presented in a written form as an academic paper to the lecturer of the departmental course.

Along with the participant students, three different instructors working in the institution where the research was conducted were also interviewed to reach more data from different perspectives. Cohen et al. (2007) confirm that an action research “involves preliminary discussion and negotiations among the interested parties” because they “may draw upon their expertise to bring the problem more into focus, possibly determining causal factors or recommending alternative lines of approach to

established ones” (p. 307). Therefore, all the interested parties were involved in the study. Table 2 shows the profile of the participant instructors.

It can be understood from Table 2 that all the participant instructors had quite a few years of experience to be called as “experienced” and these years of experience showed the time of years in which they had been working for the institution where this study was conducted. It can be concluded from these years of experience that they were totally familiar with the research context so the researcher was convinced of their familiarity to tell the efficiency and the limitations of the program applied in this School of Foreign Languages. Another important point to consider is their teaching pedagogy. As this action research was based on teaching how to write an “argumentative essay”, these instructors must know how to teach academic writing theoretically, as well. I2 and I3 were the graduates of English Language Teaching (ELT) departments so they must have acquired the necessary pedagogy that they needed to apply in a language classroom. What is more, I2 held a master degree on ELT, which showed her enthusiasm to improve herself professionally. Even though I1 was a graduate of English Language and Literature department, in which no courses are offered for teaching pedagogy, she had a master degree on ELT in which she said she learned a lot about teaching pedagogy. Therefore, it can be concluded that all the participant instructors were proficient enough with all their expertise and experience to contribute a lot to this research.

**Table 2.** The detailed information about the participant instructors interviewed.

Codes	Experience of the instructor	Graduation	Degree that s/he holds
I1	8	English Language and Literature	MA
I2	12	English Language Teaching (ELT)	MA
I3	18	English Language Teaching (ELT)	BA

## Research instruments

Four different data collection instruments were used for

the purpose of this study: an observation protocol, interviews arranged with both students and instructors, mid-term exam results of the students and writing tasks

given to the students of the class where the research was conducted.

### ***Observation protocol***

One of the primary sources of data came from observations. The classroom where the researcher chose to do an action research was observed by the researcher himself to monitor and evaluate the process of the application of the instructional unit designed for the purpose of this study. The researcher used an observation protocol designed by Charles Darwin University, School of Education in Australia (2019). This data collection tool was found suitable for the purpose of the study because it gave the researcher the chance to record the time of the moment that was specifically related to the purpose of the study, context, the teacher behaviour and the responses of the students in accordance with the instructional unit as well as the reason/explanation/discussion of that specific case in the same row. Thus, this observation protocol gave the researcher the opportunity to follow what was witnessed during the implementation of the instructional unit which was designed for an "argumentative essay". Therefore, this scale was certainly found appropriate for this study. What is more, the developments of the students were also significant because reactions of the students to the unit were also within the scope of this study.

### ***Interviews***

Interviews were conducted both with three students randomly chosen among the students in the research context where this action research was designed and three others who were taking their departmental courses at the time of the study as well as three different instructors working in the same institution where this research was carried out because their familiarity with the system would make it possible to reach both reliable and valid data. Interviews both with the prep students who were exposed to the instructional unit and with instructors who were teaching "academic writing" were held both before the design of the unit and after the implementation of the unit. However, participant students who were juniors enrolled in their departmental courses were interviewed once just before the design of the unit because they would not be able to give feedback on the efficiency of the implementation as they did not experience it. All the interviews were held in the native tongue of the participants to make them express themselves in a more comfortable way. What is more, all the interviews were recorded in an audio file so that the researcher was able to transcribe the recordings for the later analysis.

Interview questions were written by the researcher keeping the research questions of this study in mind

because they were the main determinants of the questions that were asked both to the participant students and the instructors. The questions were also seen by another academic working in the same institution to check their appropriacy for the study. Therefore, some kind of expert view was obtained through these formal discussions between the researcher and the academic working in the institution where this action research was done because an outsider might not provide an efficient feedback to the questions as they might not know whether the questions would be applicable for that research context or not.

The interview questions were semi-structured because they were written considering that they would not restrict the respondents too much to a certain point but rather they guided them in terms of the issues on which they would make their own comments. Gall et al. (2003) warn that "in qualitative research, the interview format is not tightly structured because the researcher's target is to make respondents feel free to express their view of a phenomenon in their own terms" (p. 239). However, the participants were not so free that they did not make any irrelevant comments on the topics on which their precious opinions were needed.

### ***Mid-term exams***

The mid-term exam results of the students in the class where this action research was designed were also included in the data of this study. They were used as a criterion for the researcher who also applied the instructional unit designed for this study. Therefore, the researcher also kept the results of the mid-term exams in mind while he was designing the instructional unit because those exam papers showed the level of the learners in the study in terms of their language proficiency so that the unit was designed accordingly.

### ***Writing tasks***

The writing tasks were given as an assignment to the students right after the implementation of the instructional unit in the class where the action research was carried out. This was done for the purpose of the evaluation of the both students' performance and the whole process of the action research for which an instructional unit was designed. Thus, these writing tasks submitted to the researcher as the one who applied the instructional unit in the class where the action research was carried out were used as an indicator of the efficiency of the instructional unit and to make an evaluation of the whole process, as well.

### ***Data collection procedure***

The data collection process was organized according to

the principles of an action research design put forward by Zuber-Skerritt (1996a):

1. *Strategic planning;*
2. *Action, i.e. implementing the plan;*
3. *Observation, evaluation and self-evaluation;*
4. *Critical and self-critical reflection on the results of points 1-3 and making decisions for the next cycle of action research (p.3).*

First of all, the researcher made a plan for his action research because he found a problematic situation in his research context which was the teaching of an “argumentative essay”, which is found challenging by the students. After this “strategic planning”, he started to take an “action”. In this phase of the research, he conducted interviews with the students in his class in which the action research was applied. Three students were randomly chosen for these interviews getting the consent of the participant students who were willing to contribute to the study. Additionally, interviews with the colleagues who had been teaching academic writing in this institution for the last several years were arranged. Three different academics were selected for the purpose of this study at their own will. Besides, three different students who were taking English-medium-instruction in their departments and took a preparation year in this School of Foreign Languages just before they started to take their departmental courses were also asked to share their opinions on the issue through semi-structured interviews. Along with the interviews, the mid-term papers of the students in the class of the researcher were also collected to determine the level of learners’ language proficiency in terms of academic writing skills. With all these data at hand, the instructional unit was designed and applied in the class where this research was planned to be conducted. After the “implementation of the plan” which was the second stage of the research, it was time for “observation, evaluation and self-evaluation”, all of which were also achieved by the on-site researcher by implementing the instructional unit designed for the purpose of this study in the research context. Meanwhile, observation protocols were also applied while the researcher was monitoring for the developments. Right after the implementation, some writing tasks which are directly related to an argumentative essay type were given to the students as an assignment, which was part of this third stage: “evaluation”. The final stage of the research was “reflection”, which was conducted by the researcher taking all the data available at hand into account and thinking whether the application was found successful considering the very first stage of this research. Thus, both the participant students and instructors were again interviewed for this “reflection” phase of the study to get their feedback on the implementation of the instructional unit.

## Data analysis

The analysis of the all the data was made considering the research questions. As this was an action research in which qualitative data collection tools were more dominantly used apart from the mid-term exam results, Cohen et al. (2007) state that “analysis here is almost inevitably interpretive” (p.469). Thus, all the qualitative data collected for the purpose of this study via observation protocol, interviews and writing tasks were analysed “in order to find constructs, themes, and patterns that can be used to describe and explain the phenomenon being studied” (Gall et al., 2003; p. 453). In order to achieve this, the field notes in the observation protocol and the recordings of interviews were fully transcribed by the researcher. The writing tasks submitted to the researcher by the students were already in a written form, which made them already available for the analysis. After the transcriptions, the data were firstly classified and categorized so that the researcher could put transcriptions into themes and combinations of categories (Krippendorp, 2004). From these categories which are defined as “the main groupings of constructs or key features of the text, showing links between units of analysis” (Cohen et al., 2007; p. 478); certain codes, which define “the smallest element of material that can be analysed” (Cohen et al., 2007; p. 477), were all related to the research questions. The codes, found by the researcher from the data available for this study, were descriptive and included “situation codes”, which are perspectives held by subjects; ways of thinking about people and objects according to Bogdan and Biklen (1992). With the “codes” available and thematically categorized under the related research question, the data were ready for analysis.

Some of the quotes from the transcriptions of the interviews were also provided in the results section as Gall et al. (2003) claim that “direct quotes of the remarks by the case study participants were particularly effective because they clarify the emic perspective, that is, the meaning of the phenomenon from the point of view of the participants” (p. 469). These quotes of the participant students and instructors facilitated the comprehension of the case. Along with the transcriptions, the data recorded on the observation protocols were great assets to the themes created by the researcher keeping the research questions in mind.

The analysis of writing tasks submitted to the researcher by the students was also done qualitatively to determine whether the elements taught in the unit were reflected on the papers of the students. This was achieved by the on-site researcher as an instructor who implemented the instructional unit in the context of the study. With this, the performance of the students as well as the evaluation of the whole process were assessed and these writing task papers were used as an indicator of the efficiency of the instructional unit.

As this is a contextual case study whose results cannot be generalized for the other contexts, the codes created from the interviews, field notes in the observation protocol, the exam results of the mid-terms as well as the writing tasks were all related to the research questions of the study. Therefore, the results were shared in the following considering the research questions of this study.

## RESULTS

### **What are the certain dynamics to consider while designing an instructional unit for an “argumentative essay” considering the level of their performance on this essay type?**

During the interviews, both the students and instructors were asked what to consider in order to design an instructional unit to teach “argumentative essay” writing. Both the students enrolled in the School of Foreign Languages and the juniors in their departments stated that “the needs of the students” had to be primarily taken into account when such a unit was planned. Students also stated the importance of their background knowledge, which means their level of language proficiency at the time of the implementation of the unit. Thus, they claimed that the unit had to be appropriate to their level. Otherwise, they would find it hard to keep up with the instructions. Instructors interviewed stated this in other words using the pedagogical term: “entry characteristics”, which must be taken into account before the design of the unit. Instructors also elaborated that there were some other factors which would affect the quality of the instructional unit like “goals and objectives” about which I2 said:

*“Goals and objectives must be the main focus of the instructional unit because they will determine all the other factors that must be considered while designing such a unit. Thus, they should be carefully decided by the experts so that the efficiency of the unit will go up incredibly.”*

This quote shows the priority given to “goals and objectives” in terms of an instructional design by the participant instructors.

Instructors also said that the “instructional strategy”, which will be followed to achieve the goals and objectives of the unit, must also be paid careful attention. Participant students also made comments on how the unit must be designed in accordance with their needs. Surely, “assessment” is another dynamic that affects the instructional unit. This was also mentioned by all three participant instructors. I3 said:

*“The way we assess the performance of the learners must also be stated clearly to both the*

*instructors who will implement the unit and the students who has to know how their performance will be measured because the former will organize their teaching pedagogy whereas the latter will arrange the way they study in accordance with “assessment” part of the unit.”*

These comments clearly show that the “assessment” element of an instructional unit has an influence on both the instructors who apply it and students to whom it will be applied.

Both the participant students and instructors talked about the importance of the “materials” that would be used for the unit. PS3 said:

*“Materials must serve the needs of us; otherwise, they will be useless because we, students, think that they become the primary concern of the unit. However, they must be used as a tool to teach us the content.”*

This quote shows the importance of the choice of materials for the unit as well as the way they must be utilized by the instructors.

During the interviews, all the participant instructors claimed that “implementation” phase of the instructional unit was also vital because how the instructors would apply must also be explained to each practioner so as to prevent any misunderstandings. I1 explained:

*“Unless the instructors are shown how to teach the unit specifically, everyone will follow his/her own way of teaching so the efficiency will change to a great extent according to the practice in each class. Thus, to maintain “unity”, the implementation must be explained clearly by the designer of the unit, as well.”*

This comment on “implementation” shows that instructors need guidance on how to teach a certain unit even if they are experienced enough.

Both the students and instructors told the researcher during the first interviews that they had to become part of the “evaluation of this instructional unit” design process because the efficiency of a unit could only be evaluated by the learners on which it was applied and the instructors who applied it.

Table 3 shows the variables to consider while designing a unit in the order of sequence to follow the stages.

### **How should these dynamics be dealt with to make an efficient plan for the instructional unit to influence their achievement in argumentative essay writing in a positive way?**

In this part, how each phase of the instructional unit design was handled and the findings were shared.



### **The needs of the students**

Participant students told the researcher during the interviews that their needs had to be taken into consideration in terms of a design of an instructional unit because they were highly in need of this essay type to pursue their academic studies. PS2 explained:

*"I want to search some articles about my departmental courses which are written in English and I want to react to what I have read and submit my reports in English. In order to be able to write in a well-organized way, I have to learn how to write an 'argumentative essay'."*

This quote showed the enthusiasm that these learners had to learn this essay type and this was convincing that they needed to have such an instructional unit. The participant instructors also stated the importance of this essay type. I3 mentioned in the interview:

*"They highly need to learn how to write an argumentative essay because when they take their departmental courses, they are expected to present their own viewpoints about a certain issue and they will make use of the knowledge that they have learned here. They have to know how to support their own ideas against the ones opposed to them. Furthermore, they will benefit from it in their professional life, as well."*

The comments of I3 clearly displayed the significance of this essay type for the students as well as the urgency to design this instructional unit.

The researcher also asked the participants students in the faculty whether they had ever needed to use this essay type. DS1 replied to this question by saying:

*"We were supposed to write lab reports every two weeks last year so we highly benefitted from this type of essay to explain the different points of views about a certain kind of experiments in these reports."*

The experience of the previous students in the School of Foreign Languages where this study was conducted showed that prep students would need this essay type when they started to take their departmental courses. Therefore, they were asked what they needed to learn "argumentative essay" writing. PS1, PS2 and PS3 all stated that "content" and "vocabulary" were two most important parts of their language needs. PS3 stated:

*"We have some deficiency in content and vocabulary while we are writing an essay so we have a lot of difficulty in finding the right words to write what is expected from us as we have no idea about the writing tasks given."*

**Table 3.** The stages to follow while designing an instructional unit.

<b>Dynamics to consider to design an instructional unit</b>
The needs of the students
Entry characteristic
Goals and objectives
Instructional strategy
Assessment
Materials
Implementation
Evaluation of the whole process

This quote indicated the need to cover the content that would give the students the insight into what they were going to write as well as the vocabulary that they had to be familiar with to write an essay. Thus; from the interviews, it was understood that students felt the need to learn how to write an "argumentative essay" so this instructional unit was a must and what they needed to have more was "content" and "vocabulary" so that they could acquire this style of writing.

### **Entry characteristics**

This element was mentioned by the participant instructors during the interviews. These three instructors mentioned the fact that these students were shown how to write an independent paragraph writing in the first term. At the beginning of the second term, they were shown how to write an essay. As the researcher was an on-site academic teaching in the context of the study, he was aware of these contextual clues. Thus, the entry characteristic could be listed as these for the instructional unit:

- How to write an essay
- How to organize the essay and the parts of it such as introduction, body, and conclusion
- How to write a thesis statement at the end of the introduction
- How to write topic sentences for each body paragraph
- How to write supporting sentences for each body paragraph
- How to integrate his suggestions, recommendations, advice and ideas in the conclusion paragraph

These are the concepts that were thought to be acquired by the students before the design of the instructional unit. However, the researcher wanted to have some more concrete results so he used the "writing" part of the mid-term papers of class where this action research was conducted to determine whether these students had the entry skills necessary to learn any type of an academic essay. All the mid-term papers of the students who were taught by the researcher himself were evaluated by the

researcher again and it was found that 88% of the students did not have any problems with the organization pattern or the format of the essay but they had some serious problems in making up a logical and fluent content consisting of appropriate vocabulary and grammatical structures. This also showed the consistency in the data between what was mentioned as the weakest points of the students in the interviews and the deficiencies detected in the mid-term papers. What is more, the range of the mid-term scores of the students was between 50 and 100. The average of results was 67.35. The problems on the mid-term papers were the lack of content and appropriate vocabulary that should be combined with a well-structured grammar.

### **Goals and objectives**

The interviews with the participant instructors showed the importance of “goals and objectives” as an instructional unit design. The researcher determined the goals considering what the participant instructors said during the interviews as well as the opinions of the student interviewees. What is more, the contextual clues gave the researcher an insight into how these goals and objectives had to be chosen.

#### **Intellectual skills goals:**

- Students will be able to list the controversial viewpoints in a specific well-organized academic essay format.
- Students will be able to reflect different points of views towards a controversial topic on the paper.
- Students will be able to express different perspectives from different angles in a well-organized way.
- Students will be able to organize a fluent, coherent and a unified essay with an impressive content

#### **Subordinate skills:**

- Students will be able to use certain grammatical structures to state the controversies in the issue.
- Students will be able to use certain vocabulary to be able to present the supporters’ ideas and opponents’ ideas towards a controversial issue.
- Students will be able to be aware of the differing viewpoints about an issue.

#### **Attitudinal goals:**

- Students will be able to respect the different points of views about a certain issue.
- Students will be able to be informed about the importance of essay writing.

- Students will be able to feel the need to use “Argumentative Essay” both in their educational and professional life.
- Students will be able to learn how to be objective towards a certain issue by presenting the viewpoints from different angles.

#### **Subordinate skills:**

- Students will be able to be aware that there are different viewpoints about an issue.
- Students will be able to make an empathy with people who thinks differently from others.
- Students will be able to be willing to learn different perspectives towards a controversial issue.

The researcher determined intellectual skills goals, which are more academic and directly serves for the purpose of the study, as well as the attitudinal goals, which are directly related to humane elements that can highly affect the academic success and motivation of the students. In addition to both different types of goals, subordinate skills for each category were also written.

#### **Instructional strategy**

Both students and instructors showed an interest in the way this instructional unit would be implemented in the class. Surely, the students had some thoughts from the learners’ perspectives while the instructors came up with some ideas from teachers’ points of views. Therefore, the opinions of both sides were precious even though this might be considered as the teachers’ job to determine how to teach a particular subject. Hence, PS3 modestly made a comment on how they wanted to be taught:

*“We should read a text by analysing all of it sentence by sentence so that we can be aware of the certain structures and the use of vocabulary. After reading the texts, there should be some comprehension questions that examine whether we can reach the main idea of the text and whether we can find the supporting ideas in it. This will show us how to organize our own writing, as well. Then, there must be some vocabulary activities that will improve our lexical knowledge.”*

This quote showed that students wanted to be exposed to reading texts that would be analysed in depth so that the text would provide them with the necessary vocabulary, sentence structures that they could use in their own essay, and the ideas that they needed to have to form the content of their essays. Actually, the instructors also had the same mindset because they

believed in the importance of reading to be able to write. Thus, I1 made some complaints about the issue:

*“They do not read a lot. In order to write properly, they have to read a lot so that they will broaden their horizon and they will be able to see different viewpoints about a certain issue. As they start to read gradually, their linguistic skills such as grammatical and vocabulary knowledge will also improve, accordingly.”*

This view explicitly indicated the importance of reading texts to teach to write an academic essay. I3 elaborated on the issue by saying:

*“Professionally written texts should be brought to the class. They might seem a little bit complicated for the students but they should be presented first and comprehension questions should follow them in the sequence of the lesson. Students should be able to understand the main message of the text. Then, I would like to show example essays written by students whose essays might be considered as model.”*

This comment made by I3 clearly showed the way this instructional unit could be designed. The sequence was also stressed with the help of the integration of reading texts with the sample essays that should be shown to the learners as a model.

The researcher had taken all these different views into account before the design of the unit. Consequently, the instructional unit had two professionally written, authentic reading texts along with their comprehension questions and vocabulary exercises.

### **Assessment**

The assessment of the students for this instructional unit was done in three different ways with two different types of assessments: formative and summative assessment.

The first one was pre-test process. This was highly important to determine the entry skills of the students because without knowing the entry skills, the subordinate skills and main objectives and goals would have never been decided. Thus; for this pre-test period, summative assessment was used. The mid-term results of the students who were taught the instructional unit can be considered as a summative assessment type because students were tested once and within a time period which required them to show their writing skills within 75 min. Those mid-term results gave some idea about the level of the students in terms of writing.

The second assessment was done during the implementation process of the instructional unit. The researcher used “observation protocol” in this phase of the assessment process because he recorded the

student reactions to the implementation of the unit. He tried to determine whether they could make both appropriate and accurate sentences that complied with the techniques given to them for an “argumentative essay” writing. This could be considered as “formative assessment” because the focus of the assessment was on whether the learners improved or developed their writing skills during the lesson and they were not given any grades or marks at the end of their production but rather they were given some feedback on what they had learned.

The third assessment was arranged at the end of the implementation of the instructional unit. The researcher had to understand whether the learners of the class in which this action research was planned reached the aims of this study. Thus, he gave a writing task to these learners who would write an argumentative essay considering all they had learned with the implementation of this instructional unit. However, whether this writing task should be written in class or out of class was not determined by the researcher himself but this had been determined as a result of the interviews with both participant instructors and students. Therefore, before the design of this instructional unit, both the instructors and students had been asked during the interviews where they wanted to do their writing practices. PS2 explained:

*“It will be easy for me concentrate on my writing at home all alone because it is difficult to focus on writing in class as there are various distractors especially if some of my classmates do not want to write but deal with something off-task, instead. What is more, I can do some research before writing at home as I want to create an outline before I start to write and I can only find this appropriate atmosphere at home.”*

This quote explains that PS2 explicitly wanted to write her writing task at home for several reasons. PS3 elaborated on the issue by saying:

*“If our instructor wants us to write in class, he should give us some time for us to do some research about the topic because we find it difficult to make up the content of our writing so we should do some research about the topic so as to be informed about it at home and then we should write it in class.”*

It can be understood that students did not feel comfortable to form content for their own essays so they needed to read a lot to easily write academically on the topic of the writing task. Instructors were also on the side of the students in terms of out of class writing task as I3 claimed:

*“At home they can use their resources such as dictionaries to look up some words or the*

*Internet so as to reach certain information that they might need to be able to write properly. In class they might not have such resources with them. What is more, writing is a skill that can be improved in a silent place as a self-study activity."*

This means that I3 thought that it would be both easier and beneficial for the students to practice their writing skills at home on their own right after the implementation of the instructional unit instead of in-class writing.

Both students and instructors interviewed were also asked how many times they needed to write an "argumentative essay" to practice in order to acquire the skills needed to write this essay type. PS1, PS2, and P3 all stated that writing once would be enough as they were going to write the first-draft and they would write the final-draft according to the feedback given by their instructors. Thus, they stated their content with this implementation but DS1 who was one of the students taking his departmental courses in his faculty said:

*"The number of the writing tasks given as an assignment for each essay type must be increased as the more we write, the better we become at writing."*

This quote shows the importance of practicing many times to acquire the skills needed for the learners. I1 also agreed with DS1 by saying:

*"Students should write at least three times so as to internalize a certain essay type because in their first attempt they can only try to find the appropriate content with the help of brainstorming. In their second writing effort, they learn from the mistakes that they have made in their previous essay and they learn the format that they can use to make the content seem well-organized. In their third attempt, they learn how to write an essay by using an appropriate format and an organized content."*

The instructor clearly stated the importance of practice in terms of the writing skill development because it seemed to be difficult to acquire the skills necessary to write an academic essay just after writing it once. The data collected through the writing task papers submitted to the researcher by the students of the class for which this instructional unit was designed showed that students had no trouble in the organization pattern of the essays and they used the certain vocabulary needed to write that essay. What is more, they had formed a relevant content for their essays because they had been exposed to related topics all through the unit. However, there were some problems in their sentence structures, which could be perfect by practice because writing an essay requires

a learner to be original and creative (Tomak, 2020). Thus; while they tried to make their own sentences apart from the ones shown to them in the unit, they made some mistakes which were corrected by the researcher as it was their first draft of their writings so that their awareness level would be increased and they would not make the same mistakes again in their final draft. However, students were also asked how they wanted to get their feedback on their writing paper during the interviews. They wanted to have both written and oral feedback as they thought these two different types of feedback would be more beneficial together. PS3 made some explanations about the topic:

*"I want to get written feedback on my essay paper and I want to decode it on my own so that I will be able to self-correct my own mistakes but if I have some difficulty in understanding it, I should get oral feedback from my instructor on the issues that I haven't comprehended well."*

The student explicitly mentioned his need to get both written and oral feedback. The latter is expected unless he finds the former confusing. The researcher also asked the instructors about the way they would provide the feedback, they all reached a consensus on the importance of the written feedback. I2 made some elaborations on the feedback she had given to her students.

*"I write my feedback on the paper on which students write their essays. I use symbols for them to understand their mistakes so that they will learn from their mistakes by self-correcting them. Also, I give some further information about their deficiencies as a whole. However, some students still do not understand my feedback and they want me to explain the feedback written on their papers orally. Thus, I use both accordingly if the time permits."*

This participant instructor talked about the importance of written feedback but she also gave her students oral feedback if necessary. The instructors complained about the time limitation because they had to keep up with the syllabus applied in the school so they did not have the flexibility to allocate more time to the feedback sessions as they had to introduce the topic of the week in the following weeks. This showed that they did not have enough time to provide the students with oral feedback but instead they wrote their feedback on the first draft of the paper. The instructors also stated the importance of the self-correction of the mistakes made by the students so they used symbols to make them aware of the mistakes that they had made so that they would not be spoon-fed as mentioned in the quotation of I2 above.

## **Materials**

For this instructional unit, a book which was already in use in the institution where this study was conducted was used. The book was called LEAPs and it was a compilation of different sources and it was created by the material office of the school. The texts in it were taken from authentic sources but the exercises of them were all written by the instructors working in this institution. This book was created for the purposes of improving students' academic knowledge and skills and that is why it was called LEAPs, which stands for Learning English for Academic Purpose Skills.

The book had six different modules and each module had different themes. In each module, the book aimed at teaching students some concepts and terms that they would come across when they started to take their departmental courses because the students of the institution would take English-medium-instruction when they passed the final of the School of Foreign Languages. This meant that they had to be exposed to content-based learning with the help of this book. Grabe (2009) also confirms it by saying "content-based teaching is thematic and involves a set of related topics that generate the coherence of the curricular content" (p.345). Therefore, this book was organized in accordance with this idea and every module presented some concepts and terms about different majors. For instance, one module was related to education, another one was related to media and communication. The module which was used for this research was based on health and medicine.

The book served the needs of the students who were expected to improve their CALP (Cognitive Academic Linguistic Proficiency). The unit started with a reading skill, the purpose of which was to develop the comprehension level of students. The reading skills introduced in the instructional unit were "skimming" and "scanning", both of which are significantly necessary for students who will be responsible for huge amount of reading about their majors while they are taking their departmental courses. What is more, they are required for students who will write an argumentative essay because they need to read a lot about a controversial topic if they are to write an argumentative essay about it as students should know the different ideas about an issue from different perspectives to be able to write an argumentative essay. They have to be familiar with various ideas about a certain issue. They must know the opinions of the supporters and the opponents of an idea. Thus, they have to read a lot before starting to write an argumentative essay. Skimming and scanning strategies will help students to read quite a lot in a certain period of time. Thus, these reading skills are essential for them. After providing the theoretical information about how to skim and scan a text, there were exercises for students to practice what they had learned.

Right after the reading skills, the book had two different

reading passages followed by comprehension questions and vocabulary activities. Even though these reading passages were different, they were related to each other because they were put under the theme of "health and medicine". With the help of these two texts, students were provided with the different views about health and medicine along with the vocabulary and structures that they would use in their own writings. They were also informed about differing views about controversial issues that had existed both in the media or publications.

When the students were finished with the reading texts, they were made to listen to a lecture about the same theme so the topic of the lecture that they would listen was also related to what they had read in the reading texts on previous pages in the same module. The listening section of the book was done in note-taking form due to the backwash effect reason because in the listening exam students were to take notes and they did not have the questions in front of them. They were given the questions after they had listened to the lecture twice. They did the questions in accordance with the notes that they had taken in the exam. This listening section of the book was both an exercise for the exams and a chance to be informed about the topic because students needed to be well-informed so as to make up a coherent and relevant content for their essays.

At the end of the module, the topic of the writing assignment task was given with some of the ideas that could be stated and extended in the essay. However, there was not an example essay available in the module of the book so there was an extra material used to supplement the book in accordance with the results of the interviews done for the needs analysis of the students. An argumentative essay example written by one of the successful students from last year was added to the instructional unit so that the students would understand what was expected from them. What is more, they were familiarized with the organization that was shown in line with the sample student essay.

## **Implementation**

The implementation of the material in class took 15 hours which was the total amount of time allocated for the instructional unit within a week because each module was designed to be covered in a specified time for the syllabus to be completed at the end of the year. It took a while for students to digest what had been taught to them because as writing is a productive skill, students need to be given some input so that teachers can expect them to provide the output that is aimed at the end of the instructional unit.

Considering the relationship between input and output (Ellis, 1994), the lesson hours in this instructional unit were scattered accordingly. The first three hours of the week were allocated for skimming and scanning reading strategies. They were taught how to read a lot within a

restricted time by using “skimming” and “scanning” strategies. During these three hours, they were taught how to skim and scan a text and they were given two different passages to read in order to practice their skimming and scanning strategies.

After spending three hours on reading strategies teaching, the instructor spent three hours to read a text related to medicine and health, analysed it with the learners and gave the students some time to do the exercises. After the exercises were done, the answers were discussed with the students and the points that were found difficult by the students were explained by the instructor. After this, another three hours were allocated for another different but a related reading text. Again, the text was read and analysed and some structural patterns and vocabulary were emphasized by the instructor. During the analysis, students' contributions were encouraged. Then, the exercises including comprehension questions and vocabulary practice just like the previous text were also done by the students. Students cooperated with each other while they were doing the exercises. They had group work activities so that the stronger learners could help the weaker ones. During this cooperation, the on-site researcher walked along the aisles of the class so as to check whether the students were on the right track or whether they needed any help or guidance. After answering the comprehension questions and doing the vocabulary exercises of these two different but related passages, students were asked some critical questions about the text so as to make them speak about what they had read. By doing this, students were made to think critically towards to the issue and they were made to question what they had read. This was one of the intellectual skills goals. Consequently, they would be able to have a critical view which was required so as to write an argumentative essay. This was one of the attitudinal skills goals. These implementations were carried out in class in accordance with the educational philosophy of this research, which was “constructivism” as discussed in the introduction part of the paper. Furthermore, without making students informed about the issue, it would be unlikely for them to write because they also stated in the interviews that they lacked the certain information to write an essay and this led to their deficiency in making up the content.

In addition to the three hours allocated for the reading strategy teaching and six hours allocated for two different reading passages analysis, three hours were separated for the listening activity. Before the listening part, students were asked some pre-listening questions to provide them with the opportunity to activate what they had already known about the topic. After the pre-listening questions, students were made to listen to a lecture which was related to the theme of the module about which they were going to write an essay. They listened to the lecture twice without looking at the questions because listening section was conducted as a note-taking exercise as students would be asked in this way in the mid-term

and final exams. After they wrote down what they had heard, they answered the questions by looking at their notes. After the listening questions were discussed, the instructor focused on some content information, vocabulary and structural phrases that needed special attention in the lecture so that students would be able to internalize the topic. Again, just like the reading exercises, students were asked critical questions about the lecture they listened to. This was a good post-listening activity to improve the students' production skills.

After spending three hours for the listening, the last three hours out of 15 hours were allocated for the writing skill itself. During one hour, students were taught the theoretical basis of the “Argumentative Essay”: why and how to write it. They were introduced the format and the organization pattern that they would use. In the following lesson, they were shown an example student essay as a sample which had been written by one of the most successful students who had taken an academic writing course in the same institution in the previous year. That sample essay was analysed by focusing on the format, vocabulary and structural phrases that would be used so as to write an argumentative essay. With a solid and concrete example, students were able to understand it better and the theoretical background that they were provided in the previous lesson became more tentative. What is more; by analysing an essay written by a student who was in the same level as they were, they started to believe in their potential to be able to write such an essay because they could realize that it was an achievable goal. In the last hour of the instructional unit, students were given the topic on which they were going to write an essay. They were introduced the topic and its controversies so that they could come up with the ideas discussed on it. Some of the perspectives were shared with the help of the brainstorming technique with the whole class so that students would be informed about the different viewpoints about the topic on which they were going to write out the class as they wanted to do so because the participant students all stated in the interviews that they wanted to do their writing practices out of the class. Therefore, this brainstorming activity helped them to make up their content at home when they were all alone to write their own essays. Additionally, the topic of the sample student essay was similar to the one they were going to write so this gave them some ideas on how to write their essays properly. Table 4 shows the flow of the implementation of this instructional unit.

Table 4 shows how the instructional unit that was designed for the purpose of this study was applied in the real classroom environment.

### ***Evaluation of the whole process***

This instructional unit was not designed only with the expertise of the researcher but with the views of the students of the class where this research was conducted

and the precious opinions of the previous students of the prep school. In addition to the students, instructors were also interviewed to get some expert views as for the design of the unit. Thus, the evaluation had to be made with everyone who contributed to this process. As a consequence of this, after the implementation, both participant students on whom the instructional unit was applied and the participant instructors were interviewed again. The instructors were shown the instructional unit plans, materials, evaluation tools and the phases of the implementation and they were asked whether they thought the plan went well. They all said that it seemed to be satisfactory considering their own experiences in the research context where this unit was applied. However, the views of the students were much more important

because they were the ones who went through this implementation. Thus, the participant students taking their departmental courses (DS1, DS2, DS3) were not interviewed right after the implementation. The participant students in the context of the study stated their content with the unit and they found it quite beneficial. PS3 gave some details about the process by saying:

*“Even though it was a writing course, we were taught some reading skills that we can use, we learned vocabulary from the readings and we were informed about the issue that we were going to write. The integration of the skills was so beneficial that I felt that they all improved my writing skill together.”*

**Table 4.** The phases of the instructional unit applied in the class.

The lesson hours	Things covered
3 hours	Reading strategies: Skimming and scanning
3 hours	An analysis of an authentic reading text in depth
3 hours	An analysis of another authentic reading text in depth
3 hours	Listening activity and development of note-taking skills
3 hours	Writing (Theoretical basis + Sample Essay Analysis + Brainstorming for the writing task)

This student clearly stated that she was so glad with both the integration of skills and the implementation phases of the unit designed for this study. PS2 elaborated on the issue by saying:

*“We were made to read complex passages, which included sophisticated grammar structures and complicated vocabulary, which made it difficult for us to understand them. However, when we were given a sample essay written by a student just like us, this gave us encouragement that we could write as well as that person so it was both logical and practical to analyse a sample student essay, as well.”*

It can be understood that though the learner found the level of the reading texts a little bit higher, the sample essay that had been analysed to supplement the theoretical knowledge of essay writing made it easier for them to learn how to write properly and accurately. However, the difficulty of the reading texts was arranged on purpose because they supplied the learners with the grammatical structures and vocabulary that they needed to write an argumentative essay.

Another important point to consider in terms of the evaluation of the whole process was the fact that the study was conducted by an on-site researcher who was also familiar with the contextual clues of the research setting. Thus, he could easily follow the developments of

the learners for which this instructional unit was designed with the help of the observation protocol. What is more, the writing task assignment given to the learners who submitted them to the researcher who applied the instructional unit in the class where this action research was conducted was a perfect indicator of the success of the unit because it was the reflection of what learners had acquired from that unit. When all the writing tasks were evaluated by the researcher, the students seemed to figure out the principles of an argumentative essay writing because the only mistakes that the researcher came across on the papers were some grammatical errors or incorrect sentence structures. There was no problem with the content, organization pattern or the vocabulary use. Consequently, the average score of the whole papers was 86 out of 100, which was quite high to claim that the learners acquired the necessary skills needed to write an “argumentative essay”.

## DISCUSSION

Teaching writing is a challenging task for most of the teachers because writing is a productive skill which requires learners to consider several elements while they are composing their essays because it is a complicated process as Shaughnessy (1977) has explained: “one of the most important facts about the composing process that seems to get hidden from the students is that the

process that creates precision is itself messy" (p. 222). Therefore, students have to consider lots of variables while they are writing their essays such as their vocabulary and grammar knowledge, the content of their essay, the organization pattern of it, punctuation and so on (Correa, 2010).

Students knew their own deficiencies much better than anyone else. This was significant as the unit was designed taking their weaknesses into account because teaching a particular unit is not something independent from the previous units or the following units because teaching or learning can be considered like a chain of units that should be related to each other. This case is especially valid for language teaching and learning because a good language learner is the one who can relate what s/he has previously learned to the new input presented to him/her. This means that his/her cognitive skills have improved to make these categories and relations. Thus; before starting a unit, a teacher is to expect the learners to know certain kind of knowledge for them to be able to understand and perform the objectives of the new unit. These are called "entry skills" as it has been stated by Dick et al. (2009) "learners must already have mastered entry skills in order to learn the new skills included in the instruction" (p.70). As a result of this, the entry skills were determined by the researcher before the design of the instructional unit considering the views of both students and instructors during the interviews.

Upon the determination of the entry skills needed to be able to proceed to this instructional unit, goals and objectives were finalized because they were the key factors that would affect the whole process as well as the success of the unit. Thus, this unit must have some expectations from the students at the end of the process. However, they must be realistic and reasonable for the students to achieve (Brown, 2002). It can also be claimed that teachers who expect their students to be responsible for their own learning and set goals for this will be more successful (Corbett et al., 2002; Jussim and Eccles, 1992). Hence, the familiarity of the on-site researcher both with the context and learners' profile was a great advantage to set the goals of the unit.

No matter how carefully the goals of a unit are determined, the methodology teachers use to apply it is equally significant as for the success of the unit. Hedge (2000) elaborates "every teacher needs to develop a methodology which integrates the specific needs of his or her students and a principled approach to the teaching of writing" (p.330). In other words, instructors have to develop a good methodology that will serve the needs of the students. Therefore, the views of both students and instructors were paid a great deal of attention by means of interviews. What is more, in this study, all the participant instructors wanted to have a guidance on the way they would apply the unit despite the fact that all of them could be regarded as experienced teachers because all of them had more than 8 years of experience. This attitude should not be regarded as the deficiency of

the instructors but rather they wanted to "play safe" so that the success of the unit would be so much satisfactory because the plan might not work well even though all the elements were perfectly designed. Thus, instructors must know how to implement a unit with a perfect methodology.

Instructional strategy is also affected by the background of the teachers, especially the departments where they have graduated, because in this study I3 who was a graduate of English language and literature department emphasized the importance of reading in terms of instructional strategy while I1 and I2 who were ELT graduates talked more about the significance of the pedagogy in the application phase of the unit. Cooper and McIntyre (1996) mention a case of a teacher who has an interesting background in their book "showing how by virtue of her personal biography she holds conflicting beliefs which influence her classroom practice" (p. 87). Therefore, it can be concluded that the background of the teachers naturally affects their methodology in the class.

The instructional strategy of the unit focused on the integration of skills so reading components, listening exercises and speaking activities were all integrated. Therefore, even though the purpose of this instructional unit was to teach writing, all of the skills were integrated to make students use the language and construct information as the theory of constructivism suggests. Therefore, students were active all through the different stages and phases of the lessons and they were keeping an eye on their own improvement level. Harmer (1991) puts some emphasis of the importance of the integration of the skills by saying:

*"Firstly, it is very often true that one skill cannot be performed without another. It is impossible to speak in a conversation if you do not listen as well, and people seldom write without reading - even if they only read what they have just written" (p.93).*

This quote clarifies that it is impossible to teach a certain skill by isolating it from the others. Thus, this unit allocated some time to other skills before the introduction of the writing skill which can only be completed with reading and listening skills, both of which provide the input for the students to have their own outputs (Table 4).

With the integration of four skills, students were provided with the input that they could use to make up their content in their own writing papers. Learners were concerned about how to create a certain context that would make their content of the papers both fluent and coherent. Thus, they always sought for input from which they would utilize for their essays because good writers think about what to write first and then they start to think how to write what they have thought. According to Perl (1979) and Sommers (1980) less experienced writers always concentrate on grammar and correctness, which distract them from focusing on clarity of ideas and



organization. Therefore, the importance of content is superior to the grammatical accuracy of the paper most of the time (Leki, 1991). Reid (1993) emphasizes on the importance of the familiarity of the students with the content and the topic. Thus, the focus of the unit was mostly on the content formation, organization and the vocabulary needed to write an academic essay and the writing task papers submitted to the researcher at the end of the application of the instructional unit showed that students were able to use the vocabulary and pay attention to the content formation considering the organization pattern of their essays. However, they made some grammatical mistakes to make their own sentences so grammar knowledge seemed to be a significant part of an accurate and a proper writing. Long (1991) exclaims that learners will gradually acquire the grammatical system of the language and no one can expect them to discover it all of a sudden. Thus, without any attempts, their grammar will never improve. However, without grammatical knowledge of the language, it seems to be difficult for the learners to make both proper and accurate sentences, which are some of the most significant requirements of an academic essay.

Another striking finding of this study was that there was an inconsistency of the thoughts between the prep students and students in the departments who were supported by the participant instructors in terms of the number of essay that they would write right after the unit as a practice. The prep students wanted to write only one writing task after the unit though both the participant instructors and students taking their departmental courses at the time of the study said that it was necessary for the learners to write more than once to practice well. According to the study conducted by Akinwamide (2012), the results show that students writing multiple drafts before the final writing are more successful in their essay writings. However, the important point here is that the quality time that they spend to practice their writing must be taken into consideration instead of the number of essays that students write. What is more, the value of the feedback that they will get from their instructors must also be taken into account. Therefore, instructors must pay a great deal of attention to the papers of the learners while providing feedback. However, this can only be achieved with small numbers of the students for whom the instructors are responsible because Zamel (1985) points out that there is a direct connection between the quality of feedback and the number of student essays evaluated by the teachers. As there were only 20 students in the class where this action research was conducted, the researcher was able to provide quality feedback to each learner in the research context. If the number of students increases, it is quite probable for the busy teachers to have the tendency to ignore the mistakes of the students (Cohen and Cavalcanti, 1990). This will badly affect the quality of the feedback that students get.

In addition to the inconsistency on the number of

essays students had to write, students wanted to have both oral and written feedback for their essays but this was not possible in the research context as the instructors were in a rush to cover the module of the week to keep up with the syllabus/pacing given to them for the whole term. However, this must be arranged because more time should be allocated to feedback sessions for the writing assignments given to the students as oral feedback given to the learners will facilitate their development of academic writing in a positive sense.

## CONCLUSION

An argumentative writing task is demanding for L2 writers who may not have a clear idea of this genre of writing (Kibler and Hardigree, 2017). Thus, there are a lot of variables that affect this process. These variables have all been discussed in the results section but they cannot be evaluated separately because all these dynamics are directly related to each other so every part of this process must be carefully thought. Zarrabi and Bozorgian (2020) justify the different variables affecting the process by saying that “depending on task characteristics (such as difficulty or complexity) and also students characteristics (such as problem-solving skills, need for cognition, reasoning skills), different amount of time and different budgeting of it might be needed” (p. 11). According to Truscott (1996), student profile, teacher profile as well as the learning environment all affect the quality of an essay so these elements must be evaluated as a whole. As this study was carried out by an on-site researcher, which was one of strengths of this research; he did not miss any points that would affect the process as he was already familiar with the instructors working in the context of the study, the profile of the learners as well as the atmosphere of the context.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Even though this study had several strengths like an on-site researcher, three different data collection tools, three different interviewee profiles, it had some limitations, as well.

First of all, the number of the interviewees could be higher. For instance, instead of three students from the class where this action research was conducted, 5 students could have got involved in the study but nobody was forced to participate in the study and only three students were willing to be interviewed so there were no more participants from that group. What is more, only instructors working in the School of Foreign Languages were interviewed but the lecturers offering courses in the faculties that provide English-medium-instruction and that accept students who pass the proficiency test of the institution where this action research was conducted

could not be interviewed. These faculty members could have given valuable information in terms of the writing skills of the students but due to the time limitations, the necessary arrangements could not be set.

Another limitation of this study was the assessment of the unit. It was based only on the writing assignment task given to the students in the class where this action research was conducted. Thus, the researcher could evaluate the student performance in accordance with the writing tasks of the learners. However, an official exam performance just like the proficiency test that would be applied at the end of the academic year could reveal everything so much better but because of the time restrictions this type of evaluation could not be included in the scope of this study.

The material used for this research is another point to consider because a totally new material development could not be achieved as the program applied in the research context did not permit it. Therefore, the material was only adapted with few additions for the purpose of this study. However, the construction of a totally new material directly for the purpose of this study could have given some different results. Thus, for the following studies, this could be kept in mind and the material can be created from scratch.

Last but not least, this is a contextual study, which means the results might change if this is implemented in another context. Therefore, it is highly suggested that this research design should be applied in another university considering these limitations for further research.

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