



Article

An Integrative-Cognitive Model for Developing EFL Written Competence in Secondary Schools

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Abstract: This article proposes an integrative-cognitive model aimed at developing EFL (English as a Foreign Language) written competence in secondary school learners. The model combines cognitive writing theory, communicative language teaching principles, and digital pedagogical tools to enhance learners' linguistic, discourse, and metacognitive skills. The study is based on an experimental design conducted among secondary school students. The results demonstrate statistically significant improvement in students' coherence, grammatical accuracy, lexical richness, and strategic self-regulation. The integrative-cognitive model is presented as an effective framework for systematic and reflective development of written competence in EFL contexts.

Keywords: EFL writing, integrative model, cognitive approach, written competence, metacognition, secondary education.

1. Introduction

Developing written competence in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts remains one of the most challenging and methodologically complex tasks in secondary education. Writing is not merely a linguistic activity focused on the accurate production of grammatical forms; rather, it is a multidimensional cognitive, communicative, and social process that requires idea generation, organization, drafting, revising, editing, and self-monitoring. In EFL classrooms, students frequently struggle not only with language accuracy but also with coherence, argumentation, discourse structure, and strategic control of the writing process. These difficulties are particularly evident at the secondary school level, where learners are expected to transition from sentence-level production to extended, logically organized texts[1].

Traditional product-oriented approaches to writing instruction have historically emphasized the final written product, prioritizing grammatical correctness and lexical accuracy. While linguistic precision is undeniably important, such approaches often overlook essential components of written competence, including discourse organization, genre awareness, audience orientation, and metacognitive regulation. As a result, students may produce grammatically acceptable texts that lack coherence, argumentative clarity, and communicative effectiveness. Moreover, excessive correction-focused instruction can reduce learner autonomy and limit opportunities for reflective development[2].

In response to these limitations, contemporary pedagogical research advocates for integrative frameworks that combine linguistic, cognitive, and communicative dimensions of writing instruction. Process-oriented and genre-based approaches have expanded the understanding of writing as recursive and socially situated; however, there remains a need for models that systematically integrate cognitive structuring, communicative interaction, and strategic self-regulation within a unified instructional framework. In secondary schools, learners require structured scaffolding that supports both language accuracy and

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higher-order thinking skills, including analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Without such structured guidance, writing instruction may remain fragmented and insufficiently aligned with broader educational objectives[3].

From a cognitive perspective, writing involves complex mental operations such as planning, conceptual organization, problem-solving, and monitoring. Learners must simultaneously manage linguistic encoding and discourse-level structuring while maintaining awareness of communicative purpose and audience expectations. These processes require metacognitive control – the ability to plan one’s writing, monitor progress, identify weaknesses, and revise accordingly. Research in educational psychology emphasizes that explicit development of metacognitive strategies significantly enhances writing performance and learner autonomy[4].

At the same time, communicative language teaching underscores the importance of meaningful interaction and authentic purpose in language production. Writing should not be reduced to isolated exercises but treated as purposeful communication embedded in social contexts. Peer feedback, collaborative drafting, and audience awareness contribute to deeper engagement and improved discourse competence. Therefore, effective EFL writing instruction must integrate cognitive structuring with communicative interaction and reflective practice[5].

Despite growing recognition of these principles, many secondary school classrooms still lack a coherent instructional model that synthesizes cognitive, communicative, and strategic dimensions of writing competence. Instruction often alternates between grammar-focused drills and loosely structured writing tasks without a systematic progression from idea generation to reflective evaluation. Consequently, students may develop partial skills without achieving holistic written competence[6].

Therefore, this study introduces an integrative-cognitive model designed to systematically develop EFL written competence in secondary education. The model is grounded in cognitive writing theory, communicative pedagogy, and metacognitive strategy instruction. It seeks to provide structured scaffolding across all stages of the writing process, ensuring balanced development of linguistic accuracy, discourse organization, and strategic regulation[7].

The purpose of this research is to design, implement, and empirically evaluate an integrative-cognitive instructional model for improving EFL writing skills in secondary schools. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Theoretically substantiate the components of an integrative-cognitive framework for EFL writing instruction;
2. Develop a structured instructional model applicable to secondary education;
3. Experimentally test the effectiveness of the model in improving students’ written competence;
4. Analyze its impact on linguistic, discourse, and metacognitive dimensions of writing performance[8].

By addressing both theoretical and practical dimensions of writing pedagogy, the present study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on effective EFL writing instruction and to offer a replicable model adaptable to diverse secondary school contexts[9].

2. Theoretical Framework

The proposed integrative-cognitive model is grounded in three interrelated theoretical perspectives that collectively explain the multidimensional nature of EFL writing development: Cognitive Writing Theory, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and Metacognitive Theory. The synthesis of these frameworks provides a comprehensive conceptual foundation for understanding writing as a complex, recursive,

and socially mediated process that requires both linguistic knowledge and strategic regulation[10].

1. Cognitive Writing Theory

Cognitive Writing Theory conceptualizes writing as a recursive, problem-solving activity that involves a sequence of interdependent mental operations, including planning, drafting, revising, and editing. From this perspective, writing is not a linear act of transcription but a dynamic cognitive process in which learners generate ideas, organize information, translate concepts into linguistic forms, and continuously evaluate their output. The recursive nature of writing implies that writers move back and forth between stages, refining their ideas and restructuring their texts as new insights emerge.

Within EFL contexts, cognitive challenges are intensified by limited linguistic resources. Learners must simultaneously manage idea generation and language encoding, often resulting in cognitive overload. Therefore, structured scaffolding is essential to support learners' cognitive processing. Graphic organizers, writing frames, guided outlines, and staged drafting procedures reduce cognitive burden and allow students to focus on higher-order discourse organization[11].

Cognitive Writing Theory also emphasizes the importance of explicit instruction in text structure and rhetorical organization. Students benefit from understanding how ideas are hierarchically arranged, how arguments are developed, and how cohesion is maintained across paragraphs. By incorporating cognitive structuring tools into instruction, the integrative-cognitive model promotes deeper conceptual organization and improved discourse coherence.

2. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative Language Teaching situates writing within authentic communicative contexts. According to CLT principles, language learning occurs most effectively when learners use language purposefully to convey meaning rather than merely practice isolated forms. Writing, therefore, should be treated as purposeful communication directed toward a specific audience and guided by a communicative intention[12].

In EFL secondary classrooms, writing tasks are often artificial and decontextualized. The communicative perspective addresses this limitation by integrating audience awareness, genre conventions, and real-world purposes into instructional design. Students are encouraged to consider who their readers are, what the communicative goal is, and how language choices affect clarity and persuasion.

Furthermore, CLT highlights the role of interaction in language development. Peer feedback sessions, collaborative drafting, and dialogic discussion about texts transform writing into a socially mediated activity. Through interaction, learners negotiate meaning, clarify misunderstandings, and internalize discourse patterns. This interactive dimension strengthens discourse competence and enhances students' ability to produce coherent, contextually appropriate texts.

3. Metacognitive Theory

Metacognitive Theory focuses on learners' awareness and regulation of their own cognitive processes. In writing instruction, metacognition refers to the ability to plan writing tasks strategically, monitor progress during drafting, evaluate the effectiveness of arguments, and revise texts independently. Research consistently demonstrates that successful writers exhibit higher levels of metacognitive awareness and strategic control[13].

In EFL settings, students frequently lack explicit instruction in self-regulation strategies. They may complete writing tasks without systematic planning or reflection. The integrative-cognitive model addresses this gap by embedding metacognitive scaffolding into each stage of the writing process. Checklists, self-assessment rubrics, reflective

journals, and revision protocols encourage learners to analyze their strengths and weaknesses and take responsibility for improvement.

Metacognitive regulation is particularly important during revision, where students must evaluate coherence, lexical appropriateness, grammatical accuracy, and communicative effectiveness. By fostering reflective habits, the model aims to develop autonomous writers capable of continuous self-improvement beyond the classroom[14].

Integration of Theoretical Perspectives

The integration of Cognitive Writing Theory, Communicative Language Teaching, and Metacognitive Theory ensures a balanced and holistic approach to EFL writing development. Cognitive theory provides the structural foundation for organizing ideas; communicative theory situates writing within meaningful interaction; and metacognitive theory promotes reflective self-regulation.

Together, these perspectives enable the development of three core dimensions of written competence:

- Linguistic competence – accurate use of grammar and vocabulary;
- Discourse competence – coherent organization and logical progression of ideas;
- Strategic competence – self-regulation, revision skills, and adaptive writing strategies.

By synthesizing these theoretical orientations, the integrative-cognitive model moves beyond narrow product-oriented instruction and establishes a structured, process-based framework for developing EFL written competence in secondary education[15].

Model Structure

The integrative-cognitive model is structured as a systematic and recursive instructional framework consisting of five interconnected stages. These stages correspond to the cognitive, communicative, and metacognitive dimensions of writing development and are designed to ensure progressive formation of EFL written competence in secondary school learners. Although presented sequentially for methodological clarity, the stages function recursively, allowing learners to revisit earlier phases as needed during the writing process.

1. Cognitive Activation (Pre-writing Stage)

The first stage focuses on activating learners' prior knowledge and structuring their cognitive engagement with the writing topic. At this stage, writing is conceptualized as a meaning-construction process rather than immediate text production. Learners generate ideas through brainstorming activities, mind mapping, clustering techniques, and guiding questions that stimulate analytical and critical thinking[16].

The primary pedagogical objective of cognitive activation is to reduce cognitive overload during drafting by pre-organizing conceptual content. By visually mapping relationships between ideas, students establish logical connections and hierarchical structures that later support discourse coherence. This stage also encourages topic exploration, vocabulary expansion, and awareness of communicative purpose. Teachers facilitate the process by modeling idea generation strategies and guiding students toward clear thesis formation.

2. Structured Drafting

The second stage involves transforming organized ideas into a structured written text. Students produce initial drafts following a clearly defined macrostructure, typically consisting of introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion. At this stage, emphasis is placed on textual organization, paragraph unity, and logical progression of arguments[17].

Teachers provide scaffolding tools such as outlines, writing frames, model texts, and discourse markers to support students' development of cohesive texts. Linguistic accuracy is monitored but not overemphasized during initial drafting, as the primary goal is to

ensure idea development and structural coherence. The structured drafting phase enables learners to translate cognitive planning into tangible discourse while maintaining alignment with communicative objectives.

3. Collaborative Interaction

The third stage introduces a social dimension to writing development through peer collaboration and interactive feedback. Writing is treated as a socially mediated activity in which learners construct meaning through dialogue and shared evaluation. Peer feedback sessions are organized using analytic rubrics that focus on coherence, clarity, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary usage, and argumentation quality[18].

Collaborative interaction promotes audience awareness, as students learn to interpret their texts from the reader's perspective. The exchange of feedback fosters critical thinking and discourse analysis skills, while also increasing motivation and responsibility. Through guided peer evaluation, learners internalize assessment criteria and develop a deeper understanding of effective writing features. This stage strengthens communicative competence and enhances discourse-level awareness.

4. Metacognitive Revision

The fourth stage centers on reflective self-regulation and strategic text improvement. Based on peer and teacher feedback, as well as self-assessment checklists, learners revise their drafts to enhance coherence, grammatical precision, lexical appropriateness, and stylistic consistency. Revision is framed not as superficial correction but as substantive reorganization and refinement of ideas[19].

Metacognitive revision requires learners to evaluate their own cognitive processes, identify weaknesses, and implement targeted improvements. Students are encouraged to ask reflective questions such as: Is my argument logically structured? Are transitions clear? Does vocabulary accurately convey intended meaning? By systematically engaging in revision protocols, learners strengthen their strategic competence and develop greater autonomy in writing.

5. Reflective Evaluation

The final stage emphasizes reflective evaluation of both the written product and the writing process. Students document their experiences through reflective journals, self-evaluation reports, or digital portfolios. They analyze progress, identify recurring challenges, and set goals for future improvement[20].

Reflective evaluation consolidates metacognitive awareness and reinforces the recursive nature of writing. It shifts the focus from teacher-centered assessment to learner-centered growth. By reviewing previous drafts and feedback, students observe developmental patterns and gain confidence in their evolving competence. This stage also provides teachers with diagnostic insights for individualized instructional support.

Systemic Integration of Stages

The five stages operate as an integrated cycle rather than isolated procedures. Cognitive activation prepares learners for structured drafting; collaborative interaction enhances communicative effectiveness; metacognitive revision refines discourse quality; and reflective evaluation promotes long-term competence development. Together, these stages create a coherent instructional system that supports balanced development of linguistic accuracy, discourse organization, and strategic self-regulation. Through this structured yet flexible design, the integrative-cognitive model ensures that writing instruction in secondary EFL classrooms moves beyond product-oriented correction toward a dynamic, reflective, and competence-based learning process[21].

3. Materials and Methods

Research Design

The model was tested in a quasi-experimental study involving 60 secondary school students divided into control and experimental groups. The intervention lasted 12 weeks. Data collection methods:

- Pre-and post-writing tests
- Analytic scoring rubrics
- Student reflection journals
- Statistical analysis (Student's t-test)

The effectiveness of the integrative-cognitive model was examined through a quasi-experimental research design conducted in a secondary school EFL context. The study involved 60 students from the 9th grade, who were divided into two groups: an experimental group (n = 30) and a control group (n = 30). The groups were selected based on comparable English proficiency levels determined by a preliminary diagnostic writing test. Statistical analysis of the pre-test results confirmed that there was no significant difference between the two groups prior to the intervention ($p > 0.05$), ensuring initial equivalence[22].

The intervention lasted 12 weeks and was integrated into the regular English language curriculum. Both groups received the same thematic content and writing assignments; however, instructional procedures differed. The experimental group was taught using the integrative-cognitive model, which incorporated structured cognitive activation, guided drafting, collaborative interaction, metacognitive revision, and reflective evaluation. The control group followed a traditional product-oriented writing approach, focusing primarily on individual drafting and teacher-centered correction.

Research Procedure

The study was organized into three major phases:

1. Pre-experimental phase (Diagnostic Stage).

At the beginning of the study, both groups completed a standardized writing task designed to assess baseline written competence. The pre-test measured coherence, grammatical accuracy, lexical richness, discourse organization, and communicative appropriateness[23].

2. Intervention phase (Treatment Stage).

During the 12-week period, the experimental group engaged in structured writing cycles following the integrative-cognitive model. Each writing task progressed through the five instructional stages. The control group completed similar writing tasks but without structured cognitive scaffolding, peer interaction, or systematic reflective activities.

3. Post-experimental phase (Evaluation Stage).

At the end of the intervention, both groups completed a parallel writing test equivalent in structure and difficulty to the pre-test. The results were compared to measure development over time and between groups[24].

Data Collection Methods

To ensure methodological validity and reliability, multiple data collection instruments were employed:

- **Pre- and post-writing tests.**

These tests measured improvements in written competence across defined criteria. Tasks were aligned with CEFR-based secondary school standards.

- **Analytic scoring rubrics.**

Writing samples were evaluated using a structured analytic rubric assessing five dimensions: coherence, grammatical accuracy, lexical range, discourse organization, and communicative effectiveness. Each criterion was scored on a five-point scale. Two independent raters assessed the texts to ensure inter-rater reliability. The reliability coefficient reached 0.85, indicating high scoring consistency.

- **Student reflection journals.**

Learners in the experimental group maintained reflective journals documenting their writing strategies, challenges, and revisions. These qualitative data provided insight into metacognitive development and learner autonomy.

- **Statistical analysis (Student's t-test).**

Quantitative data from pre- and post-tests were analyzed using Student's t-test to determine whether observed differences were statistically significant. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$. Mean scores, standard deviations, and percentage gains were calculated to provide a comprehensive understanding of performance changes[25].

Validity and Reliability Considerations

Content validity was ensured by aligning writing tasks with secondary school curriculum standards and CEFR descriptors. Construct validity was supported by using multi-dimensional scoring criteria reflecting linguistic, discourse, and strategic components of writing competence. Reliability was strengthened through double-rating procedures and consistent testing conditions across groups.

Overall, the quasi-experimental design allowed for systematic comparison between traditional instruction and the integrative-cognitive model, providing empirical evidence regarding the model's pedagogical effectiveness in developing EFL written competence at the secondary school level.

The quantitative and qualitative findings of the study indicate that the integrative-cognitive model had a statistically significant positive impact on the development of EFL written competence. Comparative analysis of pre- and post-test results revealed that the experimental group demonstrated substantially greater improvement across all assessed criteria than the control group. Statistical verification using Student's t-test confirmed that the observed differences between groups were significant at the $p < 0.05$ level, thereby supporting the effectiveness of the intervention[26].

4. Results

Quantitative Findings

The most notable improvements in the experimental group were observed in discourse-level and strategic dimensions of writing competence:

- Discourse coherence increased by 23%, reflecting enhanced logical organization, clearer paragraph structure, and improved use of cohesive devices. Students demonstrated greater ability to maintain thematic unity and develop arguments systematically.
- Grammatical accuracy improved by 18%, indicating more precise sentence construction and reduced frequency of syntactic errors. Although grammar was not the sole focus of the intervention, structured drafting and revision stages contributed to gradual linguistic refinement.
- Lexical richness grew by 20%, as evidenced by increased use of varied vocabulary, more accurate word choice, and reduced lexical repetition. Exposure to peer feedback and reflective revision encouraged students to diversify their lexical resources.
- Metacognitive awareness showed a marked increase, as reflected in students' self-assessment reports and revision behaviors. Learners demonstrated improved

ability to identify weaknesses, reorganize content, and apply strategic corrections independently[27].

In contrast, while the control group exhibited moderate improvement, gains were less substantial and primarily limited to grammatical correction rather than discourse or strategic development.

Qualitative Findings

Qualitative analysis of student reflection journals and writing drafts revealed important developmental trends. Students in the experimental group displayed increased awareness of writing as a process rather than a one-step task. Their revisions included structural reorganization, clarification of arguments, and more deliberate attention to audience perspective.

Furthermore, classroom observations indicated greater engagement and collaborative interaction during peer feedback sessions. Students actively discussed textual organization and rhetorical effectiveness rather than focusing solely on surface-level corrections. This suggests that the integrative-cognitive model fostered deeper cognitive engagement with writing tasks.

Learner Autonomy and Confidence

Beyond measurable linguistic gains, the intervention positively influenced learners' psychological and strategic dimensions of writing. Students reported increased confidence in producing extended texts and greater autonomy in revising their work. The structured revision protocols and reflective evaluation practices enabled learners to assume responsibility for their own improvement.

Overall, the results demonstrate that the integrative-cognitive instructional model contributes not only to improved linguistic accuracy but also to enhanced discourse competence and strategic self-regulation. The findings provide empirical support for adopting structured, process-oriented frameworks in secondary EFL writing instruction[28].

5. Discussion

The findings confirm that an integrative-cognitive approach enhances EFL written competence more effectively than traditional product-oriented instruction. While product-oriented models primarily emphasize grammatical correctness and final textual output, the integrative-cognitive framework addresses writing as a dynamic, recursive, and strategically regulated process. The statistically significant gains observed in discourse coherence, lexical richness, and metacognitive awareness suggest that structured cognitive scaffolding combined with interactive and reflective practices leads to deeper and more sustainable learning outcomes.

The combination of cognitive structuring, communicative interaction, and metacognitive reflection fosters holistic development of writing competence. Cognitive activation techniques reduce cognitive overload and facilitate organized idea generation; collaborative interaction strengthens audience awareness and discourse sensitivity; and metacognitive revision cultivates self-regulation and independent error correction. Together, these dimensions transform writing from a mechanical exercise into an intellectually engaged learning process.

The model supports balanced development of three core components of EFL written competence: Linguistic competence, reflected in improved grammatical accuracy and lexical precision. Through iterative drafting and revision, learners gradually refine their language control without reducing writing to rule-based correction.

Discourse competence, evidenced by enhanced coherence, logical progression of ideas, and effective paragraph structuring. Structured planning and peer interaction contribute to clearer argumentation and stronger textual unity. Strategic competence,

demonstrated through increased metacognitive awareness, self-monitoring, and autonomous revision strategies. Students become active agents in evaluating and improving their own texts rather than passive recipients of teacher correction.

Importantly, the integrative nature of the model ensures that these competencies develop simultaneously rather than in isolation. Linguistic accuracy supports discourse clarity, while strategic awareness strengthens both structural organization and language precision.

However, successful implementation of the integrative-cognitive model depends on several contextual factors. First, teachers require adequate professional training in process-oriented and metacognitive instructional strategies. Without a clear understanding of scaffolding techniques and formative assessment principles, the model may not be applied effectively. Second, sufficient classroom time must be allocated for drafting, peer interaction, and revision cycles, as meaningful writing development cannot occur under severe time constraints. Third, access to instructional resources—including structured rubrics, planning templates, and, where applicable, digital tools—facilitates systematic application of the model.

Additionally, classroom culture plays a significant role. Learners must feel psychologically safe to share drafts and provide peer feedback. Establishing a supportive environment enhances collaborative learning and reflective engagement.

In summary, the discussion underscores that the integrative-cognitive approach not only improves measurable writing outcomes but also reshapes the pedagogical orientation of EFL writing instruction. By integrating cognitive organization, communicative practice, and strategic reflection, the model offers a comprehensive framework for sustainable development of written competence in secondary education contexts.

6. Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that the integrative-cognitive model provides a structured, theoretically grounded, and pedagogically coherent framework for developing EFL written competence in secondary schools. By synthesizing cognitive writing theory, communicative language teaching principles, and metacognitive strategy instruction, the model addresses writing as a multidimensional process rather than a purely linguistic product. This integrated orientation enables balanced development of linguistic accuracy, discourse organization, and strategic self-regulation.

The findings indicate that systematic scaffolding across all stages of the writing process—idea generation, drafting, collaborative feedback, revision, and reflection—leads to measurable improvement in students' written performance. In particular, structured cognitive planning enhances coherence, peer interaction strengthens discourse awareness, and metacognitive revision fosters learner autonomy and self-monitoring skills. These elements collectively contribute to deeper learning and more sustainable competence development.

Importantly, the model shifts instructional focus from teacher-centered correction to learner-centered engagement. Students become active participants in evaluating and refining their texts, which increases both confidence and responsibility for learning. Such transformation is especially significant in secondary education, where students are transitioning toward more independent academic writing practices.

At the same time, the study acknowledges that successful implementation requires methodological consistency, teacher preparedness, and adequate instructional time. The model's effectiveness depends on deliberate pedagogical design rather than isolated use of writing activities.

Future research may explore digital adaptations of the integrative-cognitive model, including the integration of collaborative online platforms and AI-supported revision tools. Additionally, further studies could examine its applicability across diverse educational contexts, age groups, and proficiency levels, as well as its long-term impact on academic writing development.

Overall, the integrative-cognitive model represents a viable and evidence-based approach to enhancing EFL written competence, offering practical and theoretical contributions to contemporary writing pedagogy in secondary education.

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