

# Comparison-Contrast and HOTS: An Innovation in Practice

Ghina Itani

Department of English Language and Literature, Beirut Arab University, Beirut, Lebanon

Email: ghina.itani@bau.edu.lb

**How to cite this paper:** Itani, G. (2025). Comparison-Contrast and HOTS: An Innovation in Practice. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 15, 178-198.  
<https://doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2025.152013>

**Received:** February 28, 2025

**Accepted:** March 30, 2025

**Published:** April 2, 2025

Copyright © 2025 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial International License (CC BY-NC 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>



Open Access

## Abstract

Regarded as essential in the 21st century, higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) empower students to analyze information, form well-reasoned arguments, and solve complex problems innovatively. One way to nurture these skills is the comparison-contrast (CC) essay. Effective CC essays involve a multi-step process which encompasses critical evaluation and analysis of different subjects besides the synthesis of findings, highlighting key similarities and differences in a creative, well-structured, and logical manner. Therefore, this article describes the training conducted with one group of twenty Intensive English INTE 103 (Common European Framework of Reference CEFR: B2) students at Beirut Arab University during spring 2023-2024. The training aimed to determine how the higher-order thinking skills can be integrated into the comparison-contrast essay so students employ them in their future essays. To this end, the researcher developed the analytical, critical, and creative thinking (ACC) charts with guidelines for incorporating these skills in the CC essay. Students were first introduced to the ACC skills and charts to understand how these skills are linked to the CC essay. After that, they were given a sample essay for analysis and discussion using the ACC charts, and then they were asked to create a CC essay, using all information they learned in class. Finally, students exchanged essays for evaluation and discussion using three rubrics developed by the researcher to evaluate the students' analytical, critical, and creative thinking skills as evident in the CC essays. At the end of the training, essays were examined by the teacher using the same rubrics and the scores were discussed with students. Essay scores revealed that the majority of students passed the benchmark (60%) on all three rubrics, and more importantly, students enjoyed the experience of tackling the CC essay in a new manner through the conscious integration of their higher-order skills.

## Keywords

Analytical Thinking, Comparison-Contrast Essay, Creative Thinking, Critical

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, universities employ various strategies to effectively develop students' higher-order thinking skills (HOTS). These strategies incorporate curriculum design, pedagogical techniques and assessment policies, including problem-based learning, debate, peer review and feedback (Ragab et al., 2024). By implementing these practices, universities create an environment that actively fosters the development of HOTS. One such practice is the comparison-contrast (CC) essay, being a crucial means of communication and a gateway to academic achievement. Most universities extend the use of comparison-contrast assignments beyond the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class, integrating them into a variety of disciplines. This encourages students to progress past basic description, prompting them to evaluate, analyze, and synthesize information to uncover subtle distinctions and unexpected parallels across different fields (Facione, 2015; Sun & Hyland, 2013). To this end, a new teaching innovation was established represented by introducing the analytical, critical, and creative thinking (ACC) Charts (**Appendix A**) and Evaluation Rubrics (**Appendix B**) into the EFL intensive English class. These charts and rubrics were developed by the researcher to guide EFL learners on how their HOTS can be employed, fostered and evaluated via the CC essay.

The implementation of the ACC charts in the Intensive English writing class enabled the students to delve deeper into the comparison-contrast essay, seeing it from a new perspective and served to present the pedagogical innovation in this article. This innovation seeks to explain how the intensive English students used these charts to analyse a comparison-contrast essay, compose their essays and participate in the assessment and evaluation of the essays by means of the ACC rubrics.

## 2. The Pedagogical Context

This innovation was carried out at Beirut Arab University in Beirut, Lebanon, specifically in the Intensive English course INTE 103 (Common European Framework of Reference CEFR: B2) during spring 2023-2024. This upper-intermediate course addresses students who scored an average of 40% - 49% on Beirut Arab University English Language Entrance Exam. It is a 6-noncredit-hour course that tackles all language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) and sub-skills (lexis and language focus) in an integrated manner. It is a goal-based course which prepares learners to use English independently for global communication.

The participants in the training were 20 students who belonged to one INTE 103 class. All students were enrolled at the various faculties at Beirut Arab University. They had similar characteristics in that they came from various educational backgrounds in Lebanon and the region, their mother tongue was Arabic and their first foreign language was either English or French. They were newly

admitted to Beirut Arab University and assigned the Intensive English language course INTE 103. The participants were intentionally selected from the Intensive English Language course INTE 103 since students at this level (CEFR: B2) “can write clear, detailed texts on a variety of subjects related to his/her field of interest, synthesizing and evaluating information and arguments from a number of sources” (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 61). This indicates that the students at this level were chosen for their ability to think critically and write analytically. The fact that this paper reflects the training held with one INTE 103 class means that there was no control group in this study.

All training sessions were carried out by one teacher. She was selected due to her qualifications, experiences and contributions, which are crucial to the implementation of the study. She has a PhD in English Language and Literature and has been teaching intensive English language courses, mainly INTE 103, for no less than 10 years. She has attended workshops and training programs delivered by representatives from the British Council and Cambridge University Press. Her expertise in comparison-contrast essays has significantly influenced training outcomes in several key ways. Her deep understanding of the genre allowed her to effectively convey the genre’s requirements to students. She also employed effective modelling and demonstration techniques, breaking down complex tasks into manageable steps, thus helping students understand how to approach their own writing. Moreover, her expertise enabled her to provide precise and constructive feedback as well as more in-depth analysis of students’ writing. Hence, she could identify areas where students were struggling and offer targeted guidance to help them improve. Whenever time permitted, she could tailor her instruction to meet the specific needs and learning styles of their students. Most importantly, she could create a learning environment where students felt supported and encouraged. Her guidance and feedback could boost students’ confidence in their ability to write effective comparison-contrast essays.

As for materials, the *Effective Academic Writing, The Researched Essay Book 3* was used to present to students the structure and organisation of the comparison-contrast essay. This book contains six chapters. However, of concern to this study is Chapter Two only. Entitled “Comparison-Contrast Essays”, this chapter provides adequate explanation and practice on the organisation of both types of the comparison-contrast essay: block and point-by point. It is divided into five parts. In Part One, Writing Process 1, students brainstorm ideas about a topic through reading two photos and an article. Part Two enables students to outline their ideas by identifying comparison and contrast signal words, and in Part Three, students develop their ideas through examining a sample essay. At this stage, students are required to write their first drafts. Part Four asks students to review their drafts for content, organisation and language mistakes. At the end of this part, students write their final drafts and use the Editor’s Checklist. In the last part, Review, students examine all concepts they learned in this unit.

The ACC charts include features already covered in the EFL writing class as well as other disciplines. Therefore, the training started with a quick revision of

the comparison-contrast essay structure, followed by introducing the higher order thinking skills. This introduction is important for students to differentiate among these skills and be able to consciously apply them in their majors and later in their careers since they equip them with valuable tools for future learning and problem-solving. Moreover, students' communication and research skills were essential in this training as they needed to gather information, express their ideas clearly and concisely, using evidence and reasoning to support their claims. The whole process led to a more comprehensive understanding of the features of the comparison-contrast process which actually transcends mere subject knowledge presentation.

Based on the significance of rubrics in evaluating writing (Andrade, 2000), the ACC rubrics, were developed by the researcher to evaluate the students' analytical, critical and creative thinking in the CC essay. The validity of the rubrics was checked. They were given to two inter-raters and each rater gave their own independent ratings of the rubric. Their consensus and consistency were examined. The content validity of the rubrics was inspected by two academic experts. Moreover, the validity and reliability of the ACC charts were examined and confirmed through piloting. All suggestions and recommendations were taken into consideration and the necessary modifications were made accordingly.

To achieve a passing grade in each of the three assessed areas—critical, analytical, and creative thinking—students were required to score 12 or higher out of 20 points. This criterion was established in accordance with departmental academic standards.

### 3. Purpose

One practice that enables students to develop their ACC skills is the CC essay. This essay demands engagement with various facets of analytical, critical, and creative thinking. Concerning analytical thinking, students need to differentiate surface-level similarities from deeper, analytical comparisons, not only focusing on obvious traits but also delving into underlying characteristics (Rosenwasser & Stephen, 2018). Also, students must choose relevant evidence to support claims about similarities and differences; otherwise, their arguments shall be weak and their information irrelevant (Hendrawaty & Saraswati, 2016; Dwyer et al., 2014). As for critical thinking, students must effectively represent and analyze multiple viewpoints beyond their own in order to present a critical comparison (Yang, 2019). In addition, students should critically examine the underlying assumptions behind the subjects being compared, adding up to the depth and insightfulness of the analysis (Facione, 2015). With respect to creative thinking, identifying unusual, or unique similarities and differences that go beyond the obvious is key to the originality and depth of the comparison (Dumas & Dunbar, 2014). Furthermore, students should use insights from the comparison to generate new ideas and formulate creative solutions or perspectives that transcend the individual sub-

jects (Itani, 2024).

The main aim of the training is to teach students how to employ and develop their ACC skills through the CC essay. Therefore, five objectives were set. First, students were introduced to the ACC skills and charts. Then, they analysed a comparison-contrast essay adopted from *Effective Academic Writing, The Researched Essay Book 3* (Lis & Davis, 2012) using the ACC charts and the CC Essay Analysis Form. Afterwards, they composed a CC essay using these charts. Finally, they exchanged essays for evaluation and discussion using the rubrics and the analysis form. At the end of the training, the essays were assessed by the teacher using the same rubrics to examine if students could employ their ACC skills well in the essay.

#### 4. Description

The training lasted for six weeks (a total of 12 sessions or 36 hours; i.e. each session makes 3 hours) and aimed to enable students to:

- 1) apply analytical, critical and creative thinking skills in the CC essay.
- 2) connect the CC essay to the ACC charts.
- 3) develop their comparison-contrast essay content and organisation.
- 4) practice autonomous learning.
- 5) analyze and evaluate a CC essay.
- 6) provide peer review and feedback.

The training comprised five stages, as shown in **Table 1** below.

**Table 1.** Training stages.

Stage	Process	Description	Steps	Duration
1	Write CC essay.	CC essay 1	Depend on Background Knowledge.	1 session
2	Revise CC essay.	CC essay organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Revise CC essay layout.</li> <li>Identify CC essay styles.</li> </ul>	2 session
		ACC skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research ACC skills.</li> <li>Get introduced to ACC charts, rubrics and Analysis Form.</li> <li>Recognise how ACC skills can be employed in the CC essay.</li> </ul>	2 sessions
3	Analyse CC essay.	CC essay analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze a sample CC essay as per content and structure.</li> <li>Chart analysis into the Analysis Form.</li> <li>Connect analysis forms to ACC charts.</li> <li>Classify ACC skills used.</li> </ul>	3 sessions
4	Create CC essay.	CC essay 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Follow 5-step writing process.</li> <li>Follow steps in CC essay analysis using the Analysis Form.</li> <li>Use ACC charts for guidance.</li> <li>Compose essay.</li> </ul>	1 session
5	Evaluate CC essay.	CC essay feedback by students and teacher.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students use three rubrics for peer review.</li> <li>Students discuss the reviewed essays.</li> <li>Teacher evaluates all essays using the rubrics.</li> <li>Teacher provides feedback on rubrics submitted by students for final decision.</li> </ul>	3 sessions

The first stage of the training was completed in one session. During this session, students were required to write a CC essay (Essay 1), depending on their background knowledge and what they already learned about CC essay writing. At the end of this stage, the teacher collected the essays for evaluation.

In the second stage, a revision of the CC essay layout was conducted, and its significance to all university disciplines explained. Also, CC essay block and point-by-point styles were introduced. The teacher's mission was restricted to eliciting the students' background knowledge about the CC essay, guiding them through misconceptions to ensure they are all on the right track. The second stage was completed in two sessions.

The third stage comprised two phases, focusing on ACC skills revision and essay analysis. The first phase lasted for two sessions during which the ACC skills were presented by encouraging students to research them and brainstorm examples on how these skills can be applied in the CC essay. Students, then, compared their brainstorming lists with the ACC charts, recognising how, where and why each of the ACC skills can be employed in the CC essay. The second phase which took three sessions was dedicated to a sample CC essay analysis. An essay adopted from *Effective Academic Writing, The Researched Essay Book 3* was distributed to students. Students had to analyse its content, charting their data into the CC Essay Analysis Form. This form consists of three parts, namely Content & Organization, Writing Mechanics and Higher-order Thinking Skills. This facilitated the process of comparing the analysed essay against the ACC charts.

Stage four was covered in one session. Students were required to compose a CC essay (Essay 2), following the 5-step writing process (prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing). During this session, students researched the topic, brainstormed ideas using maps and wrote their preliminary drafts. Then, they revised their essays for any problems or inconsistencies, using the CC Essay Analysis Form and the ACC charts to ensure the smooth and logical flow of ideas as aligned with the ACC skills. After that, they edited their drafts as related to writing mechanics, word choice and appropriate style. Finally, students published their final drafts and shared them with each other for peer review and feedback.

In stage five, student essays were evaluated and feedback provided. This stage lasted for three sessions. During the first session, the three evaluation rubrics were distributed, each dealing with one of the ACC skills in the CC essay. These rubrics were fully discussed and explained in class (Stage 3, Phase 1) for students to be able to apply them to the essays. Each student received a random essay along with the three rubrics; the evaluation process was done over one session. Once done, the teacher collected all essays and evaluated them for purpose of comparing her results against the students'. This stage ended with the teacher's final feedback on the essays and the peer review.

The point of peer review was mainly to engage students in the teaching process and train them on offering objective and constructive criticism. Therefore, during peer review, students were required to fill in the CC Essay Analysis Form for the reviewed essays, focussing on how the ACC skills were evident in the essay, sup-

porting their answers with specific examples from the essay. They were also requested to add their final feedback at the end of the form and provide ample explanation for each mark they inserted on the rubric. Analysis forms and rubrics carried the name of the student who wrote the essay while reviewers remained anonymous.

Students' analyses were accurate and almost all of them were backed up with relevant evidence from the essay. However, the rubric score explanation was short and up to the point. Student overall feedback was informal with some critical remarks.

This training prioritized student learning and independence. Initially, the teacher acted as a guide, outlining the CC essay structure and organisation and encouraging students to research ACC skills and analyze the CC essay on their own. This allowed them to take ownership and develop their autonomous leaning strategies. Then, the teacher acted as a facilitator, aiding students in the writing process. And finally, she provided feedback as a mentor, as did students through peer evaluation remarks and analyses.

## 5. Findings

Before the start of the training, students were asked to write a comparison-contrast essay, resulting in the Essay 1 score for each. Descriptive statistics were obtained to determine the proportion of students with failing grades. This involved calculating the percentage of students scoring below 12/20 on each of the analytical, critical and creative thinking skills.

In Essay 1, the analytical thinking skill scores were distributed as follows: 1 student (5%) received 5/20, 1 student (5%) received 7/20, 1 student (5%) received 8/20, 4 students (20%) received 9/20, 2 students (10%) received 10/20, 4 students (20%) received 11/20, 4 students (20%) received 12/20, and 2 students (10%) received 13/20. This indicates that 70% of students had unacceptable scores (below 12/20) on the analytical thinking skills in Essay 1 (**Table 2**).

**Table 2.** Scores of the analytical thinking skill in CC Essay 1.

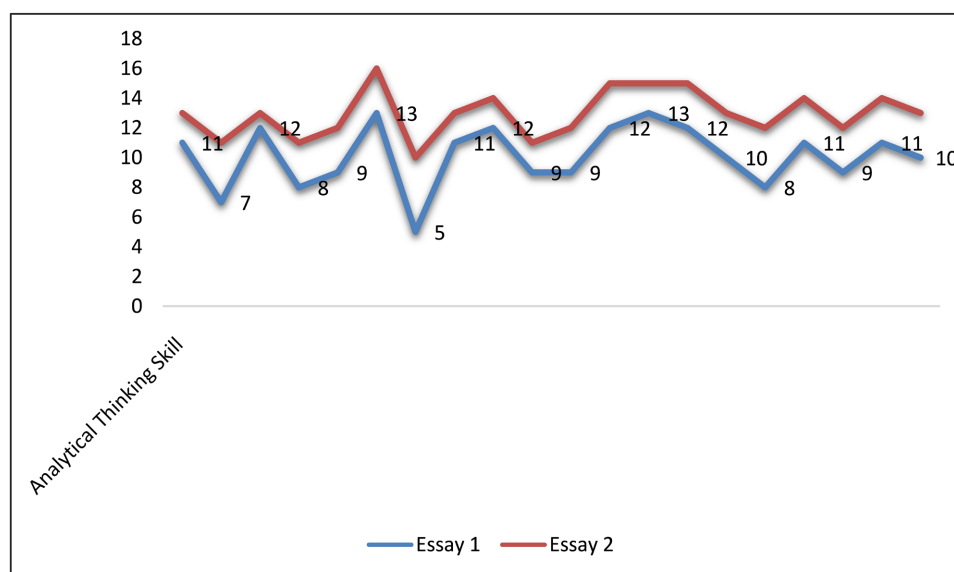
Score/20	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
5	1	5	5
7	1	5	10
8	2	10	20
9	4	20	40
10	2	10	50
11	4	20	70
12	4	20	90
13	2	10	100
Total	20	100.0	100.0

In Essay 2, the analytical thinking skill scores differed to a large extent from those in Essay 1. Scores revealed that 1 student (5%) received 10/20, 3 students (15%) received 11/20, 4 students (20%) received 12/20, 5 students (25%) received 13/20, 3 students (15%) received 14/20, 3 students (15%) received 15/20, and 1 student (5%) received 16/20. This indicates that only 25% of students could not reach the benchmark ((12/20) of the analytical thinking skill in Essay 2 (**Table 3**).

**Table 3.** Scores of the analytical thinking skill in CC Essay 2.

Score/20	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
10	1	5	5
11	3	15	20
12	4	20	40
13	5	25	65
14	3	15	80
15	3	15	95
16	1	5	100
Total	20	100.0	100.0

The results revealed significant differences in the increase of student scores on the analytical thinking skill between Essay 1 and 2, with scores ranging between 5/20 to 13/20 in essay 1 and between 10/20 to 16/20 in essay 2. These results provide evidence that all students showed progress and that the training led to a better acquisition of the analytical thinking skill in the CC essay (**Figure 1**).



**Figure 1.** Scores of the analytical thinking skill across CC Essays 1 & 2.

As for the critical thinking skill, in Essay 1, scores were distributed as follows: 2



students (10%) received 5/20, 1 student (5%) received 6/20, 1 student (5%) received 7/20, five students (25%) received 9/20, 3 students (10%) received 10/20, 6 students (30%) received 11/20, 2 students (10%) received 12/20. This designates that 90% of students scored below average (12/20) on the critical thinking skill in Essay 1 (**Table 4**).

**Table 4.** Scores of the critical thinking skill in CC Essay 1.

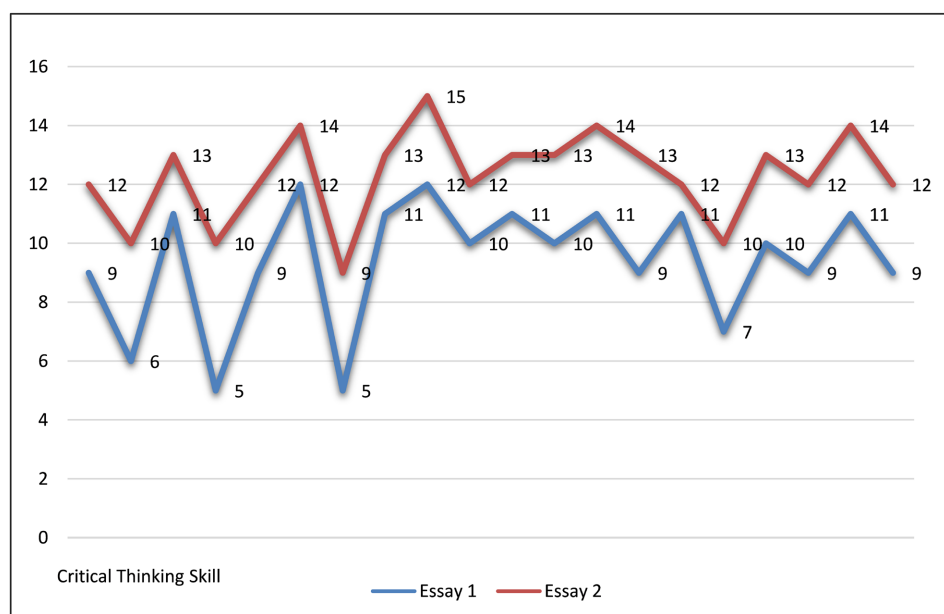
Score/20	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
5	2	10	10
6	1	5	15
7	1	5	20
9	5	25	45
10	3	15	60
11	6	30	90
12	2	10	100
Total	20	100.0	100.0

In Essay 2, the critical thinking skill scores differed greatly from those in Essay 1. Scores revealed that 1 student (5%) received 9/20, 3 students (15%) received 10/20, 6 students (30%) received 12/20, 6 students (30%) received 13/20, 3 students (15%) received 14/20, and 1 student (5%) received 15/20. This shows that only 20% of students could not pass the benchmark of the critical thinking skill in Essay 2 (**Table 5**).

**Table 5.** Scores of the critical thinking skill in CC Essay 2.

Score/20	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
9	1	5	5
10	3	15	20
12	6	30	50
13	6	30	80
14	3	15	95
15	1	5	100
Total	20	100.0	100.0

The results showed significant differences in the increase of student scores on the critical thinking skill between Essay 1 and 2, with scores ranging between 5/20 to 12/20 in Essay 1 and between 9/20 to 15/20 in Essay 2. These results provide evidence that all students showed progress and that the training led to a better acquisition of the critical thinking skill in the CC essay (**Figure 2**).



**Figure 2.** Scores of the critical thinking skill across CC Essays 1 & 2.

Concerning the creative thinking skill, Essay 1 scores were distributed as follows: 2 students (10%) received 6/20, 2 students (10%) received 7/20, 1 student (5%) received 8/20, 2 students (10%) received 9/20, 7 students (35%) received 10/20, 4 students (20%) received 11/20, 2 students (10%) received 12/20. This indicates that 90% of students had failing scores (below 12/20) on the creative thinking skill in Essay 1 (**Table 6**).

**Table 6.** Scores of the creative thinking skill in CC Essay 1.

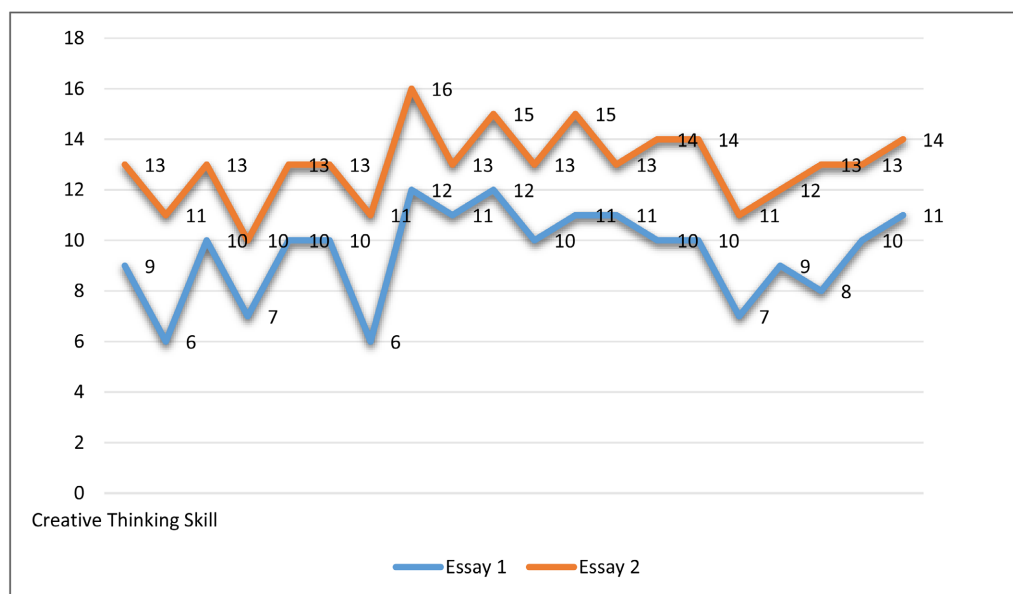
Score/20	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
6	2	10	10
7	2	10	20
8	1	5	25
9	2	10	35
10	7	35	70
11	4	20	90
12	2	10	100
Total	20	100.0	100.0

In Essay 2, the creative thinking skill scores differed largely from those in Essay 1. Scores revealed that 1 student (5%) received 10/20, 3 students (15%) received 11/20, 1 student (5%) received 12/20, 9 students (45%) received 13/20, 3 students (15%) received 14/20, 2 students (10%) received 15/20, and 1 student (5%) received 16/20. This shows that only 20% of students could not pass the benchmark (12/20) of the critical thinking skill in Essay 2 (**Table 7**).

**Table 7.** Scores of the creative thinking skill in CC Essay 2.

Score/20	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
10	1	5	5
11	3	15	20
12	1	5	25
13	9	45	70
14	3	15	85
15	2	10	95
16	1	5	100
Total	20	100.0	100.0

The results revealed significant differences in the increase of student scores on the creative thinking skill between Essay 1 and 2, with scores ranging between 6/20 to 12/20 in Essay 1 and between 10/20 to 16/20 in Essay 2. These results provide evidence that all students showed progress and that the training led to a better acquisition of the creative thinking skill (Figure 3).

**Figure 3.** Scores of the creative thinking skill across CC Essays 1 & 2.

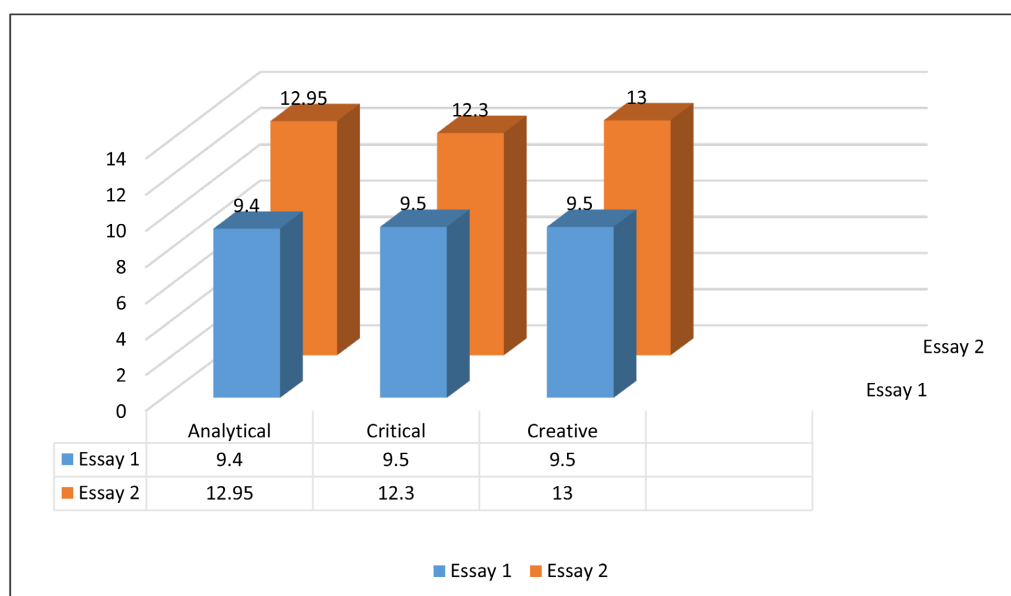
In order to assess the effect of the training on the students, the difference between their Essays 1 and 2 scores was obtained. The difference in the scores of each student reveals that all scores of the three ACC skills in Essay 2 showed progress. Hence, the average total score of the analytical thinking skill in Essay 2 increased by 2.85 points and the critical thinking skill by 2.9 points while the creative thinking skill recorded the highest increase among the three by 3.5 points, eventually leading to a decrease in the standard deviation of each score. (Table 8 & Table 9, Figure 4).

**Table 8.** ACC thinking skills mean scores and standard deviation in CC Essays 1 & 2.

Thinking Skill	N	Mean	Sd. Dev.	Mean	Sd. Dev.
		E1		E2	
Analytical	20	10.1	2.100125	12.95	1.564449
Critical	20	9.4	2.083266	12.3	1.519868
Creative	20	9.5	1.820930	13	1.486784

**Table 9.** Difference in the ACC thinking skills mean scores and standard deviation across Essays 1 & 2.

Thinking Skill	Mean Diff.	Sd. Dev. Diff.
Analytical	2.85	-0.53568
Critical	2.9	-0.5634
Creative	3.5	-0.334147053

**Figure 4.** ACC thinking skills mean scores across CC Essays 1 & 2.

## 6. Implications

The observed improvements in student scores from Essay 1 to Essay 2 are primarily attributed to the targeted training. The design of the study which includes explicit instruction on ACC skills, analysis of sample essays as well as peer and teacher feedback suggests that these components collectively played a role in enhancing students' abilities. Before the start of the training, students were explicitly instructed to refrain from seeking supplementary assistance from external tutors, online resources, or study groups to maintain the integrity of the training evaluation. Furthermore, consistent testing conditions were maintained across both essays, including room configuration, time allocation, and a controlled environment. The instructor actively fostered student engagement, thereby enhancing

motivation and focus, which contributed to improved performance. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that extraneous factors beyond the classroom environment may have exerted some influence. Specifically, increased familiarity with the essay format and assessment rubrics could have contributed to the observed enhancements.

In addition to its advantages, the training faced some limitations as well. Concerning advantages, the training as a whole encouraged students to practice the ACC skills both directly and indirectly. Students were asked to analyse a sample essay, create their own essay and evaluate their peers'. Such process (analyse—create—evaluate) enabled students to unconsciously employ their analytical, critical and creative skills. Delving deeper into stages 2 and 3, students were directly introduced to the HOTS and provided with the ACC charts for essay analysis, production and evaluation. Students could consciously and successfully work on their HOTS which is evident in the evaluation and analysis of the essays. Moreover, their research skills were strengthened through information gathering, analysis, and synthesis. In this respect, students could deconstruct complex concepts, examine details, establish intricate connections, synthesize findings, integrate information from multiple sources and forge novel insights, strengthening their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities applicable to diverse real-world challenges (Gentner & Smith, 2013; Rusmin et al., 2024). Furthermore, by delving into not just shared characteristics but also unique aspects, students could cultivate open-mindedness towards information and challenge their own preconceived notions. This fostered their creative thinking and expanded their understanding of the world around them (Alvionita, 2021). Additionally, presenting the results of their analyses and syntheses effectively necessitated clear and concise communication. They were able to organize their thoughts logically and connect ideas cohesively for their readers, which consequently strengthened their written communication skills (Van der Meijden & Andriessen, 2014). Last but not least, constructing a well-structured comparison-contrast essay elicited a sense of accomplishment and pride in students. It showcased their intellectual rigor and the ability to communicate complex ideas effectively. This contributed to the development of their self-confidence and reinforced their self-awareness as capable and critical thinkers (Itani, 2024).

As for the limitations, despite its global success, this training identified some challenges to students. Due to the inherent complexity of the ACC concepts and the diverse needs of learners, some students required additional support to master the material. Thus, very few essays, despite showing some progress in the ACC skills, could not reach the benchmark. Some students struggled to go beyond surface-level comparisons and identify deeper similarities and differences between the subjects. Others could not clearly explain the reasons behind the similarities and differences they identified. Also, few students found it challenging to develop a clear and insightful thesis statement that goes beyond simply stating similarities and differences or to maintain a balanced approach, focusing too heavily on one

subject or the other. The most challenging aspect which most students faced was supporting arguments from both subjects with evidence to present a clear analysis. When it came to peer review, more emphasis should have been given on how to criticize or write comments in a more formal style.

## 7. Recommendations

Based on the students' comments at the end of the training, and despite all challenges they faced, it is clear that this training offered them a valuable learning experience, which they considered powerful for developing their critical thinking, analytical skills and creativity, equipping them with the tools necessary for future learning and problem-solving. However, more time should have been dedicated to this training to ensure a slower instructional pace, supplemental tutoring, a distraction-free learning environment, and more explicit guidance to foster inclusivity in such a learning environment. Teachers might need to collaborate closely with certain students to identify the most beneficial adjustments for their individual needs (Vangrieken et al., 2015). Additionally, they should balance instruction with varied learning activities, including group work, classwork, and homework assignments. Short formative assessments are also crucial to monitor student progress throughout each session (Schildkamp et al., 2020). Moreover, to enhance the generalizability of the findings obtained from this training, future research should employ a larger and more representative sample with a control group. More follow-up studies or evaluations should be done to assess the long-term impact of this training on the students' abilities to use ACC skills in their academic or professional lives.

In conclusion, this training suggests that comparison-contrast essays extend beyond mere academic exercises. They actively engage and cultivate higher-order thinking skills, equipping students with valuable cognitive tools applicable in diverse aspects of life (Gupta & Mishra, 2021; OECD, 2025). Therefore, the future call is for EFL teachers to consciously focus on integrating the comparison-contrast writing activities with higher-order thinking skills, especially that technology can be a valuable tool in offering diverse resources and opportunities for collaboration.

## Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to everyone who provided intellectual and emotional support throughout my project. I also extend my sincere thanks to the editor and reviewers for their valuable time and contributions.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

## References

Alvionita, M. (2021). A Study on the Teaching Comparison Contrast Essays in Essay Writ-

- ing Class. *English Research and Literacy Journal*, 1, 82-89.
- Andrade, H. (2000). Using Rubrics to Promote Thinking and Learning. *Educational Leadership*, 57, 38-42.
- Council of Europe (2018). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Companion Volume with New Descriptors*. Council of Europe. <https://www.coe.int/lang-cefr>
- Dumas, D., & Dunbar, K. N. (2014). Understanding Fluency and Originality: A Latent Variable Perspective. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 14, 56-67. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2014.09.003>
- Dwyer, C. P., Hogan, M. J., & Stewart, I. (2014). The Effects of Argument Mapping-Infused Critical Thinking Instruction on Reflective Judgement Performance. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 16, 11-26. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2014.12.002>
- Facione, P. (2015). Critical Thinking: What It Is and Why It Counts. *Insight Assessment*.
- Gentner, D., & Smith, L. A. (2013). Analogical Learning and Reasoning. In D. Reisberg (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Psychology* (pp. 668-681). Oxford University Press.
- Gupta, T., & Mishra, L. (2021). Higher-Order Thinking Skills in Shaping the Future of Students. *Psychology and Education*, 58, 9305-9311.
- Hendrawaty, N., & Saraswati, R. (2016). Developing Students' Critical Thinking in Essay Writing. *Annual International Seminar on English Language Teaching, 2016*, 181-188.
- Itani, G. (2024). All in One: Comparison-Contrast, Coherence and Cohesion, Bloom's Taxonomy and CEFR. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 14, 914-947. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2024.145048>
- Lis, R., & Davis, J. (2012). *Effective Academic Writing, The Researched Essay, Book 3*. Oxford University Press.
- OECD (2025). *Trends Shaping Education 2025*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/ee6587fd-en>
- Ragab, A., & Kaid, A., & Kotby, A. (2024). Enhancing Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in Education: Strategies and Outcomes. *The Future of Education Journal*, 3, 1488-1499. <https://doi.org/10.61445/tofedu.v3i5.267>
- Rosenwasser, D., & Stephen, J. (2018). *Writing Analytically*. Cengage Learning.
- Rusmin, L., Misrahayu, Y., Pongpalilu, F., Radiansyah, R., & Dwiyanto, D. (2024). Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills in the 21st Century. *Join: Journal of Social Science*, 1, 144-162. <https://doi.org/10.59613/svhy3576>
- Schildkamp, K., van der Kleij, F., Heitink, M., Kippers, W., & Veldkamp, B. (2020). Formative Assessment: A Systematic Review of Critical Teacher Prerequisites for Classroom Practice. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 103, Article 101602.
- Sun, Y., & Hyland, K. (2013). Learning through Comparison: Analyzing the Rhetorical Construction of Compare-Contrast Essays in Different University Disciplines. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 22, 356-371.
- Van der Meijden, H., & Andriessen, J. (2014). Developing Critical Thinking through Textual Analysis: A Mixed Methods Training. *Studies in Educational Research*, 30, 423-455.
- Vangrieken, K., Dochy, F., Raes, E., & Kyndt, E. (2015). Teacher Collaboration: A Systematic Review. *Educational Research Review*, 15, 17-40. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2015.04.002>
- Yang, R. (2019). Writing from Different Perspectives in Argumentative Essays: Enhancing Students' Critical Thinking and Critical Literacy. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 40, 85-95.

## Appendices

### Appendix A: ACC Charts

#### Comparison-Contrast Essay & Analytical Thinking

Aspect	Description
<b>Identify Similarities and Differences</b>	Inspect both subjects accurately to assess how they relate to each other.
<b>Detect Underlying Factors</b>	Go beyond superficial understanding to explore how underlying patterns and assumptions can be revealed.
<b>Break down Complex Concepts</b>	Examine similarities and differences carefully to recognize important parts, organize information in a logical manner and construct an effective thesis statement.
<b>Select Evidence</b>	Select relevant information from different viewpoints wisely.
<b>Evaluate Evidence</b>	Examine gathered evidence to confirm claims about the subjects compared and strengthen the arguments presented.
<b>Pose Arguments Logically</b>	Present objective arguments neatly through a clear and logical essay structure.

#### Comparison-Contrast Essay & Critical Thinking

Aspect	Description
<b>Evaluate Strengths and Weaknesses</b>	Analyze both sides of the comparison carefully to develop judgment skills and the ability to assess information objectively.
<b>Consider Diverse Perspectives</b>	Take into account different viewpoints by challenging initial assumptions and biases.
<b>Question Assumptions</b>	Question initial perspectives on subjects through a deep, critical exploration of assumptions and biases.
<b>Evaluate Perspectives</b>	Evaluate different viewpoints and examine their strengths and weaknesses to shape a knowledgeable personal opinion.
<b>Identify Bias</b>	Acknowledge personal bias and those present in the source material by critically evaluating all sources.
<b>Construct Argument</b>	Build a strong argument to present and support claims effectively.

#### Comparison-Contrast Essay & Creative Thinking

Aspect	Description
<b>Find Unexpected Connections</b>	Explore subjects carefully to uncover unexpected relationships and connections between them.
<b>Challenge Conventions</b>	Challenge traditional views and investigate alternative perspectives to find unique similarities and differences.
<b>Generate New Ideas</b>	Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each subject to create new ideas by merging their attributes strategically.
<b>Generate New Solutions</b>	Explore how the subjects' aspects can be combined to form novel solutions.
<b>Develop Unique Perspectives</b>	Transcend the limitations of each subject and develop a unique perspective that arises from the comparison and contrast.
<b>Synthesize Information</b>	Generate original content in an innovative framework.



## Appendix B: Rubrics

### Evaluation Rubric for Analytical Thinking Skill in the Comparison-Contrast Essay

0 = Not Applicable      1 = Below Expectations      2 = Meets Expectations  
3 = Exceeds Expectations      4 = Exceptional

**Student Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Essay Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Section	Description	0	1	2	3	4
<b>Analysis and Evaluation</b>	Goes beyond visible similarities and differences and includes underlying structures and cause-and-effect connections.					
	Breaks down complex concepts and integrates them with existing parts, showing how they relate to each other.					
	Identifies patterns and trends regarding the subjects compared and assesses them.					
	Selects and evaluates accurate details as evidence to show understanding of complex concepts.					
<b>Reasoning and Logic</b>	Identifies and assesses possible biases in various sources and viewpoints.					
	Ensures a smooth and logical flow of ideas through coherent ideas and evidence.					
	Considers and responds to potential opposing arguments fairly and comprehensively.					
	Draws solid, well-backed conclusions through a detailed and rational examination of the evidence					
<b>Problem-Solving</b>	Formulates relevant and specific research questions to guide the analysis and comparison.					
	Examines different explanations and perspectives of the information provided.					
	Identifies and analyzes possible errors or weaknesses in arguments.					
	Offers solutions and recommendations based on the observations from the comparison.					

### Evaluation Rubric for Critical Thinking Skill in the Comparison-Contrast Essay

0 = Not Applicable      1 = Below Expectations      2 = Meets Expectations  
3 = Exceeds Expectations      4 = Exceptional

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Essay Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Part	Description	0	1	2	3	4
<b>Analysis and Evaluation</b>	Uncovers deeper relations and conclusions beyond superficial similarities and differences.					
	Evaluates and uses evidence effectively by examining sources and identifying biases.					
	Applies appropriate comparison criteria by avoiding irrelevant features.					
	Presents complex arguments by considering various perspectives and opinions.					
<b>Reasoning and Logic</b>	Guarantees a reasonable flow of ideas by linking information cohesively.					
	Recognises and questions the main assumptions of both subjects compared.					
	Draws meaningful conclusion based on the analysis of evidence and comparison.					
	Identifies limitations in the comparison by considering different perspectives.					
<b>Originality</b>	Presents unusual similarities or differences that are unlikely or not foreseen.					
	Examines hypothetical or original scenarios and events beyond common experience.					
	Offers exceptional conclusions and unique insights that cannot be reached from a superficial approach.					
	Presents novel solutions or suggestions based on the analysis and the comparison.					

### Evaluation Rubric for Creative Thinking Skill in the Comparison-Contrast Essay

0 = Not Applicable      1 = Below Expectations      2 = Meets Expectations  
 3 = Exceeds Expectations      4 = Exceptional

**Student Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Essay Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Part	Description	0	1	2	3	4
<b>Originality and Inventiveness</b>	Introduces uncommon similarities or differences in a creative way.					
	Employs metaphorical thinking and original comparisons to explain relationships.					
	Examines original scenarios or situations beyond conventions.					
	Provides unique interpretations not available in conventional comparisons.					
<b>Exploration and Divergence</b>	Considers multiple perspectives and examines different explanations.					
	Poses Open-ended challenging questions that go beyond superficial comparisons.					
	Presents innovative explanations and solutions to deal with issues resulting from the comparison.					
	Uses humor and playfulness to captivate the readers' attention.					
<b>Elaboration and Refinement</b>	Develops and explains innovative ideas based on original observations.					
	Expresses complex concepts in a straightforward and concise way.					
	Ensures the strong link between the creative components and the primary focus of the essay.					
	Uses descriptive language, imagery, and literary techniques to engage the reader.					

## Appendix C: Comparison-Contrast Essay Analysis Form

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Essay Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### I. Content & Organization

- **Clarity of Thesis Statement:**

- Is the thesis statement clear, concise, and arguable?
- Does it effectively state the main points of comparison and contrast?
- Is the thesis statement supported throughout the essay?

- **Development of Supporting Points:**

- Are the points of comparison and contrast developed with sufficient detail and evidence?
- Is there a clear and logical organization to the essay (e.g., subject-by-subject, point-by-point)?
- Does the essay effectively transition between points of comparison?

- **Use of Evidence:**

- Is evidence (examples, facts, quotations) used effectively to support claims?
- Are sources properly cited and documented?

- **Analysis and Interpretation:**

- Does the essay go beyond simply listing similarities and differences?
- Does it analyze the significance of the comparisons and draw meaningful conclusions?

- **Conclusion:**

- Is the conclusion strong and insightful?
- Does it effectively summarize the main points and restate the thesis in a new and insightful way?

### II. Writing Mechanics

- **Grammar and Mechanics:**

- Are there any grammatical errors (e.g., subject-verb agreement, pronoun errors, run-on sentences)?
- Are there any spelling or punctuation errors?

- **Sentence Structure and Variety:**

- Is the writing clear, concise, and engaging?
- Does the essay use a variety of sentence structures (simple, compound, complex)?

- **Word Choice:**

- Is the vocabulary precise and appropriate?
- Are there any instances of wordiness, jargon, or clichés?

### III. Higher-order Thinking Skills

- **Identification of Similarities and Differences:**

- Does the essay accurately and effectively identify both similarities and differences between the subjects?

- **Evaluation of Evidence:**

- Does the student critically evaluate the evidence they use to support their claims?

- **Analysis and Synthesis:**

- Does the essay demonstrate strong analytical skills by breaking down complex ideas and synthesizing information from different sources?

- **Originality and Insight:**

- Does the essay demonstrate original thought and insightful analysis?
- Does it go beyond superficial observations and offer unique perspectives?

**Overall Comments:**

- What are the essay's strongest areas?

- 
- What areas need improvement?

- 
- What specific suggestions for improvement can you offer to the student?

---

**Reviewer's Comments:**

---

**Teacher's Comments:**