



Genre-Based Approach to Teaching Writing in EFL Context

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ABSTRACT

Writing is considered to be one of the most difficult skills that learners are expected to master. To write appropriately and effectively is a task that most ESL learners face despite years spending for learning and developing their writing skills. Genre-based approach is a teaching methodology that is believed to assist students in coping with this difficult task. Thus, this paper aims to examine the effects of genre-based approach to teaching writing in EFL contexts using an experimental approach. 40 EFL learners were selected from a private language institute; 20 of them were randomly selected to form the treatment group and the rest formed the control group. The experimental group was taught using the genre-based writing techniques and the other group was taught writing without it. The results showed considerable improvement in the treatment group compared with the control group.

Key words: Genre-based Approach, EFL Context, Writing

INTRODUCTION

Teaching EFL students to write whole texts is often replete with difficulties. The student writer has to create a text which should be both rhetorically and linguistically appropriate. According to Richard and Renandya (2002), the difficulties of teaching writing to students include those in (1) generating and organizing ideas using an appropriate choice of vocabulary, sentence and paragraph organization and (2) putting such ideas into an intelligible text. Often, teaching English to EFL students tends to be in a way that focuses on the sentence level and these learners often have minimal, if any, awareness at the level of complete texts.

In order to provide students with the ability to recognize textual and linguistic features that are used to construct and shape whole texts, there has been a move towards explicit teaching of genres in many contexts. As one of the precursors, Australia, for example, has led the way by introducing genre-based pedagogy into its formal education system and even other teaching environments (Christie, 1999; Rothery, 1996). Genre-based pedagogy views language as an open dynamic system, and suggests that knowledge about language should be taught in an explicit manner. Genres (types of texts) are seen as the starting point for modeling, deconstructing, and understanding language. Genre approach focuses on models and key features of texts written for a particular purpose. Genre-specific writing's instruction may be useful since it presents some examples to students who have only limited exposure to authentic English writing.

There is no doubt that writing is the most difficult skill for L2 learners to master. The difficulty lies not only in generating and organizing ideas, but also in translating them into readable texts. The skills involved in writing are highly complex. L2 learners have to pay attention to higher level skills of planning and organizing as well as lower level skills of spelling, punctuation, word choice, and so on. The difficulty becomes even more highlighted if their language proficiency is weak. If teachers are aware that writing assignments constitute a genre that presumes understanding of implicit assumptions, they can attempt to make them explicit, helping students understand implied requirements. Consciousness-raising is the primary goal of genre analysis in that it can generate practical suggestions and advices. For example, teachers might spend time defining terms such as "discuss," "analyze," "address," "argue" or "compare and contrast," showing students examples from actual texts of how those terms become actualized in a thesis or position. Other terms that might need additional explanation include "critique," "construct," "define," "evaluate," "identify," "review," or "trace." Teachers can also call attention to the use of technical language that may seem familiar but which has a specialized meaning within the genre. Thus, this paper endeavors to utilize genre-specific writing instructions to assist teachers in teaching writing tasks and promoting EFL learners' abilities.

In Iran, writing has gained eminent importance in recent years. Increasing demands of academic institutes for professional writing in different educational levels such as M.A./M.S., and Ph.D. courses and scientific growth in research among Iranian youth as well as high rate of written articles in national and international journals in English led the instructors in gauging all the useful techniques in promoting their students' writing skills.

The reason of students' errors and problems in writing is not related to their surface errors in writing such as spelling or their inappropriate choice of vocabulary, but because they are not abiding by the conventions of

the genre in some way. In this vein, genre analysis can enable instructors to become aware of the hidden assumptions within a writing prompt, helping them understand that it does not consist of a simple, straightforward list of instructions. It will also focus their attention on how the form in which the assignment is written can maximize the appropriateness of the learners' uptake. Thus, exercising genre analysis approach as an additional technique for promoting writing skills is suggested. To this end, this study aims to take a further step for shedding light on this issue. It is hoped that this approach will assist teachers in promoting their learners' writing skills.

Review of the related literature

The Meaning of Genre: To understand what is meant by the genre approach to teaching writing, first, we need to understand what is meant by the term *genre*. A genre is a particular class of speech events [written texts included] which are considered by the speech community as being of the same type, e.g., prayers, sermons, conversations, songs, speeches, poems, letters, and novels. A genre is usually characterized by its communicative (i.e. writing) purpose(s) in general, associated themes, conventions (rhetorical structure, lexicogrammar and other textual features), the channel of communication (e.g., spoken, electronic, hardcopy, etc.), audience types, and sometimes the roles of the writer and readers. Genre for most people is associated with the world of fiction writing, and categories such as thriller, science fiction, or gothic horror spring immediately to mind. What most of our students need to produce when they need to function in English, however, are things like a letter to a prospective employer, a business report, or the write-up of a scientific experiment. The key to the concept of genre is the 'purpose' the piece of writing serves. In another perspective, "genre" refers not only to the types of literary texts but also to the predictable and recurring patterns of everyday, academic and literary texts occurring within a particular culture (Hammond & Derewianka, 2001). In the western countries, "genre" or "text-type", either spoken or written, is often identified or grouped according to its primary social purposes. According to Swales (1990), the genres which share the same purposes belong to the same text-types.

Classification of Genres: Choosing an appropriate genre for teaching is as crucial as planning to teach a writing lesson. When we come to talk about choosing genres, there is no way that we can escape from the task of classifying genres. Different scholars have offered different classifications of genres some of which will come as follows. Derewianka (1990) has identified six main schools of genre types which according to their primary social purposes include: (1) Narratives: telling a story, usually to entertain; (2) Recount: telling what happened; (3) Information reports: providing factual information; (4) Instruction: telling the listeners or readers what to do; (5) Explanation: explaining why or how something happens; and (6) Expository texts: presenting or arguing a viewpoint. These social purposes of the text-genres in turn decide the linguistic inputs of the text (i.e. their linguistic conventions, often in the form of schematic structure and linguistic features). Specifically, schematic structure refers to internal structure or text organization of the text-type in forms of introduction, body, and conclusion while language features consist of linguistic aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, and connectors which the writers have to use in order to translate information/ideas into a readable text. With another perspective, another three broad categories will be introduced to: primary, secondary, and creative genres. The categorization itself is an abstraction of some very sophisticated classification systems. In reality, there are overlaps among the three. However, the three categories here will suffice to handle the tasks and in practice teaching. One way of classifying genres is that posited by Bakhtin: primary and secondary genres.

The Effects of Genre-based Analysis on Writing Performance of EFL Learners: Lu Trong (2011) concludes that a genre-based approach based on the phases of the teaching-learning cycle created a great impact on the student participants. Most of the students gained the control over the key features of the required genre in terms of social purposes, language features, and schematic structure. The necessity and usefulness of the application of teaching-learning cycle into learning the related genre was predominantly recognized among students. Also, in order to implement successfully this teaching-learning genre-based program into their own actual classroom, teachers of English should introduce many well-written sample reading texts which contain the features of the specific text-types into their own classroom. In his work, Reppen (2002) discusses the genre-based approach. He suggests that a genre-based approach provides students with ample opportunities to become aware of the different purposes of written communication and the different ways information is organized in written texts. Unless students are exposed to these different text types and are given sufficient practice in these types of writing, their written products will leave much to be desired. In his paper, Reppen describes an action research study in which he teaches fifth-grade students a methodology that combines the principles which underlie the genre-based and the process approaches to teaching writing. The results of this study show that his students react positively to this instructional procedure with most of them becoming more aware of the different conventions used in different genres.

Genre-Based Approach to Teaching Writing: Miyoun (Sophia) Kim's (2005) study, which is about how to improve the writing skills of Korean students, concluded that the genre approach works best when it is joined with the process approach. In the combined process called the process-genre approach, the final artifact is created through a sequence of several activities undertaken after learners understand the structural and linguistic features of a particular situation as reflected in a text. Learners' steady progress is expected to come

out of teachers' facilitation with regard to the appropriate input of knowledge and skills at different stages. Therefore, if the process and genre approach are balanced in the curriculum, students will better improve their writing skills through experiencing a whole writing process as well as realizing the social functions of genres and the contexts in which these genres are used. Kim (2005) pointed out that one of the main causes of Korean university students' low performance in English writing was, among other things, the lack of genre-specific writing across the curriculum. The genre approach seems to fit well in Korea, because currently Korean students lack input of English genres, and they are usually good at following the given sample because they are traditionally familiar with learning by rote. Together with the process approach, the genre approach can contribute to amplifying students' writing potentials.

A Process Genre Model for Teaching Writing: Guo Yan (2005) contends that throughout the years, different theories have offered direction on how to teach writing. After the product approach was mostly discredited, it was supplanted by the more interactive and dynamic process and genre approaches. Although they have advantages and disadvantages, these two approaches have made valuable contributions to the writing classroom. Their techniques become even more useful when combined to create the process genre approach, which helps students use their individual writing processes to construct a text in a familiar genre. According to Raimes (1983), teachers should always try to provide students with writing assignments that can "unite form and content, ideas and organization, syntax and meaning, writing and revising, and above all, writing and thinking." The process genre approach does help teachers to unite all these features, and, in addition, it is personal and relevant, which is good news for teachers. Even if writing lessons are done in a classroom, they relate strongly to real-life situations, motivating students and preparing them to write for audiences outside the classroom.

A Process Genre Approach to Teaching Writing: Richard Badger and Goodith White (1982), believe that the disadvantages of process approaches are that they often regard all writing as being produced by the same set of processes; that they give insufficient importance to the kind of texts writers produce and why such texts are produced; and that they offer learners insufficient input, particularly in terms of linguistic knowledge, to write successfully. The main advantages are that they understand the importance of the skills involved in writing, and recognize that what learners bring to the writing classroom contributes to the development of writing ability. The negative side of genre approaches is that they undervalue the skills needed to produce a text and see learners as largely passive. More positively, they acknowledge that writing takes place in a social situation, and is a reflection of a particular purpose, and understand that learning can happen consciously through imitation and analysis. An effective methodology for writing needs to incorporate the insights of product, process, and genre approaches. One way of doing this is to start with one approach and adapt it.

METHODOLOGY

Research Question and Hypotheses

Based on the objectives of the study the following research question and hypotheses were formulated:

Research question: Is there a significant difference between the writing level of learners who write with the aid of genre-analysis approach and those who write the same text without using genre-analysis techniques?
Null hypothesis: There is no significant difference between the writing level of learners who write with the aid of genre-analysis approach and those who write the same text without using genre-analysis techniques.
Alternative hypothesis: There is a significant difference between the writing level of learners who write with the aid of genre-analysis approach and those who write the same text without using genre-analysis techniques.

Participants

The main participants of the study included 40 Iranian EFL learners from a private language institute in Iran. An English language proficiency test was given by the teacher to measure students' English language proficiency to divide them into two groups, each group comprising 20 students. The participants were randomly selected before the initiation of the treatment. Their age range was 16-30, and they were all native speakers of Persian and learners of English as a foreign language. This study was done in an institutional setting. Thus, the setting was a private language institute in Zanjan, Iran.

Instrument

Nelson's Proficiency Test: Nelson's *English Language Proficiency Test* which consisted of 50 items was used for sixty students in order to find out the participants' homogeneity and also to reduce their number to forty students. Then, according to this test, students were divided into two groups, the first group was named experimental group, and the second group was named the control group.

Posttest

There were two types of posttests, an immediate posttest and a delayed posttest. These posttests were administered and the results (mean scores) of both of the groups were compared to see if the performance of the members of the experimental group had any significant difference in comparison with the members of the

control group. These tests included topics of writings that were given to students to measure the efficiency of the treatments.

Procedure

In order to conduct the research and to test the research hypotheses the following steps were taken: first Nelson's language proficiency test was administered to the subjects to find out the homogeneity of the groups. This test included 50 items. The test was administered to sixty students to find out their homogeneity. Nelson's test includes 30 grammar items, 10 vocabulary items, and 10 reading comprehension items. After analyzing data and according to their scores, the selected participants were forty students and their level of proficiency was determined to be intermediate. These forty students according to their scores were divided into two groups. The first group was called the experimental group and the second group was the control group.

Design of the Study

In this study the participants' task was to write based on a given scenario. Before the administration of the writing task, the learners of both the experimental and the control groups underwent a series of workshops. For the experimental group, their workshops were on genre-based approach while the control group was taught according to the usual normal style. Both groups were given the same materials. Apart from the experimental materials which were specifically highlighted to raise the learners' awareness of the genre-based approach, most of the essential features of the two groups remained identical.

The participants were randomly divided into two groups (control and experimental). The experimental group was instructed by the same EFL teacher who was the researcher of this study as well. The class met three times a week for an hour and half as the class time; while the control group did not receive any treatment for doing the same task. The posttests (immediate posttest and delayed posttest) were administered and the results (mean scores) of both groups were compared to see if there was any significant difference between the performances of the members of the experimental group with the members of the control group. Therefore, the design which was selected for this study was quasi-experimental.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis

Framework of Data Analysis: The participants' writing task was assessed in terms of: Context of Participants' Text (CPT) and Written Recall of Salient Point-The Moves (WRSP). The scoring procedure used for assessing the CPT was based on the Multiple Trait Scoring by Hamp- Lyons (2003) and the instrument used for assessing the WRSP was based on the Moves Score by Henry and Roseberry (1998). The results from the experimental and the control groups were compared using the independent sample T-tests.

Homogeneity Process through Nelson's Proficiency Test

The Nelson's Proficiency Test was administered to 60 participants to assure their homogeneity. Those students whose Nelson Test score fell within one standard deviation, 5.37, above and below the mean of 38.61 were selected as homogeneous intermediate participants for this study. Hence 40 students whose score were between 34 and 43 were chosen. The descriptive statistics of the participant's scores on this test before and after homogenizing are laid out in Table 1 below.

The figures 1 and 2 depict the distribution of the Nelson Test scores in normal curves before and after homogenizing. One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test was used to test the normal distribution assumption of scores for Nelson's Test before and after homogenizing. Table 2 displays the results of this analysis.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for Nelson Test before and after homogenizing

| Nelson Test | N | Range | Min. | Max. | Mean | Median | Mode | SD |
|---------------------|----|-------|------|------|-------|--------|------|-------|
| Before homogenizing | 60 | 20 | 28 | 48 | 38.61 | 39.00 | 39 | 5.378 |
| After homogenizing | 40 | 19 | 34 | 43 | 38.73 | 39.00 | 39 | 2.796 |

Table 2: One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test of Normality for Nelson Test before and after homogenizing

| Nelson Test | Mean | N | Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z | Sig. |
|---------------------|-------|----|----------------------|------|
| Before homogenizing | 38.61 | 60 | .630 | .822 |
| After homogenizing | 38.73 | 40 | .779 | .578 |

The results of One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test revealed that the p values were .82 and .57 for Nelson Test before and after homogenizing respectively that both are more than .05 ($P > \alpha$); as a result, it can be claimed that the Nelson Test scores were normally distributed before and after homogenizing. These forty students according to their scores were divided into two groups. The first group was called the experimental group, and the second group was called the control group.

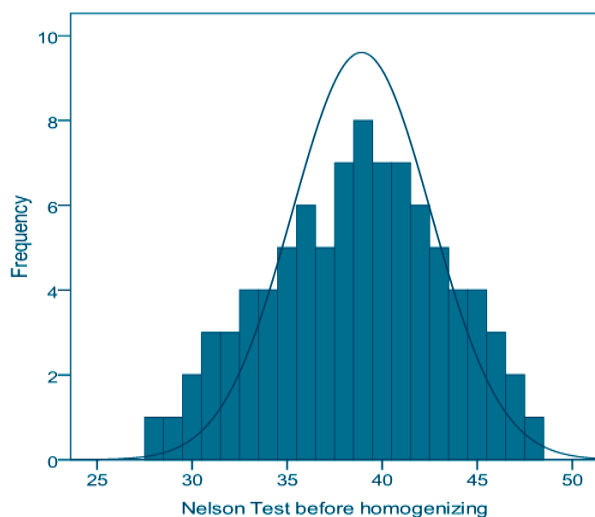


Figure 1: Distributions of Nelson Test scores before homogenizing (Mean: 38.61 Std.; Dev.: 4.652; N: 60)

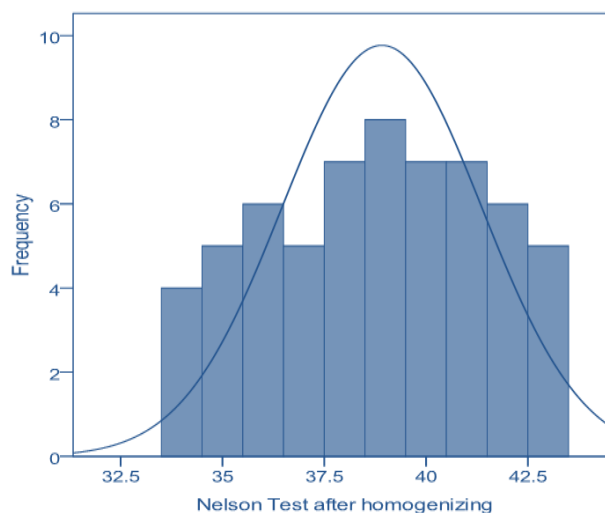


Figure 2: Distributions of Nelson Test scores after homogenizing (Mean: 38.73 Std.; Dev.: 2.686; N: 40)

Posttest

There were two types of posttests, an immediate posttest and a delayed posttest. These posttests were administered and the results (mean scores) of both groups were compared to see if the experimental group members had any significant difference in their performance with the members of the control group. These tests included topics of writings that were given to students to measure the efficiency of the treatments. Table 3 illustrates the descriptive statistics for the immediate test. As shown in Table 4.3, the average mean score was 45.0500 with the standard deviation of 4.32222 for the immediate posttest for two groups. The following table shows the descriptive statistics of the delayed test.

As is obvious in Table 4, the average mean score was 33.2500 with the standard deviation of 7.36903 for the immediate post-test for two groups. To select parametric or nonparametric data analysis method, the normality distributions of the scores were required to be tested. To check the normal distribution assumption of scores for the immediate test, One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test was used. The results of this analysis are displayed in Table 5. One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test showed P value of .912 for the immediate test, which is greater than .05 ($p > \alpha$); consequently, it can be concluded that these sets of scores were normally distributed. To check the normal distribution assumption of scores for the delayed test, One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test was used. The results of this analysis are displayed in Table 6.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for the immediate test for two groups

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------------------|----|---------|---------|---------|----------------|
| Score | 20 | 36.00 | 50.00 | 45.0500 | 4.32222 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 20 | | | | |

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for the delayed test for two groups

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------------------|----|---------|---------|---------|----------------|
| Score | 20 | 18.00 | 45.00 | 33.2500 | 7.36903 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 20 | | | | |

Table 5: One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for the immediate test

| | | Score |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|---------|
| N | | 20 |
| Normal Parameters ^{a, b} | Mean | 45.0500 |
| | Std. Deviation | 4.32222 |
| Most Extreme Differences | Absolute | .204 |
| | Positive | .126 |
| | Negative | -.204 |
| Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z | | .912 |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | | .376 |

a. Test distribution is Normal; b. Calculated from data

Table 6: One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for the delayed test

| | | Score |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|---------|
| N | | 20 |
| Normal Parameters ^{a, b} | Mean | 33.2500 |
| | Std. Deviation | 7.36903 |
| Most Extreme Differences | Absolute | .095 |
| | Positive | .073 |
| | Negative | -.095 |
| Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z | | .423 |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | | .994 |

a. Test distribution is Normal; b. Calculated from data

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test showed P value of .423 for the delayed test, which is greater than .05 ($p > \alpha$); consequently, it can be concluded that these sets of scores were normally distributed.

We have met the homogeneity of variance assumption because the P value is much more than .05 for both tests. The results of the statistics of both tests and the calculated standard deviation and the standard error mean are set in the Table 7.

The results of T-test to compare the mean scores of the two groups on the two immediate and delayed tests are set forth in Table 8.

We have met the homogeneity of variance assumption because the P value for Levene’s test was .053, which is more than .05. The results of T-test to compare the mean scores of the two groups on post-test of immediate and delayed showed that there is a significant difference between the immediate and delayed tests.

Table 7: Test Statistics

| | | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|-------|-----------|----|---------|----------------|-----------------|
| Score | Delayed | 20 | 33.2500 | 7.36903 | 1.64777 |
| | Immediate | 20 | 45.0500 | 4.32222 | .96648 |

Table 8: Independent Samples Test

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|-------|-----------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|--------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|----------|
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | | | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Score | Equal variances assumed | 3.988 | .053 | -6.177 | 38 | .000 | -11.80000 | 1.91029 | -15.66718 | -7.93282 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -6.177 | 30.690 | .000 | -11.80000 | 1.91029 | -15.69766 | -7.90234 |

Results of data analysis regarding the null hypothesis

The only null hypothesis of this research was: There is no significant difference between the writing level of learners who write with the aid of genre-analysis approach and those who write without using genre-analysis techniques. The results of this study showed that there was a significant difference between the writing level of learners who write with the aid of genre-analysis approach and those who write without using genre-analysis techniques. The results of the immediate and delayed tests clarifies that students with the treatment for genre writing, do better in writing. According to the tables and results in this chapter it can be concluded that the null hypothesis is rejected and learners who write with the aid of genre-analysis approach are better in writing than those who write without using genre-analysis techniques.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study it can be said that teaching EFL students to write on specific titles and genres might enable them to improve their writing skill. Consequently, it can be said that if the genre approach is balanced in the curriculum, students will better improve their writing skills through experiencing a whole writing process as well as realizing the social functions of genres and the contexts in which these genres are used. The genre approach seems to fit well in Iran, i.e. the EFL context mentioned at the beginning of this paper. This is because currently Iranian students lack input of English genres, and yet, once introduced to a model, they are usually good at following the given sample because they are traditionally familiar with learning by rote. The genre approach can be effective in helping Iranian students to learn the organizational structure as well as linguistic features of a certain genre. The genre approach can contribute to amplify students’ writing potentials.

Implication of the study

Also after observing the results, it can be concluded that using genres in classroom settings in EFL contexts like Iran it will be beneficial if the learners are taught the construction of moves in all kinds of social writing, especially in writing narration and description which are two important issues in improving the ability of learners. Moreover, English students by this kind of instruction can achieve higher scores in writing courses. Also, a considerable progress can be achieved in the construction of compositions and paragraphs in the writings of the students in Iran which is an EFL context.

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