



Implementing genre approach in post-graduate writing classroom: Necessities and obstacles

تطبيق مقاربة التدريس بنوع النص :

دواعي و معوقات

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Abstract

Writing at the tertiary level requires more than acquiring linguistic knowledge. Thus, adopting approaches that take into consideration the linguistic knowledge as well as the socio-cultural knowledge is necessary for students to achieve an acceptable level in academic writing. This study investigates necessities and obstacles of adopting a genre-based instruction to teach academic writing in English foreign language class at the university. It is a descriptive study based on qualitative and quantitative analyses. For data collection, two questionnaires were administered. One questionnaire was administered to first year Master students to see their attitudes towards previous academic writing courses and their views on writing skill. The other questionnaire was designed for teachers to know their adopted approach in academic writing and the difficulties Master students face in academic writing. Results show the absence of the social dimension of academic writing in previous courses. This can be a reason, among others, that necessitate the adoption of a genre approach.

keywords: Genre, academic writing, genre-approach, English as a foreign language (EFL), English for specific purposes (ESP), rhetorical genre studies (RGS).

الملخص:

لا تقتصر الكتابة الأكاديمية في التعليم العالي على المعرفة بالقواعد اللغوية فقط وإنما تتعداه إلى معرفة السياق الاجتماعي والثقافي الذي تمت فيه هذه الكتابة. و لذلك اعتماد مقارنة تأخذ بعين الاعتبار هاتين المعرفتين يمثل عنصرا حيويا يساعد الطلبة على الكتابة بإتقان و في هذا الإطار تهدف الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على الأسباب و المعوقات التي تقف أمام اعتماد مقارنة نوع النص لتدريس الكتابة الأكاديمية في الجامعة وهي دراسة وصفية معتمدة على تحليل كمي و كيفي . وقد استعملت الدراسة استبيانين لجمع المعطيات المطلوبة¹ أحدهما لطلبة سنة أولى ماستر قسم إنجليزية لجامعة ورقلة لاستخلاص آرائهم حول مهارة الكتابة و الدروس التي يتلقونها في التدرج و الآخر للأساتذة لمعرفة المقاربات المعتمدة و الصعوبات التي تعترض الطلبة في هذه المهارة . و قد أظهرت النتائج غياب المظهر الاجتماعي و الثقافي في دروس الكتابة الأكاديمية و هو ما يحتم تبني المقاربة بنوع النص . كما عدت بعض معوقات تبني هذه المقاربة كافتقار التوجيه الممنهج و التغذية الراجعة . و في الأخير فإن الهدف العام من الدراسة هو الدعوة إلى خلق فضاءات نقاش تفضي إلى تبني تدريس الكتابة الأكاديمية بالمقاربة بنوع النص بدلا عن الاعتماد على القواعد اللغوية البحتة.

الكلمات المفتاحية :

نوع النص² الكتابة الأكاديمية³ المقاربة بنوع النص⁴ التعليم العالي⁵ اللغة الأجنبية الثانية⁶ اللغة الإنجليزية للأهداف الخاصة⁷ الدراسات البلاغية⁸ للسانيات الوظيفية .

1. Introduction

Writing in one's mother tongue is a demanding task which calls upon many language and metacognitive abilities. In second language (SL), writing is a more demanding task because of the lack of necessary skills for its development (Schoonen et al, 2003: 3). Recently, much emphasis has been directed to the academic writing in English as a second language at the university to provide courses based on students' needs and expectations (Lea, 2004).

Further, the large adoption of study skill courses has failed to meet students' needs in a changing higher education context, a multi-disciplinary setting and various students' sociocultural backgrounds (Wingate, 2012; Lea, 2004). Therefore, subsequent approaches have been adopted to cope with students' needs.

This article tackles the genre-based instruction as one of the most influential models to teach academic writing in higher education (Hyland, 2007; Wingate, 2012; Bruce, 2013). It suggests the adoption of a genre-based instruction to teach academic writing at the Department of Letters and English Language at Ouargla University focusing on available opportunities to achieve students' goals.

2- Literature review

In higher education, students write for different purposes which require more than knowing the formal writing conventions. In other words, students should master skills like anticipating the audience, arguing for an opinion, expecting readers' abilities, cognitive abilities, adopting flexible use of rhetorical devices and the ability to map the overall rhetorical and organizational goals while writing (Barkaoui, 2007: 37-38). The study skill approach to teach academic writing has failed to address the above skills. It also has not taken students' levels, backgrounds and tutors' expectations into consideration (Lea & Street, 1998). Moreover, the changing context in higher education, the increasing use of technology in the education setting and the various

purposes for which students write have suggested new strategies for teaching academic writing (Coffin et al, 2003; Lea & Street, 1998). Genre-based instruction is one approach among those approaches that adopt strategies such as learning strategies, recognizing students' sociocultural backgrounds, anticipating the target audience and rhetorical strategies needed to fulfil writing purposes (Hyland, 2007: 149).

Genre is a systemic way of text categorization or a way of expressing ourselves either in a written or a spoken mode (Baker and Ellece, 2011: 53). The term 'Genre' was firstly used in the context of language teaching in the 1980's (Paltridge, 2014: 309). The notion was brought to the classroom in three traditions: rhetorical genre studies (RGS), systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and English for specific purposes (ESP) (Paltridge, 2013; Phiciensathien, 2016; Swales, 2009).

Genre in systemic school is influenced by three theories: language as social semiotic (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), sociology of language (Bernstein, 1990) and action research projects in literacy studies (Rose, 2012: 209). In this approach, genre is defined as staged, goal oriented, social process. It is a social process since texts are always interactive events within a speech community . A goal oriented practice as in the text unfolds towards interactants purpose. A staged process because it is a sequence of more than one step to reach the goal (ibid). Further, genre is described in broader linguistic rhetorical patterns as elementary genres like recounting, arguing and exposing. These patterns can be combined to form the macro genres in everyday life like lab-reports, and recipes (Hyland, 2007: 153; Phiciensachien, 2016: 217). Thus, designing an effective writing course should be oriented to target the typical stages, the linguistic items and the purpose for which a text is written. In addition, feedback is provided to students on their written products by suggesting remedies for incoherent texts and clear options for well-formed writing and appropriate for readers (Hyland, 2007: 153).

In English for specific purposes, the term ‘genre’ has been firstly used in 1981 (Paltridge, 2013: 347). Since then, genre has become an important notion in the area of ESP. Swales (1990) stated that the term ‘genre’ shaped the ESP model of teaching. He described genre’ as a class of communicative events with some shared set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by members of an academic or a professional group. Thus, ESP teachers are more concerned with genres as routine practices thereby academic or professional group fulfils its purposes (Hyland, 2007: 154).]

Unlike the previous models, rhetorical genre studies model was grounded in the work of composition studies where English is used as the medium of instruction (Johns, 2013: 2). This view was influenced by sociocultural theory which studies the influence of society and its culture on the individual (ibid). Moreover, genre has been described by Coe and Freedman (1998) as: “A socially standard strategy, embodied in a typical form of discourse, which has evolved for responding to recurring types of rhetorical situation (p41). Hence, teachers and scholars of rhetorical genre studies start their genre description by identifying the culture and the situation in which a text occurs. Then, they turn to investigate how individuals and their spoken and written discourse are influenced by these cultures in a specific situation (Johns, 2013: 2). In other words, when choosing a text to analyse, students should determine the situation and human interaction that characterize the context in which the text appears. Next, they identify the frequency of these genres, their organization, their processes of production or distribution and their linguistic forms (Ibid).

Although the three approaches differ in their theoretical backgrounds, they share the view that genre is a social way of knowing or acting within the world (Johns, 2013). Moreover, this social view differs among the three approaches because they target different audiences. In ESP, the audiences are EFL students who need courses for professional or academic purposes. Whereas, the

systemicists target students who acquire English as a second language or whose English literacy skills are low. For new rhetoricians, the audiences are the undergraduate students who take composition or rhetorical courses as a part of their liberal arts education (Swales, 2009: 3). Swales (2009) stated that the difference between the three traditions has become less sharp. This closure has led genre movement to bring the following benefits to the classroom (as summarized by Hyland 2007, 150).

It makes clear what is to be learnt to facilitate the acquisition of writing skill.

It provides a coherent framework for focussing on both language and content.

It ensures that the course objectives and content are derived from students' needs.

It gives teachers a central role in scaffolding students' learning and creativity.

It provides access to possibilities and patterns of variation in valued texts.

It provides resources for students to understand and challenge valued discourses.

3- Methodology

This research is a descriptive study. It tries to answer the following questions:

- What necessitates the adoption of a genre-based instruction to teach academic writing in first year Master linguistic class at the Department of Letters and English Language at Ouargla University?

- What hinders the implementation of this model to teach academic writing in first year master linguistic class at the Department of Letters and English Language at Ouargla University?

In doing so, the study seeks to reach the following objectives:

- To identify the reasons that necessitate the adoption of a genre-based instruction to teach academic writing in first year Master linguistic class at the Department of Letters and English Language at Ouargla University

- To identify the obstacles that hinder the adoption of this model to teach academic writing in first year Master linguistic class at the Department of Letters and English Language at Ouargla University.

- To offer some practical guidelines to adopt a genre-based instruction to teach academic writing at post-graduate level.

To achieve the study objectives, two questionnaires were used. The first was designed for teachers to know their views on master students' level in academic writing, requirements of academic writing in English at post-graduate level. The second was distributed to the first year Master students of English to explore their attitudes towards the academic writing requirements (like their level, difficulties etc). Some questions from both questionnaires are discussed in what follows.

3.1- The Students questionnaire

Q1- How do you evaluate your level in academic writing in English?

This question elicits the students' view of their level in academic writing in English.

Table 1: student's opinions about their level in academic writing

Choices	Number	Percentage
Acceptable	16	51,61%
Good	15	48,38%
Very good	00	00%
Total	31	100%

The results show that the majority of students are satisfied of their level. These results do not guarantee that they are sufficiently competent in academic writing since teachers' points of view are completely different. Thus matching students' opinions with teachers' ones provides an adequate description of students' needs to write in academic English (Lea & Street, 1998).

Q2- Are you satisfied with the previous course in academic writing in your graduate studies?

This question looks for the students' satisfaction of the previous course in academic writing.

Table 2: students' attitudes towards previous courses in academic writing

Choices	number	Percentage
Very satisfied	02	6,45%
Satisfied	21	67,74%
Not satisfied	08	25,80%
Total	31	100%

Most of the students see that they are satisfied with the course.

Q3 -The focus of the previous writing course was language skills, writing skills or social skills?

The aim of that question is to shed light on the elements the previous courses focussed on.

Table 3: Target elements in the previous courses

Previous course objectives	Number	Percentage
Language skills	26	83,87%
Writing skills	03	9,67%
Writing social skills	02	6,54%
Total	31	100%

Results demonstrate that these courses neglected the social aspects of academic writing and targeted only the linguistic elements. This makes these courses inadequate tools to fulfil students' needs (Zdell, 1995). Further, these results question the students' satisfaction expressed in the previous question.

Q4 - How frequent are the following tasks in your field of study? The fourth question seeks the frequency of some writing tasks in the classroom

Table 4: Task frequency in the academic writing course

Frequent tasks in students studies	Tasks frequency	Number	Total	Percentage	Total
Exams with short answers	Very often	09	31	29,03%	100%
	Often	15		48,83%	
	Not such a task	07		22,58%	
Exams with essay responses	Very often	16	31	51,29%	100%
	Often	14		45,16%	
	Not such a task	01		3,22%	
Summary of an article or a book	Very often	06	31	19,35%	100%
	Often	13		41,93%	
	Not such a task	12		38,70%,	
An academic paper	Very often	02	31	6,45%	100%
	Often	12		38,70%	
	Not such a task	17		54,83%	

From the results above, it is clear that exam with essay writing is the most frequent task, Though, the other tasks are relatively frequent in writing courses. Hence, students are required to write in different genres and care about various skills: coherence, cohesion, analysing, arguing.... etc.

Q5The following elements are aspects of academic English writing. How difficult are they to you?

The current question elicits difficulties that students face in writing tasks.

Table5: Students’ opinions on difficult area in academic writing

Skills	Choices	number	total	percentage	Total
Writing an effective introduction	Very difficult	01	31	3,22%	100%
	Difficult	16		51,61%	
	Easy	14		45,16%	
Searching for appropriate literature review using library resources	Very difficult	11	31	35,48%	100%
	Difficult	14		45,16%	
	Easy	06		19,35%	
Citation (quoting an author):	Very difficult	08	31	25,80%	100%
	Difficult	10		32,25%	
	Easy	13		41,93%	
Writing the research methodology section	Very difficult	07	31	22,58%	100%
	Difficult	18		58,06%	
	Easy	06		19,35%	
Writing up method section , analyzing and discussing the results	Very difficult	19	31	61,29%	100%
	Difficult	08		25,80%	
	Easy	04		12,90%	
Writing an effective conclusion	Very difficult	01	31	3,22%	100%
	Difficult	07		22,58%	
	Easy	23		74,19%	

Writing up reference list	Very difficult	04	31	12,90%	100%
	Difficult	11		35,48%	
	Easy	16		51,61%	
Using specific jargon	Very difficult	09	31	29,03%	100%
	Difficult	18		58,06%	
	Easy	05		16,12%	
Using academic style	Very difficult	03	31	09,67%	100%
	Difficult	19		61,29%	
	Easy	09		29,03	
Summarizing and paraphrasing	Very difficult	04	31	12,90%	100%
	Difficult	12		38,70%	
	Easy	15		48,38%	
Using correct grammar	Very difficult	01	31	3,22%	100%
	Difficult	10		32,25%	
	Easy	20		64,51%	
Writing coherent-cohesive paragraph	Very difficult	05	31	16,12%	100%
	Difficult	11		35,48%	
	Easy	15		48,38%	
Using correct spelling	Very difficult	00	31	00%	100%
	Difficult	06		19,35%	
	Easy	25		80,64%	
Using appropriate punctuation	Very difficult	01	31	3,22%	100%
	Difficult	11		35,48%	
	Easy	19		61,29%	

Based on the table above, text and academic intellectual skills are the most difficult academic writing skills for students due to over emphasis of previous writing courses on the formal aspect of language. These skills can be better improved using a genre approach as suggested by Olson (2013).

Q6How useful are the following activities for you to improve your level in academic writing?

The sixth question inquires students about preferred activities to improve their levels in academic writing

Table 6: students' preferences in writing tasks

Academic writing activities	Choices	Number	Total	percentage	Total
Punctuation exercises	very useful	18	31	58,06%	100%
	Useful	10		32,25%	
	less useful	03		9,67%	
Grammar exercises	very useful	22	31	70,96%	100%
	Useful	09		29,03%	
	less useful	00		00%	
Spelling Exercises	very useful	18	31	58,06%	100%
	Useful	11		35,48%	
	less	02		6,45%	

	useful				
Academic Skill activities	very useful	17	31	54,83%	100%
	Useful	13		41,93%	
	less useful	01		3,22%	
Academic vocabulary exercises	very useful	20	31	64,51%	100%
	Useful	09		29,03%	
	less useful	02		6,45%	
Reading authentic sample of academic writing	very useful	17	31	54,83%	100%
	Useful	12		38,70%	
	less useful	02		6,45%	
Citation and reference activities	very useful	13	31	41,93%	100%
	Useful	11		35,48%	
	less useful	07		22,58%	

Basing on these results,students prefer various activities like: language activities, authentic writing activities,and academic skill activitiesetc. Therefore, using a genre approach meets students' needs and task variability (Hyland, 2007).

Q7 How useful are the following types of feedback for you to develop as a writer?

The last question aims at determining students' preferences in the feedback they receive.

Table 7: students' preferences in feedback strategies

Feedback types	Choices	number	Total	percentage	Total
Teacher's correction of errors in your writing	Very useful	26	31	83,87%	100%
	Useful	05		16,12%	
	Less useful	00		00%	
Teacher's response on the content and organization of your writing	Very useful	25	31	80,64%	100%
	Useful	05		16,12%	
	Less useful	01		3,22%	
peer correction of errors and his/her comments on content and organization	Very useful	09	31	29,03%	100%
	Useful	14		45,16%	
	Less useful	08		25,80%	
Teacher tells you to get the final draft by a more competent colleague	Very useful	11	31	35,48%	100%
	Useful	14		45,16%	
	Less useful	06		19,35%	

According to these results, students prefer teachers' feedback on the content and organization. Yet, peer correction is accepted by the majority of students. In a genre approach, learners are given

opportunities to discuss with each other the content and the form of the text. The role of the teacher is just a guider, a motivater input provider etc(Wang, 2013: 2128)

3.2- The teachers' questionnaire

Q1 What subjects do you teach?

In this question teachers are asked about the modules they teach. The results reveal that each teacher teaches more than one subject and students are exposed to different subjects during their studies, some of which are linguistics, literature, civilisation, didactics, written expression.... Thus, the academic writing requirements change from one context to another. For instance, writing is considered good in one subject and not so in another (Olson, 2013, 4).

Q2 Do you think that the language used in your speciality is restricted to that field? If yes, in what way?

In this question, teachers are requested to demonstrate what characterises their subject.

Table 8: language Differences between Teachers' Specialities'

Choices		Number		Percentage	
Yes	Specific genres ortext types	11	01	91;66%	9;09%
	Specific jargon		00		00%
	Both		10		82;57%
No		01		8;33	
Total		12		100%	

Most of teachers believe that their subjects have distinct genres and vocabularies. Hence, raising students' awareness to different genres is a vital element in teaching academic writing (Hyland,2013: 96).

Q3 What kind of genres are your students required to produce during their studies?

This question investigates the difference between subjects in terms of genres and academic writing requirements. teachers provided various genres such as: narrative essays, argumentative essay, summaries, book review, dissertation.... Thus, highlighting the difference between the genres by showing their constructive moves may help the students become good writers (Swales 1990).

Q4 In your opinion, what are the most difficult academic writing areas that face students?

This question concerns students' difficulties from teachers' views.

Table 9 : Students' difficulties from teachers' view

Academic writing skills	Choices	Number	total	Percentage	total
Searching for the appropriate literature review	very difficult	6	12	50%	100%
	difficult	4		33,33%	
	less difficult	2		16,66%	
Looking for a searchable topic	very difficult	8	12	66,66%	100%
	difficult	2		16,66%	
	less difficult	2		16,66%	
Language skills (punctuation, correct tense, grammar, etc.)	very difficult	5	12	41,66%	100%
	difficult	5		41,66%	
	less difficult	2		16,66%	
General intellectual skills (developing ideas , expressing views, arguing and expressing opinions	very difficult	7	12	58,33%	100%
	difficult	4		33,33%	
	less difficult	1		8,33%	
Academic writing skills (discourse features of academic genres , Avoiding plagiarism , citations, Writing references)	very difficult	5	12	41,66%	100%
	difficult	5		41,66%	
	less difficult	2		16,66%	

The majority of teachers think that the intellectual skills are the most difficult skills for students. Thus, teacher can use genre as a model for writing instruction to help the students to control their learning, to

develop ideas, to relate text and context in various settings and cultures (Hyland, 2013: 97-98).

Conclusion

Using genre to teach academic writing provides teachers and students with useful ground to design a writing course. This approach relates writing to real life context and to the learning process. It also guides teachers and students to overcome many of difficulties through collaborative work. In this regard, the study reached its objectives by stating necessities and obstacles to implement this approach to teach academic writing to postgraduate students at the Department of Letters and English, Ouargla University. For example, raising students' awareness to their needs and social aspects of writing and the variability in required writing genres legitimize the adoption of a genre approach. Yet, factors (like the lack of practice, effective reading and absence of rigorous assessment and guidance) can hinder the implementation of this approach. Although this study provides a starting point to discuss the implementation and challenges of genre approach in higher education, more research in other contexts is required since the study has been conducted in a small sample.

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