The Impact of Genre-Based Instruction on English Writing Performance: Theoretical Foundations and Practical Implications

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Abstract

English language writing is a complex, time-consuming activity that requires concentration, effort, and persistence. In line with the advancements in language teaching, teaching English writing has its own approaches, namely the product, process, and genre approaches. Genre-based approach is considered to be a solution to writing deficiencies by making provision for the social aspect of writing including English varieties and conventional lexico-grammatical practices. However, the contribution of genre-based approach in enhancing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writers` writing performance is still under question. Thus, the present study aims to investigate the impact of genre-based instruction on EFL students` writing proficiency. The research setting was the written expression course for second year students of English at the University of El-Oued, Algeria. The participants in the study were sixty (60) students who practiced writing two different genres of writing: the paragraph and the essay. The findings of the study revealed that genre-based instruction has a positive impact on EFL learners` writing performance.

Keywords: *English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, Genre-based instruction, Impact, Written expression, Writing performance.*

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Introduction

The need for written communication in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), as it is an international language and the new lingua franca of the world, has been increasing not only in academic or professional fields but also in people` s daily lives. But, English writing is a very complicated skill and perceived by EFL learners as the most difficult language basic skill that requires (much) cognitive process and linguistic knowledge (Raimes, 1983). In particular, it is a challenging language skill for students who use English as a foreign language (EFL) where exposure to the target language is limited. Therefore, to make writing instruction easy, well-designed writing tasks based on theory and the results of research are necessary. Writing tasks are essential elements of teaching the writing skill; thus, an analysis of types of writing relevant to writing tasks and activities will help EFL teachers plan and adjust their writing lessons effectively while also providing implications for developing writing teaching materials and syllabus designers (Eon-Sung &Hye-Won, 2019).In order to respond to the complexities of EFL writing, a number of writing approaches to teaching writing have been suggested. These include: product-based writing approach, process-oriented approach, and genre-based approach.

In the 1960s, a product-based writing approach prevailed in which the primary aim wasproducing error-free texts with linguistically correct forms via imitating models (Badger &White, 2000; Pincas, 1982). This approach to writing was criticized for neglecting the process of writing. Hence, the process-based approach advocated by Zamel (1987) began to replace the product-based approach. This approach focused on the stages of writing rather than on the final outcome. The process-based approach was helpful to comprehend the stages of writing, but it raised some problems as it was applied in all cases regardless of different purposes, audiences, and contexts (Hye, 2012). In the 1980s, the genre-based approach emerged to overcome the shortcomings of the preceding approaches. Genre-based instruction gave learners the opportunity to understand how to construct various types of writing for different purposes in social contexts (Badger &White 2000).

Genre approaches to writing instruction assert that all writing takes place in a social situation and is a reflection of a particular purposes (Clark, 2012; Paltridge, 2013). Genres can be viewed as purposefully constructed social actions in categories assigned on the ground of external, non-linguistic, conventional criteria such as audience, purpose, and speech community. In this context, genre-based approaches are concerned with the relationship between language form, function, and language` s social context (Han &Hiver, 2018).

The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of genre-based instruction on EFL students` writing proficiency targeting second year L.M.D students at the University of El-Oued, Algeria. The context of the study is the course of written expression where the targeted learners are exposed to the textual features of paragraph and essay writing focusing on particular types of paragraphs and essays. This study, by the end, identifies whether genre analysis of these types of writing

influence**s**EFL learners` writing proficiency. The study attempts to answer the following questions:

1 - How does genre-based writing instruction affect students` writing performance?

2 - How do the participants reflect on their paragraphs and essays before and after receiving a   genre-based instruction?

3 - What impact does genre-based writing instruction have on EFL learners` writingproficiency?

1. Literature Review

This research section is dedicated exclusively to the theoretical issues relevant to the topic of the study. It covers defining relevant concepts suchas genre and genre analysis. Additionally, genre-based instruction norms, requirements and outcomes are presented and discussed.

1.1. Genre and Genre Analysis

A much more promising approach to a theory of ESP comes from the analysis of ESP texts through genre analysis.

Discourse analysis may overlap with genre analysis. Dudley-Evans and St John show the distinction between the two notions:

"Any study of language or, more specifically, text at a level above that of a sentence is a discourse study. This may involve the study of cohesive links between sentences, of paragraphs, or the structure of the whole text. The results of this type of analysis make statements about how texts –any text- work. This is applied discourse analysis. Where, however, the focus of text analysis is on the regularities of structures that distinguish one type of text from another, this is genre analysis and the results focus on the differences between text types, or genres" (1988: 87).

The term 'genre' was first used by Swales (1981). He defined 'genre' as "a more or less standardized communicative event with a goal or set of goals mutually understood by the participants in that event and occurring within a functional rather than a personal or social setting" (Robinson, 1991).

Genre analysis is the study of situated linguistic behavior in institutionalized academic or professional settings. According to him, genre analysis has the following features:

(1) Genre analysis shows a genuine interest in the use of language to achieve communicative goals. In this sense, it is not an extension of linguistic formalism.

(2) But, genre analysis does not represent a static description of language use; instead, it gives a dynamic explanation of the way expert users of language manipulate generic conventions to achieve a variety of complex goals. In this sense, it combines the advantages of sociolinguistics perspective, especially the use of ethnographic information, with those of cognitive perspective, especially regarding the tactical use of language.

(3) It is narrow in focus but wide in vision, focusing on specific differentiation in language use at various levels of generality.

(4) Genre analysis is primarily motivated by applied linguistic concerns, especially language teaching at various levels (Bhatia 1993: 22).

English for Specific Purposes focuses on studying and teaching specialized varieties of English in advanced academic and professional settings. ESP is often used as an umbrella term to include more specialized areas of study such as English for science and technology (EST). It is largely due to Swales' work (his book Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings) and the research it has inspired over the last twenty years that ESP and genre analysis have become in different ways synonymous.

One way of making a distinction between 'genre' and 'text type' is to say that the former is based on external and non-linguistic criteria while the latter is based on the internal, linguistic characteristics of texts themselves (Biber, 1988). In this view, a genre is defined as a category assigned on the basis of external criteria such as intended audience, purpose, and activity type; that is, it refers to a conventional, culturally-recognized grouping of texts based on properties other than lexical or grammatical occurrence features, which are, instead, the internal linguistic criteria forming the basis of 'text type' categories. Biber says about the external criteria: "Genre categories are determined on the basis of external criteria relating to the speaker's purpose and topic; they are assigned on the basis of use rather than on the basis of form" (1988: 170).

Genre theory provides a means for practitioners to learn specific characteristics about writing within a discipline and to be aware of the linguistic and rhetorical skills necessary to communicate successfully in the discipline. Empirical studies that analyze genre within the framework of activity theory have shown the need for familiarity with the genres used by a certain community to become a member of that community. Simply speaking, genres are instruments that members of a community use to share information, mediate social activities, and respond to the communicative needs of the community.

In the same context, genre researchers can improve understanding of technical communication practice by analyzing the organizational and social context in which writing takes place by studying genres in relation to the activity system of a community, and by exploring the linguistic and rhetorical features of the repertoire of genres used by the community. Hence, genre analysis is a useful analytical category for researchers of technical communication (Paltridge, 1995).

It should be noted that genre-based studies have implications for the teaching of communication related to science and technology fields. Recent researches have shown that although it is beneficial to help students become aware of the textual regularities of a givengenre, butthis is not enough. As these textual regularities are determined by the social actions that are performed through language in response to recurring rhetorical situations, it is necessary in teaching to emphasize the social context of workplace documents. Therefore, assignments in science and technology courses should ask students to use language in real situations related to their discipline.

Genre theory is, therefore, highly significant for science and technology teachers because by using genre-based pedagogy in their classes, they can empower their students to succeed as members of a community of practice. Another pedagogical implication of current genre theory is the need to teach genres of a discourse community as dynamic forms that can be manipulated to respond to new real situations. This can be achieved only if the features of the genre are presented as a response to a specific situation or context (Paltridge, 1996: 440-242).

ESP' s expanded interest from descriptive analyses of linguistic features to analyses of genres and their communicative functions not only helps distinguish ESP research from corpus linguistics, but also reveals similarities and distinctions between ESP genre analyses and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) genre analyses (Kennedy, 1998).

This is done even if learners already equipped with reasonable adequate competence in the use of the language for general everyday functions will still need to develop the following (Crombie, 1985: 36):
(1) Understanding of the specialist code.
(2) Familiarity with the dynamics of specialist genres that include rhetorical forms and contents.
(3) Specific contexts they respond to and the conventions they tend to use in their responses.
(4) Proficiency in the manipulation of specialist genres to respond to the exigencies of unfamiliar and novel situations.

To explain, learners need to develop the understanding of code, the acquisition of genre knowledge associated with the specialist culture, sensitivity to cognitive structuring of specialist

genres, and then they can hope to exploit generic knowledge of a repertoire of specialist genres by becoming informed users of the discourse of their chosen field. Thus, learners must acquaint themselves with the communicative goal-oriented purposes associated with specific use of genres. They need to become aware of appropriate rhetorical procedures and conventions typically associated with the specialist discourse community that they are aspiring to join.

The intent is to help the learner to use language more effectively in academic and professional settings and to bring much-needed psychological reality and relevance to the learning task. The approach to genre analysis and materials design seeks to clarify rather than prescribe. Once learned and adequately understood, the conventions and procedures can be exploited creatively to achieve private ends within the socially recognized communicative purposes (Bhatia, 1993).

1.2. Genre-Based Writing Instruction: Norms, Requirements, and Outcomes

EFL writing is a very sophisticated skill that requires much cognitive process and linguistic knowledge. Genre-based writing can benefit EFL students who are facing challenges of EFL writing to meet their communicative needs and develop their writing competencies.It deals with socio-cultural aspect of writing as purpose and audience, featuring explicit instruction and input on language and rhetorical stages of genre (Eon-Sung &Hye-Won, 2019). Researchers report that genre pedagogy has a positive impact not only on writing proficiency but also on affective factors (Han &Hiver, 2018; Lee, 2012). Badger and White (2000) suggested an instructional framework where students first explore the social context of writing and its purpose before following writing process and responding to writing instructions. Genre-based writing instruction helps EFL students develop English writing competence via providing explicit input and scaffolding, without sacrificing opportunities to experience the writing process (Eon-Sung &Hye-Won, 2019).

Genre-based instruction offers a valuable resource for assisting students` ability to understand and produce texts. This type of pedagogies put language, content, and contexts together with explicit explanations in a systematic way (Gamze &Zuhal, 2018). Aiming at gaining benefits from its positive sides, genre teaching and learning should be applied carefully according to the students` needs in writing classrooms.In what is related to teaching paragraph and essay genres, Johns (2011: 57) states "[…] essays or paragraphs with strict formats in the rhetorical modes are central and structure is often taught as fixed and almost universally transferable" (Cited in Gamze and Zuhal, 2018). In these types of genre-based pedagogies, EFL learners are supposed to learn text kinds and the use of these texts in the related contexts. This kind of genre learning can be sufficient and effective for beginners in English language or in preparatory writing English programs. However, a more sophisticated and detailed approach should be put into use and practice with advanced students who use English for academic purposes.This type of students should be motivated to develop what is called genre awareness instead of memorizing text types (Gamze &Zuhal, 2018).

2. Research Method

This section outlines the procedures of the present study from the selection of the sample of the study to the analytical frameworks and methods used in data analysis and interpretation.

The study employed the descriptive analytical method design so as to find out whether genre-based instruction has any effect on EFL learners' writing performance. In this type of design, theresearcher makes use of qualitative research method in an intervention program in terms of adopting genre-based instruction in the teaching of paragraph and essay writing. The researcher via adopting this research design is interested in understanding the impact of the intervention on EFL learners` writing proficiency and the opinions and perceptions of the participants with respect to the intervention.

2.1. Participants

The target population of the study was the second year English L.M.D students from the University of El-Oued, Algeria during the academic year 2020 – 2021. The total number of students at the Department of Arts and English Language during the academic year 2020 – 2021 was around 700 students and about 180 of them were second year students who were the target population of this study.

The participants of the study were seventy (70)students representing two (2) groups of the second year level: fifty-nine (59) female students and eleven (11) male ones as the entire population of the study was composed of an overwhelming majority of girls.It should be noted here that the gender of the students had no impact on their responses. The age of the respondents varied between 19 and 25. The research was able to manage face-to-face contact with the participants in which the university health protocol was strictly respected. The sample of the study was selected randomly to guarantee the credibility and reliability of the results. The table below gives details about the participants of the study.

Table. 1: Sample of the Study

Sampling	Male	Female
L2 EFL Students	11	59
Total Number	70	

2.2. Data Collection Tools

The qualitative data of the study were collected by means of structured interview in which the participants were asked what impact genre-based instruction has on their writing performance. The interview sessions that lasted approximately five minutes per participant, were analyzed to reach certain conclusions.

Additionally, classroom observation was also used as a research instrument that provided the teacher`s opinions and evaluations about the students` attitudes towards the implementation of the instructional intervention. Classroom intervention also targeted EFL students` writing achievements during the inclusion of genre-based instruction in the written expression course.

Finally, the participants in the study were asked to keep portfolios including three paragraphs of three types of paragraphs and similar number of essays of the same paragraph typology. These types include: argumentative, descriptive, and narrative paragraph and essay. The corpus then was analyzed and evaluated to assess the impact of genre-based instruction on EFL learners` writing proficiency.

2.3. Research Context

The study was conducted in the Arts and English Language Department of the University of El-Oued, Algeria. Generally, English Language Departments in Algeria include first cycle program, or bachelor stage of three years, and master stage oftwo years. In both cycles, the different subjects` syllabi aimedat equipping EFL learners with the necessary theoretical and practical knowledge related to language and the profession of teaching. Within this framework, the research context was the course of written expression for second year English L.M.D students where EFL learners were exposed to two genres of writing: the paragraph and the essay. The generic features of each text type were presented in order to raise EFL students` genre awareness to reach the ultimate objective of the course, which is developing EFL learners` writing performance.

The table below gives details about the generic features of the targeted genres of writing.

Table. 2: General features of the study` s targeted genres.

Genres	Paragraph	Essay
Structure		- A basic essay consists of three main parts: introduction, body, and conclusion. - The introduction guides the reader into the paper

	- The paragraph includes three parts: - Topic sentence introducing the central idea of the paragraph. - Supporting sentences providing details related to the topic paragraph. - Concluding sentence closing the topic of the paragraph.	by introducing the topic. It includes the thesis statement, which states the main idea or argument of the essay, setslimits on the topic, and can indicate the organization of the essay. - The body of the essay supports the main points presented in the thesis. Each point isdeveloped by one or more paragraphs and supported with specific details. - The conclusion brings together all the main points of the essay. It refers back to the thesis statementand leaves readers with a final thought and sense of closure by resolving any ideas brought up in the essay. - The layout of the essay can be block arrangement or point-by-point arrangement depending on the type of the essay.
Basicrequirements	- Accuracy and fluency. - Grammatical and lexical connectedness, that is cohesion. - Coherence. - Transitions: Transitions connect paragraphs to each other and to the thesis. They are used within and betweenparagraphs to help the paper flow from one topic to the next. These transitions can be one or two words("first," "next," "in addition," etc.) or one or two sentences that bring the reader to the next main point.	

Table (2) above gives general generic features of paragraph and essay writing. Details about the exclusive features of each paragraph and essay type were given face-to-face to EFL learners during written expression sessions. Then, models of each text type were exposed. Finally, writing assignments were given to the EFL students to investigate via evaluation of their written production whether genre-based instruction has an impact on their writing proficiency.

3.Data Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis and the assessment of students` portfolios, that is EFL written production relevant to argumentation, description, and narration in both paragraph and essay genres, revealed that the genre-based instruction has a fruitful impact on EFL students` writing skills. Basic knowledge relevant to the generic features of the targeted genres in terms of content, structure, and methodology presented in the lectures` and TDs` sessions of written expression influenced positively EFL learners' writing performance. On the ground of classroom observation, it was noticed that EFL students were motivated to practice writing. Meanwhile, EFL students expressed their satisfaction with the instructional content presented and their learning achievements.

Finally, the study practical section ends up with a structured interview targeting second year EFL students. The interview includes eight (8) statements where EFL learners were asked to express their agreement, disagreement or neutrality with each item in the interview. The aim was to investigate EFL students' attitudes and perceptions towards the integration of genre-based instruction in English writing classrooms and whether they are satisfied or dissatisfied with the incorporation of this instructional intervention.

Table. 3: The Findings of EFL Students` Structured Interview.

Items	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
- Understanding the generic features of text types facilitate	87.14 %	01. 42 %	11.42%

the process of writing.			
- Genre-based instruction is motivating.	91.42%	00 %	08.57%
- Genre-based instruction lessens the complexity of EFL writing.	92.85 %	01. 42 %	05.71%
- Developing genre awareness is the corner stone of developing writing skills.	85.71 %	02.85 %	11.42 %
- Thanks to genre-based instruction, I acquire the norms of writing paragraphs and essays.	87.14 %	01. 42 %	11.42%
- Genre-based writing develops my writing skills.	90 %	00 %	10 %
- Genre-based instruction has positive impact on EFL students` writing performance.	94.28 %	00 %	05.71%
- Genre-based instruction should be extended to other genres of writings.	97.14 %	00 %	02.85 %

The findings of second year EFL students` structured interview (demonstrated in table.3 above) revealed that the participants had positive attitudes towards using genre-based approaches in EFL writing instruction. The results derived from the interview have shown that (87.14 %) of the participants agreed that understanding the generic features of text types facilitate the process of writing and that due to genre-based instruction, they acquired the norms of writing paragraphs and essays. In the same vein, (92.85 %) of the respondents asserted that genre-based instruction minimized the complexity of EFL writing while (90 %) of them believed that the implementation of genre-based approaches in writing developed their writing skills.

4.Recommendations and Pedagogical Implications

This study attempted to suggest some of the ways that genre can be of considerable theoretical and practical relevance for supporting students to develop their writing skills and performance. On the ground of the results of the study, EFL teachers at the university level should integrate genre approach in teaching different writing genres to ascertain the improvement of students` writing performance. Additionally, developing and incorporating effective genre awareness writing tasks are also neededas without genre-based instruction, students may not develop genre knowledge. In terms of context, it is crucial to include reader information in more writing prompts and to expand the range of audience types by varying the degree of intimacy and social status of the reader, to build the ability to respond appropriately in diverse communicative settings(Eon-Sung &Hye-Won, 2019).

In order to ensure the inclusion of using genre-based instruction in English writing, syllabus designers need to design a comprehensive document for EFL learners around different writing genres so as it can be reflected in the writing lectures and tasks in the TDs sessions. This can begin by shedding light on the core genres and their sub-genres that particularly useful for EFL students and highly applicable to many types of texts and contexts. The selected genres and sub-genres should be distributed across the three years of bachelor cycle. It would be important also to take into account the degree of complexity of language forms of the genre when deciding which genres to include each year.

One of the difficulties encountered by students when they attempted to develop their writing skills was the lack of knowledge of the linguistic and text features of the text type. Hence, EFL learners did not know how to transform their ideas into a well-structured text respecting the norms of writing the target text genre. Therefore, when incorporating genre-based instruction in writing EFL classes, English language instructors should introduce well-written sample of reading texts**,** which contain the key features of the specific text types into EFL classrooms. That is, when designing the course materials, much attention should be devoted to the selection of texts that serve as a model for students to build and write similar texts.

Furthermore, Carter` s (2007) research findings can aid EFL written expression teachers by enabling them to design a writing course that encourages rhetorical flexibility, but classifies texts according to their purposes and macro-structures. So, learners can examine the structures of an academic introduction for a text calling for empirical enquiry, mapping these structures into introductions in EFL. Their writing assignments can involve writing introductions that varies somehow from what they have modeled or mapped, depending upon the situation in which they are askedtowrite (Johns, 2011).

Finally, the instructional intervention based on genre approach in EFL writing was integrated in written expression course for second year students. This shows that it can be integrated in other subjects to get similar impact and results. Its integration is not only possible but also necessary to assist EFL learners` develop and acquire the necessary competencies that aid them to function effectively inside and outside classrooms.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of genre-based instruction on second year EFL students` writing performance. The findings of the study showed that EFL students writing performance were significantly improved after receiving writing sessions of genre-based writing instruction. Besides, the results obtained from class observation, the analysis and evaluation of students` written production, and EFL learners` structured interview showed that the application of genre-based approaches in English writing classes affected positively EFL learners` self-confidence and their attitudes and perceptions toward writing.

The current study proved that providing effective and systematic teaching strategies using genre approach changed EFL learners'perceptions towards writing. They viewed writing as enjoyable and doable activity. Learners` self-confidence in English writing is also expected to increase with further practice related to other writing genres. The study` s findings also revealed that theunderstanding of the generic structure, linguistic features, and linguistic characteristics of different writing genres lessen**s** the complexity of EFL writing and foster EFL students` writing proficiency.

Another significant point that should be highlighted at the end of this study is the relationship among genres, choices, and constraints. Criticism to genre-based theory is centered around the point that genre-based pedagogies might hinder EFL students` writing creativity and productivity through prescriptivism and that adopting genre-based instruction on the part of EFL teachers may accommodate learners to the model of the dominant discourse by encouraging them to write as they were taught. Indeed, the dangers of static, decontextualized pedagogy are real provided teachers fail to acknowledge variation. However, genre approach in EFL writing fosters creativity and critical as well as creative thinking and develops students` writing competencies.

This study is limited in several aspects. First, its subjects are drawn from the same university, the University of El-Oued, Algeria, and therefore its results may not be generalized to other educational settings or other population with different backgrounds. Future research involving a large sample across the country would help validate the findings of this study. Another limitation of this study concerns its methodological design where only an interview, classroom observation and evaluation and analysis of students` written essays and paragraphs are adopted to collect research data. Other additional types of survey instruments should be included in further studies to obtain more in-depth information. Finally, the list of items in the interview are adequate and complete but subject to further confirmation and modification in future researches related to this study.

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