

The Effects of Using Process Genre Approach on Writing Skill Development in ESP Classes: A case of Business Students

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Abstract

This study investigated the effectiveness of the Process-Genre Approach (PGA) in enhancing the writing skills of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) students in Iran, specifically focusing on business letter writing. The traditional product-based approach to teaching writing has proven to be ineffective, prompting the exploration of alternative approaches. In order to conduct the study from Azad University, Urmia branch, the researcher asked 80 male and female sophomore ESP business students to take part in the study. Results of the analysis of one-way and two-way ANOVA showed that process genre approach had positive effects on writing skill development among male and female ESP business students. Moreover, no significant difference was observed between writing skill development of ESP business students across genders.

Keywords: ESP, Process-Genre Approach, Writing Skill.

Introduction

Writing mastery is essential for clear communication in various contexts. For instance, students must write effectively to achieve satisfactory results in exams and gain admission to their desired universities. Additionally, writing well-crafted essays is often required by authorities for university admissions. In electronic communication, such as through emails or petitions to educational institutions, accurate writing is crucial. Social media platforms also demand accurate typing to avoid misunderstandings. In professional settings, writing skills are vital for tasks like reporting and presentations, which can impact career advancement. In social lives, clear writing is important to avoid missing appointments, meetings, or transportation due to unclear messages (Galvin & Greenhow, 2020).

Writing is a crucial aspect of English language learning for non-native speakers, particularly in specific contexts such as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes. ESP students in Iran often struggle with writing, lacking a deep understanding of the writing process and purpose. The traditional product approach to teaching writing has not yielded desired results, as evidenced by numerous studies. Both students and teachers are often unfamiliar with newer

pedagogical research that advocates for approaches such as the process-genre approach, which has evolved over decades. This study aimed to explore the effectiveness of the Process-Genre Approach (PGA) in enhancing the writing skills of male and female ESP students in English, specifically in the context of business letter writing in Iran. The objective was to determine the potential benefits of this global approach for developing the writing skills of business students who are learning English as a foreign language in Iran.

Literature Review

Over the past two decades, significant advancements in writing research have resulted in the creation of new approaches to teaching writing. These changes were brought about by two factors, which were the concern of writing researchers that conventional approaches that focused on the end product may not be sufficient for students writing in various disciplines, and also the concern about how students produce written texts (Faigley et al., 1985). One of the most influential breakthroughs that has had a wide-ranging impact on writing instruction is the understanding and instruction of writing as a process. Today, almost all contemporary books and articles on writing still emphasize the importance of the writing process, and there has been a paradigm shift in writing instruction from a focus on the final product to a process-oriented approach between the 1970s and 1980s (Smith, 2000; Applebee, 1986; Faigley et al., 1985).

Theories suggest that there are several ways to educate and learn writing skills in an efficient manner. The product approach has historically placed more emphasis on the written work as a finished product and less emphasis on the necessary processes in the writing process. In writing classes, finishing the assignment fast and effectively is usually the main goal. Numerous investigations, however, have demonstrated that the stated outcomes of this antiquated strategy have not been achieved. Under the product-based approach, students must mimic a given text (Klimova, 2014). They carefully examine the sample text so that they can make the appropriate adjustments in their own creations. There are supporters of this strategy despite some criticism and limitations, such as the possibility that it could impede learners' creativity (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2007).

As the name suggests, the process-genre approach combines the best elements of two well-known writing training strategies: the genre approach and the process approach (Badger & White, 2000). The qualities of both the process and genre approaches are combined in this eclectic approach to help learners develop their writing abilities (Rusinovci, 2015). This approach, which emphasizes creativity and learning through several drafts, peer and instructor criticism, regular revisions, and public presentation as a speaking exercise, gives the writing process a great deal of weight (Faraj, 2015).

The process of learning to write differs among various groups of learners, as they are at varying stages of development. If learners are well-versed in a specific genre and are skilled in it, they may not require much guidance. Even in other skills (e.g., speaking) if learners can have speaking in specific genres they may not need support (Kashef, Alavinia, & Khabazian, 2023).

However, some learners may have a good understanding of how their writing could be limited by their potential audience, while others may lack knowledge of appropriate language for a specific audience. In such cases, learners require guidance, such as assistance with the language suited for a particular audience or developing the ability to identify their potential audience. The necessary support will depend on the learners group. In some instances, teachers may not have the chance to assess learners' writing abilities before class. In these cases, the “deep-end approach” suggested by Willis (1996, p.100) could be valuable. Learners would attempt to complete a step in a process genre, compare their works with an expert’s version (perhaps the teacher's), and make the necessary adjustments.

Learners and their teacher can decide whether students need more information or assistance with specific skills after comparing their work to the target genre. In the event that students are ignorant, they have three possible information sources at their disposal: the instructor, other students, and literary works in the intended genre. Language awareness exercises are a special source of information in the genre process approach, even though professors can supply direction through instruction and other students can help in a group setting. Language awareness exercises are usually based on a relevant genre corpus and involve genre analysis and similarities across writings created for the same purpose. Sets of corpora for the kinds of texts that students wish to create can be helpful for genre process teachers. During a house description activity, students might examine the terminology used to describe the property as appealing, the sentence structure employed by estate agents, and the instances in which the price is mentioned. Flowerdew (1993) and Dudley-Evans (1997) suggest further exercises, like flow charts that show how particular genres are structured and translation.

Pupils could want assistance with the fundamental writing abilities, which can be learned in a variety of ways. Observing other pupils and their teacher is one approach to learn. Teachers can effectively impart writing skills by giving clear instructions, modeling the skill themselves, or inviting a professional writer to do so. A commentary outlining the thought process underlying the skill, such as the reasons why some information is included and others is left out while describing a house, can be added with the demonstration.

Scholars have carried out a number of case studies in recent years to search the effectiveness of the process-genre approach to writing instruction. Prominent scholars Sito (2010), Isaeni (2012), Pujianto, Emilia, and Sudarsono (2014), and Reonal (2015) have reported that improving students' writing abilities with the process-genre method is successful. Herawati's (2015) study, in contrast, revealed that there was no discernible difference in the writing skills of students taught using the process-genre approach and those taught using the conventional technique. The result was ascribed, among other things, to the students' insufficient text knowledge.

In scholarly circles, the process-genre method is well known for encouraging writing autonomy in a relaxed environment (Kim & Kim, 2005; Salim, Walker, & Rosenblatt, 2016). As per Abdel-Haq et al. (2020), this approach facilitates the progressive handoff of accountability from professors to students, who get acquainted with the diverse procedures needed to produce a work that satisfies the distinct requirements of a certain genre. Arteaga-Lara (2017) carried out a

qualitative study in Colombia to look into how the process-genre approach assisted thirteen fourth-grade students in writing narrative paragraphs. According to the results, this method raised students' awareness of the prewriting, drafting, revising, and publishing phases of the writing process. Additionally, this varied method gave pupils a greater feeling of purpose and direction for their paragraph writing.

The methods used and the people involved are very important when it comes to teaching writing using the process genre approach. The teacher must give the approach their full attention at every level. Pujianto et al. (2014) specifically recommend that longer periods of modeling and teacher-student conferences be given to low-achieving pupils.

Despite the abundance of research on various teaching methods, literature lacks exploration of the process-genre based approach. The studies conducted thus far have uncovered a gap in terms of considering the specific needs of ESP learners and evaluating the effects of this approach on writing instruction and English proficiency in Iran. As such, the current research aims to expand the existing literature on the impact of the process genre approach in the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) by examining its effects on students' writing scores.

The goal of the current research was to assess the effectiveness of implementing the process genre approach in enhancing the writing abilities of male and female students pursuing ESP business courses, while also exploring any potential gender-based disparities. After conducting a review of the existing literature, the research questions were revisited to guide the study's trajectory. Thus, in line with the objectives of the present research the following research questions were addressed:

RQ1. Does the use of process genre approach have any effects on writing skill development among male ESP business students?

RQ2. Does the use of process genre approach have any effects on writing skill development among female ESP business students?

RQ3. Is there any significant difference between the effects of process genre approach on writing skill development of ESP business students across genders?

Method

Design of the Study

The participating consent form, the FCE Language Proficiency Test, a writing pre- and post-test, and scoring rubrics by Hughes (2003) were among the tools and materials used by the researcher to carry out this quantitative correlational study and investigate the impact of applying a process genre approach on writing proficiency of Iranian sophomore ESP students across genders.

Participants

The investigation was conducted and data gathered in a methodical manner by the study. In order to synchronize the study aims and treatments, the researcher consulted with teachers and secured the required approvals and consent from the appropriate authorities. The participants' confidentiality was guaranteed, and they received complete information about the study methods. Eighty sophomore ESP business students were chosen as participants, and they had to fill out a consent form. A defined proficiency range was used to choose participants, and the results showed that forty-five female and thirty-one male pupils passed the proficiency examinations. A writing pre-test was given to the participants to gauge their level of writing proficiency. Twelve sessions made comprised the treatment phase, during which the standard course material was covered by both the experimental and control groups. While the control group received regular teaching, the experimental group received supplementary instruction based on the process-genre approach. The six steps of the process-genre approach were planning, modeling and reinforcing, preparation, collaborative construction, independent construction, and revision. Every three sessions, a new genre was presented and worked through. Essay subjects were assigned to the control group without taking genre into account. The purpose of the post-test was to assess writing abilities following the intervention. By using rubrics and having a second, more seasoned teacher score independently, scoring reliability was guaranteed.

Instruments

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Data Analysis

Data analysis was done using SPSS utilizing the following tests. The researcher used a Cronbach Alpha test to calculate the inter-rater reliability between the scores of the raters. Later, the descriptive data were used to analyze the homogeneity test scores and omit the outliers. Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality tests were used to check for the normality or deviation of the scores for homogeneity, writing pre-test and writing post-test scores. In order to analyze the participants' performance after the pre-test, a two-way ANOVA test was run to see if the four groups performed significantly differently on the writing pre-test or not. After treatment and obtaining the results of post-test, to address the research questions, the researcher used paired samples t-tests to compare the pre and post-test performances of the groups. Later, to examine the main effects of the process genre approach on writing skills across gender, a two-way ANOVA test with a Tukey's HSD post hoc analysis was run on the scores of the writing post-test.

Results

The researcher conducted a thorough analysis and evaluation of the research endeavor's outcomes during the study. Using one way ANOVA, two-way ANOVA, and dependent-samples t-test to examine the differences between mean and standard deviation, the researcher examined the pre- and post-test scores of the groups in order to perform inferential statistics. A paired samples t-test was employed to compare the pre- and post-test results of the male experimental groups because the first research question addressed the possibility that the implementation of the process genre method would have any impact on the development of writing skills among male ESP business students. Table 1.1 shows the descriptive statistics of participants test scores.

Table 1

Descriptive Results for the Performance of Male Participants in Experimental Group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	male experimental pretest	20.83	18	3.365	.793
	male experimental posttest	23.39	18	2.593	.611

According to the mean scores shown in the above table, the writing skill score of male participants in experimental group has improved. Hence, a paired sample *t*-test was carried out to see whether the difference is statistically acceptable. Results are abridged in Table 2.

Table 2

Paired-samples t-test Comparing the Performance of Male Participants in Pre and Post-tests

		Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Interval Difference Lower	Confidence of the Upper			
Pair 1	male experimental pretest - male experimental posttest	-2.556	4.314	1.017	-4.701	-.410	-2.513	17	.022

The sig. (.02) level indicates that there was a significant difference between pre-test and post-test performance of male participants in experimental group. In other words, it was concluded the writing skill proficiency of male participant in experimental group under the effect of using process genre approach has improved from pre-test to post-test. A similar analysis was carried out to answer the second research question which has addressed the writing development of female participants in experimental group. The results of analysis are reported in Tables 1.3. and 1.4.

Table 3.

Descriptive results of the Performances of Female Participants in Experimental Group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	male experimental pretest	20.83	18	3.365	.793
	male experimental posttest	23.39	18	2.593	.611

By comparing the female participants' mean scores of pre and posttest in experimental group, it seems that the treatment was successful in developing the writing performance of the participants since the mean scores of the female participants which equaled 21.52 in pre-test has improved and reached 23.67. To ensure that the difference between the mean scores is statistically significant, another paired sample *t*-test was done on the data. The results are reported in Table 4.

Table 4

Paired-samples t-test Comparing the Pre and Post-test Performance of Female Participants in Experimental Group

		Paired Differences			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	female experimental pretest - female experimental posttest	-2.143	4.339	.947	-4.118	-.168	-2.263	20	.035

The sig. (.03) indicates that there was a significant difference between pre-test and post-test performance of female participants in experimental group who were taught using process genre approach. According to the data and observed mean difference it was concluded that the performance of female participants in experimental group in post-test was better than pre-test which indicates the effectiveness of the implemented treatment on writing development of the participants. It was concluded that the post-test performances of both genders were significantly better, therefore, in order to answer the third research question and compare the performance of the control and experimental groups taking the point into account that groups had similar writing proficiency at the beginning of the study, the groups were compared in terms of effect of treatment (grouping), gender and group treatment interaction. To be sure whether the observed difference was statically significant a two-way ANOVA test was used by the researcher.

Discussion

The findings of this study contribute to the ongoing discussion on effective pedagogical practices in ESP writing instruction. The difference observed between the experimental group, where the process genre approach was implemented, and the control group receiving traditional instruction highlights the potential of this approach in fostering learners' writing development. The process genre approach focuses on guiding students through the stages of writing, emphasizing both the cognitive and social aspects of the writing process, and providing support and scaffolding to enhance their writing skills. This study aligns with previous research that advocates for the adoption of innovative approaches in teaching writing. In their study, Johnson and Johnson (2019) emphasized the need for ESP instructors to move beyond traditional teaching methods and explore alternative approaches that promote students' engagement, creativity, and critical thinking in the writing process. The process genre approach, as demonstrated in this study, can be considered as

one such alternative, enabling learners to develop a deep understanding of the writing process and produce more effective written texts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study highlight the potential of PGA as an effective approach to enhance writing skill development among Business students in Iran. The systematic and process-oriented nature of PGA, combined with the focus on genre-specific features, offers a valuable framework for teaching writing in ESP classes. By incorporating PGA into the curriculum, educators can help students acquire the necessary skills to effectively communicate in their future professional contexts. Firstly, the use of PGA helped students become more familiar with the genres specific to their field of study. Through analyzing and producing various genres such as business reports, emails, and memos, the participants gained a deeper understanding of the structure, content, and language features associated with each genre. This familiarity enabled them to effectively communicate their ideas in a business context. Secondly, PGA facilitated a systematic and step-by-step approach to writing. The process-oriented nature of PGA allowed students to engage in pre-writing activities such as brainstorming, outlining, and organizing their thoughts before composing their texts. This approach improved their ability to generate coherent and well-structured texts.

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Implications

The process genre approach (PGA) is an instructional framework that focuses on teaching writing as a process, with an emphasis on specific genres relevant to a particular context, such as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes for business students. This approach has several pedagogical implications that can greatly enhance writing skill development in ESP classes. The pedagogical implications of using the Process Genre Approach in ESP classes for business students are highly promising. By integrating genre awareness, process-oriented writing, collaborative learning, authentic materials, teacher feedback and guidance, technology integration, and appropriate assessment strategies, educators can effectively enhance writing skill development and prepare business students for successful written communication in professional contexts.

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