The Effect of Genre-Based Teaching upon EFL Writing Achievement

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Abstract: This study utilized as a semi-experimental research and a pre-test/post-test assessment to investigate the instructional efficacy of a genre-based approach to writing achievement. Fifty four EFL university students in Iran, Islamic Azad university, Mahabad branch were assessed before and after the instruction. The teaching materials, developed for teaching writing English Description and Narration in a genre-based method in this study, were prepared in a way to conform to the procedures carried out during class instruction. After five-week treatment, post test was administered. After collecting the data and by analyzing the post-tests of control (NGB) and experimental (GB) groups, it was identified that the genre-based methodology had the great effect on task-based writing achievement in that setting. The finding will be very useful for researchers, language teachers and syllabus designers.

Key words: Genre, Writing, GBT, Genre analysis

Introduction

Genre is associated with terms such as short stories, science fiction, novels, fiction, satire, and many others. Still the definition of genre is not so vivid. The term genre can be applied to most forms of communications, although it is frequently restricted to literary information. According to Swales (2004), a genre can be briefly defined as a class of texts characterized by a sequence of segments or ‘moves’ with each move accomplishing some part of the overall communicative purpose of the text, which tends to produce distinctive structural patterns. Nwogu (1991) further specified the definition of move as ‘a text segment made up of a bundle of linguistic features, which gives the segment a uniform orientation and signals the content of discourse in it. These include communicative purpose or social function of the genre (such as entertaining, informing, questioning, and so on), the rhetorical function or dominant text structure (such as narration, description, argumentation), topic or content, dominant and typical linguistic markers of the genre. Genre analysis has become important in understanding the discourse of the disciplines and the workplace, relatively structured frames of social interaction in which, as Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995, p.24) note, "Genres are the intellectual scaffolds on which community-based knowledge is constructing". Genres would, however, suggest that this supposed sociocognitive activity is over-generalized since a producer's contract with a receiver is not general, but subject to quite sharp genre fluctuations. Orlikowski (1999) defines genre as an interesting way: "I am at a loss to decode what this sentence means, unless it says only that different genres make different assumptions about what binds writer and reader together". Genre-based approaches, where teaching and learning focuses on the understanding and production of selected genres of texts, have been identified by Rodgers (2001, as cited in Benedict Lin's paper, 2006) as a major trend in English language teaching (ELT) in the new century. Such approaches are, of course, not "new". English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) are early examples, extracting from pioneering work in genre analysis written by Swales (1981, 1990) and others. However, teaching and learning around text genres has become increasingly influential in mainstream ELT in a number of situations, involving native speakers of English as well as ESL and EFL learners, and in countries such as Singapore, South Africa, USA, Italy,
Hong Kong, Australia, UK, China, Canada, Sweden and Thailand (Derewianka, 2003). Genre-based approaches have varied theoretical bases in linguistics, such as Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST) in North America (Mann & Thompson 1988), and Generic Structure Potential (GSP) theory in Australia (Halliday & Hasan 1989).

Statement of the problem and purpose of the study

We know that making sense of any texts within genres is an active process of constructing meaning (Knight 1994). Genres provide an important frame of reference which help both learners and readers to identify, understand and interpret texts. The main psychological functions of genre are to include those shared by categorizing genres: such as reducing both text and linguistic complexity. Generic frameworks may function to make forms at least more vivid to those familiar with the genre, foregrounding the main content of given text. Genre theorists may find something in common with schema theorist in psychology: much as a genre is a kind of "mental template" within which to make sense of related experiences in everyday life and activities. From the point of view of schema theory, genres are also textual schemata, as Gledhill(1995) mentions, genres may function as a means of preventing a text from dissolving into ‘individualism and incoherence’. Besides, Genres offer an important way of framing and categorizing texts which assists comprehension. Genre knowledge leads readers of the genre towards appropriate attitudes, and expectations about a text which are essential in making sense of it. Indeed one way of defining genres is as ‘a set of expectations’ (Neale 1980: 51). According to Cope and Kalantzis (1993), “the most powerful written genres are those generically and grammatically most distant from orality”. Frames provide the scaffolding to help students to transition from spoken to written language use (Hyland, 2004). Writing is vital as listening, speaking, and reading in English competence although it takes much more time and effort to reach high-level proficiency. In Iranian universities of researched areas, students tend to avoid writing even before they try it. Limited exposure to English especially writing skill in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL, in Iran) causes students to lack confidence to write in English. Test-driven learning also makes them ignore the crucial process of writing in such condition. Students write only to practice grammar at a sentence level for getting high scores on tests. Therefore, when they are asked to write, they face with many problems in conveying what they want to say: selecting proper words, using correct grammar, generating ideas and developing them into a proper organizational pattern. More importantly, they have trouble using an acceptable writing format that conforms to a target language and society, and they strive to manipulate proper language forms for different writing purposes, so it will be very vital for the EFL students to grasp the whole knowledge of writing as different genres to follow string of central ideas in their writings, we mean: the one which is not limited to sentences but holistically cover any discourse in any given text level. EFL students are taught from very beginning, how to write sentences and are exposed to many unnecessary grammatical formulas, which lead them to ignore the whole picture, negotiation of meaning and context-based writings, lack of coherence and cohesion.

Significance and justification for the study
Swales (1990) and Martin (1984, as cited in Kay and Dudley-Evans 1998), shared an essential viewpoint that all genres control a set of communicative purposes within certain social situations and that each genre has its own structural quality according to those communicative purposes. Therefore, the communicative purposes and the structural knowledge should be identified when genres are used in writing classes.

The rationale and justification for adopting a genre-based framework is that it facilitates and supports clear links to the students' purposes for writing beyond the writing classroom. Thus, the primary factors in curricular selection are ensuring a balance of text types, to enable students to perform a broad range of social purposes for writing in English in future, and selection of specific genres based on the students immediate academic needs. The programmers seek to support the writing of a graduation essay, a research-based thesis that is a university-wide requirement for graduation in English Writing as the main course of study.

John Corner notes that ‘genre is a principal factor in the directing of audience choice and of audience expectations, and in the organizing of the subsets of cultural competences and dispositions appropriate for different kinds of things’ (Corner 1991: 72). Recognition of a text as belonging to a particular genre can help, for instance, to enable judgments to be made about the ‘reality status’ of the text.

Different genres specify different frameworks to be negotiated between the text and the reader which set up expectations on each side for the form of the communication, its functions, its epistemology, and communicative frame. (Livingstone 1994). The identification of a text as part of a genre enables potential readers to decide whether it is likely to appeal to them. Researchers have appropriated, challenged and adapted the definitions and methods of Genre Analysis as they have set out to realize various aspects of its ambitious program, what can be considered as "socio-cultural" approaches which gained momentum in the early to mid-1990s. The "socio-cultural" or "socio-historical" (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1988; Samraj, 2002; Prior, 1998). Tony Thwaites and his colleagues mentioned that "genre foregrounds the influence of surrounding texts and ways of reading on our response to any given text. More specifically, it confirms textuality and reading as functions rather than things" (Thwaites et al. 1994, 92). Genre analysis applies texts within textual and social contexts, underlining the social nature of the production and reading of texts. We can conclude that by specifying various contexts to be analyzed by learners it would be very easier for them to elaborate on any kinds of texts, in particular majoring four macro skills. Highlighting the role of discourse on one hand and cohesion with coherence, the two wings of language learning, on the other hand in any methodology would pave the way to facilitate the process of language learning. Applying the result of genre analysis into meaningful tasks to be negotiated among learners or as syllabus is pedagogically significant. Hence, we can go beyond divisions such as drama, poetry, and fiction and onward into divisions such as tragedy, epic, satire, social moves and construction of texts. The early work by Swales focused on the research article, and in particular the introduction section of the research article genre (Swales, 1990). Thus, the primary factors in curricular selection are ensuring a balance of text types, to enable students to perform a broad range of social purposes for writing in English in future. Bhatia has offered a good consideration of how parts of different text types are dealt with in the GBT approach:
“After the learners have read the head text, they are provided with a detailed explanation of the communicative purpose of the (sub) genre and the various moves the writer makes use of to achieve that purpose. The moves are also colour-coded in the head text in order to make them obvious to the learner. The explanation contains no technical or other difficult vocabulary, except the name of the moves, which are kept in simple terms.... The head worksheet gives further practice to the learner in the following three aspects of genre construction: 1) acquisition of the knowledge of the promotional genre through explanation; 2) sensitization to generic form and content through analysis; and 3) use and exploitation of generic knowledge through variation in contexts” (Bhatia, 2002, pp. 4-5).

Research question and hypothesis
Does genre-based teaching have any effect upon EFL writing achievement in Iran?

Null Hypotheses: there is no relationship between genre-based teaching and EFL writing achievement.

Review of Related Literature
Bruce (2008) advocates an approach to genre-based teaching that accordingly encompasses two types of knowledge that he views as complementary, namely as two kinds (albeit related) as: cognitive genre and social genre. The former concerns how organizing and orienting writing segments that serve a single, general rhetorical purposes, such as describing a process or arguing a point. Social genre considers texts more holistically in terms of their overall social purpose, i.e. to communicate knowledge within a context to a defined learner. Bruce argues the objective of teaching genre thus: “Achieving a discursive competence, in effect, is the ability to deconstruct, understand, reconstruct discourses in ways that are linguistically correct and socially appropriate, but also in ways in which writers as individuals are able to achieve their own communicative purposes through their own authorial voices”. (Bruce, 2008). Reacting to a perceived lack of discussion in the literature on the processes of genre-based learning among L2 students, Cheng (2007) studied a case study of Chinese doctoral student in an American University. Her aims were to elaborate on what features attract the attention of graduate students analysing discipline and specific exemplars, what they do with those features, and whether those features remain constant as students become more informative at genre analysis. Considering genre-based teaching from a needs-based approach, Cheng (2007) investigated what the student focused on in her analysis, how it made its way into her writing and her motivation for her choices. The student’s responses show signs of individualized involvement, noticing writing elements that vary from classroom discussions of norms. Dressen-Hammouda (2007) argues that disciplinary identity plays an important role in genre knowledge in that “students struggle as writers because they are also struggling to earn the beliefs and practices of their disciplines” . Mentioning the fact that genre mastery is not merely mastering textual structures, the paper uses a case study of a non-native speaker of English geology student to study whether learners must incorporate normalized disciplinary identity frames, as well as implicit textual cues. The author argues that the mastery of “symbolic genres,” i.e. the cognitive knowledge that organize disciplinary knowing and being” and “material genres” are quite interdependent.

Dudley-Evans (1997) argues that given genres are far from universal, with writing practices are quite varied, depending on cultural and academic background. He studied moves and outlined
nine “moves” he has identified in “Discussion” sections of research papers and finds that the order in which they appear is not constant. Finally, he argues that writers choose an order based on their rhetorical aims.

Flowerdew (2000) utilized an undergraduate technical communication skills course to consider genre-related issues such as how the communicative purpose of a text and recognized structures and patterns which play some roles in the classroom. The author argues the correlation between generic move structure, such as that outlined by Swales (1990), and a Problem-Solution pattern. Hyland (2003) argues that approaches to teaching writing focussed on process haven’t taken into account “forces outside the individual which help guide purposes, establish relationships and ultimately shape writing.” His position is that genre-based teaching offers students explicit and systemic explanations of the ways language functions in social contexts. He also posits that while process models expose how people write, they ignore the vital role of “why” behind linguistic and rhetorical choices. Swales (2004) updates his 1990 survey on genre and its role in both academic writing and in teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Swales approaches genre from both a theoretical and methodological perspective. Tuan Trong’s research (2011) in Vietnam is a kind of endeavour to examine the effect of genre-based approach on students’ writing performance as well as students’ attitudes towards the implementation of genre-based approach in writing learning. Research findings reveal that most of the students gained the control over the key features of the required recount genre in terms of social purposes, language features and schematic structure.

Method

Participants

The participants of the study were 54 female Iranian EFL students, aged 19-25, taking part in Islamic Azad University of Mahabad. They were randomly selected out of 104 English language students. They were studying English three times a week. They were assigned into two classes by the researcher. One of the classes was randomly selected as the control group and the other class as experimental group. The experimental group which received the treatment was called GB, another class was called NGB.

Instruments

The instruments needed for this study were a pre-test and a post-test. A pretest was used to find out whether these two groups (GB and NGB) were in the same level or not. Then, we needed a posttest to detect the progress of the experimental group due to using the genre and especially genre-based teaching during the instruction. It is necessary to mention here that each test had Completion tests and composition test. The text book used for this course was let's write in English, paragraph writing and writing many Narrative and descriptive compositions.

Design

This study was designed as a semi-experimental research. Our independent variable was genre-based syllabus. The dependent variable was writing achievement. The level of our participants was intermediate. We selected fifty four female students randomly from among the 104 students.
in Islamic Azad university of Mahabad. Then, we randomly divided 54 students into two different groups. Each group had 27 students.

**Procedure**

At the beginning of the course, pre-test was given to the control group. The course for both groups, including experimental and control, lasted for 5 weeks (two hours a day, three times a week). Both groups had the same teacher. In the first session, the teacher explained what they would study and what their roles were during the learning process. The control (NGB) group had the same text book and the same instruction, but without any treatment. GB instruction class is equipped with an awareness of the organizational possibilities and lexico-grammatical resources, along with genre moves within context, the students are now prepared to carry out joint construction of their own compositions. They do it in pairs or small groups, using their findings from the small survey in the context exploration stage. Alternatively, each student may write her first draft individually, then she works with a partner to improve her draft. To provide scaffolding, the students are encouraged to constantly refer to the model text and their grammar work as they write, and the instructor plays an active role by circulating around the classroom and guiding the students in turn or when they are in need, reminding them constantly about the text organization, proper use of grammatical and discursal structures within genre frames, how they can vary the genre moves, following through coherence and cohesion among the written text, and so on. Each piece of writing goes through more than one draft, before it is given to the instructor, who then provides further feedback for a final piece of paper to be submitted for grading (out of 20). The teaching materials, developed for teaching writing English Description and Narration in a genre-based method in this study, were prepared in a way to match to the procedures mentioned above. The first phase of the lesson presented the students with examples of Descriptive and Narrative compositions written by native speakers. These were designed for the students to read and understand. In the second phase, the learners were shown another Description and Narration written by a native speaker again which exist in textbook and other sources. This time the genre moves of the text had been underlined and marked for the students. The learners read this with the help of their teacher (the researcher). The third phase of the lesson was the teacher’s explanation of each move, its functional orientation, and the linguistic forms used in it. In the fourth phase of the lesson, the learners were asked to read another Description and Narration and identify and elaborate their moves. The last part of the lesson asked students to write their own Descriptive and Narrative compositions as they had learned, which was supposed to have the moves, the learners are to negotiate with each other the moves they have recognized among each paragraph. Some examples of let's write in English are analyzed for locating different genres. The participants in the control group did not receive this treatment. They just fulfilled the normal requirements of the curriculum for BA students of English during the course of this study.

**Results**

Before the treatment, a pretest was used to find out whether these two groups (control and experimental) were at the same level in writing achievement or not to make sure about the homogeneity of the participants. After collecting the data, we observed that the means of two groups (experimental and control groups) are almost the same. A T-test analysis was used to see whether the difference between the two groups was significant or not (Table 1).
Table 1. T-Test Analysis of Pre-test in Experimental Group, GB, and Control Group, NGB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Samples Test</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paired Differences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1</td>
<td>NGB (Pretest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GB (Pretest)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As Table 1 displays P-value, it is around 0.55. The P-value is more than 0.05. Fortunately, we conclude that the difference is statistically non-significant. Therefore, the Experimental Group and the Control Group are homogenous. It shows that two groups (Experimental and Control) are at the same level and there is no main difference between two groups.

After four-week treatment, post test was administered. After collecting the data, we observed that the mean of Experimental Group was more than that of Control Group (Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive Post-test Analysis of Experimental (GB) and Control (NGB) Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Samples Statistics</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1</td>
<td>NGB (Posttest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GB (Posttest)</td>
<td>14.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. T-Test Analysis of Pre-test and Post-test of Experimental Group (ST)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Samples Test</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paired Differences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>n</td>
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<tr>
<td>-.289</td>
<td>.565</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Table 3. Paired Samples Test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair</th>
<th>GB (Pretest)</th>
<th>GB (Posttest)</th>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>-2.692</td>
<td>3.927</td>
<td>-.770</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows the difference between the results of pre-test and post-test of experimental group. It indicates that there is a significant difference between the results of pre-test and post-test of the experimental group. Table 3 indicates the significance for two-tailed at the level of 0.05 is 0.002. The p-value is 0.002 which is less than 0.01. Therefore, the difference is statistically significant. As a result, we conclude that genre-based teaching has an effect on task-based writing achievement.

Table 4 shows the significance for two-tailed at the level of 0.05 is 0.719. The p-value which is 0.719 is more than 0.05. As a result, it is concluded that there is not significant difference between the results of pre-test and post-test of control group (Table 4).

**Table 4. T-Test Analysis of Pre-test and Post-test of Control Group (NGB)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair</th>
<th>NGB (Pretest)</th>
<th>NGB (Posttest)</th>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>-.269</td>
<td>3.769</td>
<td>.739</td>
<td>-1.792</td>
<td>1.253</td>
<td>-.364</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Therefore, by analyzing the post-tests of control (NGB) and experimental (GB) groups, It was identified that the genre-based Methodology has the great effect on task-based writing achievement (Table 5).

**Table 5. T-Test Analysis of Post-tests in Experimental and Control group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Samples Test</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paired Differences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair</th>
<th>GB (Pretest)</th>
<th>GB (Posttest)</th>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
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<td>3.927</td>
<td>-0.770</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Discussion

According to the findings, the answer to the research question, “Does genre-based teaching have any effect upon EFL writing achievement in Iran?” is “yes” and the null hypothesis, “there is no relationship between genre-based teaching and EFL writing achievement” is therefore rejected.

It was also concluded that, after observing the results, using genres in classroom setting in EFL situation like Iran will be beneficial. The learners are taught the construction of moves in any kind of social writing especially in writing narration and description which are two important issues in improving the ability of learners and English students to achieve higher scores in writing courses and a considerable increase in construction of compositions and paragraphs in Iran in an EFL setting. Iranian students are in an EFL situation and do not have enough opportunity to be exposed to English. In addition, they have little experience of writing beyond the sentence level, and so they tend to lack confidence especially when they are in a basic level class. Students in EFL situations need to acquire linguistic knowledge, such as grammar and vocabulary, to write exactly what they want to say. Understanding of linguistic forms and their functions is the foundation of writing to achieve specific purposes in their future. They should also know how a text is organized in an accepted way in a society. The genre approach deals with these requirements for students in EFL situations. It does not neglect linguistic knowledge as a foundation of writing for students who have little linguistic competence. It stresses learning rhetorical patterns of different genres to write in socially accepted ways, which helps students achieve the purpose of writing. Therefore, in a genre-based writing class, the teacher starts with building contextual knowledge of the target genre by concentrating on the purpose of the text, the context where the writing occurs, and the elements that make people accept a certain kind of writing for what it is intended to be. After building this knowledge, students move to deconstructing the model text genre and prepare for independent writing by practicing the model genre with the help of the teacher. The findings will be useful for both applied linguists and teachers to note the role of genres in classroom setting (as syllabus) to achieve the ability of learning writing skill.
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