

*Process-Genre Approach to Teaching Writing University Foundation Course
Students in Pakistan*

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Abstract

This paper is written to talk about the importance of teaching and learning English writing through process-genre approach in the context of Pakistan. English as Second Language students in Pakistan are not fully aware of the process of writing and purpose of writing due to the prevalent old-fashioned product approach; therefore, it has not achieved its intended outcomes highlighted in many studies. In my opinion, students as well as teachers are not familiar with new pedagogical research in the field of writing that has undergone many major shifts over many decades. Purpose of this paper is to investigate the effects of teaching writing through process-genre approach on the writing performance among English as second Language (ESL) university foundation course students in Pakistan and students' and teachers' perception and consciousness about a comparatively new approach to teach writing in the context. The results obtained by using Classroom Action Research methodology, indicate that the process-genre approach is conducive for improving students' writing ability and both students and teachers interviews responses support the implementation of the approach.

Key words: Process-genre approach, ESL writing pedagogy

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Introduction

Writing is undoubtedly an important component of learning English as a second language and should be given more concentration in ESL classes in order to organize learners to deal with the communicative needs of real life situations, which are embedded in aims and objectives of university academic courses. The communicative approach has been introduced for ESL students in universities on all sides for the last few years and the problems for students are there, when they enter university as they do not have the required abilities and skills to deal with writing courses. In fact, great importance is given to writing skill at universities, keeping in view the real life long leanings; therefore, effectual teaching writing approaches need to be focused on with the intention to help those learners, who are not ready to put together an appropriate piece of academic writing in order to meet the standards of universities.

Many students come to the ESL writing courses with different levels of language proficiency and different learning styles. ESL students particularly in Pakistan need to meet the standards for admission and continuation of their university studies particularly in writing English Language. As a matter of fact, in Pakistan school and college curricula have a long history of traditional language teaching methods like many other ESL contexts where students are taught their second language chiefly through memorization grammatical formations and secluded expressions and such prevalent teacher-centered setting actually dispirits thought process and originality. Teaching academic writing to ESL learners at the university level can be a complicated task because some teachers and large number of students are not entirely committed to process and genre a comparatively new approaches in the context. These conditions are not much different for other ESL/EFL contexts, the role and place of English Language especially in academic settings (Evans 2000).

I personally believe that ESL students, like in Pakistan write without fully understanding the process of writing and purpose of writing. Despite a much enriched curriculum with very effective aims and objectives and lots of planning efforts, a considerable number of students is nevertheless unable to write on their own. The old-fashioned product approach, however, has not achieved its intended outcomes proved in many studies. In my opinion, students as well as teachers are not familiar with new pedagogical research in the field of writing that has undergone many major shifts over many decades e.g. from Product to Process and Genre approach. Personally, having both learnt and taught English writing as an ESL student and teacher, I think that the product approach should gradually be replaced with some new concept a combined process-genre approach, which seems would prove more conducive and helpful for ESL university foundation year students.

The prevalent teaching writing theories and practices in Pakistan, however I always feel, here something is missing with reference to teach writing in my context particular and ESL context in general. Therefore, this research has two basic aims:

- To find out the improvement in students' academic writing performance with the help of process-genre approach.
- To investigate students' and teachers' responses and perception of the introduction and implementation of the process-genre approach to teach academic writing.

Literature Review

There are several different and overlapping approaches to teaching ESL writing students. However, according to Raims (1983) “there is no single answer to the question of teaching writing in ESL classes”. ESL writing pedagogy has shifted its focus in different times mainly due to the impact of L1 writing pedagogy and the results of different studies in the field (Ferris and Hedgcock 2005). The different approaches of writing instruction for the development of writing ability among ESL students are mainly divided in three major divisions: text-oriented, writer-oriented and reader-oriented (Myhill and Locke 2007).

Despite all new trends and academic requirements, in my context, the teaching of writing still emphasizes the final written product, a product in which aspects of usage and correct form are focused on. Furthermore, many instructors following the product approach believe that writers should know what they are going to write. Model texts are therefore, read and memorized in the writing classrooms to enable students to pass their exams.

Teaching writing from a process perspective is a complex, recurrent process or set of behaviors. Learning to write entails developing an efficient and effective composing process. The writer is at the center of a process, engaged in the discovering and expression of meanings, focusing on content and ideas. The composing process was seen as a “non-linear, exploratory and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning” (Zamel, 1983:165). In essence, composing means the expression of ideas, conveying meaning or, more concisely, composing means thinking (Raimes, 1983: 261).

In general, approaches have focused on the constraints of structure and substance that have to be obeyed when a writer is concerned with the social purpose of a text. This has come to be associated with the notion of the ‘Genre approach’ where “a genre comprises a class of communicative events, the numbers of which share some set of communicative purpose” (Swales, 1990 cited in Tribble, 1996).

Process approach has good many features that need to be highlighted for clear writing pedagogy to achieve the communicative ability. And if we see both process and genre approaches together, again it looks quite practical to learn and acquire the processes of different genres (Flowerdew, 1993, Badger and White, 2000). Though, it is not easy to judge the importance and highlighted features or to focus on some particular genres, however students’ need and appropriateness should be considered while proposing any suitable ESL writing pedagogy (Gao, 2007).

Process-genre combined approach; is basically a combination of models both from the process-based approach and the genre-based approach seems more useful to put up a text in a familiar genre (Kim & Kim, 2005). According to Raimes (1983, 266), the focus of writing courses should be on “join form and content, ideas and organization, syntax and meaning, writing and revising, and above all, writing and thinking.” Writing instructions should be connected to real-life situations, inspiring students and organize them to compose for extensive audiences (Badger & White, 2000, Nordin & Mohammad, 2007).

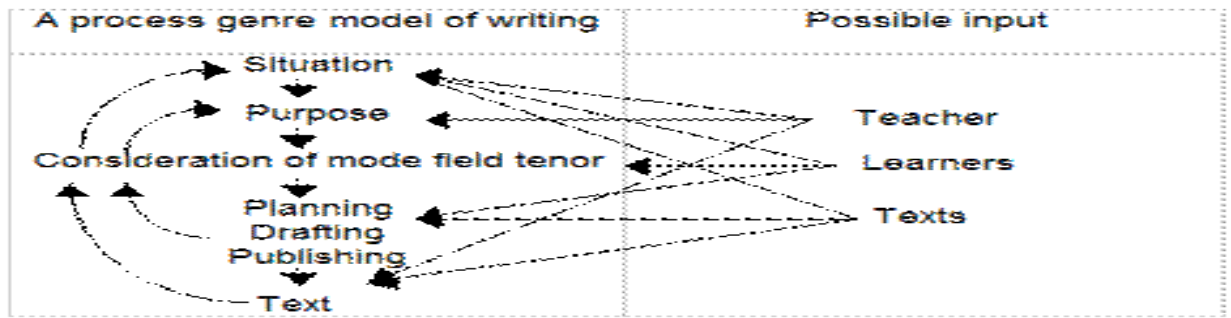


Figure 1: A Process Genre-Approach to Teaching Writing (adapted from Badger and White, 2000:159)

Methodology

In this study Class room action research (CAR) is used and the participants are from Forman Christian College (A Chartered University), Lahore. In three terms gradually the process-genre approach to teaching writing was introduced and implemented. Thirty (30) university foundation year (Class XII age 17-18 Years) students and two English Language Teachers helped the researcher to carry out this study. It was also ensured that teachers and students were well introduced and envisioned the instructional process for the process-genre approach, as separated into the subsequent six stages: ‘(1) grounding, (2) modeling, (3) planning, (4) joint constructing, (5) independent constructing (6) revising, according to Badger and White (2000).

In order to collect data, research instruments are used including observation sheet, essay and paragraph writing tests and interviews. Observation sheet helped to record classroom activities during the process of introducing and using process-genre approach to teach writing, whereas, the terminal essay and paragraph writing tests and both the learners and teachers who implemented the approach were interviewed at the end.

In this study, both paradigms qualitative and quantitative data analysis were used. Qualitative data were collected from the observation sheer and students’ and teachers’ answer to interview open-ended questions, whereas, quantitative data were collected from students’ essay and paragraph writing tests scores and answers to close- ended questions of interviews from both students and teachers. The result of writing test was assessed using scoring rubric developed by the Examination Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education, Lahore.

Data Presentation and Discussion

In the first term spanning two months, the process-genre approach of teaching writing was introduced and implemented. At the end of the first term mean score of writing tests was 55, with 72.5 as the highest score and 44 as the lowest score. It means 54% students got B grade and above (B grade is awarded on achieving 83% as per college assessment framework). Teaching writing was contained in the second term, test results reflected at the end of term as 78% students got B grade and above.

In the final term, the mean score was 83.6 with 91 as the highest and 73 as the lowest score and 84% students got B grade and above. It means that there was a continuous improvement in students' writing scores in writing tests with the help of process-genre approach to teach writing. There is statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the students writing tests over three terms. The results of this study established an improvement in students writing scores as similar to the study results by Kim and Kim (2005) and Hilda (2013).

If we take stock the students and teachers' responses to the introduction and implementation of process- genre approach to teach writing, was largely positive. In the interview students' made remarks in favor of this approach as really helpful in better understanding of the writing process along with purpose and context of writing. Furthermore, students thought the approach to be was helpful in improving their writing ability as compared to the traditional product- based approach.

If we see from teachers' perspective this approach of teaching writing give more importance as teacher has many important roles to play: audience, assistant, evaluator and examiner (Nordin & Mohammad, 2007) In this study, it also established from the students views that that teacher's feedback during the writing process is helpful in giving them clear idea of the entire writing process along with its context and purpose especially in planning , drafting and later revision stages of writing process. Furthermore, peer feedback is also prove positive by using this approach to write academic essays as found in the study carried out by Gao (2007).

In my view, this combination of process-genre is a comparatively new way of looking by merging of approaches in my context. This example of amalgamation of the process and genre approaches, which Badger and White (2000) have given name the 'process-genre approach'. It is to facilitate students and teachers to learn the association between function and form for a particular genre including the demand of writing skills for coming academic years.

Conclusion

Learning and teaching to write in a second language is a challenging task. It becomes more dispiriting when students are producing writing products only by memorization and imitating model texts to pass writing exams. Accordingly, the development of the writing ability among students to use the language in real life situations is quite limited, as observed in the Pakistani context. In order to overcome this problem, ESL writing teachers need to play their role by implementing the process-genre approach of teaching writing during university foundation year. The objective of the introduction and implementation of this devised teaching writing approach together with the improved curricula would be to strengthen the student writers with their developed writing ability to write different genres for different purposes in diverse contexts. We must keep in mind that students are not to prepare for exams only. The process-genre approach to writing allows students to be familiar with the process of writing for different purposes to create a written text which should be less stressful, more applicable and motivated.

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