

Investigating the Effects of Process-genre Approach on EFL Students Writing Ability

Dr. Eskinder Getachew Degaga

College of Social Science and Humanities, School of Languages and Communication Studies
Hawassa University, Hawassa, Ethiopia, P.O.box: 05, Hawassa, Ethiopia

Abstract

This study was conducted to investigate effects of process-genre approach on EFL students' writing skills performance and perception. The study was carried out in Hawassa University in 2015 academic year. It employed a quasi-experimental research design. A total of eighty student, forty students of experimental and forty students' of control groups, participated in the study. The instruments used to collect the data applicable to this study were writing skills test, questionnaire and interview. Before the instruments were applied on the main study, they were piloted on other subjects to test the validity and reliability of the instruments. The results obtained through quantitative data of the instruments were analyzed using independent and paired samples t-test and the qualitative data was analyzed using thematic relationships of ideas obtained from students' interview. Both groups were compared in the development of their English writing performance by administering pretest and posttest. The statistical analysis of the students' writing performance showed that students who were assigned to the experimental and the control groups had homogenous writing performance before the intervention ($t = .627$, $p = .532$). However, after the intervention, experimental group students significantly improved their overall writing performance ($t = 3.989$, $p = .000$). In addition, the observed value on the effect of process-genre approach on the different aspects of writing indicated that the process-genre approach has a significant effect on the different aspects of writing except for mechanics (for content $t = 4.441$ $p = 0.000$, organization $t = 2.253$ $P = 0.027$, vocabulary $t = -1.947$ $p = .045$, language use/grammar $t = 3.973$ $p = 0.000$ and mechanics $t = 1.551$ $p = .125$). Similarly, the result of questionnaire and interview data also revealed that the process-genre writing approach has positive effect on the learners' perception. Thus, it is recommended that instructors incorporate an integrated process-genre instructional approach in their lesson preparation while offering the course basic writing skills.

Keywords: genre, process-genre, product oriented, process oriented, subject specific

1. Introduction

1.1. Statement of the problem

Writing is an important communication skill for students' success in their academic deeds. None the less, students enrolled in higher institutions have problems in developing competency in writing. As a result, developing learners' writing skills in second and foreign language has been a major problem for both learners and teachers. According to Jordan (1997), in the first place, there is a mismatch between the expectations required by the institutions and the students. They are at least expected to have a good command of grammar and vocabulary in the target language in order to convey the messages. However, most of the time, students writing development may not be at the level they are expected (Busch, 2010).

Different studies have also been reporting that students' proficiency in writing skills is not adequate enough to cope-up with their academic endeavors (Geremew, 1999, Italo (1999:8) Alamirew, 2005; Dawit, 2008, Haregewain, 2008 and Meseret, 2012). For instance, Alamirew (2005:21) stated that "*students are not well capable of using the language to carry out their academic activities successfully, and this is clearly evidenced on tests, examinations, class works and home take assignments*". Similarly, a study by Geremew (1999) also identified that there is a gap between students' writing ability in English, and the quality and level of writing that their course requires. He emphasized that writing failure of university students more likely results in educational failure, because having a problem to communicate their knowledge, students find it difficult to answer properly the tasks they are assigned.

As "Basic Writing Skills" course is given to all freshman students as a compulsory course to all University students to make them communicate using the written texts in their studies, however, the reality of teaching writing at Ethiopian Universities revealed that students have difficulties to write in English language. In line with this, the researcher, in his teaching career at Hawassa University has observed various problems in relation with students' written works. First, students are poorly motivated to write in English language. Second, the quality of students' writing is not adequate enough to convey their intended message. Moreover, students have problems on identifying the types of writing needed for their intended message.

There are different reasons for the declining performance of the quality of students' writing. As noted by Meseret (2012), students writing problem emanate from the teaching method employed to teach writing skills. He indicated that;

One source of problem for the teachers and students in improving the writing skill could be their approach to the teaching/learning of writing. If an instructor is to use any kind of teaching method he/she may prefer, it is an indisputable fact that instructor's and students' interaction in the process is required. Accordingly, there has to be room for both the instructors and students to grow into. Therefore, to improve the students' writing ability, they should be supported by methods that encourage their active roles and interactions in the writing process (p.2).

More importantly, Alamirew (2005: 228) also depicted two significant reasons for the ineffectiveness of students' writing. First, teachers do not give much emphasis to the teaching of writing although they seem to have the knowledge about the teaching-learning process of writing skills. Second, it could also be related to the suitability of methods adopted. Therefore, the present study is concerned with investigating the question of method suitability by taking the process-genre instructional approach in perspective.

In connection with process-genre approach, studies have been conducted abroad on the effects of it on EFL students' writing skills. Among these, a study by Babalola (2012) investigated the effects of process-genre approach on the written performance of computer science students. The study adopted a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design. The findings of this study revealed that process-genre approach to the teaching of writing had significant effect on the students' writing performance. Hanane (2014) also conducted a study on the effects of process-genre based approach on EFL students writing skills. The study examined the effectiveness of process-genre approach to teaching writing in promoting EFL writers' genre awareness and writing competence of Biskra University students. Three sets of data (i.e. writing skills test, questionnaire and observation) were collected and analyzed. Based on the analysis of data, process-genre oriented approach proved to be an effective instructional approach to EFL writing classes of Biskra University. Another study by Hossein et al. (2014) examined the effects of process-genre approach to teach writing in EFL contexts by conducting an experiment. Forty EFL learners were selected from a private language institute; twenty of them were randomly assigned to the experimental group and the rest formed the control group. The experimental group was taught using the process-genre writing approach and the other group was taught writing in a conventional approach. The results disclosed significant improvement in the experimental group compared with the control group.

Therefore, in this study, an attempt was made to investigate whether or not a process-genre approach to teach writing has an effect on students' writing skills performance.

1.2. Objective of the study

1.2.1. General objective

The general objective of this study was to investigate the effects of the process-genre approach on University students' writing skills performance.

1.2.2. Specific objectives of the study

The specific objectives of this study were:

1. To investigate the effects of the process-genre approach on students' holistic writing performance
2. To examine the effects of the process-genre approach on the different aspects of writing i.e. content, organization, grammar, vocabulary and mechanics.

1.3. Hypothesis

In this study, an attempt has been done to investigate the effects of a process-genre approach on students' writing performance and perception. To this end, the following null (Ho) and alternative (H1) hypotheses have been formulated,

1. Ho- There is no significant difference on students' writing performance between the control group (students who are taught using the existing approach to teach English language writing skills) and experimental group (student who are taught using a process-genre approach to teaching English language writing skills).
H1-There is significant difference on students' writing between the control group (students who are taught using existing approach to teach writing) and experimental group (student who are taught using a process-genre approach to teaching English language writing skills).
2. Ho: There is no statistically significant difference between students who receive training using process-genre based writing approach and those who do not receive training using process-genre based writing approach with regard to their writing skills in the aspects like relevant contents, organizing contents appropriately, using accurate grammar, appropriate vocabulary and correct mechanics.
H1: There is statistically significant difference between students who receive training using process-genre based writing approach and those who do not receive training using process-genre based writing approach with regard to their writing skills in the aspects like relevant

contents organizing contents appropriately, using accurate grammar, appropriate vocabulary and correct mechanics

1.4. Significance of the study

This study is conducted to find out the effects of a process-genre approach to teach writing on first-year students of Hawassa University, Ethiopia. The findings of this study may help Basic Writing Skills course instructors to consider process-genre approach as an alternative approach to teach writing skills compared to the conventional teaching method. As a result, students could also improve their writing skills and benefit from the research.

This study may also give an insight to future researchers who are interested to conduct a research on the different effects of process-genre approach on students' writing skills in different sample groups. Particularly, future researchers who want to fill the gaps of this research with regard to whether a process-genre approach brings effects on different samples like ability group, sex and age group e.t.c. can use the research as a stepping idea to their broad investigation.

1.5. Scope of the study

The scope of this study is limited to first-year Hawassa University students who were taking the course "Basic Writing Skills (Enla 1102)". The study is interested in analyzing the effects of a process-genre approach to teach writing on the written products of students by comparing the process-genre based approach and the existing practice of teaching English language writing skills. So, as stated earlier, this study doesn't examine if a process-genre approach brings significant effects on different ability group, sex and age group e.t.c.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Research design

This research investigated the effects of process-genre approach on first year University students' writing skills. In addressing the research objectives, the study employed a quasi-experimental research design. As Cohen (1994) pointed, it is not always possible to conduct a true experimental research in educational studies. Assigning students randomly to experimental and control groups and to change the participants' classes is not always possible. In addition to this, total control of extraneous variables in educational settings is impractical. Thus, as this study sought to find out the effects of process-genre approach to teach writing on university students' performance and perception, it couldn't assign subjects randomly to experimental and control groups. Rather, the study considered the students intact class arrangement. Especially, the study employed the pre-test post-test comparison group design whereby one intact group received a treatment using process-genre based approach and the other group didn't receive a treatment.

The present study followed post-positivists' paradigm that experiments a theory by collecting numeric measures of observed data which either support or refute the theory and studies the behavior of individuals. One of the reasons to adopt post-positivist approach was it encompasses both quantitative data and gives a room to qualitative data as it studies behavior. According to Creswell (2003), post-positivism based its knowledge on the development of numeric measures of scores and the study of individual's behavior through quantitative and qualitative instruments. Moreover, this paradigm helped the researcher to identify cause and effect relationships based on priority set hypothesis.

2.2. Participants of the study

The participants of the study were 80 first year students of 'College of Business and Economics, Department of Cooperative management' of Hawassa University. Of which, equal number of students (40/40) were assigned in the experimental and control groups using their intact classes. Among them, five subjects from experimental group who were learning writing through process-genre approach were randomly selected to participate in the semi-structured interview session. There were also instructors from the school of Language and Communication studies who involved in the study in handling the classroom teaching and rating students written products.

2.3. Sampling techniques

As it was mentioned above, the populations of this research were 80 students of Hawassa University who were taking the course 'Basic Writing Skills'. The selection of cooperative department students was done using random sampling technique. Three teachers (classroom teacher and raters) participated in this study. One of the teachers was involved in the classroom teaching. The reason for assigning same teacher to teach experimental and control group students was to avoid individual differences among teachers. The classroom teacher was selected using purposive sampling technique among other teachers based on their qualification, area of specialization and willingness to take part in the study.

2.4. Data gathering instruments

In order to obtain the necessary data to investigate the effects of a process-genre approach to teach writing skills on EFL students', different data gathering tools were used. These involve writing tests, students' questionnaire and semi-structured interview. A pre-test was administered to the control and experimental groups before the intervention started. Later, a post-test was administered to students to see the effects of the intervention. Similarly, a pre and post intervention questionnaire was used to collect data on students' perception about students' perception of writing in English language, students' perception about their own writing development, students difficulties while writing in English language and their perception about the level of emphasis given to the process of teaching writing. Subsequently, a semi-structured interview was carried out to collect additional information on students' perception about the writing approach under investigation.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Pre-test and post-test data analysis

Table 1: Comparison of control and experimental group students' pre-test result

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Pre control and pre experimental students test score	Equal variances assumed	.348	.557	.627	78	.532	1.875	2.99	-4.07764	7.82764
	Equal variances not assumed			.627	77.247	.532	1.875	2.99	-4.07855	7.82855

In order to check the homogeneity of the groups, the writing performance of the control group students' pre-test result was compared with the performance of the experimental group students' pre-test result using an independent sample t-test. The observed value for the given pre-test exam was $p=.532$ at .05 level of significance with 78 degree of freedom. The significance value 0.532 is greater than the level of significance 0.05 with 78 degree of freedom. This indicates that the difference between the performances of the experimental group and the performance of the control group students before the intervention was statistically not significant. It can be concluded that students in both groups had relatively homogenous performance or there was no significant difference between the groups before the intervention.

Table 2: Comparison of control and experimental group students' post-test result Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Post control and Post experimental students' test score	Equal variances assumed	1.028	.314	3.989	78	.000	10.50	2.63200	5.26009	15.7399
	Equal variances not assumed			3.989	77.886	.000	10.5	2.63200	5.25996	15.7400

As shown in table 2, a comparison was made between the average score of control and experimental group students writing skills performance in post-test. Regarding the significant value, the observed value for the given post-test exam was $p=.000$ at .05 level of significance with 78 degree of freedom. The significance value .000 is less than the level of significance 0.05 with 78 degree of freedom. Therefore, the difference between the performances of the experimental group and the performance of the control group students was statistically

significant. Owing this, it can be concluded that the experimental group students outperformed than the control group students after getting treatment.

Table 3: Comparison of post-test scores of control and experimental group students in the aspects of writing

		Independent Samples Test									
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper	
Content	Equal variances assumed	.034	.855	4.441	78	.000	4.25000	.95694	2.34488	6.15512	
Organization	Equal variances assumed	.010	.920	2.253	78	.027	1.42500	.63249	.16580	2.68420	
Vocabulary	Equal variances assumed	.074	.786	-1.947	78	.045	-1.17500	.60345	-2.37637	.02637	
Language	Equal variances assumed	.004	.953	3.973	78	.000	2.97500	.74879	1.48427	4.46573	
Mechanics	Equal variances assumed	.176	.676	1.551	78	.125	.25000	.16123	-.07097	.57097	

In line with the second hypothesis, to accept or reject the null or alternate hypothesis on the effects of process-genre oriented writing approach on the different aspects of writing, an independent and paired sample t-tests were employed on the different aspects of writing (i.e. relevant content, organizing contents appropriately, appropriate choice of vocabulary, using accurate language, which refers to grammar and correct mechanics) before the intervention and after the intervention. The observed paired sample t-test values (for content $p= 0.000$, organization $P= 0.027$, vocabulary $p= 0.045$, language use/grammar $p= 0.000$ and mechanics $p= 0.125$) indicated that the process-genre approach has a significant effect on the different aspects of writing except mechanics. Similarly, the independent sample t-test values displayed that there was significant improvement on students writing in aspects like content, organization, language and vocabulary: except mechanics aspect. Thus, the results showed that, compared with the control group students, the experimental group students gained significantly higher result. The result agrees with Chow Foo (2007) work which investigated the effects of training ESL students using process-genre approach on their writing knowledge and strategies in expository essays. He concluded that compared to the students who received training using product centered instruction, a process-genre writing approach found to be effective for students writing skills in different aspects of writing (content, organization, language (grammar), vocabulary and mechanics).

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings obtained, the following conclusions have been reached.

1. Teaching writing through process-genre approach significantly improved students' holistic writing performance than the conventional approach
2. Teaching writing through process-genre approach brought improvement on aspects of writing like content, organization, vocabulary and grammar. However, it hasn't brought significant change in mechanics aspect.

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