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THE EFFECTS OF PROCESS GENRE APPROACH ON UPPER SECONDARY STUDENTS' WRITING
ABILITY: A CASE STUDY IN A SPECIALIZED UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL IN VIETNAM

KIM THANH TUYEN¹, SHUKI BIN OSMAN¹, NOR SHAFRIN BINTI AHMAD¹,
THAI CONG DAN², S. KIUMARSI²

¹School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)

²School of Social Sciences and Humanities Campus II, Can Tho University, Vietnam

²Graduate School of Business, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)



ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the effects of the process genre approach (PGA) on English foreign language (EFL) upper secondary students' writing ability in terms of content, organization, vocabulary and grammar. The quasi-experimental design named the nonequivalent control group design with pretest and posttest was used to collect quantitative data. Participants including 25 English-majored students of grade 10 at a specialized upper secondary school in Vietnam divided into two groups: one control group (12 students) and one experimental group (13 students). T-Test results of pretest and posttest scores revealed that the group treated with the process genre (PG) instruction significantly outperformed the control group in writing ability in terms of content, vocabulary, language (grammar) except for organization. The findings of this study suggested that the PGA should be used as pedagogical tool to teach writing for EFL upper secondary students in Asian contexts.

Keywords: Process genre approach (PGA); Writing ability; EFL upper secondary students

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1 INTRODUCTION

Acquiring writing skills helps gain career promotion and academic success (Colombi & Schleppegrell, 2002). However, EFL students have faced problems when they are asked to write in academic texts. For example, according to Kim and Kim (2005), teaching writing for EFL learners is challenging. A conducted survey in Indonesia also indicated the overemphasis of writing practices in EFL classrooms on spelling, word formation, vocabulary, grammar, and theories of writing (Pujianto et al., 2014). A lack of familiarity with academic rules was also found (Hyland, 2003). It is the fact that most students pay less attention to the process of writing, especially ignore the reader, lack ability to use vocabulary appropriately (Karimnia, 2013). Moreover, the low level of learners' motivation in learning writing was found because EFL teaching has

focused on the language form of the target language (e.g., completing English grammar and vocabulary exercises) (Tran, 2007).

To find solutions to those matters, approaches of L2 writing teaching and learning have become a great concern since 1980 (Hyland, 2003). More specifically, studies on the effects of the product, process and genre approach have been explored by a number of scholars (e.g., Flower & Hayes, 1981; Nunan, 1991; Atkinson, 2003; Hyland, 2003; Tangpermpoon, 2008; Badger & White, 2000 etc.). The findings of those studies showed that each writing teaching approach has its own strengths and limitations. For example, positive points of the product approach emphasize the imitation of input, repetition, controlled writing and accuracy, whereas writing skills are ignored in this approach. By contrast, the process approach concentrates on language skills, whereas no emphasis on linguistic knowledge is given. Much similar to the product approach, the genre approach is also blamed for limiting learners' creative thoughts about content; nevertheless, it has some strengths as a result of a great emphasis on conventions, readers and purposes of a certain genre.

Thus, a novel writing teaching model named process genre approach was then proposed by Badger and White (2000). Just a few years later, PGA was widely applied and supported by a number of researchers (e.g., Yan, 2005; Kim & Kim, 2005; Nordin & Mohammad, 2006; Foo, 2007; Anik & Nihayah, 2009; Babalola, 2012; Pujianto et al., 2014, Tuyen.K.T, 2016, etc.). Also, in recent years, EFL teachers in Vietnam have been integrating the process genre based and communicative approaches into their writing classes (Tran, 2007; Tuyen.K.T, 2016). Nevertheless, little information on the effects of the PGA on EFL upper secondary students' writing ability in terms of content, organization, vocabulary and grammar is investigated. This study therefore, aims to examine the effects of the PGA on EFL upper secondary students' writing ability in terms of content, organization, vocabulary and grammar. This current study aims to answer the following question:

Does the group treated with the process genre writing instruction significantly outperform the control group in writing ability in terms of content, organization, vocabulary and grammar?

2. Literature review

2.1 Academic writing ability

The definition of academic writing ability varies within different approaches of writing teaching. According to Hyland (2002), writing ability in the product approach is referred to producing correct forms of language precisely, following prescribed patterns at either sentence or discourse level. Meanwhile, writing ability in this process/cognitive-oriented approach is defined as the ability to develop ideas and use the process of writing such as revising and editing. In the genre approach, writing ability is characterised as the ability to perform writing tasks for a given purpose, satisfy a given discourse community regarding the structure and content of the discourse, and functional communication (Yi, 2009).

Therefore, within the scope of the present study, the concept of '*academic writing ability*' is defined as the ability to develop, select, organize and order ideas (*content*), which is relevant to the topic, to a particular genre. This concept also involves the ability to produce a written text in an organized and coherent way that suits the purpose and audience in a specific genre (*organization*). It also refers to the ability to use effective grammatical structures, tenses, numbers, word order/function, articles, pronouns, and prepositions (*language*). In addition, the term '*writing ability*' means the ability to use correct words, idioms and registers (*vocabulary*).

2.2. Advantages and criticisms of the product approach

Previous researchers of writing teaching approaches such as Nunan (1991); Badger and White (2000), and Tangpermpoon (2008) have perceived that the product approach puts a great emphasis on the imitation of input, the repetition, the controlled writing, and the final product. Appropriate aspects of writing such as vocabulary use, grammatical use, mechanical considerations, content and organization are mentioned in this approach. As a result, with the product approach, L2 learners find it easy to produce their pieces of writing. This approach is considered teacher-centered because the teacher plays a role as an accurate and careful model provider. In the product-based approach, writing is viewed as a simple linear model which proceeds systematically from prewriting to composing and to correcting (Tribble, 1990).

On the other hand, the product approach has received criticisms. For instance, Murray (1980) investigated some drawbacks of the use of model texts in the product approach. The main disadvantage is that model texts prevent L2 learners' creativity (as cited in Saeidi & Sahebkhair, 2011, p. 131). In addition, Prodromou (1995) stated that this approach devalues learners' potential. Learners' skills and knowledge could be undervalued. Writing in this approach gives little attention to audience and the writing purpose because the precision of the grammar, syntax, and mechanics are much focused. As a consequence, learners have a high pressure in producing their writing tasks (Tangpermpoon, 2008).

2.3. Advantages and criticisms of the process approach

In the mid-1970, the process approach began to replace the product approach. A number of researchers including Flower and Hayes (1981); White and Arndt (1991); Tribble (1996); Hyland (2003); Harmer (2004) agree that the writing process is a recursive and complicated process, an explanatory and generative process requiring motivation. In that respect, meaning and ideas are explored instead of grammar exercises (O'Brian, 2004, as cited in Tangpermpoon, 2008); the cognitive process plays a key role in this approach (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Waes & Schellens, 2003). Specifically, it is viewed as writer centered (Tangpermpoon, 2008). On the other hand, the process approach has some disadvantages. This approach emphasizes language skills rather than linguistic knowledge, regards all writing types by the same set of process regardless of the target audience and the content of the text (Badger & White, 2000). This approach gives students a false impression of how university writing will be evaluated. That leads to the bad consequences that the process approach fails to take into account the social and cultural aspects that have an impact on different kinds of writing (Atkinson, 2003).

2.4. Advantages and criticisms of the genre approach

Modern growth theory has emphasized the significant role of the genre approach to writing teaching. This approach, emerging in the 1980, mainly focuses on the reader, the purpose of writing, and the conventions in regard to the content, organization and linguistic features to convince the readers (e.g., Badger & White, 2000; Hyland, 2003). Despite genres' beneficial roles in helping learners to produce written work with confidence, the genre approach has criticisms. The genre approach emphasizes conventions and genre features. Hence, it is less helpful for students to discover the texts' true messages. Likewise, if teachers attempt to explain how language is used for a range of purposes and with a variety of readers, learners become more passive. It is also blamed for limiting learners' creativity because writing takes place through imitation and exploration of different kinds of models (Badger & White, 2000, Yan, 2005).

2.5. The process genre approach (PGA)

As discussed previously, all three approaches have received criticisms; therefore, the implementation of the synthesis of the strength of the process and genre approach in teaching writing for EFL students has been supported by a number of researchers (e.g., Badger & White, 2000; Kim, Y. & Kim, B., 2005; Yan, 2005, Nordin & Mohammad, 2006; Frith, 2006; Goa, 2007; Foo, 2007, Anik & Nihayah, 2009;, Karimnia, A. , 2013; Pujianto & et., 2014, Tuyen K.T, 2016, etc.).

According to Badger and White (2000), in PGA, writing involves language and context knowledge. It also focuses on writing process such as planning, drafting, publishing, together with considering the purpose, audience of writing and all aspects of social contexts. For example, it involves setting up a situation and gives a sufficient support in order for learners to identify the purpose and other aspects of social contexts. They also suggested that teachers should provide students with sample writing texts, and ask students first to consider real situations, readers, and then practice language use (vocabulary and grammar) on a specific genre. Adapted from Badger and White's (2000) PGM, Yan (2005) constructed the teaching procedure for the PGA through six steps: (1) preparation, (2) Modeling and reinforcing, (3) planning, (4) joint constructing, (5) independent constructing, and (6) revising. Yan (2005) confirmed that the PGA assisted teachers in providing students with writing assignments that can unite content, organization, syntax and meaning, writing and revising, writing and thinking.

In other words, both theories of PGA refer to the purpose, the audience and the process of writing. Nevertheless, Yan (2005) added more activities and suggested that the writing process should follow six steps. Another thing is that Yan (2005) paid little attention on context and writing knowledge including vocabulary and grammar. Writing process are mentioned in both theories; nevertheless, Yan (2005) developed and added more writing sub-process such as brainstorming, clustering, drafting, publishing, editing, responding and evaluating, revising. Meanwhile, Badger and White (2000) refer to planning, drafting and publishing.

2.6. Conceptual research framework

The main aim of this study is to compare the effectiveness of the PGA and the product approach. It also aimed to explore students' perceptions of the PGA. For this reason, in this work, the PGA (the independent variable) was monitored in the experimental condition. The students' writing ability in terms of content, organization, vocabulary and grammar (the dependent variable) were measured. In this study, adapted from Badger and White's (2000) model and Yan's (2005) application of PGA, the PGA writing teaching module was proposed to teach writing for EFL upper secondary students. The lesson plan for PGA instruction in this study has 3 main stages: (1) pre-stage/ planning involves brainstorming ideas or vocabulary, analyzing sample writing texts, organizing ideas; (2) while-stage/ drafting; (3) post-stage involves providing feedbacks for students, revising and editing. Each writing lesson took 90 minutes with a ten-minute break.

PGM proposed in this paper consists of three stages: 1) Pre-stage including brainstorming, genre analysis and organizing ideas; 2) while-writing refers to drafting; 3) post-writing includes feedback, revising and editing. Activities and the objective of each stage are presented as follows:

1) Pre-writing stage

Brainstorming: Includes activities which help writers find out what they are going to write about. It is effective if a practical purpose for discussion is provided in order to help learners share their experiences. That can lead to the enhancement of motivation for individual writers.

Genre analysis: refers to analyzing writing samples with the aim of providing input for students so that they can identify and be aware of the schematic (or generic) structure, discourse structure, linguistic conventions of a particular genre with regard to the purpose and audience of writing. This activity also guides writers in making choices about the content they should include and how they should express it. That helps writers to select useful ideas and reject irrelevant ones.

Organizing: consists of activities which help writers to identify priorities in what they have to say and help writers give emphasis to the most important parts of their arguments to make sure that what is being written about is relevant to a potential reader.

2) While-writing stage

Drafting: includes activities such as practicing writing in groups, in pairs or individually. A set of writing tasks is provided. It focuses on two types of writing tasks: controlled writing and free writing tasks. The writers then translate plans and ideas into a provisional text.

3) Post-writing stage

Feedback: includes peer feedback and teacher feedback. Peer feedback aims to provide input and authentic audience for students. Teacher feedback helps reduce mistakes on content and organization of the text, word choice, language use and mechanics use.

Revising and Editing: Revising refers to reading back over the text. It helps maintain an overall coherence of the text. Good writers should tend to concentrate on getting the content right first and leave details like correcting spelling, punctuation and grammar until later. The checklist of guideline for writers to edit their work is provided. Students practice in pairs in this activity.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The quasi-experimental research was conducted in this study; and the nonequivalent control group design with pretest and posttest was employed to measure the effects of the independent variable on the dependent variable.

3.2. Research Sample

The sample size was 25 English-majored students of grade 10 at a specialized upper secondary school, located in Southern Vietnam. Probability sampling was employed. The subjects were randomly selected from a very specific group (English-majored students). They all passed an entrance English test for English-majored students at a specialized upper secondary school. A sample of 13 students (one male and 12 females) was obtained in the experimental group and 12 (one male and 11 females) in the control group. The experimental group received the writing instruction using materials designed based on the PGA; whereas the control group received the writing instruction based on current English Text book 10, published by the Ministry of Education in Vietnam.

3.3 Research Instruments

Pretest and posttest were employed to measure students' writing ability in terms of content, organization, grammar and vocabulary.

3.3.1 Pretest and Posttest

3.3.1 (a) Planning and Designing

Writing a descriptive paragraph about a movie review was chosen for quantitatively measuring students' writing ability in terms of content, organization, vocabulary and grammar. The text length is about 150 words to 200 words for both pretest and posttest. The time allotted for both tests is 45 minutes. The topic for pretest and posttest is described in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. Topic for Pretest and Posttest

Topic for Pretest	Topic for Posttest
What is your favorite film?	A magazine for young people is running a competition and has asked high school students to send an article about a movie they love the most.
Write a paragraph of 150-200 words to describe it.	Write a well-organized descriptive paragraph of 150-200 words about a movie you enjoy the most for the magazine.

(Source: Adapted from unit 13: Theater and Movies-Tieng Anh 10 Nang Cao, p.176)

3.3.1 (b) Method of Scoring

Analytic and error count methods were used. In this study, linking word errors, vocabulary errors and grammatical errors were marked based on the number of errors made. An analytic scale adapted from Carroll and West (1989, as cited in Tribble, 1996) was employed. According to this marking scale, writing aspects, namely content, organization, vocabulary, grammar and mechanics were graded separately. In this study, mechanics are, however, excluded in the marking scale because mechanics have not been the main problem in the context of study.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. FINDINGS

4.1.1 Students' overall writing ability

The findings indicated that the PGA significantly improved EFL upper secondary students' overall writing ability. The results from the *Independent Samples t-Test* showed that no statistically significant difference ($MD = -.002$) in the means of pre-test scores between the two groups in terms of writing ability was found, $t = -.006$, $df = 23$, $p = .995$. However, the mean difference ($MD = -.748$) in posttest scores between the two groups was statistically significant. This difference was significant at the .05 level, $t = -2.254$, $df = 23$, $p = .034$. The results are described in Table 4.1.1.

Table 4.1.1Independent Samples T-Test Statistics of Pretest and Posttest Scores of Two Groups

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Pretest	-.006	23	.995	-.002	.384
Posttest	-2.254	23	.034	-.748	.332

4.1.2 Students’ writing ability in terms of content, organization, vocabulary, language (grammar)

The results from the Independent Samples T-Test showed that the group treated with the PGA instruction significantly outperformed the control group writing ability in terms of content, vocabulary, grammar except for organization. There was a statistically significant difference in the means of posttest scores on content ($p = .013$), vocabulary ($p = .036$) and language ($p = .041$) between the two groups; however, no significant difference in the means of posttest scores on organization ($p = .130$) between the two groups was found. The results are presented in Table 4.1.2 and Table 4.1.3.

Table 4.1.2 Descriptive Statistics and Independent Sample T-Test Statistics of Pretest Scores on Content, Organization, Vocabulary and Grammar of the Two Groups

Group	Content		Organization		Vocabulary		Grammar	
	M	p	M	p	M	p	M	p
Con	7.792	0.796	7.583	0.976	7.733	0.896	7.475	0.945
Ex	7.892		7.569		7.685		7.446	

Table 4.1.3 Descriptive Statistics and Independent Samples T-Test Statistics of Posttest Scores on Content, Organization, Vocabulary and Grammar of the Two Groups

Group	Content		Organization		Vocabulary		Grammar	
	M	p	M	p	M	P	M	P
Con	8.167	0.013	8.000	0.130	8.025	0.036	7.817	0.041
Ex	9.039		8.577		8.692		8.692	

4.2 Discussions

The results from pretest and posttest on writing in English indicated that the PGA to writing instruction significantly improved upper secondary students’ overall writing ability in movie review paragraph. These findings are consistent with earlier findings of Badger and White’s (2000), Kim and Kim’s (2005); Foo’s (2007), Anik & Nihayah’s (2009); Babalola’s (2012) studies that the implementation of the PGA in teaching writing positively effected students’ overall writing ability. Moreover, Pujianto (2014) mentioned that PGA helps students develop writing skills of report text. It is clear that in the experimental group of this study, students were aware of the purpose and audience of the text, identify certain conventions of content, organization, vocabulary and grammar. For example, in this study, to interest readers (*young people*), a romantic movie genre about a true love was selected by students for their writing. The content of their writing covered basic information about the movie (i.e., movie title, movie type, director’s and main characters’ name and the time of film release). The movie plot was also well-developed. In the paragraph body, students tended to describe special scenes to support the topic sentence. Additionally, the quality of acting was mainly discussed in their writing. Critical comment on the film was also given in the concluding sentence. Students expressed their thoughts and opinions in a touching way that persuades the target audiences. More importantly, students used grammar and vocabulary in an effective way; for example, a variety of descriptive adjectives was employed to describe the personality, physical appearance, and family background of main characters. In addition, there were very few common grammatical mistakes in their writing such as tenses, numbers, word order, articles, and prepositions. Appositives were mainly used to make their writing succinct.

After the intervention, the results of this study also showed that the group treated with the PG writing instruction would significantly outperform the control group in writing ability in terms of content, vocabulary

and grammar except organization. However, in terms of organization, this finding is inconsistent with previous findings. Such an astonishing finding could be explained that there is a close relationship between the product and the genre approach (Badger & White, 2000). As mentioned earlier, these two approaches mainly emphasize the imitation of input, repetition and accuracy in language use. Within the scope of the study, students in both groups therefore, learnt to write through the familiarization stage, imitation of input, and repetition. In the movie review paragraph writing lesson, Text book 10 (*advanced*) required students to imitate the sample text, and follow schematic structures of descriptive writing about the movie review. As a result, like students in the experimental group, students treated with the product approach were able to be aware of organization of a particular text through familiarization stages. The consequence was that a piece of writing of one student in the control group was performed like the sample text in the text book because of the memorization.

5 Conclusions and recommendations

The findings of this study provide evidence that the PGA is a better approach to teach writing to EFL or ESL upper secondary students. Yet, to apply the PGA effectively, EFL or ESL teachers should follow the following suggestions:

First of all, in the planning stage of writing process, teachers should encourage students to think of what they are going to write through brainstorming ideas or vocabulary activities in the PGA. Schemata activation could make students arrive at determining a purpose, organization and readership. Activities used in this stage could be the buzz group and listing, free writing, individuals, pairs and groups, whole group discussion, note making, spider gram, mind map and clustering, Wh-Questions. Secondly, teachers should provide sample texts for students to analyze texts to help them raise an awareness of purpose, audience, organization, and linguistic conventions of a certain genre of writing. This activity also guides writers in making choices about the ideas; as result, useful ideas can be added, whereas irrelevant ones can be rejected.

Thirdly, teachers should provide further practice tasks of vocabulary and grammar for students. Also, structuring or organizing idea activities should be employed, which helps writers focus on the most important parts of their writing. These activities also let learners review the way in which they organize their texts to communicate effectively with potential readers. Necessary information is allowed to settle into some sort of overall plan or a graphic organizer. In these activities, students are asked to outline their ideas in clusters. More importantly, teachers should provide chances for students to write their first rough draft to enable them to express their ideas freely without worrying making mistakes. Providing feedback is also important, which aims to reduce errors in final drafts. Teachers should respond to the content and organization of students' writing and examine students' writing ability by considering the content of the text first, and then go on looking at a range of vocabulary and analyzing accuracy by looking at the grammatical errors. After that, teachers should look at the structure of the text and finally make a decision to drop this analysis because of too much work to do and the limited time. In these activities, teachers could underline errors on all students' texts, and then provide the direct correction for students. Finally, revising and editing activities should be applied to teaching writing, which provide chances for students to look back on the text to ensure that the text is maintaining an overall coherence. However, because of the limited time, revising and editing activities should be considered as homework assignments.

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