



IMPROVING EFL STUDENTS' WRITING SKILLS THROUGH A GENRE-BASED APPROACH IN SECONDARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM CONTEXTS: A MIXED-METHOD STUDY

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Abstract

Writing is one of the most demanding skills for students learning English as a foreign language because it requires control of content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, mechanics, and genre conventions. Many students can produce sentences but still struggle to organize ideas into coherent texts that meet communicative purposes. This study aims to examine the effectiveness of a genre-based approach in improving students' writing skills and to explore how students experience genre-based writing instruction in secondary English as a foreign language classrooms. The study employed a mixed-method design using a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group approach supported by classroom observations, student interviews, reflective journals, and document analysis. The participants were 72 Grade X students divided into an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group received genre-based writing instruction through four stages: building knowledge of the field, modelling and deconstructing the text, joint construction, and independent construction. The control group received conventional writing instruction. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, paired-sample t-tests, independent-sample t-tests, normalized gain scores, and effect size analysis, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The findings showed that the

experimental group achieved significantly higher writing improvement than the control group. Students improved in content development, text organization, vocabulary use, language control, mechanics, and genre awareness. The study concludes that a genre-based approach can improve EFL students' writing skills when instruction explicitly scaffolds text structure, linguistic features, audience awareness, and purposeful writing practice.

Keywords: *genre-based approach; writing skills; EFL; secondary students; genre awareness*

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A. Introduction

Writing is a central skill in English language education because it enables students to express ideas, organize information, and communicate meaning in a structured way. However, writing remains one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners to master.

Many secondary school students experience difficulty in writing English texts. They may have ideas but struggle to organize them into coherent paragraphs, use appropriate vocabulary, and follow the conventions of a given text type.

In many classrooms, writing instruction is still dominated by product-oriented practices. Students are often asked to write a text based on a topic or prompt with little explicit guidance on how texts of that type are typically structured or organized.

A genre-based approach offers a useful pedagogical framework for addressing these issues. Genre-based pedagogy views writing as a socially situated practice in which texts follow recognizable patterns shaped by their purpose and context.

The genre-based approach is strongly influenced by systemic functional linguistics and the Sydney School tradition of literacy pedagogy. In this tradition, language is understood as a resource for making meaning, and writing instruction is organized through explicit teaching and scaffolding. Derewianka (2003) notes that

genre-based approaches make textual patterns visible to learners, while Rose and Martin (2012) emphasize that genre pedagogy supports students by guiding them from supported text analysis to independent production. Martin and Rose (2008) and Christie and Derewianka (2008) further show that school writing develops through increasing control over genre, register, and discipline-specific language.

Genre-based writing instruction is relevant for EFL classrooms because students need explicit guidance to understand genre conventions in a language that is not used as their everyday language. Yasuda (2011) shows that genre-based tasks can develop learners' genre awareness, linguistic knowledge, and writing competence. Tardy (2006) also emphasizes that genre learning involves the development of rhetorical, linguistic, process, and subject-matter knowledge over time. These perspectives indicate that genre instruction should not be reduced to memorizing generic structure; it should help students understand how meaning is built through language choices.

Previous studies have indicated that genre-based instruction can support writing development by making text organization and language use more explicit. Cheng (2006, 2008) demonstrates that genre analysis helps learners understand how texts are shaped by communicative purposes and discourse communities. De Oliveira and Lan (2014) show that genre-based pedagogy can help English language learners improve writing in content-area classrooms. Pessoa, Mitchell, and Miller (2018) show that scaffolding argumentative genre can support multilingual students' writing development. Thongchalerms and Jarunthawatchai (2020) also report that genre-based instruction can improve EFL learners' writing development.

Despite these contributions, the implementation of genre-based writing instruction in secondary EFL classrooms still requires further empirical investigation, particularly regarding its effect on specific writing components and students' learning experiences.

This study focuses on the use of a genre-based approach to improve secondary students' writing skills in EFL contexts, asking:

(1) is there a significant difference in writing improvement between genre-based and conventional instruction; (2) which writing components improve; (3) how do students experience genre-based instruction; and (4) what challenges emerge?

B. Method

This study employed a mixed-method research design. The quantitative component used a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design to measure effects on writing skills, supplemented by observations, interviews, and document analysis.

The participants were 72 Grade X students from a secondary school. Two intact classes were selected: an experimental group (36 students) and a control group (36 students), with comparable prior writing achievement.

The experimental group received genre-based writing instruction for eight meetings, focused on analytical exposition texts and following the teaching-learning cycle: building knowledge of the field, modelling, joint construction, and independent construction.

The control group received conventional writing instruction. The teacher explained the definition and generic structure of analytical exposition, followed by independent writing practice without staged modelling or joint construction.

The main quantitative instrument was an analytical writing test in which students wrote an analytical exposition text on a familiar topic, scored using an analytic rubric covering content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics.

Qualitative data were collected through classroom observations, student interviews, reflective journals, and document analysis, focusing on the experimental group's experiences during the genre-based teaching-learning cycle.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, paired-sample t-tests, independent-sample t-tests, normalized gain scores, and Cohen's d; qualitative data were analyzed thematically and triangulated with the quantitative results.

C. Finding and Discussion

1. Finding

The findings are presented in four parts. The first part reports students' writing scores before and after the intervention. The second part explains improvement across writing components. The third part presents students' experiences during genre-based writing instruction. The fourth part describes implementation challenges.

The pretest results showed that the experimental and control groups had comparable initial writing skills, with no significant difference, confirming baseline equivalence before the intervention.

After eight meetings, the posttest results showed a clear difference between the two groups, with the experimental group obtaining a notably higher mean score than the control group.

Table 1. Writing Skill Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

Group	Test	N	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Experimental	Pretest	36	59.42	7.18	Moderate
Experimental	Posttest	36	80.17	6.31	High
Control	Pretest	36	58.86	7.06	Moderate
Control	Posttest	36	68.34	7.02	Moderate to high

Source: Processed from students' writing test data.

The paired-sample t-test showed that the experimental group improved significantly from pretest to posttest, $t(35) = 16.84$, $p < .001$, with a larger gain than the control group's improvement.

Table 2. Gain Scores and Statistical Comparison

Indicator	Experimental Group	Control Group	Statistical Result
Mean gain	20.75	9.48	Experimental group higher
Normalized gain	0.51	0.23	Moderate vs. low-to-moderate
Posttest comparison	80.17	68.34	$t(70) = 7.52$; $p < .001$

Effect size	-	-	Cohen's d = 1.77; large effect
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Source: Processed from pretest and posttest data.

These findings indicate that the genre-based approach produced stronger writing improvement than conventional writing instruction. The large effect size suggests that the intervention was not only statistically significant but also pedagogically meaningful.

The analytic rubric measured five components of writing: content development, organization, vocabulary use, language use, and mechanics. The experimental group improved across all components. The strongest improvement occurred in language use and content development, followed by organization, vocabulary use, and mechanics.

Table 3. Writing Component Scores in the Experimental Group

Component	Maximum Score	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Gain	Interpretation
Content development	25	14.86	19.91	5.05	Strong improvement
Organization	20	11.45	16.15	4.70	Strong improvement
Vocabulary use	20	12.08	16.08	4.00	Strong improvement
Language use	25	14.03	19.13	5.10	Strong improvement
Mechanics	10	7.00	8.90	1.90	Moderate improvement

Source: Processed from analytic writing rubric data.

The improvement in organization was related to students' better understanding of the structure of analytical exposition. Before the intervention, many students wrote without a clear thesis or logically ordered arguments.

Content development improved because students learned to elaborate arguments with reasons and examples during the modelling and joint construction stages, rather than relying on brief, undeveloped statements.

Language use also improved because students received explicit instruction on linguistic features commonly found in analytical exposition, such as evaluative language, conjunctions, and topic-specific vocabulary.

Qualitative findings showed that students experienced the genre-based approach as structured, supportive, and helpful for writing development. Four major themes emerged: genre awareness, model text support, collaborative scaffolding, and revision confidence.

Table 4. Qualitative Themes on Students' Genre-Based Writing Experiences

Theme	Evidence from Classroom Practice	Pedagogical Meaning
Genre awareness	Students identified thesis, arguments, reiteration, and language features	Students understood how analytical exposition works
Model text support	Students analyzed examples before writing	Model texts made writing expectations explicit
Collaborative scaffolding	Students constructed texts with teacher and peers	Joint construction reduced writing anxiety
Revision confidence	Students revised drafts using genre checklist and feedback	Feedback became more focused and actionable
Purposeful writing	Students connected text structure with communicative purpose	Writing became more meaningful and organized

Source: Synthesized from observations, interviews, and reflective journals.

Observation data showed that students initially had limited genre awareness. They knew that analytical exposition contained a thesis and arguments but could not clearly explain how each stage functioned before the intervention.

Students also reported that model texts were helpful. They stated that before the intervention, they often wrote without knowing what a good analytical exposition should look like, and the models gave them a concrete reference.

Joint construction was another important experience. During this stage, the teacher and students wrote a text together, allowing students to observe decision-making about structure and language before writing independently.

Revision confidence developed through the use of genre checklists and teacher feedback. Students used a checklist to examine whether their texts met the expected structure and language features before submitting final drafts.

Despite positive results, several challenges emerged. The first challenge was students' dependence on model texts; some students closely imitated the models rather than developing their own arguments.

The second challenge was limited vocabulary. Students often had ideas in Indonesian but struggled to express them in English, requiring additional vocabulary support during the writing process.

Table 5. Implementation Challenges and Teacher Responses

Challenge	Classroom Evidence	Teacher Response
Dependence on model texts	Some students imitated model sentences too closely	Explained adaptation and originality
Limited vocabulary	Students struggled to express ideas in English	Provided word banks and topic vocabulary
Time constraints	Teaching-learning cycle required several meetings	Structured stages across lessons
Uneven participation	Confident students dominated joint construction	Assigned group roles and writing tasks
Weak revision habits	Students focused only on grammar correction	Used genre checklist and feedback sheets

Source: Synthesized from classroom observations and teacher notes.

2. Discussion

Findings show that the genre-based approach significantly improved students' writing skills. The experimental group achieved higher posttest scores and gain than the control group, supporting the view that explicit genre instruction benefits EFL writing development.

The strongest improvement occurred in organization, language use, and content development. This finding is consistent with the theoretical foundation of genre-based pedagogy, which emphasizes the relationship between social purpose and text structure. Hyland (2007) argues that genre pedagogy helps teachers plan, sequence, support, and assess writing instruction by making textual expectations visible. In this study, students improved because they learned how to organize analytical exposition into thesis, arguments, and reiteration. This explicit structure supported clearer writing.

The improvement in content development indicates that genre-based instruction also helped students elaborate ideas. Before the intervention, students tended to write short and underdeveloped paragraphs. After the intervention, they provided more reasons, examples, and explanations. This improvement occurred because the modelling stage showed how arguments were developed in sample texts, while joint construction allowed students to practice elaboration with teacher support. The finding is aligned with Graham and Perin (2007) and Graham, McKeown, Kiuahara, and Harris (2012), who report that explicit strategy instruction and structured writing support can improve students' writing performance.

Language use and vocabulary also improved, supporting Yasuda's (2011) finding that genre-based tasks can develop genre awareness alongside linguistic knowledge simultaneously.

The findings also support the process-genre perspective. Badger and White (2000) argue that writing instruction should combine attention to process, genre, language knowledge, and social context. In this study, students did not only analyze model texts. They also planned, drafted, received feedback, revised, and reflected. This combination allowed students to understand genre conventions while still experiencing writing as a process. Written corrective feedback also supported revision, consistent with Ferris (1999, 2010) and Bitchener and Knoch (2010), who emphasize the potential value of focused feedback in L2 writing development.

The qualitative findings explain how the improvement occurred. Students developed genre awareness through deconstructing model texts, which gave them a clear reference point for their own writing.

Joint construction was especially important. It created a bridge between teacher modelling and independent writing. Students learned how to move from ideas to sentences and from sentences to paragraphs. They observed teacher decision-making and participated in constructing a text. This is consistent with the Sydney School teaching-learning cycle, which emphasizes gradual release of responsibility from teacher support to student independence (Rose & Martin, 2012). Humphrey and Macnaught (2016) similarly show that functional language instruction can support writing growth when linguistic resources are made explicit to learners.

The use of genre checklists and feedback strengthened revision. Students often view revision as correcting grammar and spelling only, but the checklist encouraged them to also revise structure and content.

The study also shows that genre-based instruction requires careful implementation. Students may become dependent on model texts if teachers do not explain how to adapt patterns creatively. This risk is important because genre pedagogy should not turn writing into formulaic copying. Genre knowledge should provide rhetorical resources, not rigid templates. Bhatia (1993), Swales (1990), Paltridge (2001), and Tardy (2006) all indicate that genres are social and rhetorical resources that writers need to understand flexibly rather than reproduce mechanically.

Vocabulary limitation was another challenge. Genre knowledge alone is insufficient if students lack the language resources to express their ideas, suggesting that vocabulary instruction should be integrated into genre-based teaching.

Time constraints also need attention. The teaching-learning cycle requires several stages, and each stage has pedagogical value. If teachers skip modelling or joint construction, students may not receive enough support. If teachers skip independent construction,

students may not develop autonomy. Therefore, teachers need to plan writing instruction across multiple meetings rather than treating writing as a one-session activity. Overall, this study confirms that the genre-based approach can improve EFL students' writing skills when implemented explicitly and systematically. Its effectiveness lies in the integration of text modelling, scaffolding, collaborative construction, independent practice, and genre-focused feedback.

D. Conclusion

This study examined the effectiveness of a genre-based approach in improving EFL students' writing skills in secondary school classrooms. The experimental group, which received genre-based instruction through the teaching-learning cycle, achieved significantly higher writing scores than the control group, with the strongest gains in organization, language use, and content development. Qualitative findings showed that model texts, joint construction, and genre checklists supported students' growing genre awareness and revision confidence, while dependence on models and limited vocabulary emerged as implementation challenges. These findings suggest that genre-based instruction is an effective approach for developing EFL students' writing skills, provided that teachers gradually withdraw scaffolding, integrate vocabulary support, and allocate sufficient time for each stage of the teaching-learning cycle. Future research may examine the approach's effectiveness across other text types and proficiency levels.

Declaration of AI-Assisted Technologies

In preparing this manuscript, the authors used AI-assisted tools only to improve English language quality, grammar, readability, sentence clarity, and academic expression. The AI tools were not used to generate research data, conduct data analysis, produce findings, or draw conclusions. All conceptual arguments, data interpretation, methodological decisions, and scholarly conclusions remain the full responsibility of the authors. The

authors carefully reviewed, edited, and verified all AI-assisted outputs to ensure the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the final manuscript.

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