

# The Effects of Types of Writing Approaches on Efl Students' Writing Performance

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## *Abstract*

This pilot study, part of the researcher's thesis, aims at testing and applying the necessary modifications to the PA' and PGA's procedures and ensuring the do ability of the intervention. Moreover, pilot-testing provides the opportunity to evaluate the validity and reliability of the research instruments. The sample of the pilot students comprises two groups: Process Approach (PA) class and Process-Genre Approach (PGA) class for the experimental groups. It was conducted in two classes of one university in Pekanbaru-Riau. Four research instruments were tried out: essay writing test, questionnaire, interview, and observation. The process of constructing each of the four instruments as well as setting up their validity and reliability are discussed throughout the paper.

**Keywords:** Writing Approaches, Writing Performance

## **Introduction**

Writing is considered to be a very difficult skill and complicated activity to do. This is true because there are many activities that should be done at the same time. While expressing ideas, students need to think about the appropriate vocabulary, the spelling of the words, the mechanics, the style, as well as the correct structure to be used in arranging good English sentences. The complexity of writing skill makes students' writing performance unsatisfactory.

There might be a number of factors responsible for the students' low ability in essay writing performance, among them are the approach used by the lecturer in essay writing instruction, the materials discussed in the classroom, the complexity of writing skill itself, the strategy used by the students in essay writing, etc. Several studies reveal that it is caused by many factors, among them are: (1) the complexity of the language itself which includes vocabulary, organization of ideas, grammar, spelling, referencing; (2) environment which includes few opportunities to practice English and culture; and (3) methods of teaching English which includes the strategies of instruction, using L1 or L2 in English classes, teachers' low proficiency in English, and lack of writing practice in educational institutions (Al-Khasawneh, 2009).

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that EFL students' problem in writing skills might be caused by several factors: the curriculum, the approach used by teachers in writing instruction, and the teachers' lack of ability in writing instruction. This study focuses on the second factor, the approach used in writing instruction,

Views on Writing Process

Human being is unique and individuals vary. The same case also happens to writing activity. People employ different processes while writing so that the results will never be similar although they have similar materials to write about similar topics. What the teacher needs to do is suggest students to explore various possible strategies and encourage them to experiment and search for one that is personally effective (Ur, 2006).

Writing is a complex and complicated activity to do. As a complex activity, it might be useful to advise students to focus on ideas or content at the beginning, then on grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, organization, etc. Ur (2006) supports this suggesting that in general, good writers think about content first, then form. In the process of writing itself, encourage

students to work with multiple drafts and a number of revisions. Furthermore, if students write about something worthwhile or enjoyable, they will do that quickly and they will be proud if they can finish their writing and want it to be read. Therefore, choosing the topic which interests the writer contributes a lot to the successful process of writing itself.

Concerning about the writer, Tribble (2009) explains that in order to be successful in writing, the following range of knowledge needs to be undertaken: content knowledge, context knowledge, language system knowledge, and writing process knowledge. Therefore, if the writer knows what to write in a given context, what the reader expects to read, which parts of the language system are relevant, and has a command of writing skills appropriate to the writing, he/she has a good chance of writing something that will be affective (ibid).

### *Approaches to Teaching Writing*

There are three well-known approaches to teaching writing, they are: Product-based approach, Process-based approach, and Genre-based approach. In addition, the synthesis of these three approaches is called Process-Genre approach. Each of these approaches is discussed together with its strengths and weaknesses.

#### 1. Product Approach.

This approach is grounded on behaviorist principles and relates language teaching to linguistic form, discrete linguistics skills and habit formation. It is claimed that language consists of parts, which should be learned and mastered separately in a graded manner. The learner's role is to receive and follow the teacher's instruction; an example of these approaches is the audio-lingual approach (Turuk, 2008). According to this approach, the teaching of writing focuses on the production of texts by individual students, often under time constraints and usually in silence.

Tribble (2009) claims that product approach in which the focus is on form, is a traditional, text-based approach which is still used in many materials today. In this approach, the teacher often presents authoritative texts for students to imitate or adapt. Errors are considered as something that should be corrected, or, if possible, eliminated. The teacher's main role is to instill notions of correctness and conformity. Pincas (1982b) sees writing in product approach as being primarily about linguistic knowledge, with attention focused on the appropriate use of vocabulary, syntax, and cohesive devices.

Steele (2004 as cited in Hasan and Muhammad 2010) and Pincas (1982a, in White and Richard, 2000) clarify that Product Approach consists of four stages. Stage one (Familiarization) is the stage where students study model texts and then the features of the genre are highlighted. For example, if studying a formal letter, students' attention may be drawn to the importance of paragraphing and the language used to make formal requests. Stage two (Controlled writing): This stage consists of controlled practice of the highlighted features, usually in isolation. If students are studying a formal letter, they may be asked to practice the language used to make formal requests. Stage three (Guided writing): This is the most important stage where the ideas are organized. The organization of ideas is more important than the ideas themselves and as important as the control of language. Stage four (Free writing) is the end product of the learning process. Students choose from the choice of comparable writing tasks. To show what they can be as fluent and competent users of the language, students individually use the skills, structures and vocabulary they have been taught to produce the product, such as a letter, story or essay. From the explanation above, it can be concluded that the weaknesses of product approaches are that process skills, such as planning, drafting, revising, etc are given a relatively small role, so that the knowledge and skills that learners bring to the classroom are undervalued. The strengths are that they recognize the need for learners to be given linguistic knowledge about texts, and they understand that imitation is one way in which people learn (Badger and White 2000)

## 2. Process Approach.

Process approach emphasizes the cognitive aspect of learning and acknowledge the contributions that the learner brings to the learning context. These approaches claim that students should be taught ‘systematic thinking skills’. Therefore, planning, setting goals, drafting and generating ideas became part of teaching strategies in L2 classroom, particularly in the field of writing.

Process approach is grounded on sociocultural theory (SCT) proposed by Vygotsky (1896-1934), a Russian psychologist whose ideas have great influence in the field of educational psychology and the field of education. This theory is grounded in the psychological theory of human consciousness proposed by L.S. Vygotsky (in Lantolf, 2011). The theory describes about how people acquire and use their second language. His most outstanding work is the concept of Zone Proximal Development (ZPD) which is regarded as a remarkable contribution to the field of education and learning process, (Turuk 2008). ZPD, defined by Vygotsky, is the difference between what a person can achieve when acting alone and what the same person can accomplish when acting with support from someone else and/or cultural artifacts, (Turuk 2008).

Good writers plan and revise, rearrange and delete text, re-reading and producing multiple drafts before they produce their finished document. This is what a process writing approach is about (Stanley 2003). The process writing has been seen as an improvement of the traditional methods of writing instruction in recent years. Leki (1991) states that the process approach is an approach to teaching writing that places more emphasis on the stages of the writing process than on the final product. It is “interpretational, learner-centered and not specifically related to examinations” (Pennington 1995).

The presence of process approach can be considered as an innovation in academic writing as the results of the weaknesses of product approach. Because of the overstressed focus of product approach on linguistics knowledge, process approach comes up with the focus on linguistic skills. The development of the writers’ skill in writing will be dominant together with the application of collaborative writing. These activities become the strength of this approach. This is supported by Alwasilah (2005) who claims that activities in process approach such as collaborative writing, peer editing, drafting, and teacher-student conferencing are strategies of empowering students to be independent learners and writers.

In spite of the popularity of process approach, it also has limitations. The main concern is that it pays less attention to grammar and structure, and puts little importance on the final products (Onozawa 2010). The next weakness is because of too much concern on the process, writing can become impractical and over-lengthy in class. The emphasis on multiple drafts can make the work on a particular text boring to students, especially when they know that the audience is still the teacher. In addition, the approach can suggest that writing is inevitably a long process, in which a text is gradually refined. Finally, the process approach is not suitable for writing examination essays and is not applicable to all types of writers and tasks (Caudery 1995, Horowitz 1986, as cited in Cahyono 2001). Badger and White (2000) also argue about the disadvantages of process approaches where all writing as being produced by the same set of processes, give less importance to the kind of texts writers produce and why such texts are produced, and offer learners insufficient input particularly about linguistic knowledge to write successfully. On the other hand, they also argue about the main advantages of process approaches namely about the importance of the skills involved in writing, and recognize the background knowledge the learners bring to the writing classroom which contribute to the development of writing ability.

## 3. Genre Approach

Among the three approaches, genre approach is considered to be new and there are strong similarities with product approach (Harmer 2007) and, in some ways, genre approach can be regarded as an extension of product approach (Badger and White 2000). Paltridge (2004) explains that genre approach to teaching writing focuses on teaching particular genres such as essays, assignments, and other pieces of writing that students need to be able to produce in

academic settings. This might include a focus on language and discourse features of the texts, as well as the context in which the text is produced.

Badger and White (2000) argues that proponents of genre approaches are rarely explicit about their theory of learning. However, the use of model texts and the idea of analysis implies that learning is partly of imitation and consciously applying rules. Thus, genre-based approaches see writing as essentially concerned with knowledge of language, and being tied closely to a social purpose, while the development of writing is largely viewed as the analysis and imitation of input in the form of texts provided by the teacher.

Dealing with writing development, genre approaches also have many similarities with product approaches. Cope and Kalantzis (1993) discuss about a wheel model of genre literacy. This wheel has three phases: modeling the target genre, where learners are exposed to examples of the genre they have to produce; the construction of a text by learners and teacher; and, finally the independent construction of texts by learners. In theory, the cycle can be repeated as and when necessary, but it seems that each phase often appear only once.

In the application of genre approach in teaching, it also has been criticized for stifling creativity by imposing models on students (Hyland, 2008). However, he further clarifies that the genre doesn't dictate that the students write in a certain way nor determine what to write, it enables choices to be made to create meaning. This argument might be true in some ways, but the students are automatically guided very much to imitate since they are only provided with very little practice on developing linguistic skills. In accordance with this, Badger and White (2000) argue that the negative side of genre approaches is that they undervalue the skills needed to produce a text and see learners as largely passive.

Having discussed the three approaches to teaching writing, it can be concluded that each has strengths as well as weaknesses. The appropriate approach to the teaching of essay writing is expected to be concluded so that teachers as well as lecturers can apply that in the classroom. Process-Genre approach. The central point of genre analysis is that writing is embedded in a social situation, so that a piece of writing is meant to achieve a particular purpose which is from a particular situation. Since genre analysis focuses on the language used in a particular text, we want to include processes where writers produce a text reflecting these elements under the term 'process genre'. This would cover the process where writers decide what aspects should be highlighted, as well as the knowledge of the appropriate language, (Badger and White 2000). The process-genre-based approach thus integrates the strength of the process approach and the genre-based approach. Planning, drafting, conferencing, editing and peer review are components of the process approach to teaching writing. Understanding and considering the purpose, audience and context on the other hand, are elements in the genre approach.

Matsuo and Bevan (2002) state that the essential advantages of a process-genre-based approach over other writing pedagogies is that emphasizing the notion of genre in writing promotes not only linguistic skills and self-expression but also rhetorical awareness. Therefore, using process-genre approach will help students develop their knowledge of various texts types such as essays, editorials, business letters, etc., and various organizations of essay development such as description, narration, exposition, evaluation, argumentation, as well as the composing process itself. In addition, it also makes students possible to study the relationship between purpose and form for a particular genre as they use the recursive processes of prewriting, drafting and revising.

Badger and White (2000) propose that Process-Genre approach provides the situation to help students identify the purpose and consider the field, mode and tenor of the text they are about to produce. Texts within the genre (in this case expository writing) will be selected by the teacher who also then encourages students research into the genre (Tribble 2009). Language awareness activities may also be carried out. Perhaps with the help of flow-charts, the students will plan and organize their ideas before drafting and revising with the purpose and audience in mind. These latter stages are not linear and students may jump between them as they find necessary. Finally, the collaborative aspect of process writing (as highlighted by Richards 1990), is maintained, particularly if the teacher can provide the situation wisely.

## Discussion

A number of different types of data were collected for this study. The first data were collected through essay writing test to know the students' essay writing performance at pretest and posttest stages. This instrument was developed by the researcher. The second instrument was the questionnaire which was intended to gather information on students' perceptions of the Process Approach and Process-Genre Approach. The questionnaire was also to know the participating lecturers' (PLs) perception on the process Approach and the Process-Genre approach applied in the writing instruction. The questionnaire for both the students and the PLs were distributed after the treatment. In addition to the quantitative data, the qualitative data were also collected through interview for PLs and several students. The interview protocol consisted of six open-ended questions, specifically to investigate phenomena that are not directly observable. Since interviews are interactive, researchers can elicit additional data if initial answers are vague, incomplete, or not specific enough (Mackey and Gass 2005). In this research, the researcher used semi-structured interviews which was adapted from Creswell's example (Gay and Airasian 2000). The PLs and several students (five and six) from each class were interviewed. The fourth data were collected through observation. By doing observation, the researcher immerses in a research setting, and systematically observes dimensions of that setting, interactions, actions, events, and so on, within it (Mason 1996 cited in Mackey and Gass 2005). Pelham and Blanton (2007) claim that conclusions about instructional effects can be made with greater confidence when the kind of processing that occurs in each condition is documented. Observation Tally Sheet from Nunan (1989) was used for classroom observation since it is quite detail to collect information about the application of PA and PGA procedures.

Before conducting the real study, a pilot study was conducted in one of the universities in Pekanbaru. The intervention and all the research materials and instruments were tried out on the defined population. The objectives of the pilot-testing were to test and apply the necessary modifications to the PA' and PGA's procedures and also to ensure the do ability of the intervention. Moreover, pilot-testing provided the opportunity to evaluate the validity and reliability of the research instruments.

### Pilot-testing of the Intervention (PA and PGA)

After the researcher got consent from the PLs and research assistant (RA), the researcher conducted a mini workshop in order to train them. The training took 4 hours (2 two-hour sessions) consisted of (a) a brief introduction to PA and PGA ; (b) its implementation procedures; and (c) the introduction of the research instruments and their rubrics.

When the PLs and RA were both proficient enough to begin the pilot study, only two classes (existing groups) with 30 and 31 students were selected. The materials intended for the actual study were used in this pilot testing. The pilot subjects received four instructional sessions of the intervention. Each pilot session took 1 hour and forty minutes and was evaluated by the RA and the researcher for the accuracy of the implementation procedures through the Observation Tally Sheet. During the pilot study, the pilot students were required to prepare 2 expository essays.

The pilot students were given pretest and posttest on essay writing by using the researcher-developed test. When the 4-session pilot research was completed, all participants filled out the questionnaires to gain information on their perception of the approach applied in their class. The pilot participants who received the writing instruction through the application of PA filled out questionnaire about their perception on PA, while those who received the writing instruction through PGA also filled out the questionnaire on their perception on PGA. In addition, the two participating lecturers also filled out the questionnaire to gain their perception after applying process approach and process-genre approach in their writing instruction class. six and five students out of 31 and 30 pilot participants agreed to take part in the interview which was intended to elicit additional data if initial answers are vague, incomplete, or not specific

enough about their perceptions PA and PGA. The data obtained from the measures were used to determine and to statistically calculate reliability of the instruments.

As mentioned before that the purpose of the pilot-testing was to evaluate the feasibility of the intervention and to refine the PA and PGA along with the related measures. The following revisions were made to the PA and PGA based on the pilot study conducted:

- 1) Because most pilot students had difficulty in brainstorming activity, they are allowed to do
- 2) that activity in pairs or small groups.
- 3) Since they need to find references for ideas, drafting activity was done outside of the class.
- 4) For the groups that could finish revising activity earlier were supported to get feedback from more than two groups.

#### Pilot-testing of the Essay Writing Test

In essay writing test, the respondents were advised to spend 100 minutes to write a cause and effect essay in around 500 words. The content validity, construct validity, and inter-rater reliability were determined during the pilot-testing. For content validity of the writing test, a panel of three experts in the writing domain were consulted. They were asked to examine the questions and the marking scheme. Therefore, the test underwent some alternations and revisions with regard to the recommendations made: test directions were made clearer and scoring methods were made consistent.

The second type of validity was determined through the pilot-testing of the instrument i.e. construct validity. Thus, the essay writing test was administered to pilot students at two different times with a 3-week interval. Then, the two sets of scores obtained were compared and the correlation coefficient of their performance at these two differing times were statistically determined. The resulting coefficient was 0.641 for PA and 0.704 for PGA, indicating that the tests were neither too easy nor too difficult. Thus, the test could be claimed to have the potentiality of differentiating students with various levels of the trait being measured. The last is inter-rater reliability where the students' essay writing performance were rated by two raters (three raters for the real data) and Pearson Product Moment Coefficient Correlation was computed.

#### Pilot-testing of the Questionnaire

The content of the questionnaire were developed from the elements of the two approaches applied. For process approach, the elements are prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing. For process-genre approach, the elements are preparation, modeling, planning, joint constructing, independent constructing, and revising and editing. The original version of the questionnaire is from <http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/mla/questionnaire.pdf>. However, the researcher adapts the questionnaire to focus on investigating students' perception of Process Approach and Process-Genre Approach. The questionnaire for Process Approach consists of sixteen items in total and for Process-Genre Approach consists of twenty seven items in total.

The two sets of questionnaire were distributed to the two groups of pilot students after the intervention session. All respondents from the two pilot students' classes filled out the questionnaire. The results of analysis showed that Alpha Cronbach value for students' perception toward Process Approach was 0.80. All items are valid except item no 11 because it has low reliability index ( $< 0,361$ ). To make all items valid and reliable, the researcher deleted item no 11. Then the researcher reanalyzed the questionnaire to find out the reliability index and to make sure that all items are valid. The results of the analysis show that all items are valid and the reliability of  $\alpha$  is 0.801. This index shows that the questionnaire has high reliability.

The questionnaire on the pilot students perception on PGA was also analyzed and the Alpha Cronbach value was 0.895. However, three items (items 3, 4, and 13) were not valid because they have low reliability index ( $< 0,361$ ). Therefore, the researcher deleted those items and reanalyzed them in order to find out the reliability index and make sure that all items have good reliability index. The results of the analysis show that all items are valid and the Cronbach

Alpha value is 0.900. This means that the questionnaire has high reliability and ready to use for the real sample.

#### Pilot-testing of the Interview Protocol

Once the 3-week pilot intervention was completed, a number of interviews were conducted by the RA. The researcher-developed interview protocol was composed of 6 questions to elicit information on students' perceptions about PA and PGA. The purposes of the pilot interview were (a) to ensure the feasibility of the developed interview protocol, (b) to develop a coding instrument, and (c) to try out the necessary procedures for the content analysis of qualitative data.

Six pilot students from PA class and five from PGA class volunteered to participate in the interview which was conducted in students' L1. After obtaining permission from the pilot students, their interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed. Finally, the transcriptions were translated into English. The translated texts were assessed by the RA for the accuracy of the translation. Each pilot interview session took 7 - 10 minutes. The obtained transcripts were duplicated and then analyzed by the RA and the researcher. In the pilot study, the coding instrument was pretested. Coding procedures of the interview data were based on open coding (identification of themes) and axial coding proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). The relevant meaning units from the pilot interview transcripts were coded. In fact, the researcher and the RA independently coded the obtained textual data. Therefore, inter-coder agreement was also evaluated informally during the pilot studying of the interview protocol.

The pilot-testing of the interview protocol led to a number of considerations that were taken into account during the major study. They are as follows: (a) to make the interviewee feel relaxed as much as possible by beginning with some small talk, (b) to encourage the interviewee with open-ended discussion by saying "Anything else?" rather than accepting the first answer that the interviewee comes up with, and (c) to keep the interview on track by using 'carry-on feedback' such as nods, 'uh-huh' noises, and one-word utterances like 'yeah'.

#### Pilot-testing of Classroom Observation

Classroom observation was carried out while the teaching and learning process. For this research, the researcher used observation scheme by Nunan (1989): Classroom Observation Tally Sheet. Since there might be some possibility of the Hawthorne effect which may occur when learners perform better due to positive feelings at being included in a study, the researcher asked the instructor's input such as when the observer to come and where the observer can sit, so that the impact of the observer can be lessened (Gas and Mackey 2005). In this case, the instructors suggested that the observer come at the same time with instructor and sit at the back row. Therefore, observation was conducted four times for each PA and PGA classes of the pilot intervention.

### Conclusion

This pilot study is part of the researcher thesis which aims at looking at the effects of PA and PGA on students' essay writing performance. The pilot study was conducted in one university in Pekanbaru. There were two groups of the pilot students: Process Approach (PA) class and Process-Genre Approach (PGA) class. In addition to testing and applying the necessary modifications to the PA' and PGA's procedures, this pilot study aims at ensuring the do ability of the intervention. Furthermore, pilot-testing evaluates the validity and reliability of the research instruments. The four research instruments tried out are: essay writing test, questionnaire, interview, and observation. Each of them is discussed from the process of constructing to setting up validity and reliability. The intervention procedures were refined, the writing test underwent some alternations and revisions, the questionnaire, the interview protocol, and the observation were revised to make them valid and reliable.

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