

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GENRE KNOWLEDGE AND WRITING PERFORMANCE

Kutay Uzun

Trakya University, Turkey

Phone: +902842234210, E-Mail: kutayuzun@trakya.edu.tr

Abstract. *Genre knowledge can be defined as the type of knowledge that is required to communicate within a discourse community. As an integral part of the academic community, students are also expected to conform to the conventions of particular genres in their assignments, reports or presentations. However, the literature relevant to Genre Knowledge in the Turkish higher education context appears to be indicating a gap regarding if and how the knowledge of a particular genre is related to the written composition profiles of learners. In this respect, the present study aims to find out if genre knowledge is related to writing performance in terms of content, organization, vocabulary, language use and the mechanics of writing. To meet the aims of the study, a quantitative and cross-sectional study design was employed in the setting of a compulsory English Literature course in an ELT department, during which students are frequently assigned to write literary analysis essays. Since the study is of a correlational nature, 30 literary analysis essays were collected from second-year ELT students with low, middle and high levels of genre knowledge, which was assessed by means of a checklist, developed and validated by Uzun (2016) in the same context to assess the level of adherence to the genre conventions of literary analysis essays. The ESL Composition Profile of Jacobs et al. (1981) was used to assess essay writing performance. The relationship between genre knowledge and writing performance was sought for through correlation analyses. Group comparisons were made by means of Kruskal Wallis and Mann Whitney U tests. The findings are discussed in the conclusion section.*

Key words: *Genre Knowledge, Writing Performance, Literary Analysis*

1. INTRODUCTION

In a considerable part of higher education, students are expected to demonstrate knowledge through their written compositions to complete assignments, finalize projects or pass courses through exams. This makes the productive skill of writing a crucial one, determining a substantial part of students' general academic performance. In the context of education, the demonstration of performance and knowledge on behalf of the students naturally takes various forms such as presentations, reports or essays, an umbrella term for which variety is the term 'genre'.

Swales (1990, p. 33) defines genre as "a distinctive category of discourse of any type, spoken or written" whose primary purpose is to respond to the shared social demands of a given context (Johns, 2002). The social aspect of genre is also pointed out by Hyland

(2010), who describes the concept as using the language to interact with a discourse community in compliance with the conventions of that particular community. From the definitions of genre, it can be inferred that students within the higher education context are expected to conform to the conventions of academic genres to interact successfully with the academic community, for which a satisfactory amount of genre knowledge is inevitably required.

Genre knowledge can be defined as the resources one has to utilize to respond appropriately to the recurrent demands of a particular discourse community. This particular type of knowledge enables the writer of a text to identify its type and choose the strategies that would best suit the purpose of the text (Olive et al., 2009). Genre knowledge is of a dynamic nature since genres may posit alterations in accordance with the immediate objectives of the members of a particular discourse community. At the same time, however, genre knowledge is situated since it has to draw upon a community's shared knowledge, practices and cognition. Furthermore, it requires adherence to both register and meaning-making conventions of the community, following common practices in both structural and contextual levels. Lastly, genre knowledge demands the acknowledgement of the fact that genres are typically reconstituted and reproduced (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995).

In a similar vein with Berkenkotter and Huckin's analysis, Tardy (2009) states that genre knowledge is comprised of formal, process, rhetorical and subject-matter knowledge and that an improvement in genre knowledge can be actualized through the augmentation of the integration of these four domains. In Tardy's terms, formal features of a genre are constituted by its lexico-grammatical conventions. Process knowledge, on the other hand, encompasses one's knowledge regarding the processes which are typically undergone in the composition of a genre and its reception by the target audience. Rhetorical knowledge is oriented towards the communicative purposes of the genre, typically marked by a high level of reader awareness. Subject-matter knowledge, finally, refers to the content to be produced by the composer of the genre, requiring community or discipline-specific content knowledge (Tardy, 2009).

From the definitions of both Tardy and Berkenkotter and Huckin, it is understood that genre knowledge is multi-faceted, having linguistic, social and disciplinary levels. Therefore, the aforementioned argument that higher education students are required to participate in the academic community necessitates the utilization of a variety of resources from the knowledge of the conventions of their community to efficiently using language to meet their intended purposes.

Although genre knowledge is related to participation in one's discourse community and genres also serve the purpose of being used as criteria to determine the level of literacy competence (Bawarshi, 2016), assessing academic writing with specific reference to genre is not a common practice in the Turkish undergraduate context and most of the writing assessment is realized through holistic or analytical rubrics focusing on different aspects of the text such as the content, grammatical accuracy, word choice and mechanics such as spelling and punctuation. However, genre knowledge, as described above, may also be contributing to the quality of writing since it covers the knowledge of the practices as well as the expectations of a particular discourse community (Hyland, 2009).

Evidence for the contribution of genre knowledge to writing quality has been provided in several studies. Lu (2010), for instance, concludes that genre knowledge predicts writing performance although the strength of prediction is not as high as language proficiency level. Moreover, awareness of a particular genre or discourse conventions in addition to

communicative aims serves as the basis of generating ideas in the process of writing according to Chenoweth and Hayes (2003). Graham (2006) also corroborates the integrity of genre knowledge with writing performance suggesting that this particular type of knowledge has an enhancing effect on both performance and writing psychology. In another study with 140 participants, Hooeven and Gelderen (2015) find out that improving genre knowledge increases the quality of peer-feedback, resulting in an increased writing performance. In a study with a more specific focus, Olinghouse and Wilson (2013) conclude that word choices of student writers also improve as their genre knowledge increases.

To conclude, higher education students are expected to conform to the standards of the academic community in order to demonstrate knowledge and interact with the members of the community. In order to achieve these purposes, they need to have a certain repertoire of genres at their disposal. Considering that it is not a common practice within the Turkish context to assess systematically the genre knowledge of the students in relation to their academic writing performance, the present study attempts to identify if and how adherence to the genre conventions of the literary analysis essay interacts with the writing performance of the students.

2. RESEARCH CONTEXT

The study takes place at the English Language Teaching (ELT) department of a public university in Turkey. Second-year ELT students in Turkish universities are entitled to take two English Literature courses as a compulsory part of their curriculum, whose content includes a history of English Literature as well as the history of Britain and life in Britain. Throughout the course, students are assigned to write numerous essays in academic style discussing certain themes or characters from literary works in relation to the content, style or historical facts related to the period in which the work was produced. Since the demonstration of knowledge within the English Literature course is primarily in written form and the group is composed of students who have already taken Genre-Based Instruction with a focus on literary analysis essays, it is considered to be a suitable context regarding the aims of the present study.

3. AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to reveal if there is a relationship between the levels of genre knowledge and writing performance in the literary analysis essays of second-year ELT students. Secondly, the study aims to identify which components of writing performance might be related to genre knowledge.

To meet the aims of the study, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. Are there differences in the writing performance levels among second year ELT students grouped by their level of adherence to the genre conventions of the literary analysis essay?
2. Is there a relationship between the levels of writing performance and adherence to the rhetorical conventions of the literary analysis essay?

4. METHODOLOGY

The aim of the present study is to find out if there is a statistically significant relationship between genre knowledge and writing performance. In this respect, a quantitative design was preferred because, according to Creswell (2012), measuring the degree of relation or association among variables necessitates a quantitative and correlational research design.

For the analyses, 30 literary analysis essays written by the students taking English Literature course, which displayed low, mid and high levels of adherence to the genre conventions of the literary analysis essay within the research context were selected by the researcher to ensure that the scores were distributed towards both the low and the high ends of adherence. The corpus of 30 essays were found to consist of 9168 words. The shortest essay contained 116 words and the longest one had a length of 529 words. The mean word count of the essays were found to be 306.

The essays selected for the study were first assessed in terms of their adherence to the rhetorical moves pertaining to literary analysis essays with a checklist developed and validated by Uzun (2016) within the same context. The checklist is a dichotomous one, having 14 items, each one referring to a single rhetorical move within a literary analysis essay. The rhetorical move stated in an item is coded as 'Present' (1) if it exists in the essay and it is coded 'Absent' (0) if that particular move cannot be observed in the essay. Therefore, the highest possible score in the checklist is 14 and the lowest possible score is 0. Based on relevant literature, the items are grouped under 3 subheadings as 'Thesis', 'Argument' and 'Conclusion'. In general, the checklist assesses if a literary analysis essay begins with the background information related to a given literary work, continues with a thesis statement related to the essay prompt, elaborates on the thesis statement by providing relevant arguments and support from the text and consolidates the thesis by closing the essay. The instrument is reported to be a valid and reliable one with an I-CVI value ranging between .83 and 1.00, an S-CVI value of .95 and an interrater Kappa coefficient of $K = .72, p < .001$.

Upon determining their level of adherence to the genre, the essays were assessed once again, this time using the ESL Composition Profile developed by Jacob et al. (1981). The ESL Composition Profile is a widely cited, valid and reliable analytical rubric which is used to assess writing performance. The rubric is considered to be one of the best scoring procedures of ESL writing that is known and suitable especially for non-native speakers of English (Hamps-Lyons, 1990). The rubric is divided into five components, each one taking up a different percentage of the total score, as content (30%), organization (20%), vocabulary (20%), language use (25%) and mechanics (5%). From these components, content is used to assess the linguistic features of the text and organization is related to the way the writer of a text presents and supports ideas. Vocabulary, on the other hand, deals with the range and complexity of the words chosen by the writer. Language use component is the part of the rubric where grammatical and syntactical accuracy is assessed and lastly, mechanics deal with spelling and punctuation. The highest possible score in the rubric is 100.

To ensure that the essays were scored consistently, 30% of the corpus were re-scored by the researcher three weeks after the first scoring and Interclass Correlation Coefficients were calculated for both sets of scores for each instrument. The results of the analyses indicated that the scoring procedure for ESL Composition Profile had a high level of intrarater reliability, producing an average measure Interclass Correlation Coefficient of .951 with a confidence interval of 95% from .797 to .989 ($F(8,8) = 19.997, p < .001$). Checklist scores were also found to have a high level of reliability with an average measure

Interclass Correlation Coefficient of .955 with a confidence interval of 95% from .805 to .990 ($F(8,8)=25.533, p < .001$).

For the analysis of the data, data distribution was first investigated with Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests on both instruments and the components within the ESL Composition Profile. The results revealed that the Checklist ($K-S = .13, df = 30, p > .05$), ESL Composition Profile ($K-S = .11, df = 30, p > .05$), Vocabulary ($K-S = .16, df = 30, p > .05$) and Content ($K-S = .14, df = 30, p > .05$) scores were distributed normally. On the other hand, Organization ($K-S = .31, df = 30, p < .001$), Language Use ($K-S = .26, df = 30, p < .001$) and Mechanics ($K-S = .30, df = 30, p < .001$) scores were found to have non-normal distributions.

For data analysis, frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviation values were produced for the scores related to the literary analysis essay checklist and ESL Composition Profile, including its components. The essays were then grouped according to their checklist scores. The scores ranging from 0 to 4 were grouped as 'Low' ($n = 8$), those ranging from 5 to 9 were grouped as 'Mid' ($n = 12$) and the scores from 10 to 14 were grouped as 'High' ($n = 10$) adherence to the genre conventions of the literary analysis essay. Since group sizes were too small to conduct parametric analyses for comparison purposes, a Kruskal-Wallis test was administered to see if groups differed from each other in their ESL Composition Profile scores. Mann-Whitney U tests were used to see which groups significantly differed from one another. Taking the normality of distribution into account, Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation analysis was used in order to test the relationships among the Checklist, ESL Composition Profile, Vocabulary and Content Scores. For Organization, Language Use and Mechanics scores, Spearman's Rank Order Correlation coefficients were computed since these components were non-normally distributed. The effect size for the Kruskal-Wallis was calculated as the eta squared value, produced with the formula $\eta^2_H = H - k + 1 / n - k$, where H is the Chi-Square value, k is the number of groups and n is the number of cases in the sample. The effect sizes for the Mann-Whitney U tests were computed with the $r = Z / \sqrt{N}$ formula and R-Squared values were calculated for the effect sizes of correlational findings.

5. FINDINGS

Table 1 Mean Essay Scores for the Checklist and ESL Composition Profile ($n = 30$)

Instrument	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Checklist	.00	14.00	7.07	4.22
ESL Composition Profile	34.00	95.00	67.90	16.60

The scores for the literary analysis essays used in the present study are presented in Table 1. In the table, it can be seen that the minimum score in the checklist is 0 and the maximum score is 14.00. The mean checklist score is 7.07 ($SD = 4.22$). Furthermore, it is seen in the table that the minimum score taken from ESL Composition Profile is 34.00 and the maximum score from the same instrument is 95.00. The mean score in the ESL Composition Profile is 67.90 ($SD = 16.60$).

Table 2 Mean Scores in the Components of ESL Composition Profile (n = 30)

Component	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Content	13.00	30.00	20.57	5.78
Organization	7.00	20.00	12.33	4.12
Vocabulary	7.00	20.00	14.10	3.47
Language Use	5.00	23.00	16.97	4.54
Mechanics	2.00	5.00	3.93	.91

Table 2 displays the mean scores for the literary analysis essays among the components of ESL Composition Profile. As seen in the table, the Content component of the instrument has a minimum score of 13.00 and a maximum score of 30.00 ($M = 20.57$, $SD = 5.78$). Organization component, on the other hand, has a minimum score of 7.00 and a maximum score of 20.00 ($M = 12.33$, $SD = 4.12$). The minimum score for the Vocabulary component of ESL Composition Profile is 7.00 and the maximum score for the same component is 20.00 ($M = 14.10$, $SD = 3.47$). The component of Language Use reveals a minimum score of 5.00 and a maximum score of 23.00 ($M = 16.97$, $SD = 4.54$). The last component of the instrument, mechanics, has a minimum score of 2.00 and a maximum score of 5.00 ($M = 3.93$, $SD = .91$).

Table 3 Mean Scores for the Checklist and ESL Composition Profile according to Groups Based on Checklist Scores

Group	<i>n</i>	Instrument	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Low	8	Checklist	.00	4.00	2.00	1.31
		ESL CP	34.00	68.00	51.00	12.14
Mid	12	Checklist	5.00	9.00	6.25	1.42
		ESL CP	53.00	80.00	65.42	8.80
High	10	Checklist	10.00	14.00	12.10	1.29
		ESL CP	69.00	95.00	84.40	10.66

In Table 3, it can be seen that the mean checklist score for the low-scoring group in writing literary analysis essays is 2.00 ($SD = 1.31$) and the mid-scoring group has a mean score of 6.25 ($SD = 1.42$) in the same instrument. The group which demonstrates high scores in literary analysis essays, on the other hand, has a mean checklist score of 12.10 ($SD = 1.29$). In the same order of low, mid and high score groups, the mean values are 51.00 ($SD = 12.14$), 65.42 ($SD = 8.80$) and 84.40 ($SD = 10.66$) in ESL Composition Profile scores.

Table 4 Kruskal-Wallis Results for the Comparison of Groups based on Checklist Scores According to their ESL Composition Profile Scores

Group	<i>n</i>	Mean Rank	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Direction of Differences
Low (A)	8	6.38	53.00	18.622	2	.000	C > B, $p = .002$
Mid (B)	12	14.33	67.00				C > A, $p < .001$
High (C)	10	24.20	90.00				B > A, $p = .011$

Table 4 shows the Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney U test results comparing the ESL Composition Profile scores according to the groups based on the scores taken from the checklist. The findings suggest that there is a statistically significant difference among the low, mid and high checklist score groups in their ESL Composition Profile Scores indicating a medium effect size ($H = 18.622, p < .001, \eta^2_H = .62$). Mann-Whitney U tests reveal that the group with the high checklist scores (Mdn = 90.00) has a significantly higher ESL Composition Profile score than the groups with the mid (Mdn = 67.00) ($Z = -3.107, p = .002, r = .57$) and the low (Mdn = 53.00) ($Z = -3.565, p < .001, r = .65$) checklist scores, both indicating medium effect sizes. The median for the ESL Composition Profile score in the mid checklist score group (Mdn = 67.00) is also significantly higher than the same value belonging to the low checklist score group (Mdn = 53.00) ($Z = -2.550, p = .011, r = .47$), indicating a medium effect size.

Table 5 Correlation Results between Checklist Scores and ESL Composition Profile

Instrument	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Pearson's <i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i> ²
Checklist	7.07	4.22			
ESL Composition Profile	67.90	16.60	.809	.000	.65

Results of the Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Analysis administered to check if there is a relationship between the checklist and ESL Composition Profile scores are tabulated in Table 5. According to the results of the correlation analysis, checklist scores and scores taken from the ESL Composition Profile have a strong and positive correlation which is statistically significant ($r = .809, p < .001, r^2 = .65$). The r^2 value of .65 indicates that the correlation coefficient explains 65% of the variance.

Table 6 Correlation Results among Checklist Scores and the Components of ESL Composition Profile

Instrument	Value	Content	Organization*	Vocabulary	Language Use*	Mechanics*
	<i>r</i>	.778	.773	.728	.610	.290
Checklist	<i>p</i>	.000	.000	.000	.000	.120
	<i>r</i> ²	.61	.60	.53	.37	.08

*: Spearman's *r* due to non-normal distribution

Table 6 displays the results of the Pearson's Product-Moment and Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Analyses. According to the findings, checklist scores have strong, positive and statistically significant relationships with the content ($r = .778, p < .001, r^2 = .61$), organization ($r_s = .773, p < .001, r^2 = .60$) and vocabulary ($r = .728, p < .001, r^2 = .53$) components of ESL Composition Profile, explaining 61%, 60% and 53% of the variance respectively. Language Use component, on the other hand, has a moderate, positive and statistically significant relationship with the checklist scores, explaining 37% of the variance ($r_s = .610, p < .001, r^2 = .37$). Scores taken from the mechanics of writing component do not have a statistically significant relationship with the checklist scores according to the findings ($r_s = .290, p = .120, r^2 = .08$).

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The present study aims to find out if the level of genre knowledge has a relationship with writing performance including content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics of writing. The findings show that the essay group with the lowest level of adherence to the genre conventions of the literary analysis essay demonstrate the lowest writing performance and the group with the highest level of adherence perform the highest. The findings can be considered in line with those of Lu (2010) and Graham (2006), who also conclude that genre knowledge serves as an indicator of writing performance since there appears to be a parallel between the demonstration of genre knowledge through the use of rhetorical moves of the literary analysis essay and the scores taken from a rubric which is not genre-specific.

The findings also suggest that writing performance increases alongside genre knowledge with a strong correlation. Furthermore, it can be seen in the results of the component-specific correlation analyses that the performance related to the content, organization, vocabulary and language use in writing increases parallel to level of genre knowledge. According to Negretti and Kuteeva (2011), increasing the genre awareness of students results in an increased level of metacognitive writing awareness, providing them with an understanding of rhetorical moves, discourse communities and structuring texts taking the purpose of writing into account. The findings of the present study confirms this by disclosing that the essays which demonstrate a superior command of the genre show a better performance in other criteria related to writing quality, too.

Genre knowledge is also transferable from receptive to productive level, which is manifested through an increased awareness of audience and an increased performance in task fulfillment, task appropriacy, cohesion, organization, grammar and writing fluency (Yasuda, 2011). The findings presented in this study are in a similar vein, confirming the relationship between genre knowledge, content, organization, vocabulary and language use. Since genre knowledge also encompasses the knowledge of formal features or the lexicogrammatical conventions of a particular genre (Tardy, 2009), a high level of genre knowledge may also mean a higher level of mastery in the lexicogrammatical choices as well their use with respect to the genre to be produced. This may be accounting for the higher level of writing performance in the group with a higher level of genre knowledge as identified within the present study.

In short, genre knowledge appears to be related to writing performance as indicated in the content, organization, vocabulary and language use scores within the context of the present study. For that reason, increasing the level of genre awareness through exposing learners to various genres may have an enhancing effect on the discourse knowledge and lexicogrammatical choices, also allowing for more successful adherence to the communicative purposes of a particular genre (Byrnes et al., 2006). This enhancement may be achieved through Genre-Based Instruction adopting the English for Specific Purposes approach to genre, which concentrates on the analysis of rhetorical moves within particular genres to build genre knowledge, since this particular approach is suitable to teaching contexts due to its specific focus on the situatedness of genres in contexts (Hyland, 2007).

It should be noted that the conclusions reached within the context of the present study are limited to their own context, which is an English Literature course for second year ELT students where the means of demonstrating knowledge on behalf of students is primarily in written form. Moreover, the essays to be subject to analyses in the study

have been selected purposively to demonstrate varying levels of genre knowledge, therefore, different findings may be acquired if data sets belonging to intact groups are used for similar analyses.

REFERENCES

- Bawarshi, Anis. Beyond the genre fixation: A translingual perspective on genre. *College English*, 78(3), 243-249, 2016.
- Berkenkotter, Carol and Thomas N. Huckin. *Genre knowledge in disciplinary communication: Cognition/culture/power*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1995.
- Byrnes, Heidi, Cori Crane, Hiram H. Maxim and Katherine A. Sprang. Taking text to task: Issues and choices in curriculum construction. *ITL-International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 152(2006), 85–109, 2006.
- Chenoweth, Ann N. and John R. Hayes. The inner voice in writing. *Written communication*, 20, 99-118, 2003.
- Creswell, John W. *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill, 2003.
- Graham, Steve. Writing. In Patricia A. Alexander and Philip H. Winne (Eds.), *Handbook of educational psychology*, 457–478. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2006.
- Hamp-Lyons, Liz. Second Language Writing Assessment. In Barbara Kroll (Ed.) *Second Language Writing: Research insights for the classroom*. Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Hoogeveen, Mariette and Amos van Gelderen. Effects of peer response using genre knowledge on writing quality. *The elementary school journal*, 116(2), 265-290, 2015.
- Hyland, Ken. Genre pedagogy: Language, literacy and L2 writing instruction. *Journal of second language writing*, 16(3), 148-164, 2007.
- Hyland, Ken. *Academic discourse*. London: Continuum, 2009.
- Hyland, Ken. English for professional academic purposes: Writing for scholarly publication. In Diane Belcher (Ed.), *English for specific purposes in theory and practice*, 83–105. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010.
- Johns, Ann M. *Genre in the classroom: Multiple perspectives*. Lawrence Erlbaum: Mahwah, NJ, 2002.
- Lu, Yanbin. Cognitive factors contributing to Chinese EFL learners' L2 writing performance in timed essay writing. *Applied Linguistics and English as a Second Language Dissertations*. Paper 13, 2010.
- Negretti, Raffaella and Maria Kuteeva. Fostering metacognitive genre awareness in L2 academic reading and writing: A case study of pre-service English teachers. *Journal of second language writing*, 20(2), 95-110, 2011.
- Olinghouse, Natalie G. and Joshua Wilson. The relationship between vocabulary and writing quality in three genres. *Reading and Writing*, 26(1), 45–65, 2013. doi:10.1007/s11145012-9392-5
- Olive, Thierry, Monik Favart, Caroline Beauvais and Lucie Beauvais. Children's cognitive effort and fluency in writing: Effects of genre and of handwriting automatisisation. *Learning and Instruction*, 19(4), 299–308, 2009. doi:10.1016/j.learninstruc.2008.05.005
- Swales, John. *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. CUP: Cambridge, UK, 1990.

- Tardy, Christine M. *Building genre knowledge*. Parlor Press: Indiana, 2009.
- Uzun, Kutay. Developing EAP skills through genre-based instruction: An action research. *The international journal of educational researchers*, 7(2), 25-38, 2016.
- Yasuda, Sachiko. Genre-based tasks in foreign language writing: Developing writers' genre awareness, linguistic knowledge, and writing competence. *Journal of second language writing*, 20(2), 111-133, 2011.