

The Effects of Writing Intervention Program on Foundation Level Students at Shinas College of Technology, Oman

Sarath W. Samaranayake

Shinas College of Technology/Department of English
Al-Aqr, Shinas, Sultanate of Oman

Joaquin Jr. Gabayno

Shinas College of Technology/Department of English
Al-Aqr, Shinas, Sultanate of Oman

Abstract

This paper reports the results of a pilot study that investigated the effects of the process genre approach on academic writing proficiency of the foundation level students at Shinas College of Technology, Oman during the third semester (April-July) of 2013. This study included an intervention program where the study group was taught using context-specific materials employing the process genre approach. The study consisted of a pretest, mid and final- semester examinations as research instruments. At the end of the study, data was analyzed using One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to determine whether the process genre approach had an impact on the performance of the study group in examination settings. The findings indicated statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) differences across the three tests; the pretest, the mid-semester and the final-semester examinations. Therefore, based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the context-specific materials delivered through the process genre approach are effective in enhancing students' academic writing proficiency that will help them perform better in examination settings in English Foreign Language (EFL) programs in the context of technological education in Oman.

Keywords: Academic writing proficiency, accuracy, composing, intervention, process genre approach

Introduction

Improving writing proficiency in learners who study English as a foreign or a second language has become one of the major concerns among the foreign language English writing instructors in contexts where students have had little or no experience with either their native or the target language as literate product of an educational system (Leki, 2001). Given the role that academic writing plays in Omani tertiary level education, it is mandatory for the students studying at the colleges of technology in the Sultanate of Oman to be proficient in academic writing skills (Al-Badwawi, 2009). Shinas College of Technology which falls under the purview of the Ministry of Manpower in Oman is one of the seven colleges, which conducts professional courses in Engineering, Business Studies and Information Technology leading to certificates and diplomas. It is mandatory for each student to acquire a satisfactory level of competence in all language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). Therefore, the students who are enrolled for a study program with the college of technology should first sit for a placement test in English and based on their scores, they are placed in groups regardless of their prospective specialization. The English Language Center (ELC) of the college conducts an English program for the freshmen in four levels (1, 2, 3, and 4) in order to develop their linguistic proficiency to meet the requirements of the Post-Foundation specializations.

Being English teachers in the foundation English program at the Department of English, Shinas College of Technology for the past two years, the researchers have observed that a majority of foundation students from all the four levels (Levels 1 to 4) demonstrates low performance in the college based mid-semester examination (MSE) and the final-semester (FSE) examination. Test result analysis performed for the quality assurance purposes of the college for the academic year 2013-2014 indicates that a considerable number of students from all the four levels (level 1 to 4) have received low marks for writing skill even though most of them have been able to perform well in other skills (reading, speaking and listening). Given the condition stated above, the current pilot study aims to address the academic writing issues experienced by foundation level students at Shinas College of Technology.

Research problem

As stated in the introduction, the Foundation Level English program at Shinas College of Technology lasts one semester (16 weeks) and during the semester foundation level students are required to sit for two examinations (MSE and FSE). This is to emphasize that level 1 and 2 students study general English while level 3 and 4 students need to study academic English which includes different types of descriptive writing. In the examinations, level 3 students are expected to be able to produce a well-thought out and organized paragraphs in line with the academic writing conventions. During the first and second semester in 2012-2013, the researchers taught writing skill for two different groups of level three students. Analysis of the tests results of mid semester and final term exams of 2013 (second semester) by the quality assurance unit of the college indicated that most of the students had not performed well in writing. In extreme cases, students wrote nothing and only copied the question on to the answer script. Other students had problems with content, organization and language use. It should be noted here that these students have studied English as a subject at school for almost ten years in addition to studying the writing course for one semester (16 weeks) at the college

Lack of writing proficiency in the target language constantly poses problem for foundation level students both in academic and social contexts. The students at Shinas College are from different majors such as Engineering, Business Studies and Information Technology and most of

them aspire to find a job after graduation while a few chooses to pursue their higher studies at a Higher College of Technology or a local university where degrees are awarded.

The low performance in writing skill in the college based examinations and other evidence from the classroom-based writing instruction suggest that writing needs to taught systematically to the foundation level students. If not, what students write does not conform to discourse and genre requirements demanded in academic writing. Therefore, given the problem described above, the researchers decided to conduct an intervention program on writing to foundation students (level-3) in which Process genre approach and context-specific materials were included in classroom instruction with the premise that the Process genre approach allows students to learn more effectively by exposing them to see writing as a process rather than a product (Badger & White, 2000). In other words, Process genre approach involves several stages such as pre-writing, planning, composing, revising, editing and producing a final draft.

Literature review

This section will focus on the relevant and important theories and pedagogical approaches in teaching writing to EFL learners. The crucial role that approaches to writing plays is explained in general and the process genre approach is explained in particular. Moreover, the effects of context-specific writing materials and the process genre approach in enhancing academic writing proficiency of EFL learners are described with reference to published literature and its relevance to the current pilot study.

The students at Shinas College of Technology are expected to master academic writing skills during their respective study programs such as Engineering, Information Technology and Business Studies. Even though there are different views of what constitutes academic writing, the general view held by most of the authors which the researchers reviewed is that academic writing displays students' understanding of an expository or argumentative topic and of writing conventions.

The responsibility of the writing teacher is to expose students to various writing strategies which include combinations of activities such as outlining, drafting, or free writing (Lavelle & Bushrow, 2007) based on their level of general and academic writing experience. Despite all the efforts that teachers exert in an EFL class to help learners achieve academic writing proficiency, "many learners never move beyond composing single sentences or perhaps paragraphs" (Williams, 2005, p. 1). In the next section, we will discuss why a condition of this nature prevails in many EFL academic writing contexts in general and Oman in particular by referring to generally accepted findings in second language (L2) acquisition research.

Model-based approach

The literature that describes the field of writing instruction suggests that teaching of writing was language focused in traditional teaching contexts and writing was used as a means of reinforcing language which had already been learned in spoken form. Therefore, the emphasis in writing instruction was on correctness. To produce a piece of writing that is correct, it was necessary to provide learners with a good model from a textbook (or from the teacher). This kind of instructional method is known as model-based or product approach in which the students were required to follow a procedure when they wanted to write. Students using the product approach are normally told to write an essay imitating a given pattern. Generally the focus of such writing is on the written product rather than on how the learner should approach the process of writing. Writing is viewed as "mainly concerned with the knowledge about the structure of language, and

writing development is mainly the result of the imitation of input, in the form of texts provided by the teacher” (Badger & White, 2000, p. 154). Model-based approach is therefore teacher-centered, as the teacher becomes the arbiter of the models used. Due to some weaknesses and limitations of the Model-based approach, Process approach emerged as a counter reaction to it (Yan, 2005).

Process approach

Writing is often referred to as composing because it emphasizes the importance of communication and the creative process that learners go through. Emphasizing why writing needs to be seen as a process rather than a product, Liebman-Kleine (1986, p. 785) argues that “process is not a dogma, but a concept that enables people to see writing in a new way and thereby ask questions that were not asked as long as people saw writing simply as finished products”.

The process approach movement began with studies about the composing process of writers (Emig, 1971; Perl, 1980) and resulted in informing students how to approach a writing task. Even though an effective piece of writing, or the product, is the ultimate aim for any writer, there are different methods or strategies available to reach the product stage. This was recognized by some composition teachers and researchers (Emig 1971; Hairston, 1982; Zamel 1983) and the traditional thinking about writing was questioned.

Most proponents of the process approach (Shih, 1986; Tessema, 2005; Williams, 2005; Yan, 2005; Zamel, 1983) agree that the number of stages can range from three to five such as prewriting (conceptualize/ think), drafting (first attempt), revising (improve on the first draft), proofreading (correct the text), publishing (Share the finished product). Several empirical studies that investigated the effects of process approach (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Urzua, 1987; Zamel, 1983) have found positive results.

Despite the wide recognition of the Process approach in EFL/ESL classrooms, it is not free from criticisms in that some authors argue that process-based instruction will give learners a false impression of what will be expected from them once they leave the classroom (Williams, 2005). Even though there are arguments against the process approach, one may think if ESL/EFL learners can improve their writing in L2 writing classes, it is most likely that they will be able to transfer these skills to other settings such as tests or examinations. However, given the weaknesses of Process approach, some authors began to argue that writing varies with the social context in which it is produced (Martin, 1993; Swales, 1990). As a result of the argument of the authors stated above, a new approach called Genre approach came into being. In the following section, we explain the Genre-based approach with reference to the literature that deals with it from different perspectives.

Genre-based approach

“Genre” refers not only to types of literary texts but also to the predictable and recurring patterns of everyday, academic and literary texts occurring within a particular culture (Hammond & Derewianka, 2001). A genre-based approach places great emphasis on the relationship between text-genres and their contexts (Hyon, 1996). In doing so, it aims to help students become effective participants in their academic and professional environment as well as in their broader communities (Hammond & Derewianka, 2001). However, limitations of the Genre approach led to the conclusion that using the genre approach exclusively might not be capable of making learners competent writers. Therefore, similar to the Product and Process approaches, the genre

approach has also been criticized by its opponents. Badger and White (2000) therefore, proposed a merger of the two approaches under discussion, hence the development of the Process-genre approach to the teaching of writing came into existence.

Process genre approach

From the theoretical perspective, a number of authors (Badger & White, 2000; Hyland, 2003) in L2 writing have called for the integration of process oriented and genre based approaches to teaching writing to students in L2 contexts. It was argued that writing is complex in nature and that writers require knowledge not only of linguistic features, but the process of writing and also the social context to produce successful texts (Archibald & Jeffery, 2000). In actual teaching situations, the L2 writing instructions are commonly a mixture of several approaches and teachers typically integrate the main elements into their practice (Hyland, 2003). From the theoretical viewpoint, instruction that combines key elements of process based and genre oriented approach should help students gain complex view of L2 writing, as the students should learn the necessary writing skills of planning, drafting, and revising the written drafts and gain explicit knowledge of linguistic features in relation to the social context (Badger & White, 2000).

The issue of skills dealing with the process of writing is addressed by the process approach, whilst the knowledge of social context and its influence on textual features is addressed by the genre based approach. By using an approach integrating process writing and genre, it is expected that students should gain the necessary knowledge of textual features, process of writing and social context to deal with writing as a complex activity. The students at Shinas College of Technology study Engineering, Information Technology and Business Studies and they are required to write project reports, business letters, job applications, advertisements and memos and to design and develop web-based materials. Therefore, the Process genre approach (PGA) seems relevant and important for the study context of the students at Shinas College.

Stages involved in process genre approach

Students must first recognize the recursive nature of the writing process. Even though the phases mentioned below are presented in a linear fashion, they are not necessarily meant to follow in the order suggested.

Pre-writing phase:

At this stage, students are supposed to become familiar with the genre and the relating conventions through direct instruction by the teacher or models they are provided with.

Composing:

In composing, students structure the ideas in meaningful sentences based on the conventions of the specific genre. Thus, students construct sentences and paragraphs, but, their ideas are hardly ever completely formulated before they write their first draft, therefore, they need to produce multiple drafts at this stage.

Re-reading and revising:

Once the first draft is completed or while students are still busy composing, they are encouraged to re-read their text firstly to determine whether their subject content matches the topic and what they intended to say (Shih, 1986).

Peer-editing:

Peer-editing means that students read each other's work, and then offer feedback on content, structure and grammar. Peer-editing is also a form of input, as discussion on content with other students might lead to the addition of ideas.

Teacher feedback:

The teacher should edit and evaluate the students' first draft once it is written, self-edited, peer-edited and revised, possibly re-written.

Arguments against the Process genre approach

It seems difficult to find concrete criticism against the use of the process genre approach in the literature about writing. This may be due to the fact that the process genre approach is a relatively new approach in teaching writing in ELT (Badger & White, 2000). Moreover, it has not been determined yet, whether the process genre approach helps students to write better and/or faster in examination settings. The assumption underlying the process genre approach is that if students are instructed based on genres and have had the opportunity to analyze and manipulate model examples, then they should be able to compose more effectively in an examination setting. However, it was not possible for the researchers to find any empirical studies that could corroborate the assumption that helps students to write better and faster in examination settings. A few studies summarized below give information on the effect of the process genre approach on students' writing skills.

Empirical evidence on Process genre approach in application

The studies reported below are similar to the current pilot study in some features such as research design and research questions. Chelli and Hassina (2012) investigated the effectiveness of the Process genre approach on EFL written productions of the first year students at Biskra University, Algeria. This research was conducted in order to confirm or reject the hypothesis that the implementation of the process genre approach would bring positive results in the students' EFL written productions. The experimental group which consisted of 40 students was taught using the PGA while the control group which consisted of a similar number that of the experimental group was instructed through the Product approach. At the end of the study, writings were evaluated in terms of fluency, accuracy and complexity using T-Unit as a measure of analysis. The findings related to fluency revealed that the control group recorded a slight increase in the means score from pretest to posttest (12.56 to 13.17) with a difference of 0.61 while the experimental group increased significantly from pretest to posttest (12.17 to 17.81) with a difference of 5.64. All in all, given the findings of this study, researchers state that the Process genre approach can help EFL students develop their writing competence better than the Product approach.

Nordin, Halib, and Ghazali (2010) conducted a study at the University TeknologiPetronas, Malaysia to investigate the effect of the process genre approach on the writing skills of engineering students. The experimental group received writing instruction based on the Process genre approach while the control group was taught through the Genre approach. The findings of the study indicated that the writing ability of students in the experimental group was significantly better than those in the control group. A school-based study conducted in Indonesia by Nihayah (2009) reported that after the implementation of the Process genre approach, her students' writing ability had improved. The researcher provides statistical evidence in her study to support

the positive effects of the Process genre approach in improving writing ability of the students. In an attempt to enhance the writing ability of foundation level undergraduate students in a Malaysian International University, Jackson (2012) employed Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) combined with the Process genre approach and the researcher concluded that the use of CLIL combined with process genre approach was effective in enhancing academic writing skills of tertiary level EFL/ESL students.

It should specifically be noted that, to the best of our knowledge,- no studies have been conducted in the Omani context on the application of the Process or the Process genre approach. The studies described above, which were mainly conducted in different teaching contexts, suggest that the Process approach and Process genre approach are beneficial in improving academic writing skills of students who study English either as a second or a foreign language. Therefore, given the findings of the studies stated above, the researchers believe that application of process genre approach in academic writing class would be more beneficial to our students whose linguistic needs are specifically linked to different genres.

Given all the theoretical, empirical and pedagogical underpinnings of different writing approaches, their strengths and weaknesses and the success of previous studies on the use of process genre approach in the EFL/ESL classroom situations as described above, the researchers employed process genre approach in their pilot study to investigate its effect on learners' academic writing proficiency in the context of Oman technological education.

In an attempt to engage with the research problem stated above, the researchers formulated the following research question and the hypothesis.

Research questions

Does the application of the process genre approach and context-specific materials in writing interventions help tertiary level EFL students perform better in an examination setting?

Research hypothesis

The application of the process genre approach and context-specific materials in writing interventions help tertiary level EFL students perform better in an examination setting.

Materials used in the study

As discussed earlier, the majority of students in the foundation program at Shinas College of Technology were not proficient in academic writing in the target language even though they had studied English in schools for several years and at the college for several months. The researchers hypothesized that their students' academic writing proficiency could be developed by using context-specific materials delivered through the process genre approach since this approach involves several stages which follow each other.

Instructional materials in any given language program play a very important role and is generally considered the second most important factor in EFL classrooms after the teacher (Riazi, 2003). Given the pedagogical value of materials as indicated by Riazi (2003), the researchers used context-specific materials with the premise that they help learners improve their academic writing proficiency. Based on the course outline for level 3 students in our institution, the researchers prepared teaching materials in which they followed a specific order for each writing topic to be covered in a given semester.

Contextually-developed materials

Since the main objective of our pilot study was to investigate the effects of a process genre approach in developing writing proficiency that will help students to perform better in an examination setting, the researchers developed extra materials because the writing tasks suggested in the prescribed textbook- *Ready to write: perfecting paragraphs fourth Ed*, by Blanchard and Root (2010) which is used in level three were not adequate to provide students with ample opportunities in writing practice. Both psychological theories of skill acquisition and second language acquisition theories suggest that considerable practice is required to automatize a skill (DeKeyser, 2007). Moreover, practice in writing improves performance in writing. Therefore, given the theoretical underpinnings and the research evidence from studies conducted into skill acquisition by a number of researchers (Anderson, Fincham, & Douglass, 1997), the extra writing activities the researchers developed and used with the study group were consistent with Ortega's (2007) model for the design of activities. In his model, he proposes that the following two principles should be considered when designing activities for EFL learners to practice in class:

1. Practice should be interactive.
2. Practice should be meaningful.

When applied to writing, Ortega's model implies that teachers should design interactive activities in which the writing teacher exposes his students to various writing strategies such as outlining, drafting, or free writing (Lavelle & Bushrow, 2007; Spack, 1988). The topics for developing modules were selected from the prescribed textbook-*Ready to write: perfecting paragraphs* by Blanchard and Root (2010). Based on the delivery plan issued by the English Language Center in our institution for level 3 writing, the researchers prepared extra tasks for the topics stated below:

1. Getting organized: The key to good writing.
2. Understanding paragraphs.
3. Expressing your opinion.
4. Comparing and contrasting.
5. Writing personal and business letters.
6. Description and comparison: Bar graphs
7. Analyzing causes and effects
8. Writing personal and business letters

In designing academic writing tasks, the researchers followed a process genre approach by including the stages such as pre-writing, composing, pre-reading and revising, peer-editing and teacher feedback. Moreover, the researchers maintained the principles stated above such as providing context to the learner in a meaningful way, providing forms and functions relevant to the activities, and making the content of the activity related to different kinds of writing such as comparing and contrasting, expressing an opinion, analyzing data and personal and business letters.

Methodology

As noted above, given the writing difficulties encountered by the foundation level students studying in level three at Shinas College of Technology, a pilot study was conducted to investigate the effects teaching materials for instruction of writing in and EFL context, using the Process genre approach. In this study, a quantitative research framework was used because the researchers needed a research design that would enable them to detect the effects of a specific

intervention. Moreover, the statistical tests form a part of the design in that they will inform the researcher whether there were any statistically significant differences among the mean scores of the three tests conducted for the intervention group during the study (Nunan & Bailey, 2009). The research, according to Nunan and Bailey (2009) was one group pre-test post-test design in which no control group randomly selected and randomly assigned was included. The participants were 19 Omani college students who studied English in the Foundation English program-Level 3 during the third semester of 2013 (April-July) at Shinas College of Technology in Oman.

The subjects for the study were selected from a level 3 Foundation English program because the students had already completed their studies at level one and two (where they had received instruction in listening, speaking, reading and writing). Therefore, it was assumed that the participants in the intervention group had already acquired the basics of writing. It should be noted that in Foundation level (Levels 1 and 2), students are exposed to general English where they are expected to study the basics of writing paragraphs, whereas level three, four and Post Foundation students are taught academic writing in which they are required to write texts belonging to various types of genres such as writing personal and business letters, compare and contrast essays, analyzing causes and effects, explaining a process, describing graphs and charts and expressing opinions.

The study lasted for 9 weeks with a total of 54 hours classroom instruction. The study employed four research instruments such as pretest, mid-semester examination, semester-end examination (Level Exit Examination) and the treatment instrument to gather data. A pretest on writing was administered for the study group to measure their writing proficiency before any instruction began. At level two, they study writing different types of paragraphs in which they are required to include a topic sentence, supporting ideas and a conclusion. Therefore, it was assumed that the intervention group had already studied the mechanics of writing a paragraph. On the first day of the class, the researchers administered the pretest and their answers were rated in accordance with the writing rubrics of the English Language Department and recorded in a paper for later analysis.

For the mid-semester examination which was held in May, 2013, the level 3 students were given a choice for writing. The students were instructed to select one question from the two questions. One question was meant to test students' ability to think critically, analyze and solve problems. Therefore, one question was based on expressing an opinion while the second question sought to test students' ability to write a business letter (writing a letter applying for a job).

Even though there were 20 students allocated for the pilot study group, one student left the course soon after the instruction commenced, so there were only 19 students in the class. Of the 19 students, except two, all the others wrote a letter applying for the job in the mid-semester examination. In accordance with the examination rules and regulations of the College, written answers are marked by two examiners and the average of the scores given by the two examiners is taken as the final marks.

Inter-rater reliability

After the two raters had evaluated the writing task in the final semester examination using the criteria stated above, an agreement between the two raters was calculated using Pearson's Product Moment ($r = 0.93$, $n=19$, $P < 0.01$). The statistics show that the general agreement between the two raters concerning writing scores of the study group subjects (19) was 0.93, which is a high agreement.

In the final-semester examination, the students had to answer two writing questions (guided-writing and free-writing). The allocation of marks for guided writing and free writing was 15 and 10 respectively. For guided writing, the students were required to write a compare-and-contrast paragraph of about 150 words while the free-writing question was based on a bar graph. The writing rubrics used in the semester-end examination included content, organization and vocabulary, use of transitional words, grammar and spelling. The five aspects were differently weighted for both free-writing and guided writing tasks. The content, organization and vocabulary and grammar and spelling were weighted equally (4 points) each, the use of transitional words received 3 points making a total of 15 points for the guided writing task while the same writing rubrics were used for rating the free-writing task in which the points were allocated as follows: Content, organization and vocabulary (3 points) each and use of transitional words, grammar and spelling (2 points) each making a total of 10 points. Given the two writing tasks which the students were required to write in the semester final examination, they could claim 25 marks for writing skill.

It should be noted that the writing rubrics used to score the writing tests conducted by the English Language Center of the college has four aspects namely content, organization and vocabulary, use of transitional words and grammar and spelling. The scoring of writing is highly subjective. Therefore, a standard writing scale should be used. The researchers propose the writing scale proposed by Jacobs, Wormuth, Zinkgraf, Harfiel, and Hughey, (1981) may be more appropriate than the present writing rubrics used in the center because the writing scales proposed by Jacobs, et al (1981) includes five aspects namely content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics.

Data analysis

With the help of SPSS statistical software, One-Way ANOVA was performed using the three data sets (scores from pretest, mid-semester and final-semester examinations) which the researchers had obtained from the study group during the study and the results of the ANOVA is indicated in the Tables 1 and 2 below. According the descriptive statistics of ANOVA summary included in Table 2, F -value (29.19) and the p-value (0.001) are high across the three set of scores (pretest, Mid-semester and Final-semester examinations). Therefore, it can be considered this kind of significance is due to the treatment effects where the study group was taught using context-specific materials through the process genre approach (independent variable).

Table 1 and 2 below indicate descriptive statistics calculated from the test scores of the pilot study group (N=19) using the One-Way ANOVA test.

Table 1: Descriptive results of the ANOVA test performed on pretest, mid and final-semester examinations of the pilot study group (N=19).

	Pretest	Mid-semester Exam	Final Semester Exam	Total
N	19	19	19	57
$\sum X$	178	241.5	302	721.5
Means	9.36	12.71	15.89	12.65
$\sum X^2$	1726	3220.75	4965	9911.75
Variance	3.24	8.39	9.15	13.91
Std. Dev.	1.80	2.89	3.02	3.72
Std. Err.	0.41	0.66	0.69	0.49

Table 2: ANOVA Summary

	Sum of Squares (SS)	Degree of freedom (df)	Mean squares (ms)	F-value	P-value
Between groups	404.71	2	202.35	29.19	<.0001
Error	374.36	54	6.93		
Total	779.09	56			

Findings and discussion of the results obtained from the study group

This section presents and discusses the collected data from the study group and interprets these results in the light of previous research.

As indicated earlier, the main objective of the current study was to investigate the effects of the process genre approach in enhancing writing proficiency that will help foundation level students to perform better in examination settings. On applying the concepts relating to the descriptive statistics such as measures of central tendency and variability, in order to answer the question the researchers posed, “Does the application of the process genre approach and context specific materials in writing intervention help tertiary level EFL students perform better in an examination setting?”, One-Way (ANOVA) was used to analyze the interval data gathered from pretest, mid and final semester examinations. The ‘SPSS 11.0 (2010)’ statistical package was used for all the data calculations in the study.

Table 1 and 2 above indicate the descriptive statistics calculated from the scores obtained from pretest, mid-semester and final semester examinations. At the outset, it should be noted that the mid-semester and final semester examinations for Foundation level students are designed, moderated and conducted by the testing unit of the English Language Department. However, the pretest in the study was designed and conducted by the researchers and it was marked by two raters from the English Language Department of the college.

In language research, measures of frequency are used to indicate how often a particular behavior occurs (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Therefore, in second language research, frequencies and measures of central tendency provide a summary of the basic characteristic of the data. The most common measure of central tendency is the mean which provides information on the average performance of a group on given tasks, and helps the researcher obtain insight by condensing a large amount of data (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989). Even though the mean does not provide information on the performance of each individual on a given task, the mean informs a researcher how a group as a whole performed on a given task. As shown in Table 1 above, according the descriptive statistics, the difference of mean scores and standard deviations across the three tests (pretest, mid-semester and final) on writing performance of the study group in the final semester examination is statistically significant at ($\alpha = 0.05$). This is to emphasize that the study group performed much better from the pretest (M=9.36, SD=1.80) to Mid-semester examination (M=12.71, SD=2.89) with a mean difference of 3.35 within the group and also from Mid-semester (M=12.71, SD=2.89) to Final semester (M=15.89, SD=3.02) with a mean

difference of 3.15. When compared the mean scores of the pretest (M=9.36) to the Final-semester examination (M=15.89) of the study group, the mean difference is 6.53 which is significantly a higher value which clearly testify that the study group made a significant progress in writing from pretest to the final-semester examination. In other words, according to, One-Way ANOVA summary in Table 2, F -value (29.19) and the P-value (0.0001) are higher across the three sets of scores (pretest, Mid-semester and Final-semester examinations). F-ratio tells us measured differences within groups and measured differences between groups (Nunan & Bailey, 2009). Therefore, it can be considered that this kind of significance is due to the treatment where the pilot study group was taught using context-specific materials through process genre approach (independent variable).

When the results of a study are analyzed quantitatively, statistical significance of data indicates that findings of that research are stable. Therefore, given the description provided by Nunan and Bailey (2009), findings of our study related to the research question as stated above can be reliable. Moreover, given the higher value of F- (29.19) in the study group, it is evident that the average performance of the individual subjects on writing had improved from the pretest to the Final-semester examination.

Based on the findings of the study group which was taught using the process genre approach, it can be asserted that instructional procedure which consisted of teacher prepared materials in addition to the use of the prescribed textbook (*Ready to Write-2*) and the process genre approach were useful for the foundation level students at Shinas College to perform better in the Final-semester examination than in the pretest and Mid-semester examination. Given the success of the instructional procedure as discussed above, it can be concluded that the hypothesis which the researchers had formed at the beginning of the study in an attempt to answer the research question, “The application of the process genre approach and context-specific materials in writing interventions help tertiary level EFL students perform better in an examination setting”, can be accepted.

Limitations and delimitation of the study

As noted above, the current study did not deal with other language proficiencies such as speaking, listening and reading even though they are also important aspects of language proficiency. This study focuses on academic writing proficiency because it will allow us to gain an understanding of the usefulness of applying the process genre approach to improve writing proficiency of EFL college level students who are the focus in this pilot study. Moreover, the outcomes of this study cannot be generalized to learners who are not cognitively mature enough to carry out the writing tasks suggested in the prescribed textbook for Foundation level 3 students and whose educational level is different from the subjects in the current study even though they study academic writing in similar situations and levels at other educational institutions both in and outside of Oman.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has presented the findings of a pilot study based on the quantitative data gathered during the study. The major findings of the study include the results of comparing writing performance in the pretest, Mid-semester and Final-semester examinations within the study group. On the whole, given the values of F (29.19) and P (0.001) calculated using One-Way (ANOVA) indicated that the study group which was instructed using the Process genre approach in writing had performed better in the Final-semester examination than in the pretest

and the Mid-semester examination. Therefore, given the results that emerged from this study, it can be stated that the instructional tools which included the contextually-developed materials and the process genre approach were useful in helping foundation level students studying academic writing programs in Omani Colleges of Technology to perform better in examination settings.

About the Authors:

Sarath W. Samaranayake is an English Lecturer at Shinas College of Technology. He holds an MA in TESOL from the University of South Africa. Currently, he is pursuing his doctoral studies at the same university. His professional background includes ESL/EFL teaching in schools, technological institutions and universities in several countries (Sri Lanka, Republic of Maldives, Thailand and Oman). He is the author of *A new dimension to Role-plays: Real-World Activities for EFL learners*. His research interests are in EFL pedagogy and second language acquisition.

Dr. Joaquin Jr. Gabayno is a seasoned educator with a Doctoral degree in Education in Curriculum & Supervision, MA in Educational Administration, BSE in English, and Certificate in TESOL. He has taught in colleges and universities in several countries (Philippines, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, and Sultanate of Oman). His research interests include trends in education and teaching strategies and methodologies. Dr. Gabayno is an English Lecturer at the English Language Centre of Shinas College of Technology, Sultanate of Oman and he is currently heading the Quality Assurance Committee at the ELC.

References

- Al-Badwawi, H. S. Q. (2011). *The Perceptions and Practices of First Year Students' Academic Writing at the Colleges of Applied Sciences in Oman*. PhD diss., University of Leeds.
- Anderson, J. R., Fincham, J. M., & Douglass, S. (1997). The role of examples and rules in the acquisition of a cognitive skill. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: learning Memory and Cognition*, 23 (4), 932-45.
- Archibald, A., & Jeffery, G. C. (2000). Second language acquisition and writing: A Multi-disciplinary, approach. *Learning and Instruction*, 10, 1-11.
- Badger, R., & White, G. (2000). A process genre approach to teaching writing. *ELT Journal*, 54 (2), 153-160. Oxford University Press.
- Blanchard, K., & Root, C. (2010). *Ready to Write: Perfecting paragraphs* (4th Ed.). Pearson Education, Inc.
- Carstens, A. (2011). Meaning-making in academic writing: A comparative analysis of pre- and post-intervention essays, *Language Matters: Studies in the Languages of Africa*, 42 (1), 3-21.
- DeKeyser, R. M. (2007). *Practice in a Second Language: Perspectives from Applied Linguistics and Cognitive Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Emig, J. (1971). *The composing processes of twelfth graders*. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Flower, L. S., & Hayes, J. R. (1981). A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing. *College Composition and Writing*, 32 (4), 365-387.
- Hairston, M. (1982). *The Winds of Change: Thomas Kuhn and the Revolution in the Teaching of*

- Writing. *College Composition and Communication*, 33 (1), 76-88.
- Hammond, J., & Derewianka, B. (2001). Genre. In R. Carter & D. Nunan (Eds). *The Cambridge Guide to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hyon, S. (1996). Genre in Three Traditions: Implications for ESL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 30, 693-732.
- Hyland, K. (2003). *Second Language Writing*. Cambridge university press: Cambridge.
- Jacobs, H. L., Zinkgraf, S.A., Wormouth, D.R., Hartfiel, V. F., & Hughey, J. B. (1981). *Testing ESL composition: A practical approach*. Rowely, MA: Newbury House. Knoch
- Kim, M.S. (2007). Genre-Based Approach to Teaching Writing. Hawaii Pacific University. Retrieved April 30, 2013, from: http://web1.hpu.edu/images/GraduateStudies/TELS_WP5/07Kim_Genre_a17238.pd
- Lavelle, E., & Bushrow, K. (2007). Writing approaches of graduate students. *Educational Psychology*, 27 (6), 807-822.
- Leki, I. (2001). Material, Educational and Ideological Challenges of Teaching EFL Writing at the Turn of the Century. *International Journal of English Studies*, 1 (2), 197-209.
- Liebman-Kleine, J. (1986). Two Commentaries on Daniel M. Horowitz's "Process, Not Product: Less Than Meets the Eye": In Defense of Teaching Process in ESL Composition. *TESOL Quarterly*, 20 (4), 783-788.
- Martin. J. R. (1993). 'A contextual theory of language' in B. Cope and M. Kalantzis (Eds.). *The Powers of Literacy: A Genre Approach to Teaching Writing*. London: Falmer Press.
- Nihayah, A. (2009). *Implementing Process Genre Approach to develop students' writing ability at SMP Negeri 8 Malang*. (Unpublished master's dissertation). Malang State Univeristy, Malang. Indonesia.
- Nordin, S. M., Halib, M., & Ghazali, Z. (2010). The Dilemma of Second Language Writing Teachers in a Higher Learning Institution. *Review of Higher Education and Self-Learning*, 3 (6), 46-56.
- Nunan, D., & Bailey, K.M. (2009). *Exploring Second Language Classroom Research: A Comprehensive Guide*. Heinle. USA.
- Ortega, L. (2007). Meaningful L2 practice in foreign language classrooms: A cognitive-interactionist SLA perspective. In M. DeKeyser (Ed.), *Practice in a Second Language Perspectives from applied Linguistics and cognitive psychology* (pp. 180-207). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Plessis, K. D. (2012). *Action Research on the implementation of Writing Approaches to improve Academic Writing Skills of Namibian Foundation Programme students*. (Master dissertation, University of South Africa, 2012). Retrieved April 12, 2013, from <http://uir.unisa.ac.za/handle/10500/44>
- Perl, S. (1980). Understanding Composing. *College Composition and Communication*, 31(4), 363-369.
- Riazi, A. M. (2003). Methodology & Material design in Language teaching: Current perceptions and practices and their implications, *Anthology series 44* Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Center.
- Shih, M. (1986). Content-based Approaches to Teaching Academic Writing. *TESOL Quarterly*, 20 (4), 617-648.
- SPSS 11.0 [Software]. (2010). Retrieved April 10, 2013, from www.spss.com. Available at

www.spss.com

Swales, J. (1990). *Genre Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tessema, K.A. (2005). Stimulating Writing through Project-Based Tasks. *English Teaching Forum*, 43 (4), 22-28.

Urzua, C. (1987). "You Stopped Too Soon": Second Language children Composing and Revising, *TESOL Quarterly*, 21 (2), 279-303.

(<http://www.hct.edu.om/about/the-college>).

Williams, J. (2005). *Teaching writing in second and foreign language classrooms*. The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.

Yan, G. (2005). A Process Genre Model for Teaching Writing. *English Teaching Forum*, 43 (3). Retrieved April 24, 2013, from

<http://exchanges.state.gov/forum/vols/vol43/no3/p18.htm>

Zamel, V. (1983). The Composing Processes of Advanced ESL Students: Six Case Studies. *TESOL Quarterly*, 17 (2), 165-187.