

Genre-Based Instruction and the Development of Expository Writing in English

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Abstract

The study examined how genre-based instruction had an influence on Korean students' development of expository writing in English. The participants of the study were nine college students who took a composition course in the spring semester, 2011. They were taught how to write exposition based on the genre-based pedagogy. They were instructed on macro-level features, text structure and grammatical features of expository writing during the treatment. The participants' writings were collected before and after the treatment. The data were analyzed in terms of the length, text structure and grammatical features including modality, voice, and connectives. The results of analyses revealed that the genre-based instruction had a significant effect on Korean learners' development of writing abilities in terms of the growth of the text length, text structure and development, and appropriate use of grammatical devices. These findings suggest that genre-based instruction in writing can be an effective approach to help Korean learners of English improve their writing abilities.

Keywords

English writing, Genre-based instruction, expository writing

1 Introduction

The ability to effectively communicate ideas and information in written text has been highly required for English learners in the era of globalization. However, learning and improving English writing ability is one of the most challenging aspects of English language learning. In order to complete good writing in English, L2 writers need to have not only the knowledge of the language structures, topics, composing processes, but also understanding of the genre and the context of the writing. In this regard, genre-based instruction, which claims that there are certain conventions between language and the social environment and that those can be taught

in the classroom, can be an effective alternative to teaching of English writing.

However, so far little research has been done in using a genre-based approach to teaching of English writing in Korea (Lee, 2006; Ryu, 2006; Shim, 2005). Thus, the study took an aim to implement genre-based instruction to Korean college students and to examine how it affected their development of expository writing in English.

2 Genre-Based Instruction

Genre-based instruction in writing is based on the notion that individual writers produce their texts individually, but the texts always relate to a social context and to other texts (Knapp & Watkins, 2005). Thus, its focus goes beyond language structures, subject content, and composing processes and textual forms to see writing as a communication with readers in social environments. Attending to discourse and contextual aspects of language use, genre-based instruction is concerned with teaching learners how to use language patterns to accomplish coherent, purposeful writing.

Genre-based instruction largely draws on the theory of systemic functional linguistics. Michael Halliday is the foremost functional linguist who proposed the relationship between the use of language and the social environment. He asserted a systematic relationship between social context and text, noticing that the internal organization of language corresponds to the external context of situation.

Halliday (1985) argues that we have developed very specific ways of using language to accomplish our goals, so that texts are related to social contexts and to other texts. Thus, Genre is a socially recognized way of writing to achieve a specific purpose (Martin, 1992).

From this perspective of language and genre, genre-based instruction to writing draws on Vygotsky's (1996) Zone of Proximal Development, the area in which learners cannot perform independently but they can solve tasks with the

teacher's or peer's assistance to advance to a higher level of ability. According to the Vygotsky's theory, learning takes place from verbal interaction and task negotiation with a more proficient person, and the more proficient person or the teacher in class has a central role in scaffolding learners' development. So, genre-based instruction to writing puts a strong emphasis on an explicit teaching of grammar and text through supportive interaction between the learners and the teacher.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The participants were the nine college students who took the course, "English Expository Writing". They were 7 juniors and 2 seniors majoring in English. Their TOEIC scores ranged from 600 to 865.

Table 1: Participants' Gender and Proficiency

Participant	Gender	TOEIC
J	Female	810
P	Female	650
G	Male	800
C	Male	600
M	Male	775
N	Male	670
L	Female	865

3.2 Pedagogical Procedures

Feez's (1998) teaching-learning cycle was used to instruct participants how to write expository essays in English. The cycle draws on Vygotsky's views of zone of proximal development and collaborative learning with a view to helping students to enhance their confidence and competence enough to clearly and effectively write in English.

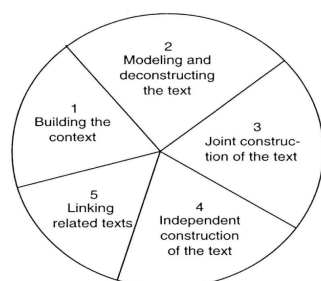


Figure 1: The teaching-learning Cycle

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Nine Participants were asked to write an essay about a specific topic before and after the genre-based instruction in English writing. However, 2 of them missed either pre or posttest, so

that 14 writings were collected for the analysis. Participants were to write an essay about "songs and foreign language learning" for the pre-writing test, and they wrote their views about "English-only classes" for the post-test writings.

The data were analyzed according to the following criteria. First, the length of writings was assessed by counting the number of words and clauses per text. Then, their writings were analyzed by generic features of expository writing: Genre and theme, text structure, rhetorical devices including the use of modality and voice. After that, textual aspects were analyzed, which concern the way that the text is held together, the way that sentences are structured and how sentences work with one another. In this study, the use of connectives and complex sentence structure were covered.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Length of Text

All the participants produced much longer texts after the genre-based writing treatment. The means of number of words rose from 173 to 333, while the means of number of clauses rose from 22 to 38. Considering that length in number of clauses rises with writers' development of writing skills (Berman & Katzenberger, 2004), the result of length of texts indicated the participants remarkably developed their writing abilities in expository production through the genre-based instruction.

Table 2: Number of Words and Clauses

Participant	Pre N.W	Post N.W	Pre N.C	Post N.C
J	223	360	28	42
P	185	221	26	30
G	80	351	11	44
C	58	168	10	19
M	393	618	43	58
N	89	215	13	28
L	180	395	20	42
Means	173	333	22	38

Note: N.W means the number of words per text.

N.C means the number of clauses per text.

4.2 Theme Development and Text Structure

Participants' texts were assessed by how well the theme of the writing and text structure were dealt with in the text based on the five ranks: excellent to very good (A), good to average (B), fair to poor (C), very poor (D), and inadequate (E). Table 3 shows the results of analyses of the texts

First the theme development of texts was examined. Most of participants stayed on the topic

in the pre-test writings, but their texts had little depth of argument and accurate detail to be persuasive. Only J and M managed to express their opinions consistently and appropriately through the texts, even though M began his writing with a long indirect introduction instead of explicit thesis statement. P began the text with her personal English learning experience in middle school and came to the conclusion without appropriate coherence of argument. Other writers showed considerable difficulties in maintain the theme in a coherent text.

On the other hand, they made a difference in the post-test writings, showing a depth of argument and some useful details. J, P, and C did not make a significant difference in terms of theme consistency of the writings even though their post writings displayed deeper argument with more detail than in pre-test writing. However, G made good progress, leaping from the level of little variety of argument and lack of detail to the one of some variety of argument and reasonably accurate details. N and L improved their texts much better than in the pre-test writings, arguing the topic in a consistent and coherent way. To my surprise, M's post-test writing comparatively degenerated to a lower level with indirect chaotic introduction and redundant argument.

Table 3: Theme Development and Text Structure

Participant	Theme		T-Structure	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
J	A	A	A	A
P	B	B	B	B+
G	C	B	C	B+
C	C	C	C	C+
M	A	B	A	A-
N	C	A	C	A
L	B	A	B	A

Let us consider the text structure. Six participants in pre-test writings began their writings with a clear thesis statement like "I think that songs are useful for foreign language", while one participant began the writing with his personal experience and then presentation of thesis statement. However, all the participants except one student wrote their thesis statement by coping or slightly modifying a part of the direction given to them in the writing task. Only 2 participants among 7 students in the pre-test writings, J and M, showed a kind of movement of introduction, argument and conclusion. For example, J displayed the well-organized expository text structure including a thesis, argument and conclusion, while other writers didn't develop their

arguments well despite the fact that they began with a thesis statement.

However, in the post-test writings, above all, most of participants wrote their own thesis statements, not from the direction given in the task. Three participants displayed a clear movement of introduction, argument and conclusion, while G used a more sophisticated discussion, presenting advantages and disadvantages of two different classes instead of following a typical text structure of expository writing. Compared with his pre-writing G's post-test writing manifested a great development of his writing skills. N simply lifted a part of direction given in the task to write his thesis statement and then gave no real development of his argument in the pre-test writing. However, in the post-test writing, he elicited a thesis statement through opening of introduction with the illustration of child acquisition of mother tongue. Afterwards, he supported his thesis with points and elaborations. On the other hand, M began his writing with a discursive description of the current situation of English education in Korea instead of starting with an explicit thesis statement. Such an opening off the point made his text hard to follow and his opinion hard to agree with.

4.3 Grammatical Features

The use of modality was analyzed first. Participants used 4 modalities on average in the pre-test writings, while they employed 9 times on average in the post-test writings. They didn't effectively use modal verbs, employing "can" and "will" most of the time in the pre-test writings, whereas they used a variety of modal verbs such as "may", "would", "should" in the post-test writings.

Table 4: Modalities and Connectives

Participant	Modalities		Connectives	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
J	3	3	9	13
P	3	6	6	13
G	1	11	6	13
C	2	5	4	8
M	15	19	20	21
N	1	9	8	11
L	4	11	11	15
Means	4	9	9	13.4

Learners used more connectives in the post-test writings than in the pre-test writings. In the pre-test writings participants exclusively used additive connectives, "and, but", and the causative connective "because". However, in the post-test writing, writers used more causative and

comparative connectives such as “however, consequently, therefore”.

The voice in their text was examined to see if the instruction had any effect on the choice of voice by the writer. In the pre-test writings, participants opened and closed their expositions using personal voice, *I think* or *we can*, while some participants changed from the first to the second voice, “you” in the argument stage like this:

If *you* listen to a pop song “Because of you”,
you can find some grammatical things.
 (From P’s first writing text)

Table 5: Use of Voice

Participant	Pre	Post
J	1-3-1	1-3
P	1-2-1	1-3
G	1	1-3
C	1-2	1
M	1	1-3
N	1	3
L	1	3

However, as shown in table 5, participants made distinctive use of impersonal voice instead of “I”, “you” in their post-writings. Almost all the texts were written by using the third voice, delivering the arguments in a more objective way. In particular, P and N expressed their opinions only by using impersonal voice rather than by using first person pronoun or second person pronoun unlike in their pre-test writings.

We are able to improve listening competence and learn various grammatical things. So *I* think songs are useful for learning foreign language.

(From N’s first writing)

Teachers in English-only class should consider student’s level and think they talk in English. *The English-only class* that is controlled by the student’s level can be more effective to teaching English.

(From N’s second writing)

5. Conclusion

The present study explored Korean college students’ development of expository writing in English through genre-based instruction. The findings showed that genre-based instruction developmentally contributed to improving the participants’ English writing abilities in terms of length, theme development, text structure, the use of rhetorical devices related to expository texts. Above all, a great growth in length of text was

found after the instruction. Considering genre-based instruction primarily focuses on the explicit instruction of genre-specific linguistic features, the remarkable increase in length of text in the study is an unexpected outcome. For theme and text structure, most of participants improved, but some participants did not make a positive change. It may be accounted for by their starting point. They already showed a higher ability to write exposition in the beginning. Nevertheless, their texts showed improvement in terms of other linguistic features. All the findings, put in perspective, strongly suggest that genre-based instruction can be an effective teaching way of writing to Korean learners of English.

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