

ENHANCING THE ENGLISH WRITING COMPETENCE OF EFL LEARNERS THROUGH A GENRE-BASED APPROACH WITH FEEDBACK

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Abstract

Two main objectives were addressed in this study: (1) to explore differences in students' ability to write an English job application letter before and after an intervention, and (2) to analyze the effectiveness of genre-based writing activities coupled with feedback. The sample comprised 30 EFL students in English for Hotel Business at Kasetsart University, Chalermphrakiat Sakon Nakhon Province Campus selected through purposive sampling.

Writing activities were conducted in accordance with a genre-based approach along with a writing proficiency test administered at pre- and post-intervention stages. Writing performance was rated according to an analytic rubric assessing 5 sections of the job application letter in terms of three sub-dimensions: content, organization, and language. Content validity of both instruments was tested with 3 expert judges leading to Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) of 0.93. Inter-rater reliability was very high (ICC = 0.87).

It was found that there was a significant difference between pre-test and post-test. Means of post-test ($M = 15.87$, $S.D. = 1.83$) exceeded those of pre-test ($M = 12.00$, $S.D. = 2.10$), $p < .001$. The effect size was very large (Cohen's $d = 1.96$). The students performed better in structured parts of the letter like

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Personal Details and organization, whereas the component of Experiences and Skills was somewhat deficient.

Therefore, genre-based writing activities along with feedback can effectively facilitate the development of EFL learners' English writing skills in particular context.

Keywords: genre-based approach, writing ability, job application letter, EFL learners, feedback

Introduction

With the development of globalization English is recognized as the international language of education and professional communication (Crystal, 2019; Jenkins, 2020). Thus, speaking of 21st century skills one should necessarily refer to language proficiency. Writing is generally perceived as the most complicated language skill as it implies not only knowledge of language but also its appropriate usage (Hyland, 2019).

English writing proficiency involves multiple factors such as grammatical correctness, coherence and cohesion, appropriateness and communicative competence (Richards, 2017). Moreover, this skill is highly important in professional context where students must demonstrate practical applications of knowledge. Yet, EFL students frequently experience problems in terms of linguistic accuracy and coherence due to lack of contact with real world and feedback (Lee, 2017).

Writing in English is rather difficult for EFL learners in Thailand although this topic is widely covered in curricula. Professional documents like job application letters raise some problems as students find difficulties in sentence constructions, content elaboration, and organization of their texts (Srichanyachon, 2012; Sermsook et al., 2017; Boonyarattanasoontorn, 2017). Difficulties appear to be even more pronounced in case of self-representation in English.

Some instructional strategies aimed at active participation of learners and authentic language use need to be developed in order to cope with these difficulties. Genre-based approach is an appropriate tool as it helps learners to understand linguistic and structural peculiarities of target texts (Hyland, 2019). Based on Systemic Functional Linguistics, genre-based instruction includes the stages of modeling, deconstruction, joint construction, and independent production (Hyland, 2019). Feedback plays a critical role in the process. According to the feedback literacy proposed by Carless and Boud (2018), the concept implies evaluation and revision of learners' works during the process of dialogue. Feedback is provided between drafts to help to revise their works focusing on content accuracy, organization, and language (Bitchener & Ferris, 2016).

There are a considerable number of studies devoted to development of second language writing ability; however, most of them are devoted to academic writing whereas professional writing receives much less attention. Job application letters are studied rarely in Thailand although purposeful, task-based activity design is essential for preparing learners for professional communication in real life (Nunan, 2004). This study attempts to explore the learners' competencies in writing English job application letters to develop this type of instruction in the EFL classroom.

Objectives

1. To compare students' competence in writing English job application letters before and after genre-based instruction with feedback.
2. To explore the effects of implementing genre-based writing exercises and feedback on students' competence in writing English job application letters.

Conceptual Framework

The current research combines genre-based pedagogy, writing process, and feedback-oriented instruction. The independent variable is the genre-based

writing instructional package for English job application letters. The dependent variable is students' writing competence including 5 sections of the letter- Heading and Objective, Personal Details, Education, Experiences and Skills, and References each of them being evaluated across 3 sub-dimensions- content, organization, and language.

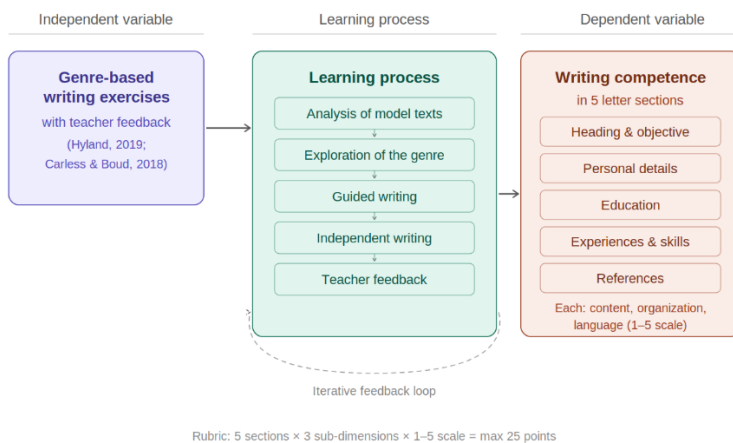


Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework

Research methodology

A pre-experimental design (one-group pretest-posttest) was used to estimate the effects of genre-based writing instruction and feedback on students' writing competence. The absence of control group should be considered as the limitation for establishing causality, which should be addressed in further research.

1. Population and Sample

All undergraduates studying English for Hotel Business at Kasetsart University, Chalermphrakiat Sakon Nakhon Province Campus in the first semester of 2023 comprise the population of this study (30 students). Purposive sampling was applied to select the sample from the course. All 30 students participated in pre- and post-tests providing the researchers with full data set without attrition.

Research Ethics

Ethics approval was provided by Kasetsart University (Approval No. KUREC-CSC65/026). All participants agreed to take part in the research.

2. Research Instructions

The instruments included 2 components:

1) Genre-Based Writing Exercises

The exercises were designed according to the principles of genre-based approach involving practice-based learning and feedback (Hyland, 2019).

The sequence of the instructions includes the following stages:

- Model texts analysis
- Genre exploration
- Guided writing
- Independent writing
- Feedback

These stages are incorporated into the cycle of teaching-and-construction as follows:

- Modeling
- Deconstruction
- Joint construction
- Independent construction

2) Writing Ability Test

A test of writing proficiency in English job application letters was developed. Students had to do a writing task in accordance with the scenario. Rating was conducted using analytic rubric measuring 5 sections of the letter- Heading and Objective, Personal Details, Education, Experiences and Skills, and References. Each section was assessed across 3 sub-dimensions- Content, Organization, and Language on a scale of 1 to 5 with weighted total score up to 25 points. Two evaluators independently scored the piece and then their

marks were averaged to minimize any bias. Feedback was provided between drafts (Bitchener & Ferris, 2016).

Both instruments were tested in terms of content validity by three expert judges. The values of IOC varied from 0.67 to 1.00 and the average IOC was 0.93 for writing exercises and writing test which indicates the high content validity. Inter-rater reliability was tested with ICC (0.87). A pilot test with 10 students who have the same characteristics as the target sample took place prior to conducting the main study. 90% of them managed to complete the tasks as required; small changes in instructions were made.

3. Collection of Data

Data collection was carried out in three phases: (1) pre-test to measure students' proficiency before the intervention, (2) 6-week long intervention involving genre-based writing activities (18 hours of instruction), and (3) post-test after the intervention.

4. Data Analysis

Data analysis was done using statistical software. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were calculated to characterize performance. Paired-samples t-test was used to compare pre- and post-test scores; Cohen's d was calculated to estimate the effect size. Final scores were taken as the means of 2 raters' ratings.

Results

Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Scores at post-test ($M = 15.87$, $S.D. = 1.83$) were considerably higher compared to those at pre-test ($M = 12.00$, $S.D. = 2.10$). It means that students became more proficient in English writing after the intervention. Also the standard deviation in post-test (1.83) was lower that indicated higher level of uniformity of performance. The effect size was very large (Cohen's $d = 1.96$).

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Test	N	Min	Max	M	S.D.
Pre-test	30	8.00	16.00	12.00	2.10
Post-test	30	11.00	19.00	15.87	1.83

Note. Scores are based on analytic rubric with a maximum total of 25 points.

As can be seen from the table, the mean scores increased from 12.00 to 15.87. Both minimum and maximum scores increased, indicating overall improvement in performance.

Analysis of Writing Components

The analysis of writing components resulted in the mean of 3.96 in each of them classified as Excellent. The highest means was achieved for Personal Details (M = 4.26) followed by Heading and Objective (M = 4.20). The lowest meaning was obtained for Experiences and Skills (M = 3.16) which was classified as Moderate and indicates difficulties with abstract, experience-based content.

Table 2 Writing Performance by Component

Component	Content	Organization	Language	M	Level
Heading and Objective	4.60	4.53	3.47	4.20	Excellent
Personal Details	4.67	4.60	3.50	4.26	Excellent
Education	4.50	4.53	3.43	4.16	Excellent
Experiences and Skills	3.37	3.20	2.90	3.16	Moderate
References	4.60	4.10	3.47	4.06	Excellent
Overall	4.34	4.19	3.35	3.96	Excellent

Note. Mean for each component was calculated based on Content, Organization, and Language. Each sub-dimension is scored on a scale of 1 to 5. The overall meaning equals the meaning across components.

Hypothesis Testing

Paired-samples t-test revealed a statistically significant increase in mean scores, $t(29) = -15.35$, $p < .001$. Mean difference was -3.87 (S.D. = 1.97) indicating higher post-test scores.

Table 3 Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Scores Using a Paired-Samples t-Test

Comparison	Mean Difference	S.D.	t	df	p
Pre-test – Post-test	-3.87	1.97	-15.35	29	< .001

Note. df = degrees of freedom. p-value based on two-tailed test.

Summary of Findings

The genre-based instructional package considerably and meaningfully improved students' English writing ability, which was proven by higher post-test scores, decrease in score variance, a large effect size, and high significance of results. Improvements took place in all components, and the highest increase was noted for Personal Details and structured parts. The component of Experiences and Skills has the largest potential for improvement, in particular, language use.

Discussion

Development of Writing Ability

Improvement from $M = 12.00$ (S.D. = 2.10) to $M = 15.87$ (S.D. = 1.83) conforms to the theory of second language acquisition according to which input, output, and feedback are the key mechanisms of language development (Ellis, 2016; Loewen & Sato, 2018; Swain, 1985). According to the Output Hypothesis of Swain the language production rather than comprehending is a mechanism that reveals the gap between present and target levels, which is reflected in the process of genre-based instruction involving deconstruction, joint construction, and independent production.

The reduction in standard deviation at post-test (S.D. 1.83 vs. 2.10) indicates not only higher level of achievement but also decreased variance in performance that speaks for effectiveness of the treatment for students of different proficiency levels. It corresponds to the claim of Hyland (2019) that explicit genre-based instruction creates a shared metalinguistic discourse that allows systematic analyzing of the target texts irrespective of learners' proficiency levels. Feedback literacy concept by Carless and Boud (2018) explains how iterative feedback process improves learners' capability to understand and apply evaluative information.

Differential Gains across Writing Components

The analysis of writing components shows that the highest scores were achieved in structured components like Personal Details ($M = 4.26$) and Heading and Objective ($M = 4.20$) while the lowest scores were achieved in Experiences and Skills ($M = 3.16$). This result reflects genre-based learning effectiveness when target structures are predictable and formulaic as it is in Personal Details and Heading (Hyland, 2019; Insuwan & Thongrin, 2025). Meanwhile, Experiences and Skills require language proficiency and narrative and evaluative skills which are more complicated for EFL learners (Ellis, 2016).

These results confirm the findings in Thai EFL writing research showing that elaboration of content and coherent representation of self are the persistent difficulties (Sermsook et al., 2017; Boonyarattanasoontorn, 2017). Low scores for language (mean = 3.35) show that genre knowledge was not entirely transferred to linguistic accuracy. This corresponds to the distinction between form-based and meaning-based instruction made by Ellis (2016): macro-level textual coherence can be considerably improved with genre-oriented instruction while micro-level grammatical accuracy needs explicit form instruction.

Practical Significance and Effect Size

The effect size reported in this study ($d = 1.96$) is very large; however, it should be treated carefully because single-group pre-experimental design is

able to distort the effect size in case of the absence of control group (Shadish et al., 2002). In the absence of control groups receiving standard instruction one should be careful making conclusions about contribution of genre-based pedagogy alone to the improvements. However, the consistency of improvements across all 5 writing aspects and high statistical significance ($t = -15.35$, $p < .001$) of the results support the benefits of this educational intervention within 6 weeks.

The findings of the study are consistent with previous research on genre-based writing of Thai EFL. According to Insuwan and Thongrin (2025) genre-based methods along with critical pedagogy improve university students' writing. Meanwhile, Boonyarattanasoontorn (2017) reports that content elaboration is a challenge for Thai EFL learners. Altogether, these results suggest genre-based instruction as the replicable and culture-appropriate approach to professional writing development in Thai universities.

Theoretical Implications

This study adds to theory in L2 writing instruction within EFL context by applying genre-based approach to professional English beyond academic writing, which is studied rather limitedly in Thailand (Hyland, 2019). The combination of Swain's Output Hypothesis and Hyland's genre cycle provides the theoretically sound explanation of sequenced writing instruction from analysis of texts to independent production reflecting professional demands of real world.

Moreover, this study adds empirical support to the theory of feedback literacy in EFL writing (Carless & Boud, 2018). Iterative feedback loops in the design of the study seem to help students internalize evaluative criteria as reflected in reduction in post-test score variability. Future theoretical studies should explore the interaction of feedback literacy and genre awareness in professional writing context and its possible variations depending on learner population.

Limitations

Several limitations should be mentioned. First, single-group pretest-posttest design is a restriction for establishment of causality in the absence of a control group. Second, the sample of 30 students from one course in one campus selected using purposive sampling restricts the possibility of generalization to other EFL populations or professional writing context. Third, writing proficiency was measured at one point after the intervention leaving the questions about persistence of gains. Fourth, although the inter-rater reliability was high ($ICC = 0.87$), the rubric was specially designed for job application letters which makes the question about its generalization to other professional texts. Finally, prior experience of learners with genre-based instruction and overall level of English proficiency were not controlled.

Conclusion

This study explored a genre-based instructional package with systematic feedback among Thai EFL students in professional English writing. 6 weeks of intervention lead to significant and practically meaningful increases in writing ability, especially in structuring the letter like personal information, headings, and organization. The component of Experiences and Skills showed somewhat limited progress, indicating the areas for improvement.

Overall, genre-based instruction along with recursive feedback appears to be theoretically grounded and efficient strategy for developing professional writing skills of EFL learners. The study adds empirical evidence to the increasing number of Thai literatures on genre-based teaching and its implementation in employment-related professional writing. Future research should employ stricter designs and larger samples to test the persistence and generalizability of these results.

Suggestions

Teaching Suggestions

1. The genre-based writing curriculum can be generalized to other EFL and ESP contexts, in particular, hospitality and business programs.
2. Additional attention should be paid to the component of Experiences and Skills using models, brainstorming, and self-reflection to produce the text.
3. Technological feedback mechanisms should be used, e.g. writing portfolios, online grammar tools, peer-review.
4. Structured feedback cycles should be implemented, providing feedback between drafts and requiring explicit response in revisions to develop feedback literacy (Carless & Boud, 2018) and reflective writers.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Future studies should apply quasi-experimental or randomized designs with a control group to make conclusions about genre pedagogy and professional writing development.
2. Larger sample sizes are recommended.
3. Longitudinal designs are needed to explore the persistence of gains and transfer of genre knowledge.
4. Comparative studies comparing genre pedagogy with process writing and task-based approaches in professional EFL writing context would be useful.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies

The author used ChatGPT (OpenAI) for language editing to improve the clarity and academic writing style of this paper. All AI-assisted content was reviewed and refined by the author, who takes full responsibility for all aspects of this publication.

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