



TEACHING VIETNAMESE UNDERGRADUATES' METHOD SECTION WRITING THROUGH PROCESS GENRE APPROACH

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Abstract

The main objective of this study is to find out whether the process genre approach is better than the product approach to teach method writing to university students in Vietnam. A non-equivalent control group experimental design with pretest and posttest was used to determine the effects of the research writing program on students' method writing ability in terms of the content, organization, language use, and mechanics use between the control group and experimental group. In the experiment, 65 participants (the third-year students, majoring in English) were placed into one experimental group (20 students) and one control group (45 students). Two groups were instructed by the same lecturer during one semester of 10 periods (theory, practice and assessment). The experimental group was required to receive the proposed research writing program based on the proposed model, whereas the control group received the existing program through the product approach. After the treatment, the results revealed a significant difference in the means of posttest scores on language use and mechanics use skills, except for content and organization in the method section. For this reason, we can conclude that the process genre approach positively affects language use and mechanics use skills, except for content and organization in the method section, compared to the product approach.

Keywords: process genre approach; product approach; method section; quasi-experiment design

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1. Introduction

Enhancing the efficacy of English language teaching and learning attracts a great deal of attention from researchers and society in different countries around the world, including Vietnam, which is due to the global acceptance of the role of English as an international language. The governments of non-English speaking countries, Vietnam included, have established a number of policies to improve the quality of EFL teaching and learning in their educational systems. In the literature, there have been many studies concerning teaching approaches of English academic writing, and in recent years, research on problems related to the development of academic writing skills has been carried out from different perspectives. A number of studies on writing teaching were conducted such as the effects of writing mode on pausing and revision patterns of experienced writers (Van Waes, L., & Schellens, P. J., 2003), the effects of genre analysis on research article introductions (Shim, 2005), improving EFL students' writing performance through text-based chat (Sharadgah, 2013), [improving L2 graduate students' academic writing in an academic writing course](#) (Rakedzon, T., & Baram-Tsabari, A., 2017), scaffolding the argument genre in a multilingual university history classroom (Pessoa, S., Mitchell, T. D., & Miller, R. T., 2018). More importantly, writing Methodology in research articles is also a challenging section. Fifty-five percent of papers hardly present methodology. Moreover, basic information on ethics, confidentiality, instrument creation, and sample selection is not mentioned. Therefore, the present study is an experimental research on the effects of the RPW program through the PGA on the teaching of method section writing. This section starts with an overall presentation of the background of the study. Main problems leading to the need to conduct this study are later addressed, and the study ends with the description of research objectives, research questions, and hypotheses.

1.1 Background of the Study

1.1.1 Curriculum, Program and Syllabus

This section aims to show the differences between the three terms, namely curriculum, program and syllabus. The curriculum is considered an overall guideline of a complete course in which the academic content is included based on the educational system to achieve the desired learning outcomes (Richards, 2013). It also refers to what is offered by the schools, colleges or universities, such as knowledge, attitude, behavior, manner, performance and skills. It also includes the teaching methods, lessons, assignments, activities, projects, study material, tutorials, presentations, assessment, test series and learning objectives (<http://keydifferences.com/difference-between-syllabus-and-curriculum.html#ixzz4ecN1aVHL>).

Curriculum development includes a wide range of processes of determining learners' needs to develop aims or objectives of a program, to determine an appropriate syllabus, course structure, teaching methods, and materials, as well as to carry out an evaluation of a language program (Richards, 2013).

Syllabus design is one of the major phases in the curriculum development to deal with the procedures of syllabus development (Richards & Schmidt, 2013). Nunan (1988) defines syllabus as the sub-component of a curriculum involving the selection, sequencing and justification of experiential and linguistic content and making a distinction between syllabus design and methodology. It is the documents, including a wide range of topics, general rules, policies, instructions, assignments, projects and test dates that are included in a particular subject. The examination board and the professors can design the syllabus. Especially, the lecturers must be responsible for the course quality.

Syllabus can be designed in hard copy or electronic form, which helps students know what they are going to learn and must acquire and know which knowledge and skills will be assessed (<http://keydifferences.com/difference-between-syllabus-and-curriculum.html#ixzz4ecN1aVHL>). Noticeably, the syllabus of language teaching has different criteria, such as items of grammar, vocabulary, language that are required for a wide range of situations and the meanings of different behaviors of language or text types that language learners need to master (Rogers, 2001). A syllabus will often contain a reading list of relevant books and articles that are compulsory or optional for students to read (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syllabus>). Flowerdew (2005) introduced three types of syllabus, namely task-based syllabus, text-based syllabus, and needs-based syllabus design.

A program is a plan or schedule of activities, procedures, etc. It is a brief printed outline of the order to be followed, of the features to be presented, and the persons who can participate.

1.2 Research Problem Statement

Adoption is defined as “*the process of choosing and selecting materials*”. It is not common to adopt materials without any modification (Marand, 2011, as cited in Navaitienè, 2015) because Cunningsworth (1984) states that the textbook seems to be a good servant but a poor master. Slightly different from adoption, Richards and Schmidt (2010) define adaptation as supplementing, modifying or deleting parts of a textbook or published sources in order to make them more suitable for particular groups of learners. It is, therefore, suggested that the existing materials should be adapted to match what students need and what the textbooks lack.

Clark (1989) provides five underlying principles for adaptation:

- 1) learner commitment,
- 2) learner as materials writer and collaborator,
- 3) learner as problem solver,
- 4) learner as knower rather than assimilator, and
- 5) learner as evaluator and assessor.

Choosing, developing or adapting materials to fit students' needs and level is not a simple step; therefore, it is suggested that the 'effectiveness' and 'appropriateness' of the materials are two main factors that must be considered before choosing, developing

or adapting materials (Graves, 1996). Gatbonton (1994) reveal two main problems or difficulties in developing teaching, instruction and materials, involving the availability of materials, the adoption and adaptation of materials to teaching activities. Although several practitioners (e.g., Grant, 1987) state that there are no perfect textbooks, there is potential to find the best ones that will be suitable for a particular group of learners.

Sikorova (2011) identifies three approaches to the use of textbooks, such as adhering, elaborating and creating. Adhering (or adopting) views the textbooks as the authority; thus, there are few or no adaptations. Elaborating refers to supplementing the textbooks with other resources. Creating involves developing textbooks. Madsen and Bowen (1978) have also added modernizing to this list, which refers to the process of updating materials to increase the relevance of content in relation to learners' interests and needs. Individualizing mentions the learning style of the individual and the members of a class working closely together. Localizing takes into account the international geography of English language teaching (as cited in McDonough & Shaw, 2003).

Compatible with adaptation, several scholars (e.g., Nation & Macalister, 2019) offer a list of reasons for doing adaptation. Nation and Macalister also give credit to the use of computers and the support of the internet in teaching. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), materials should provide a clear and coherent structure of units which will guide teachers and learners through various activities. They emphasize that materials should truly reflect what you think and feel about the learning process.

In teaching and evaluating our students, we need to adapt procedures that are congruent with what we regard as the proper objectives of language teaching. Developing new materials and activities is time-consuming and difficult. Thus, it is not surprising that most teachers use published materials for their purpose. They rarely develop their own materials. Also, Graves, K., and Xu, S. (2000) show the two most important factors in adopting, adapting, and developing language materials, such as the effectiveness of language materials to achieve the purpose of the course and their appropriateness for the students and the teacher. Appropriateness means that language learners are familiar with the material, language level, relevance, and interest.

As mentioned earlier, teachers rarely develop their own materials due to insufficient time and a lack of development ability. Thus, within the scope of the study, the researcher just focuses on proposing a program of research paper writing, including teaching students how to write method sections through the process genre approach, so that the lecturer has a detailed guideline of a complete research paper writing course, in which the content is included based on the educational system to achieve the desired learning outcomes of the course. Moreover, the guideline also shows how a course is structured and conducted, as well as which materials should be adopted or adapted. More importantly, the guideline also reveals which skills of method section writing need to be introduced to students. Finally, the guideline attempts to provide which linguistics knowledge and skills that should be taught so that students can write a method section to fit the conventions of a specific genre.

1.3 Research Objective

The main objective of this research is to examine if the teaching of method section writing using the process genre approach performs better than that using the existing product approach in terms of content, organization, language use and mechanics use skills through an experimental study.

1.4 Research Question

To achieve the main research objective, the research question of this study is stated:

- Is there any difference in posttest scores on the content, organization, language use, and mechanics use in the method section writing between the control group and experimental group?

1.5 Hypotheses

Based on the research objective and research question stated earlier, hypotheses are presented as follows:

Ha 1: There is a significant difference in posttest scores on the content in writing the method section between the control group and experimental group.

Ha 2: There is a significant difference in posttest scores on the organization in writing the method section between the control group and experimental group.

Ha 3: There is a significant difference in posttest scores on the language use in writing the method section between the control group and experimental group.

Ha 4: There is a significant difference in posttest scores on the mechanics use skills in writing the method section between the control group and experimental group.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Types of Written Assignments

Types of written assignments are clarified in this section because each type of exercise just fits a specific group of learners' needs and level. For this reason, the teacher must know which kind of exercise should be practiced in a specific classroom.

Canseco and Byrd (1989) use seven types of assignments in 48 different courses of graduate business, such as exams, written responses to problems, projects, case studies, papers, reports, and miscellaneous assignments (outlines, surveys, business plans, audits, critiques, evaluations, etc.). Meanwhile, Zhu (2004) analyzed 95 syllabi of business courses for undergraduate students and used 242 writing assignments (i.e., case analyses, article/book reports, business reports, business proposals, design projects, library research, reflection papers, letters or memos, research proposal/papers and miscellaneous (website analysis, online surveys, or participatory experiences).

Cooper and Bikowski (2007) also analyzed 200 course syllabi from 20 departments of different disciplines and identified 11 types of tasks required by professors, such as library research papers, reports, articles or book reviews, plans or proposals, summaries, case studies, unstructured writing, journal articles, essays, annotated bibliographies, and

miscellaneous (as cited in Zhu, 2004). Different writing tasks are used in different business courses, such as articles/book reports/critiques, reflection papers, library research papers, and other genres (i.e., case analysis, business report, business proposal, design report, and business letter and memo) (Horowitz, 1986).

2.2 Genre Analysis

The term “genre analysis” is described by Dudley-Evans (1997) as the study of structural and linguistic conventions in a discourse community. It also deals with considering the culture and situation context of a particular genre. The culture context involving the attitudes, values, and experiences of people living in a particular culture is shared. Meanwhile, the situation context represents situation-specific variables that combine to produce the particular register of the text. These variables consist of the topic (content) of the text (field), the relationship between readers and writers of the text (tenor) and the channel of communication (mode). Each of these variables impacts the language of the text. For example, the field of a text influences vocabulary choice and verb selection. The tenor of a text influences expressions of probability, obligation, necessity, attitude, and clause-type (such as declarative, interrogative, or imperative). The mode of text, for example, influences patterns of cohesion and aspects of language that are characteristic of it being a spoken or written text. For Swales (1990), the term ‘genre analysis’ means searching particular genre features such as the style, purpose, and function of the text. The communicative character of the discourse is mentioned.

In the current study, the term “genre analysis” refers to analyzing related research articles or theses to help students be aware of the content, organization, language use, and mechanics use, combined with considering the purpose of the text and the expectations of potential readers.

2.3 The Methods Section

The methods section is the most important part of a research paper because it provides information for the reader to confirm the study’s validity (Saper, 2014). Editors or reviewers reject papers when they consider that the research methods used are not appropriate or not strong enough (Chiswick, 2004). Therefore, in this section, the authors should provide a clear and precise description of how the study was performed and the rationale for the methodological choices and characteristics of the study design.

This section should be written in a clear and concise manner, but should always present enough information so that:

- 1) the study could be replicated by other researchers, in order to evaluate the reproducibility of results, and
- 2) the readers are able to judge the validity of the results and conclusions presented.

This will typically be the first section to be written in a paper (although many times the last to be finalized after corrections and reviews of authors and reviewers), mainly because it should be already thought of and written as a part of the research

protocol/proposal, prepared at the initial phase of the research work, and because it sets the stage for the results and conclusions presented in a paper.

Although there are different ideas of structure presentation of this section, the majority of researchers have agreed that this section should describe research design, setting and sample (instead of participants), materials, intervention description, measures or instrumentation, data collection procedures and research procedures of research in order for readers to know the details of the methods to ensure the reliability and validity of the study. Regarding the linguistics features, the past tense should be used in this section (Swale & Feak, 2004). It was also found that the method section can include 3 rhetorical:

A description of data collection procedures (move 1); (2) a description of variables measurement procedures (move 2), and (3) a description of data analysis procedures (move 3). Each move is categorized into more detailed steps, as displayed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Moves of Method Sections

Move 1	Describe data collection procedures	Step 1A	Describe the location of the sample
		Step 1B	Describe the size of the sample population
		Step 1C	Describe the characteristics of the sample
		Step 1D	Describe the sampling technique
		Step 2	Recount steps in data collection
		Step 3A	Highlight advantages of using sample
		Step 3B	Demonstrate representatively of sample
Move 2	Describe procedures for variables measurement	Step 1	Present an overview of the design
		Step 2A	Specify measurement items
		Step 2B	Define variables
		Step 2C	Describe method of measuring variables
		Step 3A	Cite research to justify methods
		Step 3B	Highlight acceptability of method
Move 3	Describe data analysis procedure	Step 1	Relate analysis procedure
		Step 2	Justify analysis procedure
		Step 3	Preview results

3. Material and Methods

3.1 Research Design

The study was a quasi-experiment design, which was done in Can Tho University, Vietnam. The sample of this study was divided into two groups. The experimental group includes 20 students, whereas the control group has 45 students.

3.2 Population

In this research, the population of the study was 600 university students who were studying in an English department. These students were divided into three categories based on their selected career: (1) English teacher; (2) tourist guild; and (3) translator.

English is their major subject. From the first to the fourth academic year, these students were taught four skills of English as their major subjects (i.e., speaking, listening, writing, and reading). Academic writing genres such as sentence writing, paragraph writing, letter writing, and essay writing are taught in the first and second years. However, in the third year, students were required to study a research paper writing course. In the last year (the fourth year), their main focus was writing up their thesis.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Methods

In this study, the simple random technique was selected for the study. The sample of this study was divided into two groups. The experimental group includes 20 students, whereas the control group has 45 students.

3.4 Administration of the Pre-test

Pretest was administered in the quiet, large and bright classroom within 60 minutes. The candidates were allowed to ask if there is something they would like to make clear about the topic. When the time was up, the candidates were asked to stop writing, and their papers were collected. For the pretest, writing a reflection in the form of a paragraph of 200-400 words based on a provided research article was used to quantitatively measure academic writing ability of students in both groups before the treatment. The writing performance of the participants was then scored by three raters using a scoring rubric developed by the researcher of this study. Then, the Independent Sample t-Test was done to examine if the two groups have the same level of academic writing ability before the treatment.

3.5 Administration of the Post-test

After the completion of the treatment, a post-test was conducted for both groups with the same procedure as the pre-test. However, the posttest required students in both groups to write the Methods section. The performance was then scored using the same rubric as the pre-test by three raters. Noticeably, at this stage, the results of the pre and post-test were compared using descriptive tests and Independent Sample t-tests to see which group has a better performance in research paper writing. The results were then verified by three raters to ensure the validity and reliability of the test scores and students' performance.

3.6 The Experimental Group

After the pre-test administration, the treatment with the writing program using PGA was done with Group A (experimental). This treatment was done within 10 periods (1 period is equal to 50 minutes). The writing course introduced both theory and practice, especially, the assessment was done through the progress tests after the instruction of each section.

3.7 The Control Group

Group B (control) was taught through the existing program using the product approach for one semester. The treatment was done within 10 periods (1 period is equal to 50 minutes). The writing course introduced both theory and practice, especially, the assessment was done through the progress tests after the instruction of each section. The lessons were taught based on the product approach, in which learners find it easy to produce their pieces of writing.

3.8 Research Variables

Variables are the entities that can be measured, controlled and manipulated in a study. An experimental study needs to determine variables to show which group receives the treatment and which one is measured as the outcome (Creswell, 2003). Variables include: (1) the independent variables (IVs) are manipulated to see the effect on the dependent variable (DV); (2) moderator variables are a form of independent variables that cause an effect on the dependent variable; and (3) controlled variables can affect the result of an experiment; however, these variables can be controlled and considered as intervening variables.

3.8.1 Independent Variable

The proposed program using the PGA is the independent variable of this research.

3.8.2 Dependent Variable

Dependent variables include the content, organization, language use and the mechanics of the method section.

4. Results and Discussions

Table 4.1. Independent Samples Test of pretest scores
on content, organization, language and mechanics of the two groups

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre.Cont	Equal variances assumed	10.102	.002	.652	63	.517
	Equal variances not assumed			.791	58.046	.432
Pre.Org	Equal variances assumed	4.759	.033	1.172	63	.246
	Equal variances not assumed			1.377	54.339	.174
Pre.Lang	Equal variances assumed	.233	.631	1.337	63	.186
	Equal variances not assumed			1.411	41.647	.166
Pre.Mechanics	Equal variances assumed	8.553	.005	.725	63	.471
	Equal variances not assumed			.956	62.959	.343

As can be seen in the table above, the results from the *Independent Samples t-Test* showed no significant difference in the means of pretest scores on content ($t(58.04) = 791, p = .432$), organization ($t(54.33) = 1.377, p = .174$), language ($t(63) = 1.377, p = .186$), and mechanics ($t(63) = 752, p = .471$) between the two groups. As can be seen, a statistically significant result has a probability of slightly more than .05. It can be concluded that the two groups of students were at the same level of academic writing proficiency before the implementation of the instruction.

Table 4.2: Descriptive statistics of posttest scores on content, organization, language and mechanics in the method section of the two groups

Group Statistics	Type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
ContMethod	Experimenal	20	4.7500	.44426	.09934
	Control	45	4.6444	.48409	.07216
OrgMethod	Experimenal	20	4.2500	.44426	.09934
	Control	45	4.2000	.40452	.06030
LangMethod	Experimenal	20	4.3000	.47016	.10513
	Control	45	3.7778	.55958	.08342
MechanicsMethod	Experimenal	20	4.9500	.22361	.05000
	Control	45	4.0667	.65366	.09744

Table 4.3: Independent Samples t-Test Statistics of posttest scores on content, organization, language and mechanics in the method section of the two groups

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
ContMethod	Equal variances assumed	3.364	.071	.831	63	.409
	Equal variances not assumed			.860	39.584	.395
OrgMethod	Equal variances assumed	.748	.391	.446	63	.657
	Equal variances not assumed			.430	33.612	.670
LangMethod	Equal variances assumed	.140	.709	3.638	63	.001
	Equal variances not assumed			3.891	43.081	.000
MechanicsMethod	Equal variances assumed	11.163	.001	5.871	63	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			8.065	60.507	.000

As can be seen in the Tables above, the results from the Independent Samples T-Test showed that method writing ability in terms of language and mechanics of the experimental group significantly outperformed that of the control group, except for content and organization. In fact, there was a statistically significant difference in the means of posttest scores on language ($t(63) = 3.638, p = .001$) and mechanics ($t(60.507) = 8.065, p = .000$) between the two groups. It can be seen; a statistically significant result has a probability of slightly less than .05. However, there was no significant difference in the means of posttest scores on content ($t(63) = .831, p = .409$), organization ($t(63) = .446, p = .657$).

.657) because a statistically significant result has a probability of slightly more than .05. The mean scores of posttest on language ($M = 4.30$, $SD = .470$) and mechanics ($M = 4.95$, $SD = .223$) of the experimental group were higher than those on language ($M = 3.777$, $SD = .559$) and mechanics ($M = 4.066$, $SD = .653$) of the control group. Meanwhile, the mean scores of posttest on content ($M = 4.75$, $SD = .444$), organization ($M = 4.25$, $SD = .444$) of the experimental group and content ($M = 4.644$, $SD = .484$), organization ($M = 4.20$, $SD = .404$) of the control group were nearly the same. Thus, it can be concluded that the process genre approach affects writing components such as language and mechanics more positively than the product approach.

The findings of this study are consistent with earlier findings of Badger and White's (2000), Kim and Kim's (2005), Chow's (2007), and Babalola's (2012) studies that the implementation of the process genre approach in teaching writing positively affects students' method writing ability. In particular, according to Badger and White (2000), the PGA involves considering the target audience and the purpose of the text to achieve communicative purposes. These findings are consistent with the findings of Kim, Y. and Kim, B. (2005)'s study that the process genre approach to teaching business writing helps students develop good writing that they could adapt later in the real world. The findings also support Chow's (2007) view that the instruction in the process genre approach strategies promotes students' awareness of conceptual writing strategies and willingness to apply practical writing strategies to compose.

These results also confirm Carter's (2003) ideas that the analysis of text is deemed to bring about language awareness of the learner. That essentially enhances consciousness and sensitivity to the forms and functions of language. Moreover, the flexibility of writing allowed by the process approach in the reviewing and drafting stages highlights useful writing skills involved in the process of different genres. Furthermore, the results support Nordin's (2017) idea that learners become aware that writing occurs in a social context and situation, and that a piece of writing has to achieve a certain purpose due to the PGA. Moreover, Pujianto (2014) mentioned that PGA helps students develop writing skills for a report text. It is clear that in this study, in the experimental group of this study, students were aware of the purpose and audience of the text, identified certain conventions of writing, and each sub-component of research papers, including language. They are also active and enthusiastic during the teaching-learning process. Additionally, the findings of this study are consistent with the study of Utami (2015), which revealed that the PGA is more effective than the product approach in teaching some aspects of writing.

5. Limitations and Recommendations

This section presents several main limitations of this study together with recommendations. First, the findings cannot be generalized to the total population of the study in all disciplines. Although the population in the School of English in CTU is divided into three categories based on their selected career: (1) English teacher; (2) tourist

guide; and (3) translator, the sample of this study was selected from those who selected tourist guides and translators as their future career. For these students, English is their major subject. From the first to the fourth academic year, these students are taught the four skills of English as their major subjects (i.e., speaking, listening, writing, and reading). Academic writing genres such as sentence writing, paragraph writing, letter writing and essay writing are taught in the first and second years. However, in the third year, students are required to study an RPW course. In the last year (the fourth year), their main focus is on writing up their thesis. As mentioned, this study was done in the context of Vietnam. Thus, the findings cannot be generalized to other countries due to different students' English knowledge backgrounds.

Another important limitation is that the sample of the experimental group is quite small, including 20 students, although there are 45 students in the control group. For this reason, we cannot be reasonably assured that none of the distributional assumptions in the t-Test is violated. Another limitation is that since the researcher was not involved in the process of implementation, real activities and reactions of the lecturer and students in both groups were not observed.

However, regarding the limitations of the study, it is assumed that the process of teaching both the experimental and control groups occurred naturally because the lecturer did not let all of them know that they would be the participants of the study. Moreover, the researcher would not involve any activity during the instruction. For this reason, the subjectivity might be avoidable. Due to the limitations above, it is suggested that further research should be conducted to avoid the mentioned limitations.

6. Conclusions

In this study, the results support the hypothesis that there is a significant difference in EFL/ESL undergraduate university students' method writing ability in terms of language use and mechanics use skills between the control group and experimental group. However, this finding does not entirely support the hypothesis that the group treated with the PGA writing instruction would significantly outperform the control group in writing ability in terms of content and organization in writing the methods section, compared to the product approach.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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