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Revista Lengua y Cultura

Biannual Publication, Vol. 8, No. 15 (2026) 109-120

ISSN: 2683-2321

Use of the Genre-based Approach through short essays to enhance Writing Skills in the EFL Classroom

Aplicación del enfoque basado en géneros mediante ensayos cortos para mejorar la escritura en el aula de ILE

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Abstract:

The present study examines the effect of implementing a genre-based approach on improving middle school students' writing skills, as well as exploring the students' perceptions of the implementation. The study was conducted at a private school located in Orizaba, Veracruz, Mexico. The study was based on the action research process, using the three stages of the genre-based approach –modeling, joint construction, and independent construction of text.

Nine third-grade middle school students participated in this project over a period of seven weeks. Qualitative data were collected through four instruments: a journal, a test, a checklist, and a survey. The results indicated that most students improved their writing skills in the expository genre, particularly in terms of structure, coherence, and organization. In addition, students' confidence in their writing skills also improved, indicating that their perception of writing essays became more positive.

Keywords:

Writing, genre-based approach, teaching writing, EFL

Resumen:

El presente estudio examina el efecto de la implementación de un enfoque basado en géneros para mejorar las habilidades de escritura de los estudiantes de secundaria, así como explorar sus percepciones sobre dicha implementación. El estudio se llevó a cabo en una escuela privada ubicada en Orizaba, Veracruz, México. Se basó en el proceso de Investigación-Acción, utilizando las tres etapas del enfoque de géneros: modelado, construcción conjunta y construcción independiente del texto. Nueve estudiantes de tercer grado de secundaria participaron en este proyecto durante siete semanas de implementación. Se recopilaron datos cualitativos mediante cuatro instrumentos: un diario, una prueba, una lista de cotejo y una encuesta. Los resultados indicaron que la mayoría de los estudiantes mejoraron su habilidad de escritura en el género expositivo en cuanto a estructura, coherencia y organización. Además, la confianza de los estudiantes en sus habilidades de escritura también mejoró, lo que demuestra que su percepción sobre la redacción de ensayos se volvió positiva.

***Palabras Clave**:*

Escritura, enfoque basado en géneros, enseñanza de la escritura, inglés como lengua extranjera

Introduction

Writing is an important skill to be taught in the EFL classroom. In the past years, writing was considered a simple representation of language; however, it is a complex process that involves the use of diverse strategies that learners need to develop to communicate their ideas about a certain topic in a specific situation. One of those strategies is knowledge of genre, which is the

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Fecha de recepción: 14/11/2025, Fecha de aceptación: 22/09/2026, Fecha de publicación: 05/10/2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29057/lc.v8i15. 16571

ability to know how to express correctly and effectively a particular topic to respond to a given context; for example, when students have to write an essay or a letter. The use of the genre-based approach in the EFL classroom can provide learners with the necessary skills to accomplish a writing task. According to Hyland (2007), teaching genre provides several benefits to create effective texts. By using the Genre-Based Approach, teachers can provide learners with examples of the language appropriate for the target text, the organization of it, and recurrent expressions used in the genre they will write. Furthermore, after enough writing practice, students can acquire expertise in using genre in many contexts until they become independent writers. There are several reasons why students may face difficulties when writing a complex piece of writing. Most of the time , students struggle with writing because they lack vocabulary related to the topic, they do not know how to organize and express their ideas clearly, they are not familiar with the type of text they have to write, they have no idea about what to write, or they are not interested in writing activities. Whatever the reason is, Harmer (2010) points out the importance of identifying what students need to write a text successfully. Teachers need to provide enough information about what they will write about and how they will write it. Furthermore, depending on the task, the teacher must provide key phrases, sentence patterns, or words to help students complete the task and suggest ideas in case they run out of them. Finally, providing students with a pattern or scheme of the target genre can help them complete the task successfully. Hyland (2007) emphasizes the importance of providing students with opportunities to observe and recognize genres in real-life situations. Typical patterns and their possible variations are often unknown to L2 learners; scaffolding plays a crucial role in students' awareness of a wide range of academic literacies suitable for specific aims and areas of knowledge (Hyland, 2007). The aims of this action research project were to explore the impact of the Genre-Based Approach on the students' writing skills. The second aim was to analyze the students' perceptions of the implementation of the Genre-Based Approach.

Literature Review

This section presents an overview of the literature related to writing skills and the use of the genre-based approach in teaching writing.

Writing

Unlike spoken language, which we acquire naturally through exposure, writing requires conscious effort to learn and master. Writing also allows students to express their thoughts by thinking consciously about what they intend to convey. Nunan (2015:78) defines writing as a "process of generating ideas and thinking about how to present them effectively in the form of a written text." This deliberate process often leads to a higher-quality product compared to spontaneous speech. From a broader perspective, writing can be defined as a coherent set of words, clauses, and sentences, which is rule-structured (Hyland, 2003). For this research, writing will be defined as a social interaction between the writer and an authentic audience on specific topics, responding to a particular purpose.

The Writing Skill

Like many academic skills, writing proficiency requires sequentially mastering specific skills, often taking years to develop fully. However, writing extends beyond standardized tests; it is a practical tool used in diverse contexts beyond the classroom, including academic writing assignments.

Walker and White (2013:60) provide some of the skills used in second language writing (see Table 1). Depending on the text type, the teacher needs to identify the writing skills the learners need to develop.

Table 1. Skills involved in second language writing

Skills involved in second language (L2) writing
Writing in a new script
Understanding the links between sounds and spelling
Using the L2 language system to express ideas accurately and clearly
Connecting ideas to create a coherent structure, using discourse markers and linking words
Arranging ideas into rhetorical patterns, for example, problem solution, which will be recognizable and interpretable by the reader
Using the language and organizational structure appropriate to a particular genre
Planning, reviewing, revising, and editing drafts of a piece of writing to get closer to the meaning the writer wishes to express
Picturing and intended audience and goal, and shaping a piece of writing in a way that communicates most effectively with that audience and achieves that goal
Obeying the rules of a particular discourse community, while also expressing the writer's own individual voice

Teaching writing skills

Traditional approaches appear to have failed to incorporate the kinds of insights that can enhance the writing process (Harmer, 2004). There are some cases, for example, when students write a composition, the teacher revises it and returns it the next day with corrections; however, students rarely look at them or reflect on them. For many years, the teaching of writing has been focused on the written product rather than on the writing process (Harmer, 2004). In this regard, Nunan (2015) also mentions that there has been a controversy over product-oriented approaches versus process-oriented approaches. Product-oriented approaches focus on the final text that the writer produces, whereas process-oriented approaches focus on the procedures involved, such as thinking, planning, drafting, and revising, involved to produce an acceptable text; therefore, there is no problem in integrating both approaches. In this view, Byrnes (1993) suggests some guidelines when teaching writing, which include providing adequate and relevant experiences of the written language, teaching them how to write different kinds of texts, making writing tasks realistic and relevant, using a variety of techniques and practice formats, and providing appropriate support. Similarly, Sokolik (2003; cited in Nunan, 2015), provides four key principles that can be applied in the EFL classroom: encouraging students to reflect on their own writing, making feedback helpful and meaningful, understanding students' reasons to write, and clarifying the evaluation.

Genre-based approach

The genre-based approach (GBA) to writing is a pedagogical framework that treats writing as a socially embedded practice. Within this perspective, learners develop the ability to produce a range of text types by examining their communicative purposes, intended audiences, structural patterns, and linguistic features. Instead of limiting instruction to grammar or sentence-level skills, the GBA emphasizes explicit teaching of how texts are organized and how language functions to achieve specific communicative goals in particular social contexts. Classroom practice typically involves analyzing sample texts, identifying their organizational and linguistic traits, co-constructing texts with guidance from the teacher, and gradually moving students toward independent writing (Hyland, 2007; Tardy, 2016).

Hyland (2009) states that this approach focuses on what written texts learners can produce, allowing writing teachers to identify the variety of texts students may need to write within their academic or social context, as well as to design a writing course aimed at meeting their needs. This approach focuses on teaching learners how to use language patterns to accomplish coherent, purposeful prose writing. This approach is beneficial for writing teachers because it allows them to explain clearly and systematically different ways to use writing to communicate, including language, content, and context together. Therefore, the context and purpose should be taken into account when deciding which main characteristics of each text type to include in the syllabus.

Harmer (2010) points out that teachers need to choose genres that are both useful and engaging for students, and to provide models that help learners construct appropriate texts independently as their proficiency develops, rather than simply having them imitate texts. In this way, students can begin to express their own creativity within a

genre. A significant number of genre experts have recognized the benefits of adopting a genre approach in the classroom. In this view, Paltridge (2001, cited in Ahn, 2012:3) also states that the genre approach enhances students' ability to organize information in various forms in writing by discussing the special characteristics of different purposeful texts. Consequently, students are empowered by the meta-linguistic understanding of the English Language, which enables them to use information skillfully and attain several objectives through writing.

Firkins, Forey, and Sengupta (2007, as cited in Dirgeyasa, 2016, p. 48) championed genre as a model for teaching and learning writing, proposing a detailed and comprehensive framework for its implementation. They utilize the term "cyclic strategic" to describe the staged approach to writing instruction within the genre-based framework. This framework outlines three essential stages that instructors should follow: modelling a text, joint construction of a text, and independent construction of a text. Firkins et al. (2007) further elaborated on each stage, providing practical steps for systematic implementation.

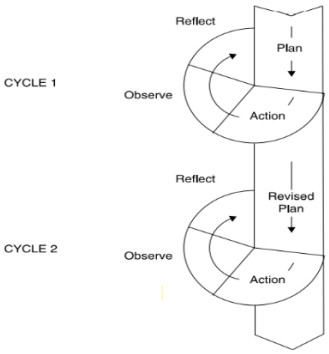
Methodology

This section describes the context in which this action research took place, and the instruments used to collect data. Besides, the weeks of implementation and how the data was collected are described.

Action Research

This study was designed using action research. Action research is an approach that can be used in any context and can be implemented by teachers who want to change or improve a specific problem identified in the classroom or in his or her teaching practice. It is not a method; however, it requires methods to collect information (Bell, 2010). Action research encourages teachers to become self-reflective, analytic, and critical of their teaching practice, it stimulates their personal and professional growth, and allows them to understand classroom issues since the teacher plays the role of a researcher at the same time. The primary purpose of action research is to address and improve specific problems identified in practice. Those improvements should be based on systematically collected information (data) (Burns, 2010). Action research engages teacher-researchers in a four-step process (referred to as the Dialectic Action Research Spiral) (Mills, 2014:21).

Figure 1. The Dialectic Action Research Spiral



Action research may be challenging for novice teachers because it differs from traditional research. In Action research, the teacher must plan, act, observe, and reflect. According to Burns (2010:8), the action research process includes the following elements: exploring, identifying, planning, collecting information, analyzing and reflecting, hypothesizing and speculating, intervening, observing, reporting, writing, and presenting; not necessarily in that specific order (see Table 2). Hence, action research is distinguished for being dynamic, flexible, iterative, and interchangeable.

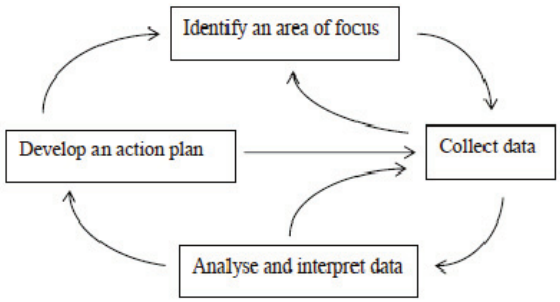
Table 2. Action Research Phases

Phase	Focus of phase
Exploring	Identifying generalized areas for investigation
Identifying	Undertaking fact-finding to refine ideas
Planning	Developing a viable plan of action
Collecting data	Selecting and enacting initial data-gathering techniques
Analysing/reflecting	Simultaneously scrutinizing and reflecting on emerging data
'Hypothesising'/ speculating	Developing initial predictions/explanations based on data
Intervening	Deliberately changing practices in response to predictions
Observing	Observing and evaluating outcomes of interventions
Reporting	Articulating processes formatively or summatively to others
Writing	Summarizing and disseminating written research accounts
Presenting	Summarizing and disseminating oral research accounts

Burns (1999:35 in Paltridge & Phakiti, 2015)

Several authors have represented the cyclical AR model; however, despite criticism of being fixed and rigid, Kemmis and McTaggart's model (Figure 2) has been recognized as a basis for developing more flexible models.

Figure 2. Cyclical AR model based on Kemmis and McTaggart Kemmis & McTaggart (1988 in Burns 2010:9)



Context

This project was implemented in an EFL classroom in a private school in Orizaba. The classes were face-to-face and hybrid. However, most students attended the class face-to-face, except for one or two who took the class via Google Meet. Since most of the students were in class, the teacher-researcher did not consider it necessary to use Google Classroom or Meet for the implementation. As mentioned before, the AMCO method was used in the classroom. This method only provides two writing practices per unit. The teacher-researcher asked students and their previous teacher about their writing experience and performance. After that, it was discovered that writing was the students' weakest skill because their writing practice was primarily based on informal texts, such as emails, blogs, short messages, and postcards. However, academic writing, such as short essays or argumentative essays, was barely practiced in class.

Participants

The study group was primarily composed of six girls and three boys who agreed to participate in the AR project. The EFL class in this research had a B2 English level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). It was observed that students were not fond of academic writing; every time they were asked to write an essay, they did not express enthusiasm. Alternatively, all students were required to take a certification test at the end of the course. The class consisted of six women and three men, aged 14 to 15 years old, from the city of Orizaba, Veracruz. They belonged to the third grade of middle school level, enrolled during the term from August 2021 to July 2022. The reason for choosing this group was that they had a good English level in speaking; however, their writing skill was not at the same level. After having a pilot exam, students expressed their desire to improve that skill.

Data collection

The data for this study were collected through non-observational and observational instruments. The non-observational instruments administered were a background questionnaire to know students' writing habits and preferences; a pre-test to observe the students' writing performance before the implementation, and a post-test to observe if there was an improvement after the implementation. The observational instruments were a checklist used by both students and teachers to check if students were able to use what they had learned during the implementation, and a survey to explore the students' perception of the implementation.

Description of the implementation

Exploratory week

During the exploratory week, a pre-writing test and a questionnaire about the genre-based approach focused on writing short essays were administered in order to explore students' knowledge about the genre-based approach and expository essays. The teacher-researcher collected the instruments administered and used a checklist to assess the essays. The exploratory questionnaires were also analyzed and categorized in an Excel file.

First/second week of implementation

The first stage of the GBA was implemented during the second week. In the first week of implementation, the teacher introduced the expository texts and taught the main structure of an expository essay using a PowerPoint presentation. Students wrote the most important information in their notebooks.

In the second week, the language features of the expository essay and its stages were taught. The teacher also provided students with two examples in which they identified the language features and the stages. Furthermore, during this week, students wrote their first short essay applying the characteristics seen in the previous lesson. The checklist was used again by students to self-assess their essays. The teacher also used the same checklist to contrast the students' assessments.

Third/fourth week of implementation

The second stage of the GBA was implemented during the third and fourth weeks. During the third week, the important features of short essays were reviewed. Moreover, to address the problems identified in the first and second essays, such as unclear thesis statements and weak introductions and conclusions, students wrote thesis statements for various topics provided by the teacher, as well as introductions and conclusions for topics assigned by the teacher.

Table 3. Calendar of activities

Date	*Week*	*Action*
May 9th -13th	1	• Application of a pre-test • Collect previous texts • Introduction to the expository genre
May 16th -20th	2	• Teach the generic structure of the Expository genre • Teach the language features of the Expository genre • Recognizing the structure of Expository Genre (different examples)
May 23rd – 27th	3	• Using a prompt to write a first Expository text • Collect the first text. • Use of a checklist for self-assessment.
May 30th – June 3rd	4	• Collect the checklist as evidence • Activity to collect a second text.
June 6th -10th	5	• Activity to collect a third text. • Collect the checklist as evidence
June 13th -17th	6	• Administering post-test.
June 20th	7	• Administering a survey to students.

Findings

The section provides an overview of the different findings derived from the research questions. The categories obtained demonstrated a significant improvement in the students' writing skills.

Research Questions:

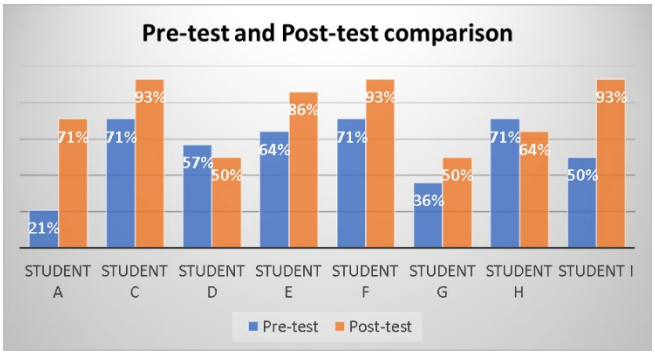
- In what ways does the implementation of the genre-based approach enhance middle school students' writing skills of the expository genre by writing short essays?
- What are the students' perceptions towards the implementation of the genre-based approach?

Objectives:

- The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of the genre-based approach on students' development of their writing skills
- The second purpose was to analyze students' perceptions towards the implementation of the genre-based approach

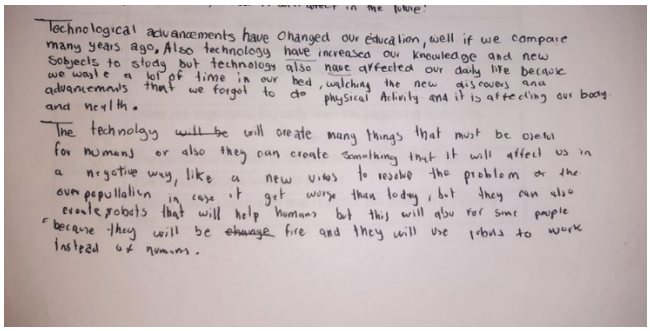
Writing ability improvement

Figure 3. Pre-test and Post-test results comparison



As can be observed in Figure 3, Student A (SA), who obtained the lowest score in the pre-test, improved his score in the post-test. According to the teacher's checklist, Student A demonstrated improvement in his writing skills, particularly in terms of organization, coherence, use of transition words between paragraphs, content, and vocabulary. During the application of the pre-test, Student A requested assistance from the teacher-researcher, whereas during the application of the post-test, the student worked independently. In the survey, which was administered after the implementation, Student A also expressed that his writing abilities improved because he used to be unaware of the organization of his text. Still, after the implementation, he became aware of the importance of organizing his ideas to write a text more clearly.

Figure 4. Student A pre-test

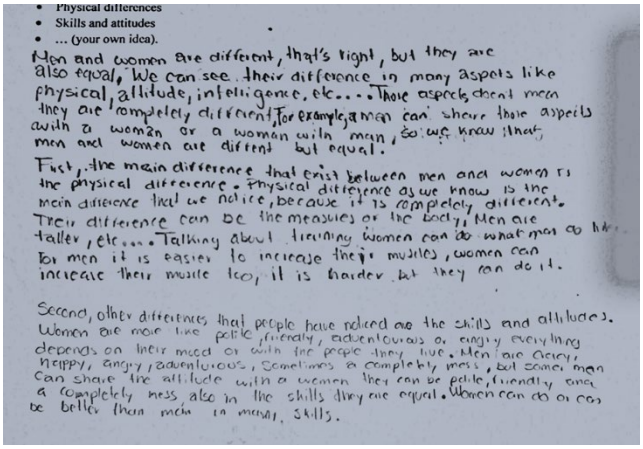

Technological advancements have changed our education, well if we compare many years ago. Also technology have increased our knowledge and new subjects to study but technology also have affected our daily life because we waste a lot of time in our bed, watching the new discovers and advancemants that we forgot to do physical Activity and it is affecting our body and health.

The technology ~~will be~~ will create many things that must be useful for humans or also they can create something that it will affect us in a negative way, like a new virus to resolve the problem of the overpopullation in case it get worse than today, but they can also create robots that will help humans but this will also for some people because they will be ~~change~~ fire and they will use robots to work instead of humans.

In Figure 4, the teacher researcher observed the following:

- The student did not follow the stages of the expository essay. The student attempted to write an introduction and only one body paragraph. However, he did not write a concluding paragraph.
- The whole text does not meet the information requested in the task.
- The student did not use transition words and linkers to connect his ideas.
- The number of words used was 122.
- The student attempted to use some linkers; however, the ideas were incomplete.
- A restated thesis statement, a summary of the main ideas, and a final thought should form the concluding paragraph. The lack of a concluding paragraph made it difficult to understand the writer´s point of view.

Figure 5. Student A Post-test


- Physical differences
- Skills and attitudes
- ... (your own idea).

Men and women are different, that's right, but they are also equal, We can see their difference in many aspects like physical, attitude, intelligence, etc... Those aspects don't mean they are completely different, for example, a man can share those aspects with a woman or a woman with man, so we know that men and women are different but equal.

Fust, the main difference that exist between men and women is the physical difference. Physical difference as we know is the main difference that we notice, because it is completely different. Their difference can be the measures of the body, Men are taller, etc... Talking about training women can do what men do but for men it is easier to increase their muscles, women can increase their muscle too, it is harder but they can do it.

Second, other differences that people have noticed are the skills and attitudes. Women are more like polite, friendly, adventurous or angry everything depends on their mood or with the people they live. Men are crazy, happy, angry, adventurous, Sometimes a completely mess, but some man can share the attitude with a women they can be polite, friendly and a completely mess also in the skills they are equal. Women can do or can be better than men in mental skills.

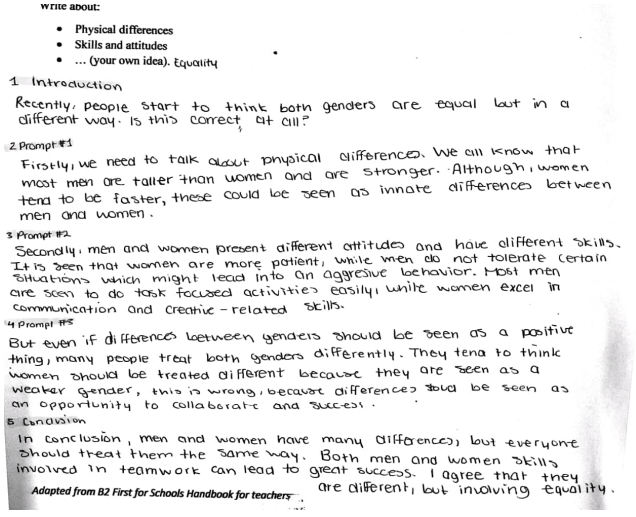
In Figure 5, the teacher-researcher identified the following aspects:

- The essay was divided into three paragraphs. In other words, student A attempted to write an introduction, body paragraph, and a conclusion.
- The first two paragraphs included a thesis statement. A good thesis statement should include the topic of the essay, the writer's position about the topic, and the main ideas that will be developed in the whole essay. In this regard, Student A was able to write a thesis statement that meets some of the requirements of a good one.
- The student used some transition words such as first, secondly, thirdly, and another aspect, among others.

- The student used linkers to connect his ideas, such as “but” and “because”.
- The student included a more detailed concluding paragraph.

The strongest students in the pre-test were Student C (SC), Student F (SF), and Student H (SH), who obtained a score of 7 out of 10 points. Both Student C and Student F demonstrated an improvement in their writing abilities in terms of connectedness between paragraphs, organization, grammar, and vocabulary. However, Student H (SH) and Student D (SD) had a slight decrease in their final scores. The possible reason for this unexpected result may be related to the students' (SD and SH) excessive self-confidence, as both indicated in the exploratory questionnaire that they do not consider writing difficult. Besides, by analyzing and comparing their checklists, students marked that all the characteristics of the short essay were presented in their texts; however, the teacher-researcher found that the students did not objectively evaluate their texts.
Next, in Figures 6 and 7, another example of a text before and after the implementation can be observed. Student F was one of the students who obtained the highest score in the pre-test.

Figure 6. Student F pre-test


write about:

- Physical differences
- Skills and attitudes
- … (your own idea). Equality

1 Introduction

Recently, people start to think both genders are equal but in a different way. Is this correct, at all?

2 Prompt #1

Firstly, we need to talk about physical differences. We all know that most men are taller than women and are stronger. Although, women tend to be faster, these could be seen as innate differences between men and women.

3 Prompt #2

Secondly, men and women present different attitudes and have different skills. It is seen that women are more patient, while men do not tolerate certain situations which might lead into an aggresive behavior. Most men are seen to do task focused activities easily, while women excel in communication and creative-related skills.

4 Prompt #3

But even if differences between genders should be seen as a positive thing, many people treat both genders differently. They tend to think women should be treated different because they are seen as a weaker gender, this is wrong, because differences should be seen as an opportunity to collaborate and succeed.

5 Conclusion

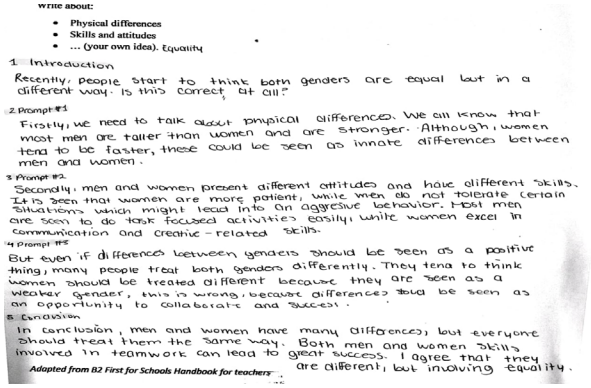
In conclusion, men and women have many differences, but everyone should treat them the same way. Both men and women skills involved in teamwork can lead to great success. I agree that they are different, but involving equality.

Adapted from B2 First for Schools Handbook for teachers

In Figure 6, the teacher-researcher observed the following:

- The student did not organize the text into three paragraphs: introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion.
- The thesis statement is presented; however, it does not mention the main ideas that will be discussed in the essay.
- Some supporting sentences are incomplete.
- The student attempted to write a conclusion; however, it is incomplete and introduces another idea that was not mentioned before.

Figure 7. Student F post-test


write about:

- Physical differences
- Skills and attitudes
- … (your own idea). Equality

1 Introduction

Recently, people start to think both genders are equal but in a different way. Is this correct, at all?

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Firstly, we need to talk about physical differences. We all know that most men are taller than women and are stronger. Although, women tend to be faster, these could be seen as innate differences between men and women.

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In conclusion, men and women have many differences, but everyone should treat them the same way. Both men and women skills involved in teamwork can lead to great success. I agree that they are different, but involving equality.

Adapted from B2 First for Schools Handbook for teachers

In Figure 7, the teacher-researcher identified the following:

- The student organized her text into five paragraphs: introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion. However, the introduction was too short.
- The student used transition words and linkers to connect one paragraph with the other and her ideas.
- The student included a concluding paragraph.
- Supporting sentences were written in a more logical way to support the controlling idea.

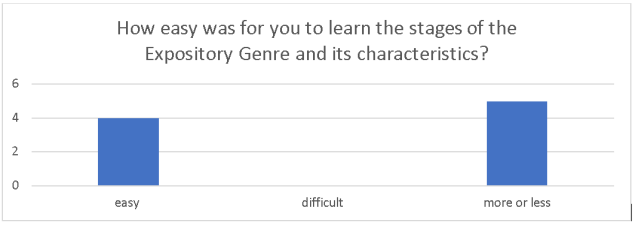
Students’ opinion towards the implementation of the GBA

The following information was obtained after analyzing the students’ opinions in the survey. Their opinions were divided into three categories: comprehension of the topic, teachers' explanations and materials, and students’ perceptions.

Comprehension of the topic

The following figures show some of the questions and answers of students during the survey. In them, their opinions and feelings about the explanation of the topic given by the teacher, materials, structure, and examples used are shown.

Figure 8. Students' opinions on their comprehension of the stages of the Expository Genre

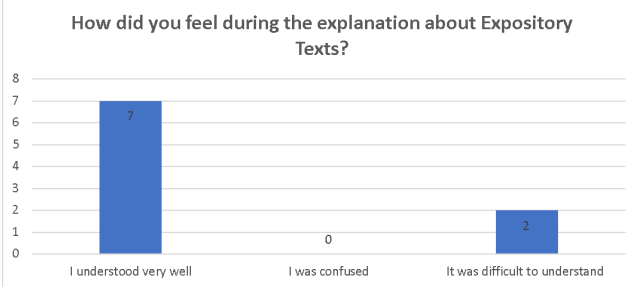


In the previous graphic, it can be observed that for five students learning the stages of the Expository Genre was neither easy nor difficult; however, for the rest of the students, it was easy to understand the information explained by the teacher-researcher during the implementation. Some of the comments given by the students in the last item of the survey were the following: "the explanation was obvious", "the teacher explained with many details which helped me to understand very well".

Teachers' explanation and materials

In the following graphs, it can be observed students' opinions and feelings about the teachers' explanation and the materials used during the intervention.

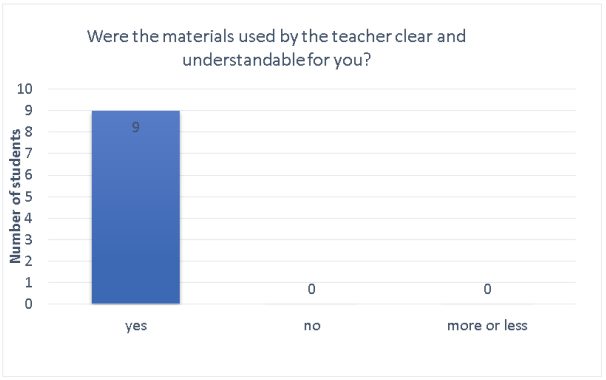
Figure 9. Students' opinions of the teachers' explanations.



In Figure 9, it can be observed that seven out of nine students reported understanding the information used during the explanation of the topic very well. Only two students mentioned that it was difficult to understand the reason. During the explanation of the expository genre, students expressed that they had a slight notion of the structure of an expository essay; however, they did not know the social purpose of the text. After the implementation, students mentioned that it was also very useful for them to understand the linkers and transition words to organize their ideas.

Students' perceptions of the materials

Figure 10. Students' opinions about the materials used during the implementation.



As shown in Figure 10, all the participants considered that the materials used by the teacher were useful and understandable to them, according to the teacher-researcher's journal. She observed that the graphic organizer helped students to organize their texts into paragraphs.

Discussion of results

The challenges to overcome by the teacher-researcher and the students throughout this intervention project were mainly three. The first challenge the teacher-researcher faced was using the checklist to assess students' writing progress. As stated previously, it was planned to use a checklist, whose function was similar to a rubric, so that students could self-evaluate their short essays and the teacher could analyze students' understanding of the Expository genre. However,

when the learners were given this checklist after writing their short essays, students appeared not to be able to check their own work and when the teacher-researcher compared her checklist with the students the results were totally different. That is, according to some students' perception, their short essays included all the aspects that must be included; however, this was not the case. Consequently, the teacher-researcher had to evaluate the students' texts without taking into account the students' checklists, using only her observations in her journal, the teacher's checklist, and comparing the learners' pre-test and post-test results.

The second challenge was handling students' behavior during the writing process and the learners' little willingness towards academic writing. Every time the learners had to start writing their short essays, rather than focusing on their writing, they were discussing other issues instead. When the teacher-researcher asked them to work on the writing task, some learners mentioned that writing essays was difficult. For that reason, the teacher-researcher had to encourage them by giving them an extra credit if they worked quietly and focused. Another disadvantage was that the class started at 7 a.m., so most of the time, students were quite sleepy, which made the writing process harder for them.

The third challenge was related to the students' writing progress. By comparing the learners' short essays, the teacher-researcher found that the students continued making the same mistakes. Although the teacher-researcher explained them more than once, provided them with examples and extra material, some students continued having the same problems with their essays. However, upon comparing the learners' essays, it was sometimes possible to observe that some learners had written three-line paragraphs or paragraphs without a thesis statement in their initial texts. Then, until their fourth or fifth essay, they were able to write longer and more structured essays. Other students were able to write more structured essays, including a clear thesis statement and well-supported ideas. However, they were still not able to write longer introductions or conclusions.

Conclusions

The purpose of this AR was to explore whether the use of the GBA process would help learners improve their writing skills of the expository genre to cope with the written task in the English Proficiency Test. The Hyland's model of genre teaching and learning cycle was implemented to progressively teach the necessary strategies through the GBA to write the expository genre. The process consisted of three stages, in which the students analyzed the target text's structure and language features, and then built their own texts using the strategies provided by the teacher-researcher through constant practice. Finally, they wrote their final essay independently, that is, without the teacher's assistance.

It was possible to train a group of intermediate English learners on the practice of the GBA to improve their writing skills in the expository genre. The learners were able to write about different topics and work on their weakest areas. This implementation appeared to be fruitful, as they were able to increase the number of words used in their essays. Additionally, they became aware of the importance of organizing their ideas into paragraphs using transition signals, for example. Unfortunately, their interest in writing essays did not increase, whereas their opinion about the difficulty of writing essays changed for those who considered it challenging.

The AR project catalyzed the teacher-researcher's ongoing exploration of innovative instructional strategies. Effective teachers are persistent learners who constantly seek new ways to improve their craft. According to Hyland (2007), reflective teachers are demonstrably more effective educators. Their insightful understanding of how texts are typically structured, interpreted, and utilized empowers them to provide targeted interventions during student writing, deliver well-informed feedback, and make reasoned choices regarding teaching practices and materials. Guevara et al. (2020) highlighted the significant use of feedback since "some teachers and/or

institutions are perhaps not sufficiently concerned about the feedback, reviewing, and specially negotiating of students' responses, to be aware of their real progress in learning." Furthermore, this reflective nature equips them with a critical lens for evaluating current instructional paradigms. However, there are some limitations in this study. First, most students had received little formal training in academic writing in previous courses; therefore while other language skills had been developed over time, writing was often left aside. As a result, when they were asked to write academically, the complexity of the task discouraged many of them, and their attitude toward writing was not particularly positive since they found it difficult. Attendance was a second limiting factor: because some students were taking their lessons online, a number of them missed the sessions in which the project was carried out, which meant they could not take part in every activity planned for the implementation. Time was the third limitation. Given that the students were in their final year and close to graduation, they had various other responsibilities to complete before the end of the term. Consequently, some students were unable to hand in their essays or complete their checklists properly simply because there was not enough time.

Overall, despite the limitations, this project fueled a desire to identify diverse strategies that not only target various writing genres but also equip students with tools to overcome language-learning challenges. In conclusion, the experience fostered a continuous cycle of improvement in both student learning and the teacher-researcher's pedagogical practice.

Declaraciones del artículo

1. Relevancia social

La contribución de este trabajo es principalmente disciplinar. No se identifica una aplicación social directa inmediata.

2. Disponibilidad de datos y materiales

No aplica. Este trabajo no generó ni analizó datos o materiales susceptibles de depósito.

3. Uso de inteligencia artificial

Las personas autoras declaran que no utilizaron herramientas de inteligencia artificial generativa en
la preparación de este manuscrito.

4. Consideraciones éticas

No implica experimentos ni intervenciones relacionadas con la salud que involucren a estudiantes.

5. Contribuciones de autoría (CRediT)

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Todas las personas autoras revisaron y aprobaron la versión final del manuscrito.

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