

Process-Genre Approach in Mixed-Ability Classes: Correlational Study between EFL Academic Paragraph Reading and Writing

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Article information

Submission	14/01/2023	Revision received	18/07/2023
Acceptance	13/06/2023	Publication date	20/10/2023

Keywords:

Achievement level,
academic paragraph,
correlational analysis,
EFL students,
process-genre
approach

Abstract: Writing and reading are two interconnected literacy skills. In English as a foreign language (EFL) mixed-ability classes, the process genre approach (PGA) has become necessary for EFL students to exchange skills and processes of reading with writing academic paragraphs. This study examines and correlates the achievement scores of academic paragraph reading and writing among EFL mixed-ability class students. Data were collected by using the achievement tests in reading and writing among mixed-ability classes of EFL students in the preparatory year of Najran University. Data were analyzed through correlation analysis and the paired sample t-test. The results showed that the mixed-ability classes of students scored high levels in paragraph understanding and moderate levels in paragraph writing, with high values of standard deviations that reflect mixed-ability classes. The results also showed that the mixed-ability levels scored low in identifying signal words and using transition words. The results also revealed a moderate positive correlation between paragraph understanding and writing. This result indicates that PGA has a potentially positive effect in mixed-ability classes, where PGA teaching materials and assessments are effective scaffolding tools for mixed-ability reading and writing classes.

Anahtar Sözcükler:

Başarı seviyesi,
akademik paragraf,
korelasyon analizi,
İngilizce yabancı dil
öğrencileri,
süreç-tür yaklaşımı

Özet: Yazma ve okuma, birbirine bağlı iki okuryazarlık becerisidir. Yabancı dil olarak İngilizce farklı yetenek düzeylerine sahip öğrencilerden oluşan sınıflarda, akademik okuma ve yazma süreçlerinin değişmesi için süreç türü yaklaşımı gerekli hale gelmiştir. Bu çalışma, İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen farklı yetenek seviyelerine sahip öğrencilerin akademik paragraf okuma ve yazma başarı puanlarını incelemekte ve ilişkilendirmektedir. Çalışmanın verileri bir Najran Üniversitesinin hazırlık okulundaki farklı yetenek düzeylerine sahip öğrencilerden oluşan bir sınıfta 81 öğrencinin okuma ve yazma başarı testleri kullanılarak toplanmış ve veriler korelasyon analizi ve eşleştirilmiş örneklem t-testi ile analiz edilmiştir. Sonuçlar, öğrenci gruplarının paragraf anlama konusunda yüksek, paragraf yazma konusunda ise orta düzeyde puanlar elde ettiğini ve öğrencilerin farklı yetenek seviyelerini yansıtan yüksek standart sapma değerlerine sahip olduklarını göstermiştir. Buna ek olarak, sonuçlar öğrencilerin sinyal kelimelerini tanıma ve geçiş kelimelerini kullanma konusunda düşük puanlar elde ettiğini ortaya koymuştur. Son olarak da paragraf anlama ile paragraf yazma arasında orta düzeyde pozitif bir ilişki bulunmuştur. Bu sonuçlar, süreç-tür yaklaşımının farklı yetenek düzeylerine sahip öğrencilerden oluşan sınıflarda potansiyel olarak olumlu bir etkiye sahip olduğunu ve bu yaklaşım ile ilgili öğretim materyallerinin ve ölçme-değerlendirme araçlarının bu tip yabancı dil sınıflarında etkili olabileceğine işaret etmektedir.

To Cite This Article: Hazaea, A. N. (2023). Process-genre approach in mixed-ability classes: Correlational study between EFL academic paragraph reading and writing. *Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)*, 17(2), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10015742>

1. Introduction

The process-genre approach (PGA) has paid the attention of language instructors and researchers as an effective strategy in writing (Badger & White, 2000; Borisovna, 2022) or reading (Borisovna, 2022). Several studies implemented this approach as a scaffolding strategy (Huang & Jun Zhang, 2020; Negretti & McGrath, 2018) that enhances literacy skills among English as a foreign language (EFL) student in several parts of the world (Adelnia & Salehi, 2016; Assaggaf, 2016; Bin-Hady & Abdu, 2020; Huang & Jun Zhang, 2020; Kafes, 2018; Rahimi & Zhang, 2022). There is a paucity of research focusing on correlating students' academic paragraph reading and writing achievements among mixed-ability classes.

A mixed-ability class is defined as a class with a clear difference among students regarding language levels, background knowledge, motivation, attitudes, learning styles, speed, and aptitude (Julie, 1997). To address these challenges, language instructors need to find various solutions, including scaffolding strategies, motivating students, and catering to different learning styles. Several approaches, such as timed reading activities (Hazaea & Almekhlafy, 2022), have been implemented to address these issues in mixed-ability classes. There are still calls to implement PGA as a scaffolding strategy (Ryshina-Pankova, 2016) in mixed-ability classes (Hordiienko & Lomakina, 2015).

Reading and writing represent half of the language skills. Reading academic texts is usually composed of paragraphs. Paragraphs are the building blocks of academic reading and writing. However, EFL learners encounter different problems in effective paragraph reading (Brooks, 2013). Existing studies also show that Arab EFL students face problems in academic reading (Qrgez & Ab Rashid, 2017) and writing (Ahmed, 2019; Javid, Farooq, & Umer, 2013; Khadawardi, 2022; Qadeer & T'chiang, 2022). Haria and Midgette (2014) recommended further research between reading and writing to help students transfer reading comprehension skills into writing, especially in the context of high-stakes tests. To fill in this existing gap, the present correlational study examines the relationship between reading and writing academic paragraphs from the PGA perspective.

As the course coordinator for either reading or writing courses at the preparatory year (PY) English language program for several years at Najran University, the researcher noticed that first-year mixed-ability classes of students enrolled in the program had poor skills in writing sentences and paragraphs. They also face many challenges in deconstructing paragraphs. In their high-stakes assessment of the writing course, the students use a PGA-oriented textbook (Writing Power 1). However, the reading course at first used a product-oriented textbook (Reading Interactions), which has been replaced with a PGA-oriented textbook (Reading Power 1) (Jeffries, 2005). Therefore, there is a need to correlate the achievement scores between academic paragraph reading and writing from a PGA perspective. It is hypothesized that PGA-based materials for reading and writing academic paragraphs and PGA-based high-stakes tests would positively scaffold reading and writing academic paragraphs in mixed-ability levels.

2. Review of Literature

Badger and White (2000) introduced the process genre approach (PGA), which has gained prominence as an approach subsumed in communicative language teaching. It is a combination of process and genre approaches. As a process, this approach enables the writer to scaffold every stage of the writing process: prewriting, drafting, and revising

(Ghufron, 2016). As a genre, it deals with paragraph structure, such as topic sentences, supporting sentences, and concluding sentences. In process approaches, Badger and White (2000) explain, “the teacher primarily facilitates the learners’ writing, and providing input or stimulus is considered to be less important” (p. 154). Brooks (2013) affirmed that language instructors should go beyond sentence level to use rhetorical and discourse skills if they wish to enhance their students’ writing skills. Hence, there is a need to thicken the investigation by providing more evidence on the efficiency of PGA. Borisovna (2022) reviewed the major trends of the Sydney School of Genre Pedagogy, English for Specific Purposes, and the New Rhetoric in the EFL context. The study concluded that PGA is an integrative approach in EFL classrooms.

Kafes (2018) analyzed the rhetorical organization of research article introductions in social sciences using Swales’ framework of move analysis. The findings showed that all corpora followed the model but differed in the extent to which the steps were used. Turkish academic writers displayed both similarities and differences to established English discourse conventions, complying with local discourse community conventions. The study recommended using a genre approach among novice Turkish EFL writers. Similarly, reading practices among EFL students were improved through text analysis (Hazaea & Alzubi, 2017).

Extensive research has also employed PGA in writing or reading skills. On the one hand, some studies used PGA in writing EFL academic essays (Alghizzi & Alshahrani, 2020), report writing (Assaggaf, 2016), and writing academic paragraphs (Bin-Hady & Abdu, 2020; Lara, 2017). In so doing, these studies investigated the effect of PGA in developing EFL writing among students at secondary or tertiary levels. On the other hand, other studies investigated the role of genre-based instruction on adult EFL learners’ reading comprehension (Zahraa, 2020). Another study used PGA to motivate EFL readers (Hakim & Tanuatmadja, 2022). Yet, there is a lack of research that specifically examines the relationship between students’ academic performance in reading and writing paragraphs in mixed-ability classes.

EFL academic paragraph reading/writing is a challenging endeavor due to the complex nature of the reading/writing processes, the relationship between writing and reading, students’ sociocultural background, and teaching strategies. Many existing strategies can be used in the processes of reading comprehension and writing practices. The reading-writing relationship is most discussed by both reading and writing researchers (Grabe, 2003). Existing research also shows a dire need to examine the correlation between PGA writing and reading. Although PGA was mainly designed for writing skills (Badger & White, 2000), some studies have implemented PGA for reading skills (Buck, 2019; Zahraa, 2020). These studies utilized PGA as a method to analyze academic texts, demonstrating the interconnection between writing and reading skills.

Existing studies used PGA in experimental research design (Marzban & Adibi, 2014; Sadeghi, Hassani, & Hemmati, 2013), test design (Adelnia & Salehi, 2016; Kalali & Pishkar, 2015; Taşpınar & Çubukçu, 2020), or interventional design (Buck, 2019; Zahraa, 2020). No research has been conducted on the relationship between academic paragraph writing and reading achievement levels. Therefore, this study uses a correlational research approach.

Content and high-stakes tests are two critical elements that push both teachers and students toward achievement. PGA has been used as a teaching strategy. Unlike existing research, this study does not use this variable as in interventional or experimental designs.

Instead, PGA is manifested in terms of the teaching materials and the high-stakes tests. Content and high-stakes tests are interconnected through the target learning outcomes. PGA is used in writing to construct a text, and it is used in reading to deconstruct a text (Table 1).

Table 1.

Constructing and deconstructing academic paragraph

Reading: Deconstructing Academic Paragraphs	Writing: Constructing Academic Paragraphs
Understanding Paragraphs	Using paragraph format, stating a clear topic sentence (topic and main idea)
Patterns of Organization	Writing supporting sentences
Using signal words	Using transition words and connectors
Listing	Listing paragraphs, using reasons/examples, list them as supporting sentences
Time order	Instructions Paragraphs
Comparison	Using steps as supporting sentences
Cause and Effect	Providing a conclusion that restates, summarizes, or gives the writer's opinion and feelings.
Skimming the writer's point of view about the topic.	

From the PGA perspective, this study examines and correlates the achievement levels of academic paragraph reading and writing among Saudi EFL mixed-ability students. It addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the PGA achievement levels in academic paragraph reading and writing among mixed-ability Saudi EFL students?
2. Is there a correlation between proficiency in academic paragraph reading and writing among mixed-ability Saudi EFL students?

3. Method

This study employed a correlational design of achievement tests to answer the research questions. It examines and correlates the mixed-ability classes of students' achievement in both reading and writing academic paragraphs from a PGA perspective. The study follows a quantitative research design in which the achievement tests are used to collect the data from mixed-ability classes of EFL students in reading and writing skills.

3.1. Population and Sampling

The population of this study is Saudi male EFL mixed-ability classes of students who were studying English courses (876 in the Reading course) and (908 in the Writing course) in the Department of English Language Skills at the PY program of Najran University. They are all male, following the Saudi gender-segregated system, and their ages range between 18 and 21. Arabic is their L1, and English is a foreign language. After completing secondary school, these respondents get an equal chance to compete in some selected competitive undergraduate programs.

These students are randomly categorized into sections (44 sections in Reading and 46 sections in Writing). The sample of this study is three mixed-ability sections at the PY of

Najran University. The total number of these students is 81 students. Based on the midterm results, these students reflect three mixed ability levels (basic level n=9 students, elementary level n=30 students, and pre-intermediate level n=40 students). These students use the same series of PGA textbooks for reading and writing: Reading Power 1 and Writing Power 1. They also sit for high-stakes unified tests.

3.2. Process-Genre-Based Materials and Assessment

The present study advances research on PGA-based content, assessment, and shared learning outcomes. Adopting Brooks (2017), Savage and Mayer (2012), the study employs four criteria to evaluate students with an academic reading/writing paragraph structure: (a) paragraph structure, (b) location of the topic and main idea, (c) presence or absence of support for the main idea, and (d) identification and using of signal/transition words.

The reading and writing textbooks follow certain steps in reading and writing academic paragraphs. These materials help students deconstruct an academic reading paragraph and construct an academic writing paragraph. The following table (2) shows the PGA elements used in these textbooks.

Table 2.

Manifestations of PGA in the textbooks

Reading: Deconstructing Academic Paragraphs	Description
Learning to look for the topic	Students learn to find a topic(s) at the word level.
Understanding Paragraphs	Students learn paragraph moves and identification of the topic and main idea of a paragraph.
Finding the Patterns of Organization	Students learn four patterns of paragraph organization: listing, time order, comparison, and cause and effect.
Skimming	Skimming the writer's point of view (for/ against) a topic; skimming listing, time order, comparison, and cause and effect patterns of paragraphs.
Writing: Constructing Academic Paragraphs	Description
Paragraph Basics and Topic Sentences	Students learn about the format of a paragraph, the topic sentence of a paragraph, and the patterns of paragraph organization.
Supporting and Concluding Sentences	Students practice writing supporting and concluding sentences.
Listing Paragraphs	Students practice writing a listing paragraph.
Writing Instructions	Students practice writing instructions (time order) paragraphs.

As for constructing the exam papers of reading and writing, the Department of English Language Skills at PY asks the concerned instructors to prepare final exam proposals based on the syllabus breakdown. These proposals are then revised by the course supervisors who prepare two suggested drafts. In so doing, they review the question types, align them with the learning outcomes, and check their validity. After that, the exam committee double-check the characteristics of the exam paper for proofreading and printing. Paper evaluation is done transparently. An instructor does not mark his students' papers. Instead,

he can mark other students' papers. After marking, the concerned instructor gets his students' marked papers for filtering. The marks are entered in an Excel database for some statistics such as question analysis, analysis of learning outcomes, and percentage of success and failure.

As an instructor, the coordinator of the reading course, and the coordinator of the department quality unit, the researcher collected students' marks in reading skills as well as their marks in writing skills after getting the appropriate approval. As a sponsored project, the study goes through certain steps, including the scientific research ethical committee, which reviews the protocol and ethically approves the research (ethical approval number: 444-50-41366-DS)

3.3. PGA-based Achievement Tests

The present achievement test is collected from the final exam of both courses: reading and writing. The final exam is out of 50 points. The researcher collected the scores from three PGA questions (18 points) in reading and equivalent three PGA-based questions (18 points) in writing. Each question equals six points. Each question was recalculated with this formula $(x/6*5)$ to provide a score out of five. The following table (3) shows the structure and relationship among these questions.

Table 3.

The structure and relationship among the variables

Code	PGA-based Reading Test	Code	PGA-based Writing Test
R1	Identification of the main idea and supporting details	W1	Writing topic sentences and supporting sentences
R2	Identification of signal words	W2	Using transition words
R3	Understanding paragraph	W3	Writing paragraph

Table (3) shows the structure of the PGA reading and writing tests of academic paragraphs. These items of the test have an equal score of 5. They match each other (R1, W1), (R2, W2) and (R3, W3). These items of the tests are guided by similar learning outcomes in both reading and writing.

The achievement test was analyzed using SPSS (version 22) and paired sample t-test analysis to answer the research questions to get the means, standard deviations, paired samples correlations, and paired samples tests. Standard deviations are very significant as they provide a high or low degree of variability among mixed-ability classes. The paired sample t-test is used to measure the degree of significance in students' achievement in academic paragraph reading and writing. GPA is used as an assessment technique in reading and writing.

4. Data Analysis and Results

In line with the research questions, students' performance in the achievement tests was analyzed, and the scores were calculated along with the arithmetic mean of students' performance. Data analysis was conducted based on the three pairs of processes of the tests to achieve the first research objective, which was to measure the achievement scores in academic paragraph reading and writing among mixed-ability classes of Saudi EFL students.

The paired-sample t-test was performed to compare the achievement scores in academic paragraph reading and writing. Table 4 shows the results of the one-sample (t-test) for achievement scores among the respondents (n=81).

Table 4.

Paired sample statistics

Achievement scores		Mean	SD	SE Mean
Pair 1	Identification of the main idea and supporting details	3.89	1.10	0.12
	Writing topic sentences and supporting sentences	2.94	1.95	0.22
Pair 2	Identification of signal words	2.83	1.81	0.20
	Using transition words	2.09	1.69	0.19
Pair 3	Understanding paragraph	4.28	1.11	0.12
	Writing paragraph	3.41	1.65	0.18

As Table 4 shows, there was a significant difference in the scores for identification of the main idea and supporting details (M= 3.89, SD=1.10), and writing a topic sentence and supporting sentences (M=2.94, SD=1.95) levels; $t(80)=5.50$, $p=0.000$. These results suggest that identifying the main ideas increases with the increase of writing topic sentences. Similarly, identifying the supporting details goes hand in hand with writing supporting sentences. However, PGA has a higher effect on reading compared with writing. The high values of the standard deviations reflect the nature of mixed-ability classes of students. In other words, the standard deviations suggest a high level of heterogeneity in students' level in these sub-skills of reading and writing academic paragraphs.

As for the second pair, there was a significant difference in the scores for identifying signal words (M= 2.83, SD=1.81) and using transition words (M=2.09, SD=1.69) levels; $t(80)=3.76$, $p=0.000$. These results suggest that identifying signal words goes hand in hand with using transition words. Again, the high values of the standard deviations reflect the nature of mixed-ability classes of students. In other words, the standard deviations suggest a high level of heterogeneity in students' level in these sub-skills of reading and writing academic paragraphs.

As for the third pair, there was a significant difference in the scores for the understanding of paragraphs (M= 4.28, SD=1.11) and writing paragraphs (M=3.41, SD=1.66) levels; $t(80)=5.99$, $p=0.000$. These results suggest that the understanding of paragraphs goes hand in hand with paragraph writing. Again, the high values of the standard deviations reflect the nature of mixed-ability classes of students. In other words, the standard deviations suggest that there is a high level of heterogeneity in terms of students' level of reading and writing academic paragraphs.

Moving to the second research question to correlate the effects of PGA on students' achievement in academic paragraph reading and writing, a correlational relationship between them was conducted (Tables 5 and 6).

Table 5.

Paired Samples Correlations

Achievement scores	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 Identification of the main idea and supporting details & Writing topic sentences and supporting sentences	81	.601	.000
Pair 2 Identification of signal words & Using of transition words	81	.492	.000
Pair 3 Understanding paragraphs & Writing paragraph	81	.606	.000

Table 6.

Paired Samples Test

Paired Samples test	Paired Differences			<i>t</i>	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	SE	SE Mean			
Pair 1 Identification of the main idea and supporting details - Writing topic sentences and supporting sentences	.950	1.556	.172	5.497	80	.000
Pair 2 Identification of signal words - Using transition words	.740	1.766	.196	3.775	80	.000
Pair 3 Understanding paragraph - Writing paragraph	.876	1.317	.146	5.990	80	.000

A paired samples correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the three pairs. There was a moderate positive correlation between the first pair, $r=0.601$, $n=81$, and $p=0.000$. Similarly, there was a moderate positive correlation between the second pair, $r=0.606$, $n=81$, and $p=0.000$. There was a low positive correlation between the first pair, $r=0.601$, $n=81$, and $p=0.000$. Overall, there was a moderate positive correlation among the three pairs.

5. Discussion

The paired sample t-test shows that academic paragraph reading and writing results demonstrate a benchmark for comparing and discussing their relationships. The achievement scores in academic paragraph reading were higher than those in academic writing. As a process, identifying the main ideas is higher than writing topic sentences. In addition, the identification of supporting details is higher than writing supporting sentences. Similarly, the identification of signal words is higher than using transition words. This result indicates that these reading sub-genres scored higher than the writing sub-genres or moves. All in all, understanding paragraphs scored higher than writing paragraphs.

The target learning outcomes for both reading and writing academic paragraphs in this context are 60% (i.e., 3 out of 5). Subsequently, reading academic paragraphs has achieved the target learning outcomes except as far as the identification of signal words is concerned. However, the high values of the standard deviations reflect the nature of mixed-ability classes of levels. On the other hand, the processes of writing academic paragraphs have not

achieved the target learning outcomes except as far as paragraph writing is concerned. Paragraph writing scored close to the target learning outcome.

These results coincide with (Montero-Arévalo, 2019), who found that a genre-based approach improved EFL reading and writing among Colombian EFL students. The results are also in agreement with (Purcell-Gates et al., 2007). Safari and Mokhtari (2016) found that PGA oral academic lectures improved TOEFL learners' writing achievement. Handayani and Siregar (2013) also found that PGA significantly improved students' achievement in writing descriptive text.

The correlation analysis indicated a moderate positive correlation between academic paragraph reading and writing. The first and the third pairs have similar levels of correlation. However, pair two has a correlation level. This is acceptable compared to the low achievement scores in identifying signal words and using transition words. This result coincides with Purcell-Gates et al. (2007). However, the results do not concur with those of Schoonen (2019), who employed an interactive view of the relationship between reading and writing and found that both literacy skills randomly interact with each other.

6. Conclusion

This study examines and correlates the mixed-ability classes of students' achievement scores in both reading and writing academic paragraphs from a PGA perspective. The results revealed a moderate score of achievement in academic paragraph reading. However, it revealed a low score of achievement in academic paragraph writing. The nature of mixed-ability classes is reflected in the high level of standard deviations in all pairs of sample tests. A moderate positive relationship exists between reading and writing academic paragraphs.

This study concludes that PGA-based EFL reading and writing materials play a significant role as scaffolding materials in mixed-ability reading and writing classes. PGA-based high-stakes tests are also effective in mixed-ability reading and writing classes. Reading and writing academic paragraphs are two sides of the same coin. From a PGA perspective, these two skills can be enhanced together. Language instructors need to pay much attention to identifying signal words in reading academic paragraphs and using transition words in writing academic paragraphs.

Further research is recommended on implementing PGA in reading and writing academic paragraphs, including experimental and interventional research designs. This study is limited to a male group of students. Further research needs to examine the role of gender in PGA achievement in both EFL reading and writing. The achievement test is used as the tool for assessment in this study. However, further research could employ portfolios as an assessment strategy based on PGA, which can also be used to examine its role in terms of leveling up slow learners in mixed-ability classes. In so doing, an interventional study could employ PGA in mixed-ability classes using PGA teaching materials, PGA teaching strategies, PGA learning styles, and PGA assessment.

The study suggests that language instructors can employ PGA in teaching both reading and writing skills. However, they need training on implementing PGA in their classes to promote PGA awareness among EFL learners. Subsequently, this study recommends in-service training programs for language instructors in contexts where teamwork language teaching is delivered, such as the English language skills programs.

Acknowledgments

The author is thankful to the Deanship of Scientific Research at Najran University for funding this work under the Research Priorities and Najran Research funding program (NU/NRP/SEHRC/12/2).

Note on Ethical Issues

Ethical permission for this study was attained from Najran University's Ethical Committee on 18/01/2023 with the decision number 444-50-41366-DS.

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