

The Zine Project

Improving Students' Skill and Creativity in Writing in English

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Keywords: Genre-based, Writing, Zine.

Abstract: The young people's low of interest in reading may be one of the causes of their difficulties in constructing texts in the writing class. Students still face problems in finding or even organizing ideas. This research explores how to develop the students' skills in writing five genres in English by applying a genre-based approach and how to improve students' creativity by creating a zine as the final project. According to Martin (2009), the primary focus of a genre-based approach is on increasing productive skills through modelling, joint construction, and independent construction with the conception of language as a meaning making system. After the teacher applied the modelling stage, she assigned the students to create a zine containing the writing assignments. The zine was based on each student's respective interests so it became the major topic of the zine. At the end of the course, it can be seen that the texts the students compiled in the zine reflected their skill and creativity. The result also reveals that the students have good understanding of the social function, generic structure, and linguistic features of explanation, analytical exposition, hortatory exposition, news item, and review genres that have been taught in the Advanced Genre-Based Writing class. Moreover, they can expand their knowledge on how to apply different genres in printed media.

1 INTRODUCTION

Reading and writing are two important skills that can help people to deal with job, school, and other daily matters. They are also beneficial for acquiring knowledge. Most importantly, reading and writing are used to communicate. The ability to read and write is commonly associated with the term literacy.

One of the current issues dealing with literacy in Indonesia is that many of its youth are not really interested in reading and writing. The easy access to the Internet are considered as the cause of these young people's low interest in reading books or other printed materials. This phenomenon also occurs in the English Department of Universitas Dian Nuswantoro (UDINUS), Central Java. When the students were asked if they like reading and what kind of reading materials they like to read, only less than a quarter of approximately 25 students said they like reading novels or books. The rest admitted that they mostly read only text messages or short social media posts online (Line, Facebook, Instagram).

Meanwhile, English is taught as a foreign language in Indonesia. Therefore, mastering the language will be an advantage both in school and in

the real world. In English as foreign language (EFL) classes, students are taught English language skills such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Writing in a foreign language can be challenging for students. They not only produce language but also organize the language into a coherent text so the readers can comprehend their texts easily. As Shaw and Weir (in Horverak and Haugen, 2016:3) put it, writing is a complex skill since it involves several cognitive processes like planning, organisation, translation, and revising.

The students' lack of reading activities may lead in their difficulties in the writing class. They still face problems to find ideas to develop and to organize their ideas in a coherent text. Moreover, they also have to consider English grammatical structure since writing not only involves idea organization but also grammar. Thus, to facilitate the students of UDINUS in EFL writing, a genre-based approach is applied. According to Martin (2009), the primary focus of a genre-based approach is on increasing productive skills through modelling, joint construction, and independent construction with the conception of language as a meaning making system.

Meanwhile, there are studies on teaching EFL writing that have been done. A study conducted by Bastian and Al-Hafizh (2014) found that pictorial story media for teaching recount can solve problems in teaching writing to Junior High School students. Pictorial story can also develop the students' idea to write the story and it can help students easier to retell their experience.

Iranada Laraswati and Suhartono (2016) analyzed the application of visual media and the students' responses in teaching writing to eleventh grade students of SMA Muhammadiyah Kediri. The result shows that the application of visual media helps the students write easily since it helps them to be more creative in finding the ideas and developing vocabulary.

Another research on EFL writing was done by Ilyasa (2013). She analyzed the use of songs in teaching narrative text through a case study in a high school in Bandung, Indonesia. The analysis reveal that songs as a prompt can help the students to understand context and social purpose of narrative text, generate ideas, enhance vocabularies and the use of expressions, and promote students' motivation.

The previous studies show various methods of teaching writing in junior and senior high schools. This research is different from the previous ones since it explores the teaching and learning EFL writing in a university context. This research also involves creating a zine project that has not been done in the previous studies. This research is interested in looking at how zines can improve students' writing skill. Therefore, the result of this research is expected to give an insight on how teaching writing can be done in a more interesting way.

This research explores on how to improve the students' skills in constructing texts of different genres in the Advanced Genre-Based Writing class. In addition, since the traditional writing class usually only requires students to submit texts in the form of paper, this research also proposed a final project that might attract students' interests. This class required the students to make a final project in the form of personal zines that were based on each student's respective interest. By creating these zines, the students are expected to be able to construct texts of specific topics in five different genres in English and to improve their creativity.

Zine is defined as personal magazine created and published independently and is usually single-authored and presented in a form of creative publication (Jacobi, 2007). Zine is mostly designed to catch the readers' interest through its layout. Thus, employing individual zine project for writing class

encourages the students to be more creative as they need to not only write, but also create well-presented design for their zine. It also enables the students to express their idea trough writing and composing their personal design. In this paper, the researchers incorporated zine project with genre-based approach in English writing class.

To the best of the researchers' knowledge, so far there has been no research on the use of zine in writing classes. However, this medium has indeed been suggested with the following considerations:

- The zine is an intriguing multimodal format. (<https://www.hastac.org/blogs/taxomania/2014/01/28/02-using-zines-classroom>)
- Students can discover a world of publishing possibilities through zines, and zines can help a teacher decenter their classroom and make spaces for students to encounter the other and to experience their own voices. (<http://zinebook.com/resource/engagingwriters.html>)
- Zines can be a multimodal type of writing since they commonly include a mix of images and written text. All of this variety results in broad and exciting possibilities for students to freely express their creativity and ideas through the structure and format of the medium. (<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/blog-posts/john-depasquale/zine-making-101/>)

In the Genre-based Writing class where this research was conducted, there were five genres that are taught. These genres are Explanation, Analytical Exposition, Hortatory Exposition, News Item, and Review. In the class, the teacher applied the following steps, which were adopted from Hayland's teaching-learning cycle of genre-based approach (2007):

- Setting the context. This first step explores the purposes and setting which normally applied by a given genre. The teacher discussed the social function, generic structure, and the linguistic features of each genre with the students.
- Modelling of the text. At this stage, the students analyze the key discursual features of the genre by using a sample text of that given genre. The teacher gave examples of each genre to discuss with the students. They analyzed the text samples to identify the structure and the features of the texts.
- Joint construction. It involves teacher-guided activities that discuss the pattern and grammatical features of the genre. The teacher guided and supported the students to

practice writing the texts. Students collaborated with their partners to construct their texts based on the examples studied.

- Independent construction. The teacher gradually withdrew her support, but continuously monitored students' independent writing activities.
- Comparing. At this final stage, the students were asked to compare particular social purposes of the genres that they have learned to other genres.

2 METHODOLOGY

This research implemented genre-based approach in the classroom and analyzed the students' texts. The genre-based approach was implemented in the Advanced Genre-Based Writing class of English Department, Faculty of Humanities of UDINUS. It was conducted in the fourth semester class from March to July 2017. After implementing the genre-based approach in the classroom, the teacher asked the students to create a zine as a final project. The texts analysis was conducted by taking 25 zines as data samples. After that, the linguistic features and the generic structured were analyzed to observe students' understanding of those genres.

At the end of the project, the researchers distributed an online questionnaire to elicit students' feedback on the zine project. The questions include whether they felt challenged by the project and whether the course successfully improved their writing skills. Horverak and Haugen's (2016) was used as a reference to develop the questionnaire for this research.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The genre-based approach in this research was implemented to facilitate the students to be able to construct their own Explanation, Analytical Exposition, Hortatory Exposition, News Item, and Review texts. These genres were given in 14 meetings in one semester, each of which was discussed in two to three meetings. As for the final project of the course, the teacher asked the students to write five texts individually and compile them as a zine. The following are some examples of the students' zine:



Figure 1: Students' zine project.

3.1 Analysis of the Students' Texts

The zines that the students created cover various topics. The zines reflected each student's interest. Some major topics of the students' zine are education, food, movie, automotive, and Korean pop culture.

3.1.1 Social Function

The students' texts show that the students wrote their texts based on each genre's social function. Some examples can be seen in the following table:

Table 1: Social functions.

Title	Genre	Social Function
The Transformation of Milk into Cheese	Explanation	to explain the process of making cheese from milk
The role of rating in K-Drama	Analytical Exposition	to persuade the reader about the importance of viewers' rating in K-Drama
Planting Trees Now, Saving the World Later	Hortatory Exposition	to persuade the reader to take action to planting trees to save the world
Torrential Rain Triggers Flood in Brebes	News Item	to inform the readers about the torrential rain in Brebes that triggers flood
The Perfect Collab	Review	to give critique of the Chainsmokers and Coldplay's song <i>Something Just Like This</i>

3.1.2 Generic Structure

In terms of each genre's generic structure, the students were able to organize their ideas. They have already followed the generic structure of the five genres. An example of the student's Review genre text is presented below:

- **Title:** *Disaster From Underground: Volcano*
- **Orientation:** *Volcano is a 1997 American natural disaster film directed by Mick Jackson and produced by Andrew Z Davis.*
- **Interpretative Recount:** *At Los Angeles, an earthquake strikes, the director of the city's office of Emergency Management, Michele Roark (Tommy Lee Jones) insist on coming to work to help out with the crisis*
- **Evaluation:** *This movie was very intense and make people who watched it hold their breath*
- **Evaluation Summation:** *Rating : 2/5*

3.1.3 Linguistic Features

Each genre has different linguistic features. The students were already aware of this as reflected in their texts. The following excerpt demonstrate the student's understanding of Explanation genre's linguistic features.

- **Use of present tense:** *Yogurt is usually made from cow's milk.*
- **Use of passive voice:** *Milk is heated to 80 degrees Celsius for 80 minutes.*
- **Usually the subject is not human:** *Yogurt is milk made through the process of bacterial fermentation.*
- **Use of action verbs to explain cause:** *The fermentation process is carried out in the incubator.*
- **Use of connective to link time sequences:** *Second, the culturisation process.*
- **Use of technical terms:** *Good bacteria are Lactobacillus Bulgarius and Streptococcus Thermophilus.*

3.2 Students' Feedback on the Zine Project

The feedbacks given by the students through the online questionnaire are mostly positive as shown in the following charts:

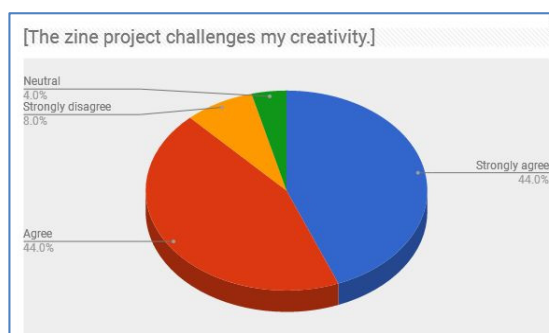


Figure 2: Students' response on zine project.

Figure 2 shows that almost all of the students were challenged by the zine project. However, it did not make them less enthusiastic. Although they had to spend about three weeks to finish the zine, they were very excited since it was something new for them and the writing assignment was no longer submitted in a plain paper. In addition, they were given the freedom to choose their own topic based on their preferences and hobbies. It gave them the opportunity to express themselves through their writing and zine design. Thus, it makes the project challenging, yet still fun and exciting.

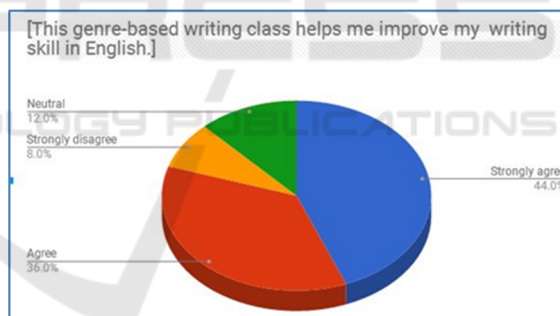


Figure 3: Students' opinion on genre-based writing class.

The students' responses demonstrate that the genre-based approach helped the students to improve their writing skills. The students did not only focus on the mastery of grammatical structure of individual sentences, but they also learned about the social function of each text type. Genre-based approach also helped them to understand the relationship between the communicative purpose of the text and its specific features. Hence, they became aware that each genre is made for different readers, has its specific structure and features, and fulfils different social goals.

Many studies have been done in the field of teaching writing by using genre-based approach. Most of them are focusing on the use of various media such as pictorial story media, visual media, and song

lyrics (Al-Hafizh, 2014; Iranada Laraswati and Suhartono, 2016; and Ilyasa, 2013). In all of those studies, the researchers concluded that those various media significantly increase the students' positive response on the course. Similar to the findings of those previous research, it can be concluded from the results of questionnaire response that the zine project has also increased the students' interest and positive response on the advanced genre based writing course taught in Universitas Dian Nuswantoro. This research however, is focusing on five genres of factual genre taught in the university context which is rather different with those previous studies that focusing only on one genre.

4 CONCLUSIONS

After implementing the genre-based approach in the writing class, it can be concluded that students understand how to write explanation, analytical exposition, hortatory exposition, news item, and review texts. Their texts followed the generic structure and linguistic features of those genres. The students are also able to develop five different texts from one topic. Furthermore, the texts the students compiled in the zines reflected their skill and creativity since they are based on their own interests. By creating zines students can expand their knowledge on how to apply different genres in different kinds of printed media.

It is suggested that future studies involves not only the result of students' writings but also the analysis of the detailed process of teaching writing in the classroom. The samples also need to be expanded and more categories and questions may be included in the questionnaire to generate a more comprehensive result.

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