

## *Nature and Importance of Teacher's Feedback in the Writing Process*

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**الملخص :**

يتناول هذا المقال أهمية استخدام الأستاذ للتغذية الراجعة باعتبارها إجراء ناجحاً في تحسين القدرة على التعبير الكتابي عموماً و تطوير صنعة الكتابة باللغة الانجليزية على وجه الخصوص ، و هو ما يجب أن يكون انشغال كل أساتذة التعبير الكتابي في سياق اللغة الانجليزية سواء أكانت لغة ثانية أم أجنبية .

### **ABSTRACT**

The present article deals with teachers feedback as being an important procedure in writing development in general and in the writing process (as an approach) in particular . It should be the concern of teachers of writing in both English as a Foreign /Second Language contexts .

### **Introduction**

Recent research in English a Foreign/Second Language (E.F.L/E.SL) context showed that feedback plays an important role in writing development in general and in the writing process in particular and leads to greater development in writing. It has been a lasting concern of teachers of writing and researchers in both English as a Foreign Language and English as a Second Language contexts. Teacher feedback, leads to greater improvements in writing. It is our belief that an effective teaching and practice of the writing skill should be partly based on an accurate understanding of what feedback entails. Some of the points raised in the present article will undoubtedly clarify the importance of teachers feedback and will assist students in a more effective way to improve their writing.

### **Definition of Feedback**

Feedback is the input from a reader/teacher to a writer/student with the effect of providing the latter with information for revision; in other words, it is the comments, questions and suggestions a reader gives a writer to produce reader “based prose” (Flower 1979) as opposed to “writer-based” prose. It is via feedback that students learn to

appreciate the various aspects of the process of composing. *The feedback which the learner gets on his or her piece of writing plays a very important role, both in motivating further learning and in ensuring that the teacher's texts gradually come warer and never to written feneny.* (Hamp Lyons 1987 :143).

It is vital to the process of learning. Research shows it enables students to assess their performances, modify their behaviour and transfer their understandings (Applebee and Langer Brinks 1993).

Keh (1990) distinguishes three types of feedback:

Peer evaluation, conferences, and written comments.

- Peer evaluation: is a possibility to stress the role of the student in the writing process. To emphasize the role of the students is an important issue and has to be carefully planned and incorporated in the writing activity. Students need to know all about evaluation ; that is to say, what to evaluate and how to do it. McDonough and Shaw (1993:191) pointed out that peer evaluation "will only be effective with guidance and focus". It can help our students to see what they produce critically and more consciously.

- Conferences: Bowen (1993) sees that conferencing is an efficient way of dealing with writing in that the latter is freed from its isolation and integrated with another skill, speaking. It is a good opportunity for the students to meet with their teacher and ask questions about the different aspects of writing. One of the interesting characteristics of writing workshop and the way it creates a working atmosphere is that the teacher is given the opportunity to confer with students on a regular basis. (Weaver 2006:92). Here, the students need to focus on two important points. First, to make of conferencing a successful technique to improve writing and have some knowledge and ideas about what a successful text consists of and how it should be presented. Second, teachers and/or students need to give an encouraging and positive feedback and offer suggestions for improvement.

Written comments are helpful in that they help students correct their writing and find solutions to their problems. In this regard, giving clues whether in the form of questions, suggestions, codes symbols or error sheets was considered more effective than correction of mistakes. (Brock and Walters 1993:97) .We believe that written comments give a certain security to writing students if they are clear and not misleading.

Oral Conferences are considered of a particular value, both in terms of being more effective for facilitating improvement than written comments and as a means of encouraging successful practices and texts. In order to allow students to develop ways of

writing which are not only effective, but in which they feel comfortable, such approaches need both support and time.

We believe that feedback has a very important effect on students in that it helps them become aware of their errors and the very many problems of writing. Leki (1992) points out that students need to learn how to revise more effectively whether the learners are international students, or immigrants or minority students in tertiary institutions. Leki (1992 : 165).

Dheram (1995 :160) also sees that “feedback seems to be as central to the process of teaching and learning writing as revision is to the process of writing”. Dheram (1995:160). Similarly, Raimes (1985) found that L2 students appreciate teacher-editing and feedback. Radecki and Swales (1988) also see that L2 learners appear to expect and accept greater intervention, and to make greater improvements when they get such feedback.

Some methodologists consider self-correction as an alternative to teacher’s correction. Taylor (1981) suggested that it is important for students to be their own critics. Students are asked to rewrite their own assignments, in this way the importance is given to the first draft. Rewriting is important in that it enables students to solve the problems they face; rewriting their own compositions gives students confidence in their ability to solve problems in their own writing.

It has been suggested by Zamel (1984) that when adopting feedback students must be given time to do multi-drafts assignments so that each draft brings them closer to approximating what they want to say [achieve]. Butturf and Sommers (1980) mentioned in Zamel (1985), see that rather than responding to texts as fixed and final products, we teachers should be leading students through the different cycles of revision. Krashen (1984) mentioned in Robb et al (1986) also advocates delaying feedback on errors until the final stage of editing. Researchers like Robb et al argue that salient feedback has a more significant effect on students' overall ability than direct feedback. "The more direct methods of feedback do not seem to produce results commensurate with the amount of effort required of the instructor do draw the student’s attention to surface errors". (Robb et al 1986 : 201).

The importance of correction and feedback and revision in the writing process made most students expect and value it after they produce any piece of writing. Research has proved that there seems to be a strong connection between active correction of errors and the improvement of students in the writing skill. Ferris (1995) put a focus on the

importance that students give to writing accurately and their perceived need to obtain corrections from the teacher.

Truscott (1996) mentioned the important factor –opposing grammar correction- that of the necessity of dealing with every linguistic category (lexicon, syntax and morphology) as equivalent, since they represent separate learning domains that are acquired differently through varying processes. Nevertheless, researchers like Ferris and Roberts (2001) and Robb Ross and Shorbreed 1986 agree that corrections are useful for students as long as they are systematic and consistent. When Chastain (1990:14) carried out a study about the effects of graded and ungraded composition found that although there was no significant difference between the number and types of errors. He put it as follows: *in some ways the expectation of a grade may influence student's writing in some positive ways....students in this study wrote longer papers containing longer sentences and a higher number of complex sentences.*

Because of the role it plays in improving writing, correction of written production has provoked some controversy. Many studies carried out by scholars such as Ferris and Roberts, (2001), Zamel 1985 and Lalande (1982) advocate differing approaches to written correction falling under main categories :

- a- Explicit or direct : where the teacher indicates the error and provides the correct form.
- b- Non-explicit or indirect: where the teacher only marks the error in some way by underlining or using a code and leaves it to the student to correct (it).

Some researchers like Chastain (1990), Scott (1996) and Ruiz Funes (2001) see that the best way of dealing with students' errors is just to indicate the type of error without giving the correct answer and it is to the student to solve the problem by correcting what should be corrected. Here, we think that such a procedure is a good and encouraging classroom practice.

In a different study Ferris (1999) sees that errors can be classified as treatable (patterned and rule-governed), or untreatable for which there is/are no specific rule(s) that students can refer to, to avoid making mistakes. For these errors she recommends a combination of direct correction and a set of strategies exclusive to this type of error.

Our students need to know that it is very important to understand that there is no ideal model for writing and that they cannot be compared to native speakers or more proficient students. Teachers also need to know that our students are dealing with a Foreign Language and therefore are not able to produce a perfect piece of writing as

natives do. In this respect, Yates and Kenkel (2002:34) point out “To compare the learner’s knowledge to native speaker knowledge commits the comparative fallacy and provides incomplete insight into what principles the learner had.”

When dealing with students' writing, teachers should bear in mind that it is extremely important that any correction or feedback procedure should reflect the kinds of tasks the students go through in the classroom. Their ultimate goal is to judge the performance of the students by checking for correct usage and grammar and being mainly concerned with organization of ideas and the quality of content as well when correcting students' writing.

### **Teacher Feedback as a Major Social Affective Strategy**

Researches that were carried out in the E.S.L. classroom indicate that teachers most frequently respond to the mechanical errors the students make (Applebee 1981. Zamel 1985 reported in Robb et al 1986). In formal schooling as Bordren (1973) and Graff (1980) mentioned in Freedman et al (1985) pointed out, formal schooling denies writing as a form of communication. The new outlook at writing as a cognitive communicative act calls for a new outlook at error correction.

When correcting, teachers are required to be more message oriented. Raimes (1979) says that when we pick up the composition of an E.S.L student, we do not have automatically to look for errors. She suggests that E.S.L. composition teachers must always, and at all levels, look at a piece of writing as a message conveying the ideas of the writer.

The same thought was voiced by Hatton (1985: 109) who said that correction should deal with content before form and that “correction should give feedback, therefore it should be specific and emphasize areas where progress is being made”; that is to say, correction is supposed to be on the positive than the negative side.

### **Nature and Role of Teacher Feedback**

When we speak about feedback, it is essential to mention the role the teacher plays in this operation. Reid and Kroll (1995: 18) highlighted the complex nature of the teacher’s role towards students' writing based on the factors that follow. “Teachers often play several roles, among them coach, judge, facilitator, expert, respondent and evaluator as they offer more response and more intervention than an ordinary reader”.

Sommers (1982) found that most teachers' comments are vague and do not provide specific reactions to what students have written. Because of this, she says students revision

show mediocre improvement and some revised essays even seem worse than the original ones. Additionally, when commenting on teachers' responses to students' drafts, she stressed the need "to develop an appropriate level of response for commenting on a first draft and to differentiate that from the level suitable for a second or third draft." Sommers (1982:332). Comments therefore should be adapted to the draft in question. As far as the early drafts are concerned, "the teacher's goal should be to engage students with the issues they are considering and help them clarify their purposes and reasons in writing their specific texts" Ferris (1997:315). This relates to Ferris, and Tate (1997) summarized the Key principles of teacher response in process-oriented writing classes as follows:

- 1- Allow time for multiple drafts.
- 2- Give between-draft feedback.
- 3- Focus on ideas rather than grammar on early drafts.

However, Fathman and Whalley (1990:187) found that "grammar and content feedback can be provided separately, or at the same time without overburdening the student "

In their study that included 72 students enrolled in intermediate E.S.L composition classes who were divided into four groups and received a different kind of teacher feedback on their (writing) compositions as follows. Group 1 received no feedback, group 2 received grammar feedback only, group 3 received content feedback only and group 4 received grammar and content feedback; they found that students receiving joint grammar and content feedback could improve significantly in both grammar and content when rewriting. However, the students' writing was limited to 30 minutes based on a story of eight (08) pictures, and may not reflect students' experience with academic writing.

Although Ferris et al (1997:155) describe responding to student writing as potentially: "the most frustrating, difficult and time-consuming part of the job.". They stress its crucial role. In their study they found that teacher feedback varied over time according to the type of text and stage depending on the draft; they reached the following implications.

- 1- Teachers should be sensitive to the needs, abilities, and personalities of their students when providing feedback.
- 2- Different types of assignments lead to different responses.
- 3- Teachers should be able to reduce the amounts and types of feedback given over a course so that to build on feedback an instruction already given, respond to student improvements and develop increasing independence in revision and editing skills.

As far as the distinction between teacher and peer feedback is concerned, Ferris et al see that: *Feedback from peers has different purposes and effects than feedback from an expert or authority; teacher-student conferences, because they involve primarily spoken interaction, operate under different dynamics and constraints than does written teacher feedback.* (Ferris et al 1997:159).

This means that the two types of feedback cannot be directly comparable, or true alternatives mainly because oral versus written communication, and the teacher's level is undoubtedly better than that of the student. Ferris et al (op.cit:160) come to the conclusion that for most circumstances teacher feedback would be more desirable and is of a greater importance. They argue that : *though most L1 and L2 experts remain enthusiastic about peer feedback and one to one writing conferences as instructional options, they are not always more desirable than written teacher commentary, given individual student variation listening/speaking ability in learning style preferences, and in cultural expectations of the teacher- student relationship.*

It is not easy for teachers to provide (the) students with a useful feedback that enables them to improve their writing. The question that many be asked by these teachers is whether to focus on form (grammar and the mechanics of writing), or on content (ideas organization, meaning, clarity and the amount of details). "The major question confronting any theory of responding to student writing is where we should focus our attention". Griffin (1982:296).

Although not much attention is paid to correctness in the Process Approach in that the importance of content passes first through the different drafts, "many teachers maintain a strong interest in correctness in spite of this recent focus on process". Applebee (1981:21).

Our teachers seem to be concerned mainly with specific problems and surface features of writing and their reaction is limited to the errors and mistakes occurring at the sentential level without bothering much about discourse. Zamel sees that teachers: *attend primarily to surface level features of writing and seem to read and react to a text as a series of separate sentences or even clauses rather than as a whole unit of discourse. They are in fact so distracted by language related local problems that they often correct these without realizing that a much larger meaning-related problem has totally escaped their notice.* (Zamel cited in Jordan 1997 : 171).

Furneaux (1998) sees that feedback focuses initially on content and organization. When these are satisfactory, comment on language is given on penultimate drafts for final

amendment. All in all, we can add that our teachers should help students become proficient writers by providing them with the appropriate feedback that leads them to review their work productively. Such an aim can be attained only if appropriate contexts for such feedback are created.

### **Teacher Feedback in a Process Approach**

The product oriented view of writing regards writing as a linear fragmented procedure “where much feedback to students on their writing appeared in the form of a final grade on a paper accompanied by much red into throughout the essay”. (Grabe and Kaplan 1996 :378), and that the rise of the Process Approach marked the beginning of a new era in L2 writing pedagogy.

The new perspective of giving response to student writing is characterized by providing feedback, and emphasis of writing is now on the whole discourse; the stress is often on function rather than form, on the use of language rather than on its usage. The role of teachers is no more that of an authority but as helpers (assistants) to help students be responsible for what they produce. They are the facilitators who offer guidance and support. We want to say that the feedback system in the Process-oriented Approach is quite different in that it regards composing as a complex developmental task.

It concentrates more on how discourse is created through the discovery and negotiation of meaning than to the production of error free sentences. Language is viewed as a means to explore the students' ideas. The focus in the Process Approach is how to give “reader based” feedback (Elbow 1981), the point about grammatical accuracy is left or postponed to the final stage. By offering feedback on both content and form, the writing activity becomes more comprehended in that it helps students form the first stage, i.e that of jotting down ideas to the final stage of refining of the whole written paragraph or essay. Thus, making the work of providing feedback to students become more demanding.

### **Teacher Feedback to First Language Students' Writing**

Zamel (1987) pointed out that how teachers respond to student writing is another indication of how writing is taught (p.700). Just like we frequently ask ourselves how best to teach language; we also ask the question how best to respond to students' writing and try to find an answer to that. According to one estimate, teachers spend at least twenty to forty minutes responding to an individual paper. (Zamel 1980:80). This Kind of information leads us to accept/agree that responding to written productions is time consuming and, even more worrying that, often of little use to students (Sommers 1982. Hillocks 1986).



Traditionally, responding to student writers' work equals marking. Hedge (1988: 37) sees that it is: *a considerable part of the work-load of the average English language teacher. It usually takes place under pressure of time and leaves teachers with a dissatisfied feeling that they can only make a minimal contribution to the improvement of an individual student's writing.*

Leki (1990) in a review of issues in written response, observes that L1 research studies have concluded that the commentaries teachers make when responding to writing are frequently too general, too specific and usually focusing on surface level features. In an earlier study, Zamel (1985:79) had already confirmed that: "Teachers marks and comments usually take the form of abstract and vague prescriptions and directives that students find difficult to interpret".

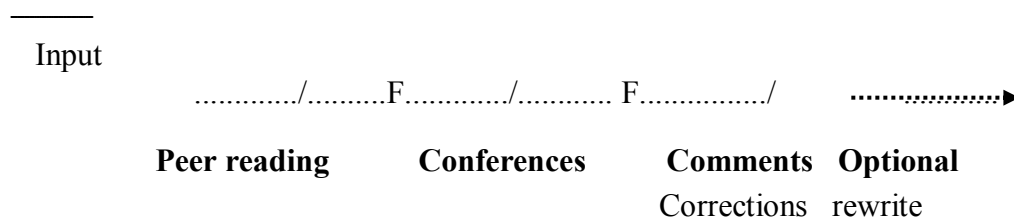
She advises teachers to avoid vague comments when responding to students writing so that the latter could benefit from the information presented to them, since it is crucial and necessary to the perfection of the writing skill. She adds "teachers therefore need to develop more appropriate responses for commenting on student writing." Zamel (op.cit:79)

Applebee (1981) led the first national survey of writing instruction and among his findings of particular study is that the majority of the teachers focused on the mechanics of texts and only 1/5 of the students reported the habit of addressing ideas and content. This, we believe, clearly passes on an extremely restricted idea of writing. If we agree with Keh (1990:294) when she observes that feedback is described as "Input from a reader to a writer with the effect of providing information to the writer for revision... what pushes the writer through the writing processes on to the eventual end product."

We therefore must come to the idea that responding solely to the mechanic aspects of the text will lead the attention of our students to those aspects of composing and consequently encourages them not to give importance to text organization and content.

Keh (1990) observes that feedback as revision is mostly encouraged by three different procedures:

Peer feedback, conferences, and teachers comments (See Figure 3.1 below and its implementation)



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***Figur.1 Implementation of Feedback (for one paper)***  
***( Keh 1990. p.295)***

Then she suggests what she thinks the best way to put them into practice, peer feedback being the first source of information the apprentice writers receive about their writing.

Feedback is advantageous and relevant particularly when writing is viewed from a process-oriented perspective. It helps novice writers to gain self-confidence when they feel they are able to comment on each other's written work. It is also an opportunity for them to develop critical skills in the revising skill and to receive feedback from a reader other than their teacher who stops to be the evaluator of the learner's writing. The other advantage of using peer feedback is that it is immediate, that is, takes place in the classroom which is not the case of teacher feedback that often waits till the next lesson.

Although Keh considers peer feedback a useful stage in the writing process, she adds that it should not be understood as a better or a substitute for teacher feedback. The author further explains that this first type of feedback is followed by a second draft. Conferences is the moment when the teacher and student interact and the former feels it possible to address the student's real needs. *The teacher reader is a live audience, and this is able to ask for clarification, check the comprehensibility of oral comments made, help the writer sort through problems, and assist the student in decision-making.* Keh (1990:298)

Finally, the teacher makes written comments, and here the teachers should adopt a slightly different attitude by avoiding writing comments that do not help the student writer or confuse him. Keh observes that: "the first step is for the teacher to respond as a concerned reader to a writer –as a person, not as a grammarian or a grade giver." Keh (1990:301)

Keh's perception of the importance of paying attention to the nature of comments on student's writing is shared by Kehl who instigates the teacher to communicate "In a distinctly human voice with sincere respect for the writer as a person and a sincere interest in his improvement as a writer." Kehl (1970:976)

To put this orientation into practice, our teachers need to help students to develop a sense of awareness and confidence in themselves and counteract the negative influence of the traditional approach where the teacher is always viewed as an authoritative person

where comments cannot be discussed. On the contrary, and if we want to be more effective, we need to explore how students interpret comments, employ them in revision and learn from the process of doing so. Praise and positive reinforcement could be incorporated in our teaching strategies to promote a better teacher-student relationship. (see Daiker 1989). In other words, our teachers should take into account the point the student reached and not where we want him/her to arrive.

### **Students' Perception of Teacher's Feedback**

Language learners' perception of their teacher feedback on their work, or their view about which forms of feedback they believe help them to improve their writing skills are not usually given importance by teachers when providing feedback on students productions. Nor have they been object of a known and significant amount of research at least in Algerian universities. Although it is our strong belief that teacher's response to students' writing plays an important role in encouraging writing and developing students' wish to revise and to rewrite

Cohen's study (1987) focused on the E.F.L and E.S.L learners reaction to teacher's feedback.

It is an investigation that dealt with the extent to which E.F.L and E.S.L learners process teacher feedback on their compositions. Cohen also looked at what teachers' responses tended to deal with and what forms of feedback might cause difficulty to students to interpret. He selected 217 students from New York State University attending different courses in English as a foreign language and English as a second language. He collected data via a questionnaire that consists of questions that primarily focus on the nature of teacher feedback and on the strategies of how students view it.

Concerning students' strategies to deal with teacher's feedback, the results showed that students had a limited source of strategies to deal with teacher feedback. Some of them reported that they just made a mental note of those comments. Taking down notes and points referring to other papers, looking over corrections and doing nothing were the most common strategies to process feedback. Just 9% of the learners reported that they considered teacher's comments and therefore incorporated them.

The two aspects of teacher feedback that were given the greatest importance by the learners were grammar and mechanics in that 89% and 83% of the students respectively paid the most attention to them, these two aspects were followed by vocabulary 79%, organization 74% and finally content 61%. The conclusion we can draw from these

findings is that students paid considerable attention to aspects of writing in which teacher's response was scarce like content and organization 32% and 44% respectively.

Cohen's research study can be summarized in two points:

1- Students have limited strategies to deal with teacher's responses to their work; that is, feedback has a limited impact on students.

2- Teacher's feedback tends to concentrate more on structure and vocabulary rather than meaning and content.

Ferris (1995), who based her research in L1 and L2 writing on the works done by Krashen 1984, Hillocks 1986 and Freedman 1987, found that teacher feedback on multiple draft compositions is more effective when given on preliminary (or immediate) rather than final drafts. She also cited L2 studies by Chaudron 1994 and Zhang and Halpern (1988) supporting the effectiveness of teacher feedback on preliminary drafts for subsequent revised texts. Chaudron has compared differences in student revisions based on two evaluation methods: teacher comments and peer evaluations. The former consists of pointing out, but not correcting the different occurring errors; that is, grammatical and mechanical; in addition to weaknesses in content, the latter followed guiding a short summary on the merits and problems of the text graded by the teacher and finally passed on to the students. The same essay was given to all and it was found that neither evaluation method was superior in promoting improvements to the writer's text. "no overall difference" Chaudron (1988 : 47)

Ferris study (1995) in a university E.S.L setting with multiple drafts found students perceptions of teacher feedback highly encouraging in that students consider their teacher a real source of help. Ferris (1995: 50) noted that: *Students do attend to, grapple with, and appreciate the efforts their teachers make in responding to their writing. Most importantly, this study indicates that the priorities of process-oriented writing instruction-multiple drafting emphasis on content, and willingness to utilize a variety of strategies (including collaboration with others) to solve problems and respond effectively to teacher feedback-are being understood and accepted to some degree by the E.S.L composition students.*

Seemingly, what preceded supported findings by Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1994) of an L2 study in a pedagogical setting where multiple drafts were required, but the question whether writers might appreciate feedback at other points in the writing process either from teachers or peers was left to others to investigate. Hayashi (1998), a Japanese researcher examined this area and took into consideration the effect of the combination of teacher feedback and peer response on errors in written work. In her study, peer correction

was largely limited to grammatical errors and received a mixed response over the three groups of Japanese freshmen, which Hayashi applied to differences in students' achievement goals and proficiency. 80% of those surveyed admitted that teacher feedback was helpful and positive.

In conclusion of her study, Hayashi, sees that teacher feedback gave the best results if given on final drafts and peer response alone was less effective than when supported by teacher feedback. Here, we share the same idea with her because we also believe that our students need teacher feedback and expect a lot from him/her.

Students' reactions to teacher feedback vary from a student to another and we can expect numerous and different attitudes towards it. The setting is one of the factors contributing to different responses to teacher comments. Hedgcok and Lefkowitz (1994) reached the conclusion that college level E.S.L students were generally more interested in feedback relating to content, while college level English as a foreign language learners paid more attention to form. These results reveal that E.F.L learners see little use for L2 writing skills. It can be expected that many E.S.L students may value comments on content more highly than those regarding sentence level errors and may put more emphasis and make more revision on this area. Ferris and Tade (1997) see that the reason for this distinction originates from the different uses that each of these groups had for English.

The philosophy of the classroom and how English is viewed by our students is another factor that should be taken into account when we consider how students respond to teacher feedback. In a classroom that adopts a Process-oriented Approach, students have different preferences and expectations than those in a classroom that adopts a Product Approach; i.e that requires only one draft.

Ferris (1995) suggests that because students must rethink and revise previously written essay drafts, they are more likely to pay more attention to their teacher's advice on how to do so than in a situation where they simply receive a graded paper with corrections and comments.

### **How to Respond to Students' Writing**

Responding to students' writing has always had an important consequence for students in that they get motivated to learn more mainly when they systematically receive constructive and supportive responses to their writing.

Research conducted on these responses has shown that teachers respond to most writing as if it were a final product, thus reinforcing a very limited notion of writing. (Zamel 1985). We are saying this simply because with the emergence of the Process-oriented Approach, unlike a Product-oriented Approach, responses no more concentrate on the surface level (for example, mechanics, spelling.). Here, it is important to note that effective comments during the writing process, which involves multiple drafts attending to both content and language at separate stages, (will) help students improve and encourage them to do so. Grabe and Kaplan (1996:378) see that: *One of the major positive impacts of the writing Process Approach has been the thorough rethinking of responses to students writing. A direct outcome of multiple drafts and pre-writing activities has been the exploration of ways in which teachers can assist students most effectively in their writing*

If we assume that we have adapted the Process Approach when responding to student's first draft, We would like to suggest the following guidelines that might help our teachers:

- 1- Focus should be put on content rather than language errors.
- 2- Make clear and specific comments and respond with statements as well as questions.
- 3- The teacher (Respondent) should not impose his own interpretation on student's writing.
- 4- Consider strengths as well as weaknesses by bearing in mind that commenting positively by showing the strong points can be a beneficial experience for the student.

We believe that when teachers follow the above cited guidelines when responding to students' writing first drafts, it is likely that the latter would take the different comments into account and get motivated to avoid the multiplicity of mistakes they make on their next productions. The operation in the writing Process Approach and between the first, second and final drafts) and through the different stages enable the teacher to assist students in a more effective way to improve their writing.

At beginning levels of writing development, Frank (1979) provides us with other guidelines we consider useful mainly for teachers working with beginning writers.

- 1- Build a helpful spirit and give directions for appropriate criticism (eg. Find the funniest sentence, find two good words, find any sentence that is not clear, think of something that might be added)
- 2- Start with anonymous pieces from outside the classroom for class criticism and ease into the process of critiquing slowly.
- 3- Focus on the positive.
- 4- Separate revising from editing
- 5- Do drafting together.
- 6- Work often with short pieces
- 7- Give specific responses: point out sentences that do not make sense, strong or weak openings, the need for more descriptive words, the over-repetition of vocabulary.
- 8- Decide what techniques need to be refined.
- 9- Recycle editing experiences into the next writing activity.
- 10- Avoid false praise.
- 11- Do not persist in an activity if student are resistant.

White and Arndt (1991) give examples of «Process Feedback» at various points in their book; according to them process feedback exhibits some or all the following features.

- 1- Response is made to content as well as to language and the text is treated as a piece of communication and the teacher reacts to it as a reader not just as a language critic.
- 2- Comments cover what is good about the text as well as what would be improved.
- 3- Many comments are put forward in the form of suggestions for change rather than instructions.

4- Students are not generally given the full solution to a problem on a plate, but they are firmly steered in a direction where, with thought, they should be able to arrive at a solution.

5- The teacher may assume a role akin to that of a colleague offering assistance to a fellow-writer rather than to that of an instructor.

### **Conclusion**

Effective teachers' comments on students' writing help students improve their writing and encourage them review their work productively. The teachers concerned with students' written productions should bear in mind that giving response provides not only an incentive to improve, but also a guidance about how to do better. When adopting a Process Approach to writing, teachers should give students enough time and more opportunities allowing them to work extensively and provide them with more instruction in writing and the teaching of writing to develop competence and confidence when tackling the writing process.

Overall, it is worthwhile reiterating the following points to serve as guidelines and principles for our teachers:

1. Make feedback an integral part of the writing process.
2. Provide informative and explicit feedback.
3. Feedback should be more accurate.
4. Students need to develop strategies for incorporating feedback in an effective and positive way.
5. Students show a greater degree of positive motivation if they receive feedback that considers positive comments.
6. Teachers should make suggestions that make students carry out revisions in the areas of organization, grammar and mechanics.

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## **Developing Discipline-specific Discourse Competence in Academic Writing: the Need for a Pedagogy of Genre**

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**ملخص**

هذا المقال المنتمي إلى مجال تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الأكاديمية يشير إلى أن تدريس الكتابة الأكاديمية ينبغي أن يحتل مكانا مركزيا في منهاج تدريس طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية من خلال إشراك جميع أساتذة وحدات ومواد المنهاج في مهمة مشتركة الهدف منها هو التطوير التدريجي لدى الطلاب لكفاءة كتابية متخصصة تمكنهم في النهاية من فرض أصواتهم كمؤلفين في المجالات التي ينوون التخصص فيها في النظام الجديد المبني أساسا على مبدأ التخصص المتدرج. إن أول خطوة نحو تحقيق هذا الهدف هو اعتماد النهج القائم على النوع في تصميم و تدريس برنامج مادة الكتابة الأكاديمية .

**Abstract**

This article located in the field of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) argues that writing should occupy a central place in the English curriculum through engaging all the teachers of the writing course and the teachers of the content modules in a joint enterprise the aim of which is the gradual development of students 'disciplinary-specific discourse competence that enables them ultimately to assert an authorial voice in the specific academic disciplines for which they bid entry in an L.M.D. system built on the principle of gradual specialization. The first step towards achieving this goal is the adoption of the genre-based approach in the design and the teaching of the writing course. The present article reviews a number of approaches to the teaching of academic writing so as to demonstrate the relevance of this pedagogic innovation centered around the notion of genre, which provides us with a more composite picture to operationalize the different aspects of discourse competence in academic writing.

**Introduction**

Writing is relatively a recent development in the long archeologically proven history of mankind. But its invention around 3000 BC marked a dramatic turning point in mankind's development that has shaped the path of its progress and governed its destiny ever since. Almost two thousand years ago, the great Chinese writer ,Lu Chi realised the power of the written word—as a permanent record, as a form of expression and as a means of communication that transcends time and space. '*Behold now the utility of letters...*

*It extends over a thousand miles and nothing can stop its course;*

*It penetrates a million years, the ferry from one to the other...*'

No wonder ,then, that Allah’s, the almighty, eternal miracle bearing his last message was a book ,the holy Qur’an, and that the book itself began with a revelation that raises awareness to the might of the pen, the symbol of the art of writing ,as a powerful medium for acquiring knowledge and passing it over from individual to individual, from generation to generation ,and from one cultural environment to another ,thus enabling every human being to partake in mankind’s continuous accumulation of knowledge.

*Read – for thy Sustainers is the Most Bountiful One  
who has taught [man] [through ]the use of the pen  
taught man what he did not know!*

The miracle worked ,as a miracle should, extraordinarily well ; it has rapidly ascended a nation of illiterates –that appreciates the magic of words and reveres good literature especially poetry to the point of worship but vastly in an oral tradition– to the leadership of human civilisation for about one thousand years before passing the torch along to Renaissance Europe.

Hundreds of years later ,in 1836,the English author Edward Bulwer-Lytton wrote a play about the father of the Académie Française entitled Richelieu ;Or the Conspiracy, where he coined the adage “*the pen is mightier than the sword*”. The Cardinal’s line in Act II, scene II, more fully says:

*True, This! —  
Beneath the rule of men entirely great,  
The pen is mightier than the sword. Behold  
The arch-enchanters wand! — itself a nothing! —  
But taking sorcery from the master-hand  
To paralyse the Cæsars, and to strike  
The loud earth breathless! — Take away the sword —  
States can be saved without it!*

Bulwer did not only write a line that would live for ages as one critic has shortly afterwards accurately predicted but it appears to have also foreseen the fate of the great empire of Queen Victoria ,who attended one of the performances, because less than two centuries later, the English empire where the sun never sets has given way to the even greater and more world dominating Empire of English. The global and globalizing role that English is playing in the

postcolonial post modernist era has indeed established its status as a global lingua franca.

### **1. The Impact of English as a Lingua Franca on English Language Teaching**

This unprecedented status is both increasing the interest in English language learning/teaching and changing the nature of ELT itself. The English for Specific Purposes movement in general, and one of its branches, EAP, in particular is leading this change. The branches of ESP are developing a pragmatic pedagogy that orientates students to issues of content. This pedagogy is based on the explicit teaching of the knowledge constructs, discourse conventions, and registers of the specific disciplines in order to enable students to write effectively in their academic assignments. A variety of options have so far been proposed in order to encourage students to engage directly with the knowledge of other disciplines: linked courses (where teachers of English collaborate with faculty from other disciplines as they tie their writing to the discipline-based assignments /curriculum ),sheltered courses (where instruction is oriented toward the discourse of the student's speciality), reading /writing courses ,and content-based instruction.Many innovations that have been sharpened in EAP :needs analysis, genre approaches, critical pedagogy are now crossing over to ELT in general and ESL/EFL writing in particular, Mcdonough (2005 ).<sup>(1)</sup>

Writing academic English with an advanced level of discourse competence that allows one to forge an identity in an academic domain is a real challenge even for native speakers; in the case of non-native speakers of English the challenges are even far greater .In the Algerian context of higher education, the implementation of the LMD system ,the increase in the number of universities offering English as a subject of study courses ,together with the significant surge in the number of students majoring in those courses have contributed to

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<sup>(1)</sup>- McDonough,J.2005,Talking Shop Perspectives on EAP An interview with Ken Hyland ELT Journal Volume 59/1 January 2005 Oxford: OUP

the growth in the number of would-be junior researchers aspiring to prepare master and doctorate degrees in one of the fields of specialization in English study like language sciences ,applied linguistics ,or literature and civilization. This climate of great academic expectations has led to fostering a strong demand for a more effective and needs-specific writing instruction that are much beyond the potential of the writing syllabus currently in use.

The implementation of the LMD system has brought many changes ,but these changes interesting as they are have remained largely changes in form rather than in real substance with the result that, with few exceptions, the long – awaited- for reform has been reduced to a mere conversion of the content of the modules of the old curriculum into an LMD architecture; the teaching of writing in this regard is no exception .Although this important module which is included in the syllabus of the three years of the license syllabus and the first year in the master degree has been allotted a far greater time volume and coefficient than in the old system especially with the recent adoption by the ministry of higher education of the common core curriculum ,which has witnessed a further increase in its time volume. This increase in the time volume allotted to the writing course ,however, was not accompanied by any deep reflection regarding pedagogy and syllabus design. As a result ,the initiative of innovation is totally left to the writing module teachers ‘individual efforts to design their own courses most often than not through adopting materials from different manuals and internet sites that have not been developed to meet the specific needs of Algerian university learners of English. The situation is even worse in newly opened departments where the course in question is often taught either by part-time teachers or in the best of cases by assistant lecturers who lack the required training and expertise to design and implement academic writing courses.

The present article argues in favor of assigning the act of writing and the writing course a central place in the English curriculum. This cannot be achieved solely through increasing the time volume allotted to the writing course ,but also through the adoption of a writing syllabus type, a writing pedagogy ,and a unified evaluation measure across the curriculum that are more responsive to the students “real world” needs . The most perceived-and

perhaps unique- “real world” need for almost all the students of English to use their writing skills beyond the writing classroom in the Algerian context is in the content subjects within the English curriculum itself .In these content subjects, some form of written text(e.g., essay exams, short-answer essays, research papers) is used as the only measure by which these students ‘academic progress is evaluated . Each subject area requires that the learners be knowledgeable not only in the content, but also in their ability to write at an appropriate level using the correct genre and rhetorical forms pertaining to the discourse community. We believe, therefore, that the main role of the writing course should be to prepare students to perform in those subjects by focusing specifically on the tasks and genres assigned in content courses. In these content modules ,the principle of the university work is based on the relationship between the oral comprehension of the course and the written production which forms the object of the essential part of the evaluation of the students .These different writings produced by students constitute a very diversified whole but in each category respond to methodological requirements ,to a codification of writing ,to composition rules which generate genuine textual genres. The knowledge and assimilation of these rules of production constitute a discourse competence which is at the same time cultural as well as methodological necessary for students all along their academic career .The non- respect of certain rules or methodological principles ,which might be aggravated by a linguistic fragility ,is more often than not a source of failure. This observed failure much complained about by the content modules is due ,we believe ,to the gap that exists between the writing course and writing in the content modules .

Seriously tackling the problem of bridging the gap between writing in the writing course and writing in the content modules, however, is a considerably challenging enterprise ,taking into consideration the diversity of the writing productions and the number of content modules concerned, the variety of tasks and text types the students are supposed to produce make it practically impossible for the writing course to prepare the students to write equally well in all the required types of texts. Moreover, the different content modules of the English curriculum such as linguistics, sociolinguistics, literature ,and

civilization ...etc. represent in fact different disciplinary subjects representing discourse communities that employ different discipline-specific registers.

The author of this article holds the strong belief that bridging the hiatus between writing in the writing course and writing in content modules can be achieved via making use of some pedagogical solutions that are conducive to the promotion of the view to teaching academic writing skills as a shared responsibility among writing teachers and content area modules across the curriculum. The first step towards achieving this goal is among the adoption of a process genre-based approach that emphasizes the cognitive, social, and the linguistic demands of the specific academic subjects in the English curriculum. The aim of this article is to set the background for the appreciation of the contribution of the genre-based approach to teaching of academic writing. The central idea around which revolve all the elements presented in this paper is that the overall aim of the teaching and evaluation of academic writing across the curriculum should be the gradual fostering in learners of a discipline-specific discursive writing competence. In order to achieve this aim, the teachers and designers of writing course should adopt a top-down model that provides for cycles of synthesis and analysis mediated by a task-based approach in which the moves, the steps, and linguistic elements of discourse are identified by analysis and reconstituted.

The first part of this article begins by a historical review of the development of approaches to the teaching of academic writing with focus on the shortcomings as well as the contribution of each approach to the multi-faceted notion of discourse competence as a concept that accounts for the knowledge elements and skills employed by expert writers, before culminating with the consideration of genre as a notion intended to operationalize in a more comprehensive way the different elements of discourse competence for the purpose of writing instruction. The second part of the article deals with the developments of the options in curriculum and syllabus design with a special emphasis on the principles and different perspectives on the task-based syllabus design paradigm especially the socio-cultural perspective. The basic aim of this discussion is to provide the background knowledge necessary for a better appreciation of the teaching/learning cycle pedagogy.



## **2.A Historical overview of the development of academic Writing**

In the context of education ,writing plays a central role because most ,if not all, examinations, whether they are testing foreign language abilities or other skills, require students to manifest their knowledge relying on their writing proficiency. For learners of English in an EFL context like ours, in addition to being the single yardstick used to gauge students' development ,writing in the subject areas constitutes perhaps the sole real life context for these students to use this skill beyond the writing classroom. The focal point of the writing course ,therefore, should be to prepare these students to perform adequately in the subject areas.

Yet despite its importance, learning to write even in one's native language is a demanding endeavour fraught with difficulties. Unlike speaking which children learn by the time they reach the school age, learning to write effectively requires a much longer time of extensive and specialized instruction. In order to write effectively in a foreign language in academic settings, EFL learners should possess four different sets of knowledge: content knowledge and context knowledge (genre);knowledge of the language system ,and knowledge of appropriate writing processes ,Tribble (1996: 73).<sup>(1)</sup>

In the context of second/foreign language writing, a range of approaches borrowed mostly from the teaching of L1 writing have been used in an attempt to respond to these needs .Two of these approaches have attracted special attention namely the process and the most recent genre approach.

### **2.1The Writing Across the Curriculum Movement Approach to Teaching Writing in First Language**

The Writing Across the Curriculum movement (WAC) is one of the major influential movements in teaching composition in English as first language(L1) academic settings. This movement has started and spread in the mid 1970's

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<sup>(1)</sup>- Tribble,C.1996.Writing ,Language Teaching A scheme for teacher education series Editors : C N CANDLIN & H G WIDDOWSON Oxford: OUP.

in North American universities where a large number of WAC programs are currently offered.

This approach emerged in order to fill a void in the teaching of academic literacy in English as an L1 especially at the university level. The basic writing needs for students majoring in philosophy, sociology, psychology, economic, etc. are related to writing “English papers” in these disciplines; yet, most of the writing that these students are required to produce in the general English course with its focus on literature failed to meet these needs. Individual attempts by some teachers to address this issue also failed to improve students’ academic writing competence because of these teachers’ ignorance of the conventions specific to each academic community. Writing a lab report or a business proposal, the proponents of this approach argued, is different from writing a the common English paper or the journalistic essay genres Williams, (2003) <sup>(1)</sup>In order to address this sensitive issue, this approach was built on a number of observations and assumptions.

Williams (2003) summarizes these observations and assumptions as follows:

-Writing is situation specific: the sets of writings skills required depends on the target audience and purpose.

-The teaching of various discipline specific writing conventions should be the responsibility of content-area teachers.

-Writing classes at all levels are artificial because they do not address real audiences.

- Students write papers in different academic disciplines so as to ‘learn more about topics in these disciplines and to master the ways of knowing, the standards of proof, and the language of the disciplines.’ (op.cit,69)

Criticism to lack of academic content in the general composition course generally offered in the first year in American universities is put succinctly by Fleming (2002) cited in Williams, (op. cit.69)

‘The intellectual “thinness” of the first-year [composition] course has become

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<sup>(1)</sup>- Williams, J. D.1989 .Preparing to teach writing: research, theory, and practice / James D. Williams.—3rd ed. 2003. New Jersey :Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

impossible to overlook. By “thin” I mean several things at once. First, the teaching of writing at the post-secondary level is undeniably modest, the entire enterprise typically contained in a single, fifteen-week course. . . . [Also,] the first-year writing class typically lacks substance, as it usually is focused on some abstract process, skill, activity, or form, and, therefore, often lacks intellectual content. . . . [A]nd perhaps most damning of all from an academic standpoint, the course is often just plain easy. . . . (pp. 116–117)’

The major goal of this approach to academic writing is to increase students ‘motivation to write through rendering writing tasks more authentic by linking them to content area courses.

The implementation of this innovative and successful approach has been subject to a strong resistance from the part of the content area teachers in American universities and colleges. The reasons for such resistance presented by Williams (op.cit.) centered around the following issues:

- Lack of time for content-area professors to be devoted to teaching and grading writing.

- Content-area teachers do not consider themselves as teachers of writing, refuse to learn writing pedagogy, and do not consider themselves adequately prepared to teach writing.

Another serious criticism to WAC came from the proponents of critical pedagogy who accuse this approach of ‘stifl[ing] individual “voice” and perpetuat[ing] what is deemed “institutional “ writing ‘ Williams (2003:78) .By so doing ,this approach is said to promote a pedagogy that perpetuates the dominance of the values of corporate America to the detriment of a “liberation pedagogy” in line with the postmodernist ideology.

Curiously enough ,a close examination of the very points of criticism against WAC in an English as an L1 context reveals that the very points that arose antagonism mentioned above in the L1 context are themselves the aspects that make the argument of granting a central place for writing through conceiving it as a shared responsibility across the English curriculum in our context appealing and more practical. Contrary to what the well-known English proverb says, this is really a case of one man’s poison is another man’s meat ,if we may say.

The majority of the teachers who participated in this study ,for example, informed that they teach the writing course along with one or more content-area modules. Accordingly ,the motivation to learn writing pedagogy is not a hindrance ,but rather a point of strength here. What is needed in our context is more awareness of the existence of discipline-specific writing conventions , an effective approach to address students 'needs in this regard, and even more importantly making the gradual development of a discipline-specific writing competence as the major goal orienting writing pedagogy across the English curriculum. This pedagogy will be empowering to our students because it will ultimately grant them access to full membership the academic communities they wish to enter. Given the fact then L.M.D system is built on the principle of gradual specialization and that these students are required to write research papers, dissertations ,research articles, and so on in order to become permanent faculty staff initially and to survive and get promoted in their academic careers afterwards, then, pursuing this goal becomes legitimate.

## **2.2 Approaches to Teaching Writing in Second /Foreign languages**

Since its emergence as a distinctive area of scholarship in the 1980s,second/foreign (SL/FL) writing has underwent a major ideological shift from *product* to *process*, and now to *genre-based writing*.SL/FL writing research as well as the models underpinning it has developed from first language (L1) writing research. Notwithstanding ,it is wrong to assume that these different theories which are usually presented as 'historically evolving movements' are opposed to or replace each other .Instead, these approaches should be more accurately viewed as 'complementary and overlapping perspectives' that enable us to grasp a more comprehensive picture of the complex reality of writing' ,Hyland (2003:2). <sup>(1)</sup> Although writing classrooms commonly draw on more than one approach ,a theory tend to be predominant.Classroom practice is usually conceptualized with a preference for a given focus. The different approaches ,in other words, should be better

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<sup>(1)</sup>- Hyland ,K. 2003, *Second Language Writing*. New York: Cambridge University Press..

viewed as different ‘curriculum options’ ,where each option organizes L2 writing teaching around a different focus:

### **2.2.1 Product Approaches**

The product teaching of writing or focus on form can be divided into two orientations :focus on language structures and focus on text functions.

‘The first is a traditional, text-based approach which is still used in many materials—as we will see in Section Two of this book. Teachers who focus on form often present authoritative texts for students to imitate or adapt and so are likely to use textbooks which give a good range of models. They will also tend to see errors as something that they have a professional obligation to correct and ,where possible, eliminate. In such a context, one of the teacher’s main roles will be to instil notions of correctness and conformity.’

#### **2.2.1 .1. Focus on Language Structures**

This orientation to teaching writing emerged in the 1960s as a result of the influence of then dominant structural linguistics and the behaviourist learning theories of second language teaching. Writing is viewed as a rule-based arrangement of words, clauses, and sentences. Writing is, in other words, considered as merely an extension of grammar. Writing ability is developed mainly by manipulating lexis and grammar ,and this is achieved through the imitation and the manipulation of models provided by the teacher. The underlying assumption is that the imitation and manipulation of models serves as a means of reinforcing language patterns through habit formation and testing learners’ ability to produce well-formed sentences.

Texts that are regarded as series of appropriate grammatical structures. “slot and filler” frameworks are used to generate sentences with different meanings by varying the words in the slots. Writing is rigidly controlled through guided compositions where learners are given short texts and asked to fill in gaps ,complete sentences, transform tenses or personal pronouns, and complete other exercises that focus students on achieving accuracy and avoiding errors.

This orientation has been criticised for its reliance on the presentation of formal patterns as short fragments which are not based on the analysis of authentic texts ,but rather on the intuitions of materials designers .This type of

instruction does not develop the students proficiency beyond the production of a few sentences and does not assist them in writing in other situations.

Moreover, grammar teaching is not necessarily conducive to better writing. Research that has indicated positive effects of such instruction has measured students' writing improvement on the basis of formal features such as relative clauses or the "syntactic complexity" of their texts. This measures alone, however, are not sufficient to judge good writing. Student may produce accurate sentence but fail to write appropriate written texts. A small number of errors may result from a student reluctance to take risks rather from writing proficiency development.

The most serious weakness of this type of instruction is its neglect of the communicative context . written texts are always a response to a particular communicative setting. Accordingly ,it is the context that determines whether a piece of writing is good or not and not the accuracy and explicitness of sentences.

For these reasons ,few L2 writing teachers now see writing only as surface forms. But it is equally unhelpful to see language as irrelevant to learning to write.

#### **2.2.1.2. Focus on Functions**

This orientation generally referred to as current-traditional rhetoric or functional approach is widely used in academic settings. It is based on the belief that language forms perform different communicative functions considered to be the means to achieving the different purposes of writing. The most relevant of these functions to the students needs are selected and taught.

This focus partly aims at helping students to develop effective paragraphs through the creation of topic sentences, supporting sentences, and transitions as well as developing different types of paragraphs. To this end, a variety of activities and tasks are used: guided writing tasks, sentence-level activities and composing tasks.

#### **2.2.1.3 Weaknesses' of the Product Approaches**

Besides their neglect of students 'meanings or purposes, the product approaches have been sharply criticised for their " undue emphasis on repeating patterns, for [their] emphasis on expository writing to the virtual exclusion of all other

forms, for neglecting invention, for emphasising “accuracy” over “fluency», and for idealising “style” and “form” as the most important elements in writing. ’Chimbganda (2001:170-171)<sup>(1)</sup>

In Badger and White’ words,” product-based approaches see writing as mainly concerned with knowledge about the structure of language ,and writing developments as mainly the result of the imitation of input ,in the form of texts provided by the teacher.” Badger and White (2000:154)<sup>(2)</sup>

In response to these weaknesses and in quest for an effective approach to the teaching of writing which takes into account all the factors involved in the production of successful writing , efforts have been made to introduce models of writing and writing teaching that highlight writers and that are generally referred to as the process approach.

### **2.2.2. The Process Approach**

This approach the importance of which is well established in the fields of first, second or foreign language writing articulates the role of the writer as an independent producer of texts. It aims particularly at equipping novice writers with the strategies of professional writers. These strategies consist principally of a cycle of writing activities which move learners from the generation of ideas and the collection of data through to the ‘publication’ of a finished text. It is precisely because of this emphasis that this newly approach has often been called *the process approach* to teaching writing skills.

The process writing models have been proposed on the basis of a significant body of research which attempted to gain a better understanding of the processes of writing through examining the different processes and stages that professional writers go through while they write. These approaches “see writing primarily as the exercise of linguistic skills, and writing development as

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<sup>(1)</sup>- Chimbganda , A B.2001.Fostering academic writing through process and task-based approaches SAJHE/SATH VOL 15 NO2 2001.

<sup>(2)</sup>- Badger ,R. and White,G. 2000.A process genre approach to teaching writing ELT Journal Volume 54/2 April 2000. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

an unconscious process which happens when teachers facilitate the exercise of writing skills.” Badger and White (2000:155). Writing in process approaches is seen as predominantly to do with linguistic skills ,such as planning and drafting, and there is much less emphasis on linguistic knowledge, such as knowledge about grammar and text structure. Although there is no general agreement over the stages that writers go through in producing a piece of writing , “a typical model identifies four stages: prewriting; composing/drafting; revising; and editing Tribble (1996:39).It should be noted, however, that the move from one stage to another is not a linear progression ,but rather is a discursive process in which writers may return to pre-writing activities, for example, after doing some editing or revising.

In order to foster fluency and free expression in students , process methods usually postpone the focus on form to the end of the writing process Hyland (2004:7)<sup>(1)</sup>

The focus on the writer in process approaches has yielded a range of pedagogical benefits to both teachers and students. Chief among these are matching writing tasks to the learners ’needs , encouraging creativity in very practical ways and respecting the learner’s cultural background .Yet, and despite its benefits ,this approach suffers from serious flaws that brought it under criticism.

### **Weaknesses of the Process Approach**

A number of scholars and educationalists especially those working within a genre-based framework of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) have questioned the appropriateness of a methodology which focuses primarily on the writer to fully address the needs of all learners, especially if they are learning to write in a second or foreign language. Swales (1990)<sup>(2)</sup> calls the process approach a “soft” process because ,according to him, it protects

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<sup>(1)</sup>- Hyland,K.2004,Genre and Second Language Writing,  
Michigan :University of Michigan Press.

<sup>(2)</sup>-Swales,J.1990.Genre Analysis: English in Academic and  
Research Settings.Cambridge :Cambridge University Press.



students from the rigours of external criteria for evaluating their written product ,and proposes that the approach be replaced by a “hard” process where “the emphasis is less on the cognitive relationship between the writer and the writer’s internal world and more on the relationship between the writer and on his or her ways of anticipating and countenancing the reactions of the intended readership.” Swales (1990:220)

In the same vein , Paltridge observes that :

‘...the process approach gave students a false impression of what is required of them in university settings and, in particular, its very particular socio-cultural context and expectations “.He also adds that in the process approach there is “... an almost total obsession with personal meaning” and proposes “a shift from the writing process to the needs of learners and the content and demands of academic writing .’ Paltridge (2004:95) <sup>(1)</sup>

Last ,but not least, Hyland (2002) <sup>(2)</sup> considers it necessary to widen our perspective beyond a single approach arguing that ‘Process theories alone cannot help us to confidently advise students on their writing, and this is perhaps one reason why there is little evidence to show that process methods alone lead to significantly better writing. Quite simply, equipping novice writers with the strategies of good writers does not necessarily lead to improvement...Students not only need help in learning how to write, but also in understanding how texts are shaped by topic, audience, purpose, and cultural norms .

While these different views do not advocate that the process approach should be completely dispensed with ,they all agree on the fact that this pedagogy has failed to provide learners in foreign language writing programmes with knowledge about the conventions and constraints needed when writing for academic or non academic readership. What learners need

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(1)- Paltridge,B.2004.Academic writing Review Article Language Teaching 37,87-105, Cambridge:Cambridge University Press.

(2)- Hyland ,K. 2002Teaching and Researching Writing. London :Longman.

,then, in addition to the ability to generate texts ,is knowledge about the genre in which they wish to write ,and above all a pedagogy that ensures a rapid access to such knowledge. And it is to the discussion of this kind of pedagogy that we will turn to at this juncture. In order to appreciate the essence and the scope of this pedagogy ,we should first of all deal with the concept of discourse competence ,an essential component of the more englobing notion of communicative competence.

### **2.2.3.The Genre-based Approach**

The genre-based approach to literacy teaching has been developed in the 1980's and throughout the 1990's by the Sydney-based genre theorists (J.R. Martin ,Christie, Halliday,etc...) in response at least partly to discontent with the efficacy of the then prevailing process-based writing approaches. The Sydney school proponents of this approach made the interesting distinction between genres that are personal—such as recount, narrative, moral tales, myths—and those that are factual, such as procedure, description, report, explanation and argument. Genre theorists operating in an English as a first language context argued that process-based approaches by encouraging student expression and discovery process through their emphasis on personal genres deprive students of knowledge about the relationship between text structures and social functions thus resulting in the reproduction of 'social inequality by denying traditionally marginalized students access to academic and cultural texts.,Barwashi and Reiff(2010:32).<sup>(1)</sup> The genre-based therefore aims to equip learners via their teachers 'assistance with the capacity 'to deconstruct ,examine ,and practice salient discourse features ,and to reconstruct discourses within their own particular disciplines' in both linguistically correct and socially appropriate ways so as to foster in novice writers a discursive competence that allows them to successfully forge 'their own authorial voice within the

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<sup>(1)</sup>- Barawashi,Anis & Mary Jo Reif. 2010. Genre: an introduction to history ,theory, research and pedagogy, West Lafayette Indiana :Parlor P

disciplinary community to which they are bidding for entry' Bruce (2008 :169).<sup>1)</sup>

This genre-based, discourse-focused top-down approach appears to be the most suitable basis for teaching writing especially at the university level because of its incorporation and articulation of the discourse and the contextual aspects of language use that are often neglected and not adequately attended to in structural approaches. Moreover, the LMD English curriculum is based on the principle of gradual specialization as students move from one level to another in different English study disciplines –such as applied linguistics, language science and English language teaching, and Anglo-Saxon literature and civilization which accentuates the need for the adoption of this approach in order to empower them with the necessary knowledge, tools, and strategies that allows them eventually to acquire authorial membership in the academic field in which they intend to specialize. Furthermore, increasing the transferability of writing skills from the writing course to the content modules also necessitates a convergence in the views, teaching methods and assessment measures of content module teachers across the curriculum who should no longer be viewing themselves as teaching merely a type of content knowledge but instead as stake holders in a the same shared enterprise with writing teachers: the gradual development of a discipline-specific discursive writing competence. The success of this demanding but certainly would-be fruitful synergy depends, in my view, upon the adoption of the essay as the sole teaching and evaluation measure across the curriculum following of course the principles of the genre-based approach.

The provision of an operational definition of the notion of genre which will serve as a basis unit of a genre-based, analytic syllabus for the university-level English writing course, however, is in itself a problematic and challenging issue due to the fundamental disagreement among the existing genre-specialists

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<sup>(1)</sup>- Barawashi, Anis & Mary Jo Reif. 2010. Genre: an introduction to history, theory, research and pedagogy, West Lafayette Indiana :Parlor P

schools with regard to the very nature of this object of enquiry. In the literature related to genre, three theoretical and research traditions can be distinguished: Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (known also as the Sydney School), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and the Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS). Drawing on the richness of the different views to genre, Bruce (2008) proposes a dual social genre/cognitive genre modal as a comprehensive way of operationalizing the elements of genre knowledge that accounts for elements of both text—the overt linguistic trace of a discourse process—and discourse—the combination of the written record and the social and cognitive operations surrounding its creation and interpretation. As far as the writing course syllabus design is concerned, Bruce (2008) suggests a gradual shift from a focus on cognitive genres in the initial levels of competence to more emphasis on social genres in the more advanced level. Genre-based writing instruction begins with the purposes of communication before moving to the stages of the texts that express these purposes following the teaching–learning cycle.

#### **2.2.3.1. Communicative Competence and Discourse Competence**

Discourse competence refers to the integration of a wide range of types of knowledge that learners use when performing the processing or representation of ‘complex, structured information, such as when reading a text or performing a writing task’ Bruce (2013). Drawing upon the different theoretical models that have informed the different views to communicative competence such as Halliday, Canale and Swain, and the Council’s of Europe Common Framework of Reference, Bruce (2013) proposes that

‘the exercise of discourse competence in academic writing involves knowledge elements from several areas, including the larger social context, including the wider academic world and the specific discipline within which the text is being created; content knowledge that is being represented within a text; socially recognized functions and patterns of organization of whole texts; meta-cognitive knowledge employed in the internal structuring of stretches of text that relate to a general rhetorical purpose

; and, systems of the language including orthography (spelling), vocabulary, syntax and grammar which support all the above.” Bruce (2013:3).

Genre as a theoretical construct ,according to Bruce(2013) , offers an effective way of ‘operationalizing the different elements of discourse competence knowledge for the purpose of writing instruction.In the same vein ,Bruce (2008) proposes a dual social genre/cognitive approach syllabus model mediated by a task-based syllabus as a basis for research and course design in an EAP context.

As far as the teaching of writing is concerned and according to Bruce (2008:6),the genre-based approach has three major strengths over the atomistic approaches to language teaching:a ‘focus on larger units of language’, ‘a focus on the organizational or procedural elements of written discourse’,while allowing the possibility’ to retain linguistic components as functioning features of a larger unit of discourse’.This approach therefore appears to be at least at the theoretical level a balanced approach at all three important levels of the teaching /learning process.At the level of the view towards language or input, it addresses the intricacies of the relation between the micro-and macro-levels of textual organization as well as the functioning of texts in their social contexts. At the level of language teaching/learning pedagogy, the teaching-learning cycle based on modern theories of learning that have been inspired by Vygotsky’s powerful ideas of collaboration, scaffolding and the zone of proximal development ensures a balanced, gradual move from direct teacher instruction towards greater students’ autonomy as their writing competence and control over the genre increase. And finally at the level of students’ output and assessment, the genre-based approach contributes to the demystification of the assessment process by rendering it more objective and more accessible to the learners through the use of transparent genre-based analytical procedures, which can be advantageous to both formative and summative evaluation and increases the skills transfer across the modules of the curriculum.

### **2.2.3.2. Discipline-specific Competence in Academic Writing**

One of the most important contributions that genre analysis has made to teaching second /foreign language writing in EAP settings is to show that

,while academic discourse is an identifiable register, language varies considerably across disciplines and sub-disciplines. An effective way to raise students awareness to the significant differences in written texts across disciplines is through focusing on authentic texts pertaining to the genres that the students are expected to write and studying the presence and use of the features typical of these differences .The genre approaches to EAP writing pedagogy is highlight the view to academic writing ‘as a situated disciplinary practice’ and challenging the students wrongly held ‘ monolithic, universal view of academic discourse’ Hyland(2004:145).

### **2.2.3.3. The Task-based Syllabus**

For a better understanding of the genre-based syllabus model that the proponents of the genre-based approach proposed to be mediated by a task-based syllabus Bruce (2008) ,we will turn now to deal with the notion of task and task-based syllabus design .An important element in this discussion is the socio-cultural- perspective on task because this perspective provides the conceptual foundations of the pedagogy of teaching /learning cycle proposed for the implementation of the genre-based approach.

In Task-based language learning (TBL),the basic and initial point of organisation is the ‘task’. Classwork is organized as a sequence of tasks, and it is tasks that generate the language to be used ,and not vice versa.So ,in TBL what teachers ask students to do is to carry out a series of tasks.The main focus is on the tasks to be done rather than on the linguistic forms to be used.TBL, therefore, highlights the instrumental function of language .Designing a language syllabus around tasks rather than on some linguistic elements as has traditionally been done by predominant form-focused syllabi appeared almost thirty years ago as a very new and quite unusual innovation in a remarkably unexpected setting-state secondary school classes in Bangalore,India.But surprisingly enough ,the task-based syllabus has not fallen off grace as did the earlier SLA models that have motivated and justified it in the first place,but continued instead to find justification in the new SLA models that have appeared ever since.TBL along with the concept on which it is based ‘task’ attracted and is till attracting the interest of many language teachers and Second Language Acquisition researchers around the world. One of the

essential attractions of TBL that may explain the continuous interest in it and its ability to survive the many SLA paradigm shifts is its flexibility: this kind of teaching/learning does not completely dismiss the previous methods but seems to incorporate many of the ideas from other methods into the tasks.

In the literature, a number of theoretical perspectives on tasks can be distinguished, an important model of which, as far as the genre-based approach is concerned, is that provided by socio-cultural theory. This is premised on the claim that participants co-construct the 'activity' they engage in when performing a task, in accordance with their own socio-history and locally-determined goals, and that, therefore, it is difficult to make reliable predictions concerning the kinds of language use and opportunities for learning that will arise (Lantolf (1996)).

### **Task from a Socio-cultural Perspective**

This perspective views the activity that arises when learners perform a task in essentially social terms. The socio-cultural framework attempts to apply a general learning theory associated with the name of the Soviet developmental psychologist Lev S. Vygotsky and which has been very influential in other domains of social and educational research to the domain of language learning. This theory that has gained extra impetus in the 1990s offers a very different perspective on tasks because it assumes that target language interaction plays a much more important role in learning than simply enhancing the 'input' to trigger the autonomous and internal mechanisms, as claimed by the psycholinguistic perspective. Interaction itself rather than any internal processing mechanisms constitutes the learning process. In Chomskyan terms, the sociocultural perspective assumes that interaction is the language acquisition device (LAD) which is external rather than internal to the learner and that learning, accordingly, is social rather than individual.

A sociocultural theory of mind provides a number of important insights for task-based research:

-The study of dialogic interactions allows us to understand the cognitive processes the learner is internalizing.

- These interactions are the best tool for researchers to understand –for example, how scaffolding creates the contingency that makes it possible for learners to perform beyond their existing developmental level.
- Tasks are not transacted in accordance with their designers' expectations, but, they are interpreted and used by learners to construct an activity in accordance with their own particular motives and goals.
- The qualitative micro-analysis of interactions directed at understanding how learning takes place—constitutes the best methodology for studying tasks.

Ellis (2000) argued that, despite its limitations, the sociocultural perspective on tasks through emphasizing the social and cultural nature of task performance helps to redress the current psycholinguistic imbalance in SLA :

Whereas researchers in the psycholinguistic tradition have emphasised the role of the inherent task properties on performance and acquisition, socio-cultural researchers have focused on how tasks are accomplished by learners and teachers and how the process of accomplishing them might contribute to language acquisition. They view the learners, the teacher and the setting in which they interact as just as important as the task itself. They reject attempts to externally define and classify tasks on the grounds that the 'activity' that derives from the task itself. They focus instead on how task participants achieve intersubjectivity with regard to goals and procedures and on how they collaborate to scaffold each other's attempt to perform functions that lie outside their individual abilities.. Such a perspective is both persuasive and informative, as is reflected in Swain's recent adoption of socio-cultural theory in her own research. Swain (2000) argues that a constructivist account of tasks is needed to understand how learning arises out of performance. Ellis (2000:210-211)

### **Sequencing Tasks and the Teaching/Learning Cycle**

According to Nunan (1989), 'Syllabus design is concerned with the selection, sequencing and justification of the content of the curriculum'. Accordingly, the way to organize the syllabus to form a coherent progression of tasks should be a central issue for teachers and task-based syllabus designers alike. The literature



abounds with different propositions to sequence learning tasks, but research is still far from pronouncing a final answer as to the right and effective way to sequence learning tasks. The genre-based tasks that will be used in this study will be organized following an approach to sequencing tasks, influential in genre pedagogy, and which draws on Vigotsky's (1978) views of collaborative learning and Bruner's (1986) ideas of scaffolding. This approach is based on the premise that novice L2 writers are likely to require greater support during the early stages of working with an unfamiliar genre and less later. This approach builds gradually the learners confidence and abilities to write effectively through chaining tasks in such a way as to permit the simultaneous utilization and extension of the skills learned at the previous stage. The provision of the appropriate input and the interaction with the teacher enables the learners to improve their skills through performing tasks that they are initially unable to do alone. As their ability to control the new genre increases, the teacher gradually removes the scaffold so as to allow the learners to move towards autonomy. Hyland (2003) suggests that this approach which is often represented as a cycle of teaching and learning '...offers an explicit model of how teachers can move through successive phases of classroom tasks and interaction to develop writing abilities.' Hyland (2003:137). The teaching-writing cycle, then, offers a principled way of selecting and sequencing writing tasks that is in harmony with the assumptions of the socio-cultural theory. 'In terms of pedagogic theory, the teaching-learning cycle draws on modern theories of learning in giving considerable recognition to the importance of COLLABORATION, or peer interaction, and SCAFFOLDING, or teacher supported learning. Most obviously, it supports learners through what Vygotsky called the 'the zone of proximal development', or the gap between their current and potential performance ... as teachers move around the cycle, direct teacher instruction is reduced and students gradually get more confidence and learn to write the genre on their own. In other words, students' autonomy increases with their writing competence as they gain greater control over the genre.' Hyland (2008:559).

A typical unit of work within this approach would involve a learning cycle that begins with the examination and deconstruction of examples genres (selected authentic texts or text types) in order to raise the learners 'awareness to the organization (moves and steps) and the ways these are realized in terms of constituent linguistic features (lexico-grammar) with the aim that such types of knowledge once adequately digested and acquired will enable them to produce their own examples of the genre under study in the subsequent tasks of the learning cycle. As a means of compensating for one of the most decried weaknesses in the genre approach namely—the potential danger of stifling learners 'creativity, the learning cycle has been put forward as a pedagogy that leaves a room for linguistic skills much promoted by the proponents of the process approach ,such as planning and drafting. Such a combination between the elements of the genre-based approach and the process-based approach provides an effective way to supplement and round out the weaknesses of both approaches. Hyland (2003),(2004), Flowerdew (1993),Badger and White (2000), Feez (1998).

### **Conclusion**

The gradual development of L.M.D. students' discipline-specific writing competence requires a synergy of efforts between the writing course teachers ,on one hand ,and the content area modules teachers ,on the other. An effective way for achieving this synergy is through the adoption of a balanced approach that addresses all the aspects of academic discourse competence. In this regard, the genre-based approach appears to be the most promising.

After briefly discussing some traditional traditions in first and second /foreign language writing pedagogy,this article has attempted to outline the essential elements of genre-based pedagogy and syllabus design.The main goal of this presentation was to raise awareness to the fact that there are a different range of academic literacy practices relevant to particular academic fields and disciplines rather than a single academic literacy.Developing students'awareness and abilities to the intricate literacy differences of academic disciplines is conducive to rendering them better academic writers.

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