

## **The Effects of Teaching Genre Moves on EFL Learners' Performance in Letter Writing**

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### **Abstract**

The actual classroom implementation and the possible final outcomes of the genre-based approach to writing instruction have not been fully explored yet. The present quasi-experimental study investigated the effects of genre-based instruction on qualitative and quantitative aspects of a group of EFL learners' writing performance on a letter-writing task. 140 EFL learners (26 male and 114 female) studying English for a BA degree at two major universities in Iran participated in the study. Half of the learners (the experimental group, n=70) were taught how to write a letter of application through a genre-based technique involving the presentation of the genre moves of job application letters. The rest of the participants did not take this treatment. Indices such as the number of words written per application, the amount of time spent, and EFL teachers' evaluations of writing quality were used to compare the performance of the experimental and the control group. The results of data analyses and mean comparisons revealed highly significant changes in the quality of writing as a result of genre-based instruction. The quantitative aspects, however, were not significantly affected by the instruction. Based on the results of the study and the review of the related literature, major merits and demerits of the GBI approach are discussed. The results support and offer guidelines for the application of the findings of genre studies in EFL writing classes.

**Key Words:** L2 writing, Writing Instruction, Genre-based Instruction, Letter Writing, Genre Move, Job Application Letters.

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### **1. Introduction**

L2 writing researchers have recently begun to emphasize the relevance of the concept of genre to L2 writing and to argue that the generic properties of different texts written by members of different discourse communities are to be mastered by L2 writers before they can write successfully in their second language (Hyland, 2004). Writing is now viewed as a social activity because of the influences from such recent notions as communicative competence in linguistics, social constructionism in philosophy, and situated learning in education (Canagarajah, 2002). Because of the social nature of writing, second language writers need to learn to participate and function in different speech communities. In the genre-based approach, “each group constructs discourses that suit its social practices, historical experiences, and interests” (Canagarajah, 2002, p. 36). Such a view acknowledges the dynamic nature of interpersonal interactions where people can have multiple community memberships in social life. In this relatively new approach, writing is seen as conforming to the norms of a discourse community. By gradual exposure to and involvement in a new academic discourse community, students try peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing which define the discourse of that community and thereby learn to write through collaborative (student-student) apprenticeship, tutor-tutee apprenticeship, and direct engagement with the broader academic community (Warschauer, 2002).

In the genre-based approach to L2 writing, the conventions of discourse and properties of written language in different contexts of use play a central role. Atkinson (1990) regards conventionalized properties of written language as important for the better understanding of the writing process. To him, conventions of written discourse are socially ratified solutions to past or present coordination problems of written communication.

One of the major problems in many second language writing classes is the neglect of the social nature of writing. Historically, the guided composition approach stressed the forms of writing; the product-oriented approach emphasized the written text; and the process approach emphasized the writer's processes. In

other words, few traditional approaches considered second language writing in its social context. Even today, this problem is still reflected in many writing textbooks and annoys many writing teachers and learners.

The social context of L2 writing is actually the main dimension of L2 writing targeted at in a recent research in this area. However, studies of students' genre-based learning are still underrepresented (Cheng, 2008; Cheng, 2006). According to Cumming (2001), "adopting mainly an ethnographic and discourse-analytic orientation, this tradition of research on L2 writing has depicted that writing in a second language involves acculturation into particular discourse communities; cooperating with and seeking assistance from diverse people and resources; adapting to and reflecting on new situations, knowledge and abilities; negotiating relations of work and power; and gaining and modifying new senses of self" (p.7).

The problem of neglect within the social context of writing is further compounded by the fact that there is currently a wide gap in the literature for studies examining the actual usefulness of the approach. "This literature gap is especially surprising, given the many direct and indirect criticisms against the approach by some researchers from various theoretical and pedagogical backgrounds" (Cheng, 2008, p. 51). When written texts produced by L2 learners is weak, one major source of weakness is usually lack of conformity with the norms of the target speech community. Further research in this area is highly in demand for a better understanding of the positive and negative aspects of this new approach and for a clearer picture of its actual classroom application.

## **2. Review of the Related Literature**

### **2.1. Genre-Based Approaches**

The word genre comes from the French word for "kind" or "class" and according to Chandler (1997) it is widely used in rhetoric and linguistics to refer to a distinctive type of text. There are three main traditions in genre theory (Hyon, 1996; Cheng, 2008). The Australian genre theory (Martin, 1984; Paltridge 2002), inspired

by the systemic-functional theory of language, focuses on the interplay between language and the social context. The New Rhetoric approach, developed by composition researchers in North America, stresses the social and ideological significance of genres (Devitt, 2004). The Swalesian tradition (Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993) focuses pedagogically on the tertiary level and beyond with the purpose of enabling students to produce appropriate genres.

In these different traditions, genres are defined in different ways. Martin's (1984) definition describes genre as "a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture" (p.25). Swales' definition introduces genre as "a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes which are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community" (p.58). The communicative purpose is the most prominent criterion for the identification of genres. The purpose of the genre is, therefore, not rooted in a single individual's motive for communication, but in a purpose that is recognized and reinforced within a community (see Amirian, 2002).

The genre analysis approach tries to explain how different genres achieve their communicative purpose. "The essence of the concept of genre, as is now used in applied linguistics, ESP, and rhetoric, is an emphasis on the primacy of communicative purpose and the way in which communicative needs shape or influence both surface and deeper rhetorical structure" (Mirhassani and Reshadi, 2001, P. 69).

A genre approach focuses on the actual use of the language in different discourse communities and attempts to characterize the way language is used by these communities. Henry and Roseberry (2001) stated, "the general aim of genre analysis is to identify the moves and strategies of a genre, the allowable order of moves, and the key linguistic features"(p. 154). In academic settings, genre studies have been carried out to show the principles that shape and constrain scientific written texts (Atkinson, 1990). The genre-based approach to L2 writing also enjoys certain degrees of specificity in approaching writing tasks. Its basic philosophy is entirely consistent with an ESP approach. "It assumes that the focus on imparting

certain genre knowledge is part of a short-cut method of raising students' proficiency in a relatively limited period of time to the level required of them by their departments and supervisors" (Dudley-Evans, 2002, p.2).

## **2.2. Genre Analysis and Second Language Writing Instruction**

The implementation of the genre-based approaches in L2 writing classes has been the subject of much recent research on writing and different researchers have different views on how this approach must be implemented. It is believed that "L2 learners often require a new (and narrow) set of 'display' conventions from/in their writing classes, conventions that are influenced and shaped by a range of factors in both thought collectives and the larger culture and that, as such, beg for uncovering and scrutiny" (Ramanathan, 2002, p. 16). It is not so much the language itself but how it is put to use by groups of users that matter in genre-based instruction (abbreviated as GBI). Genre-based instruction of L2 writing exposes students to "the ways in which the 'hows' of text structure produce the whys of social effect" (Cope and Kalantzis, 1993, p. 8).

Learning in genre-based instruction is basically about working with the significant parts of different text types. According to Miller (1984), learning a genre is not simply about learning linguistic forms and conventions, but also about learning how to participate in the actions of a community. The purpose of a particular genre and its content play a crucial role (Henry and Roseberry, 2001). Celce-Murcia (2002) believes that the ESL/EFL discipline needs to reanalyze virtually all of English grammar at the discourse level and that a sentence-based view of grammar is outdated and inconsistent with the notions of communicative competence and genre. Bhatia has offered a good description of how parts of different text types are dealt with in the GBI approach:

"After the learners have read the head text, they are provided with a detailed explanation of the communicative purpose of the (sub) genre and the various moves the writer makes use of to achieve that purpose. The moves are also

colour-coded in the head text in order to make them obvious to the learner. The explanation contains no technical or other difficult vocabulary, except the name of the moves, which are kept in simple terms.... The head worksheet gives further practice to the learner in the following three aspects of genre construction: 1) acquisition of the knowledge of the promotional genre through explanation; 2) sensitization to generic form and content through analysis; and 3) use and exploitation of generic knowledge through variation in contexts" (Bhatia, 2002, pp. 4-5).

Learners are taught the main parts or "moves" of a genre and the most common linguistic features associated with the moves (Roseberry, 2001). A move can be thought of as "part of a text whose purpose is to fulfill the overall purpose of a genre" (Swales, 1990, p.43). In other words, "A move can be thought of a part of a text, written or spoken, which achieves a particular purpose within the text. The move contributes in some way to fulfilling the overall purpose of the genre" (Henry and Roseberry, 2001, p. 154). Many researchers in the genre analysis research tradition (e.g. Bhatia, 1993; Dudley-Evans, 1995; Ramanathan and Kaplan, 2001) have argued that such moves can be taught to a novice writer of a particular genre. Upton and Connor (2001) argue that learning L2 genres requires relearning at least part of the genre in the light of its construction in the new culture.

In GBI, learners should not only learn the different parts or moves of the text but also the type of language used in each part or move. In Henry and Roseberry's (2001) words, "in order to teach effectively, language teachers need to know which linguistic features are associated for each strategy in a particular move of a particular genre" (p. 155). Students can learn to use/write a language effectively if they learn the genre. "Once a genre is learned and adequately understood, the conventions and procedures can be exploited creatively to achieve private ends within the socially recognized communicative purpose" (Bhatia, 1995, p. 166).

There are very influential suggestions in the related literature about how GBI might be implemented in the actual second language writing classroom. Paltridge

(1996) suggests that students be presented with a number of genre and text-type categories and asked to select the appropriate category for a particular text. Other researchers (e.g. Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993; Jordan, 1997; and Master's, 1997) suggest that a model of the typical communicative behavior specific to each area/discipline be provided and its important discoursal and lexico-grammatical features be highlighted. Addressing the writing problems of Iranian EFL learners, Salahshoor (2000) makes a proposal for pedagogic activities based on academic genres. Further empirical research is, however, required to specify what is affected and how it is affected by this type of writing instruction. There has been little or no attention paid to addressing ways that critical genre awareness may be cultivated in potential L2 teachers or how GBI can answer questions about effective writing (Ramanathan, 2002, Barnet and Bedau, 2002; Kay and Dudley-Evans, 1998).

This study attempts to investigate the usefulness of GBI in teaching application letters to EFL learners. Research on the genre properties of letters of application has recently concentrated on the description of the parts or the moves of such letters through an analysis of a corpus of letters written by native and/or non-native writers. Such studies have commonly shown that letters of application have a certain number of essential moves or parts and that teaching and learning these moves can improve writing application letters by L2 learners. In his thorough discussion of letters of application, Bhatia (1993) and Henry and Roseberry (2001) identified the following structures in letters of application for academic positions: a) Establishing credentials, b) Offering incentive, c) Enclosing documents, d) Using pressure tactics, e) Soliciting response, and f) Ending politely. In the present study, findings from these genre studies were used to study the effectiveness of the genre-based approach in teaching writing to EFL students at the university level in Iran. More specifically, the following questions were addressed: 1) Does genre-based instruction of job application letters (i.e., explicit instruction on the moves of these letters) significantly increase writing quantity as measured by word counts? And 2) Does the explicit teaching of genre moves of letters of application significantly increase the overall writing quality of the letter written in English by Iranian university EFL

learners? 3) Does genre-based instruction of job application letters affects students at varying levels of proficiency differently?

### **3. Research Method**

#### **3.1. The Context and the Participants**

This study was carried out on university students enrolled in English departments of two major Iranian universities, Isfahan University and the University of Kashan, where methods of teaching writing are usually product-oriented, with the teacher presenting and focusing on different elements of English paragraphs such as topic sentences, supporting sentences, and conclusion, and evaluating students' written products. EFL learners in these universities are usually heterogeneous in terms of English ability and demographic characteristics. The research population included all of the students studying for a BA degree in English (either in English Translation or English Literature) at the two universities at the time of the study. The study focused only on daytime groups in their first, second, third, and fourth years of undergraduate studies to allow investigating EFL writing behaviors across different levels of EFL writing ability and EFL proficiency.

A total of 140 students (26 male and 114 female students) from the above population were selected through stratified random sampling. 81.4 percent of the participants were female students. (This is because girls constitute roughly the same ratio of the total population.) The participants' age range was between 18 and 25 with a mean age of 21.2 and a standard deviation of 1.75. The selected sample included 29 freshman, 68 sophomore, 23 junior, and 20 senior students. Further details about the participants' relevant records, previous learning experiences, and demographic information were also used wherever necessary.

#### **3. 2. The Writing Prompt and the Instructional Materials**

In order to collect data on the qualitative and quantitative aspects of EFL writing performance, the researcher focused on the task of writing formal letters of job



application in English. The letter of application genre was selected because, as Upton and Connor (2001) argue, it clearly conforms to the definition of genre given by Swales (1990) and its genre characteristics are known. Participants were given the following writing prompt with further clarifying explanations in their mother tongue when required to produce their application letters.

Dear Student:

I am collecting data on Iranian students' writing in English as part of a research project. I would be very thankful if you could help me by writing an application letter. The situation for which you should write the letter is like this: You think that you have enough time during your studies to get a part-time job in order to make some money. You learn from a friend or in an advertisement that the ELI Company has a vacancy for a part-time job (as a secretary, or a research assistant, or some job relevant to your field of study and interest). You decide to write a letter to Mr. Mohammadi, the head of ELI, to apply for the job. You try to convince him that you are a good candidate to take the job.

In order to teach writing application letters in English based on the genre-based instructional approach (GBI), the researcher developed the necessary teaching materials. The existing materials used in Letter Writing classes at the two universities were outdated and not prepared based on GBI principles. Suggestions in recent research literature on GBI reviewed above were taken into account in the preparation of these materials. For example, according to Dudley-Evans (2002), and also Martin (1999), much of the materials in the GBI approach to teaching L2 writing include steps such as introducing a model of a the part-genre such as the introduction to the discussion section of an article, developing familiarity with that part-genre through exercises involving some kind of mini genre analysis, introducing and manipulating relevant language forms, and writing a short text that brings together the generic and linguistic features practiced in the unit. Another example drawn upon in this study was that of Tarnopolsky (2000). In his example of

process-genre EFL writing pedagogy he suggests steps for teaching including reading a teacher-supplied sample text, discussing it, defining its genre peculiarities, getting an assignment to write a text of a similar type, and so on.

The teaching materials, developed for teaching writing English application letters in a genre-based method in this study, were prepared in a way to conform to the procedures outlined above. The first part of the lesson presented the students with example application letters written by native speakers. These were designed for the students to read and understand. In the second part, the learners were shown another letter of application written by a native speaker again. This time the genre moves of the letter had been underlined and marked for the students. The learners read this with the help of their teacher, the researcher. The third part of the lesson was the teacher's explanation of each move, its function, and the linguistic forms used in it. In the fourth part of the lesson, the learners were asked to read another letter and identify its moves. The last part of the lesson asked students to write their own letters of application, which was supposed to have the moves, or parts they had learned. The participants in the control group did not receive this treatment. They just fulfilled the normal requirements of the curriculum for BA students of English during the course of this study.

### **3.3. Procedures for Data Collection**

The participants were given clear instructions, both orally and on their writing prompt, as to the purpose of their task. They were told that they should write their application letters in such a way as to be able to get the job referred to in the advertisement. They were also told that their writing samples would be used to evaluate their writing ability, and encouraged by their class teachers to do the task as carefully as they could. There was no limit to the number of words they could include in their letter and they had enough time to complete the task at their own pace. All of the 140 writing samples were collected in their language classes and participants did not convene for the data collection sessions. Some of the participants were in the researcher's own classes (learning grammar or a course on

teaching) and others were taking different courses (such as literature, translation or reading) with other instructors. They were given freedom to consult their dictionaries and write and rewrite, if they wished to do so. The researcher collaborated with the class teacher (or in some cases another assistant) to record the time spent by each individual for writing and the number of drafts produced. Only the final drafts were included in the data for the study. For data collection sessions in each class, the writing prompts were distributed and all the instructions were read and explained when necessary.

For half of the sample group ( $n=70$ ), selected randomly, the instructional treatment of the study was given before collecting the writing samples. This treatment involved teaching writing letters of application through the genre-based materials described above during two 2-hour classes in which the experimental group was taught writing letters of application before the actual sample collection. The participants in the control group were not taught these materials and just remained on the normal flow of their studies. Some of the participants in the experimental group were in the researchers own classes. For applying the treatment to the others, the researcher taught his materials in two sessions with the consent and agreement of their teacher. The participants in the experimental group received the same materials and the same instructional procedures and contents. Carrying out this experiment was restricted to a two-week period immediately before the collection of writing samples from all of the 140 participants. This was done to make sure that any significant differences in performance could be attributed to the treatment as far as possible. To minimize practice effects and the effects of varying performance conditions that might result from collecting data through a writing task used in both pre-test and post-test stages, achievement scores on previous writing tasks and writing courses were collected for all the participants in the experimental and control groups and were included in pre-test analyses.

#### **4. Data Analysis**

For determining writing quantity, the total amount of time spent for writing each

letter of application, the total number of words written per letter, and the mean number of words written per minute by each participant were calculated. The time spent was recorded while the task was being performed. The samples were not word-processed and therefore, the number of words was counted manually. As the sender and receiver's address were fixed for everybody, they were not included in the word counts. All words in the salutation, closing, and postscripts were included. Prepositions, articles, and contractions were also counted as words. The total number of words written per letter was then divided by the number of minutes spent for writing.

Once quantity measures were assigned, Jacobs et. al's (1981) EFL Composition Profile was used to assign scores to content (50 points), organization (40 points), vocabulary (40 points), language use (50 points), and mechanics (20 points), resulting in a maximum possible score of 200 for each letter. Two raters, the researcher and another writing instructor discussed the scoring profile and scored a few writing samples to agree on a consistent method of scoring. Then each rater scored all of the 140 samples independently. It is often argued that work marked independently by two different markers, with their marks being averaged, is a more reliable estimate than if it were marked by a single marker" or by different markers assigning a single score (Wier, 1993, p. 165). The average of the total scores assigned to each letter was the final index for EFL writing quality considered in all later analyses. The inter-rater reliability measured by Pearson Correlation was .97.

The mean EFL proficiency for the whole group was 37.37 out of a maximum of 80 with the standard deviation of 10.19. The participants were in different years of study and therefore represented a wide range of proficiency levels. Those who scored below 40% on the proficiency test were considered elementary. Students scoring between 40% and 70% were grouped as intermediate and scores above 70% represented students with an advanced proficiency level. Table 1 shows the number of students in each subgroup of proficiency level. Variation in EFL proficiency was not only because the students were at different years but also because they had received different amounts of instruction in English outside their formal schooling.

**Table 1: Number of students in 3 levels of EFL proficiency**

Level	Score on the MELAB Test (0-80)	N	Percent
Elementary	0-32 (below %40)	49	35.0
Intermediate	33-48 (%40-%70)	77	55.0
Advanced	49-80 (above %70)	14	10.0

The students participating in this study had already received different amounts of instruction in writing in English as a foreign language. Only 30 participants from the whole sample (n=140) had not attended a course in writing. All the other participants had taken one or more writing courses in their studies. Table 2 shows mean of achievement scores on the writing courses. 85 percent of the participants (N=119) scored between 10 and 16 out of 20 for their mean achievement on EFL writing courses.

**Table 2: Mean Scores on EFL Writing courses at the university**

Writing achievement (0-20)	Frequency	Percent
Less than 10	6	4.3
10 to 12	54	38.6
Above 12 below16	65	46.4
16 to 20	15	10.7
Total	140	100.0

The range of writing quality scores (the average of the two raters' evaluations) was between 100 and 194 points out of 200 with a mean of 154.25. Students were grouped into three different levels of writing ability based on these scores. Table 3 shows the number of participant in each level. Most of the participants (more than 75 percent) showed an average writing ability within the norm of their peer EFL writers.

**Table 3: Number of students in 3 writing ability levels**

<b>Level of EFL writing ability</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Percent</b>
0-134 poor out of 200	11	7.9
135-170 Average out of 200	106	75.7
171-200 Strong out of 200	22	15.7

The major aim of the study was to see whether students at various levels of EFL proficiency equally benefited from genre-based instruction. In addition, comparisons were also made between those who did and those who did not receive genre-based instruction.

Out of a maximum score of 80 on the MELAB EFL proficiency test, the mean proficiency score was 35.03 for the control group and 39.71 for the experimental group. However, t-test statistics showed no significant differences between the means. For all of the participants, achievements scores on EFL writing courses prior to this experimentation were also compared and no significant differences were observed in terms of this variable either. In other words, it was assumed, based on these observations, that in the control group and experimental group, participants were not significantly different in terms of EFL proficiency and EFL writing ability before the experiment, even though ability levels varied within each group. Once the genre-based teaching was completed during a two-week period, all the participants in both groups were given a letter-writing task to perform and the qualitative and quantitative aspects of their letters of application were quantified for comparisons.

Table 4 summarizes the data that was collected from the participants on the main variables. The participants in the control group used a mean time of 11.04 minutes for writing their letters of application and produced a mean of 80.99 words per letter. On the other hand, the participants in the experimental group used a mean time of 12.49 minutes to produce a mean of 81.44 words per letter of application. These descriptive values show that the experimental participants, who received genre-based instruction, spent more time on the task and produced longer texts. The significance of these differences will be discussed below.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics on variables in experimental and control groups

Variables	Mean (Control group)	SD	Mean (Exp group)	SD
EFL Proficiency	35.03	9.1	39.71	10.7
Number of words per letter	80.99	30.8	81.44	24.6
Time spent (in minutes)	11.04	3.1	12.49	3.7

The two main variables of focus in the experimental and the control groups were the quality of the written products and the fluency or speed of their writing, measured by mean number of words written per minute in producing letters of application. The descriptive values on these two variables have been summarized in Table 5. As highlighted in Table 5, the experimental group outperformed the control group in writing quality assessments and their mean writing quality scores (mean=156.7) was about five points more than that of the control group (mean=151.8). However, the speed of writing measured by the mean number of words written per minute was slightly and insignificantly higher in the control group.

Table 5: Group Statistics for the writing quality and quantity

Main Variables	Group	Mean	SD
Writing quality score	Control	151.8	15.78
	Experimental	156.7*	16.64
Mean words per minute	Control	7.7	3.20
	Experimental	7.03	2.79

The descriptive data in Table 5 showed that the experimental group had a higher mean of writing quality score but a lower mean on the speed of writing. In order to check the significance of these differences between the means the independent

samples t-test was used. The performances of the control and experimental groups were compared in order to see whether there were any differences between the means of writing quantity scores as well as the means of writing quality scores in control and experimental groups. Levine's test showed that the compared groups had equal variances and that the assumptions for the t-test were met.

The results of the t-test, summarized in table 6, showed that the mean performance in writing quality of the experimental group was significantly higher than that of the control group ( $p > 0.05$ ). However, the minor difference in favor of the control group in terms of the fluency/speed of writing was not significant at the 0.05 level. In sum, genre-based instruction apparently helped the participants in the experimental group write better application letters in terms of the quality of writing.

Table 6: Independent Samples T-test comparing writing quality and quantity

Variable	T value	DF	Sig.	Mean Difference
Average Writing quality score	-1.785	138	.047**	-4.9
Word per minute (writing quantity index)	1.391	138	.166	.71

For further confirmation of the effects of genre-based instruction of letters of application on the quality of written texts, another t-test was performed to compare pretest and posttest data, i.e., the mean writing achievement scores of the students who received genre-based instruction and the mean writing quality scores that they received after this type of instruction. As can be seen in Table 7, the mean writing quality scores were significantly higher after the application of the teaching method (T value= 30.04 df=69). Significant differences between the means of pre-test data and post-test data on writing quality in the experimental group were, therefore, observed which can be due to the fact that they received genre-based instruction.



Table 7: T-test comparing writing quality before and after genre-based instruction

Variables	T value	DF	Mean	SD	Sig.
Writing quality score assigned before the experiment	30.04	69	2.84	.79	.000
Writing quality score assigned after the experiment		69	3.1341	.33	

Another main purpose of this experiment was to see if students with different EFL proficiency levels had benefited differently from the genre-based method of teaching. One of the major questions raised in this study was whether students with different levels of proficiency could equally benefit from the genre-based instruction of EFL writing. The 70 learners, for whom genre-based instruction was used, had different levels of EFL proficiency. 17 students demonstrated elementary, 44 intermediate, and 9 advanced EFL proficiency levels. These students also varied in the qualitative and quantitative aspects of their writing task performance. Post-treatment data summary on EFL writing performance for the participants within the experimental group, showed an increase in both writing quality and writing quantity with the increase of EFL proficiency level. Out of a total of 200 points, the mean writing quality scores observed were 146.4 for the elementary, 157.6 for the intermediate, and 171.8 for the advanced subgroups of proficiency. The significance of these mean differences was tested through analysis of variance, the results of which have been presented in Table 8.

**Table 8: ANOVA comparing the means of three proficiency subgroups**

Variables	Differences	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	DF	F	Sig.
Average Writing quality score	Between Groups	3917.93	1958.966	2	8.637	.000
	Within Groups	15195.8	226.803	67		
Words per minute (writing fluency index)	Between Groups	8.367	4.184	2	.532	.590
	Within Groups	527.318	7.870	67		

Analysis of variance results (Table 8) showed that there were significant differences between learners with elementary, intermediate and advanced levels of proficiency in terms of mean writing quality scores. After genre-based instruction, students with advanced EFL proficiency wrote application letters with much better quality than those of their intermediate EFL proficiency peers and the mean differences between these two groups were significant. Post hoc Least Significant Difference analysis also showed that students with intermediate EFL proficiency had also outperformed their elementary peers in the quality of their application letters. Judged on a 0-200 points rating scale, students with a weak EFL proficiency level (N=17) wrote application letters receiving a mean quality score that was more than 25 points lower than that for the advanced EFL students. In short, even though all the participants had been instructed clearly on the different genre moves of an English application letter and how these moves might be realized linguistically, only learners with better EFL proficiency seemed to have benefited more from this type of instruction, therefore confirming the hypothesis that genre-based instruction of EFL writing can be more beneficial with EFL learners with higher EFL proficiency levels. For the writing task in this study, the quantity of writing did not significantly

change as a result of instruction and the means for number of words written per minute were close across levels of proficiency

### **5. Discussion**

T-test results showed that the mean writing quality was significantly higher in the experimental group than the control group, which received no instruction ( $p > 0.05$ ), but the minor difference in favor of the control group in terms of the fluency/speed of writing was not significant at the 0.05 level. After genre-based instruction, students with advanced EFL proficiency wrote application letters with much better quality than their intermediate EFL proficiency peers and the mean differences between these two groups were significant. In other words, learners with better EFL proficiency seemed to have benefited more from this type of instruction.

Based on the findings of this study, the explicit teaching of genre moves helps EFL learners to write texts of better quality, but it does not necessarily increase their speed of writing. Another important finding of the study is that students with higher EFL proficiency benefit more from genre instruction. The effectiveness of genre-based instruction of letters of application which was confirmed in this study indicates that EFL learners higher levels of proficiency learn to write significantly better through familiarizing themselves with the genre conventions of the task at hand. The findings in this study support the proposal that L2 writers get disadvantaged because genres are not explicitly taught (Delpit, 1988; Cope and Kalantzis, 1993; Fairclough, 1995; Hass, 1996; Johns and Swales, 2002). However, they do not support the idea that GBI teaches 'all' students the 'hows' of texts and the 'whys' of their social effects (Ramanathan and Kaplan, 2000). The success of teaching writing through a genre-based approach may depend on many conditions including the learners' contexts, levels of proficiency, genre sensitivity, and many other individual and social differences.

The findings of this study sensitize teachers to the properties of genres used in EFL writing classes. Researchers in favour of the GBI approach encourage teacher to learn more about genre so that they can impart this knowledge to their students.

Davies (1988) believes that the process of working out a genre-based syllabus for ESL students can benefit from the collaboration between teachers and students. In such a syllabus, ESL students' needs are accounted for in terms of the discourse requirements of their respective fields. Similarly, Gavigan (1999, p. 13) asserts that having an explicit knowledge of genres enables teacher to have a much deeper idea of the skills students need to possess in order to accomplish adequately the tasks they assign to the students when they ask them to write. "Only when teachers enter with interest and real understanding into discourse patterns (which give distinctive characters to the genres of composition studies in particular), will they be able to guide their students in reading and writing the various disciplinary genres available to them" (Haas, 1996, p.9). This study can help EFL teachers for a better understanding of letters of application and for the more fruitful teaching of this genre to their students. Further research in this line to characterize the genre types needed in Iranian EFL contexts like different essay types, articles, papers, reports, and other kinds of letters remains to be done.

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