



Does the development of genre knowledge equal writing quality in Burundi? Genre features in the introduction section of research articles by TESOL postgraduate students

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Abstract

Genre, defined as a socially accepted way of using language within a particular discourse community (Hyland, 2007), has had a significant influence on the way in which learning to write is conceptualized at university. Learning to write was conceptualized as a means for developing genre knowledge. Therefore, this study intends to find out whether students develop genre knowledge implicitly or explicitly as they move from one level of study to the next. To meet this objective, the data consist of 34 introduction sections of research articles by students in TESOL master's program at Ecole Normale Superieure du Burundi. Seventeen introductions were written by first year students (batch 2024-2025) who were taught academic writing through genre exemplars and 17 introductions were written by second year students (batch 2023-2024) who were taught academic writing through process approach. To analyze the data, the experienced lecturers in the department of languages rated these introductions and social sciences in terms of quality and genre feature. The results showed that there was a difference in genre knowledge and a significant difference in writing quality between Master I and Master II students. It was revealed that Master I students, who were taught academic writing through an explicit use of text exemplars, were rated higher on genre knowledge and writing quality than were Master II students, who were taught academic writing through an implicit use of text exemplars. These results have a far-reaching implication for teaching academic writing to university students in Burundi.

Keywords: Academic writing; Genre knowledge; Writing quality

1. Introduction

Over the last three decades, an increasing attention has been devoted to the notion of genre. Genre, defined as a socially accepted way of using language within a particular discourse community (Hyland, 2007; Swales, 1990), has been appearing in many scientific publications. According to Hyland (2007), this unprecedented attention to genre was a response to a shift in view of discourse and of learning to write which incorporate a better understanding of how language is used to achieve social purposes in particular discourse communities. This shift brought about a new conceptualization of writing and of learning to write. Therefore, Writing was viewed as a social act which places constraints on the writers (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2008). In fact, writers write to respond to the demands of the discourse community in which they write. The texts they produce must agree with the beliefs and epistemic values, in terms of text organization, content, vocabulary, grammar, etc. of the community in which they write (Hyland, 2007, 2010; Hyland & Show, 2016; Hyland & Diani, 2009; Parkinson, Demecheleer & Mackay, 2017; Staples et al, 2016). On the other hand, learning to write was viewed as developing learners' schematic knowledge of the valued genres in a particular discourse community. In fact, teaching writing meant socializing learners into the ways in which members of a particular discourse community use language to produce a particular type of text. As a result, a number of studies which espouse this new conceptualization of writing and of learning to write were conducted.

Within this new conceptualization, some researchers worked under the assumption that expert writers produce texts that are in line with the belief and epistemic values of the discourse community in which they write (Lancaster, 2016; Parkinson, Demecheleer & Mackay, 2017). This assumption is based on the belief that expert writers have developed knowledge of the way in which language is used in their discourse community through repeated exposure to the texts that are produced in their community. Therefore, the features of the texts they produce represent the way in which language is used and knowledge is demonstrated in their community (Hyland, 2010). As a result, some researchers analyzed linguistic and generic features of published research papers (e.g., Hood, 2012). Other researchers tested the assumption that as students move from one class to the next and from one level of study to the next, they develop knowledge of valued genres often produced in the communities in which they aspire to become members (e.g., Staples et al, 2016). Therefore, they conduct comparative studies. Some researchers compare extended essays written by first year university students and those written by outgoing university students in terms of linguistic and generic features (Staples et al, 2016). Others compare texts produced by students and published research papers in terms of linguistic and generic features (Parkinson, 2017).

These studies were conducted for two main objectives. First, they were carried out to inform L1 writing pedagogy. It was believed that L1 students enroll at university when they have not yet been exposed to academic discourses (Hyland, 2010). In fact, it was shown that incoming students at university do not have genre knowledge which would enable them to produce valued genres (Lancaster, 2016). Therefore, they need to develop this knowledge as they move from one class to the next. Second, they were conducted to inform L2 & FL writing pedagogy. It was believed that university students; whose L1 is not English; had language barrier to cope with academic discourses. In fact, it was shown that L2/FL students produced written texts which had shortcoming in grammar, vocabulary, organization, rhetoric, etc. (Hyland, 2015; Yasuda, 2011). Therefore, they needed a

writing course that would help them not only address those shortcomings, but also develop genre knowledge.

In these studies, it is clearly assumed that as students move from one class to the next and from one level to the next, they develop genre knowledge (Yasuda, 2011). It was also clearly assumed that as they develop genre knowledge, the quality of the texts they write increases (Driscoll et al, 2020; Yasuda, 2011). However, this remain largely asserted as there is not enough empirical evidence to support this assertion. Existing studies have analyzed generic features in successful written assignments by university students across level of study and have assumed that as students advance class, they develop genre knowledge and as they develop genre knowledge, the quality of the texts they produce increases (Bruce, 2016; Lancaster, 2016; Ndoricimpa & Dilip, 2024). However, few studies have investigated the extent to which advancement to the next level of study equals development of genre knowledge. In other words, few studies have provided answers to these questions- (1) do university students develop genre knowledge implicitly as they move from one level of study to the next? (2) do they develop genre knowledge explicitly through exposure to texts or genres produced in the academic community?

Providing answers to these questions is important in a country like Burundi, where English is a foreign language and where some departments at public universities are English-medium, particularly the department of English at the university of Burundi and the section of English at Ecole Normale Supérieure. The answers to these questions would shed light on the best pedagogical pathway to developing Burundi university students' genre knowledge and their writing quality. This is because the philosophy underlying genre theory has not yet been integrated in writing pedagogy at university in Burundi. The process approach to teach academic writing is followed instead. Within this approach, it is expected that students develop genre knowledge implicitly.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Genre Theory

Genre theory in writing research has been developed by researchers to provide an understanding of what is writing and how students learn to write and write to learn (e.g., Swales, 1981, 1990; Martin, 1985, 1993; Miller, 1984; etc.). This theorization of writing was made by scholars with different objectives. Some scholars focused on how international students in UK universities learn to write (e.g., Swales, 1990). Others focused on the K-12 (from kindergarten to 12th grade) literacy learning of minority children in Australia (e.g., Martin, 1993). The last group of scholars focused on L1 students writing in higher education and professional context in USA (e.g., Miller, 1984). This has led to three different theoretical orientations to writing in terms of emphasis on form and pedagogical application, which were termed the ESP, Sydney School and Rhetorical Genre studies in USA (Hyon, 2001). Despite these different theoretical orientations, the proponents of genre theory seem to agree on what is writing and on how students learn to write and write to learn.

All the proponents of genre theory define genre as a social practice. This tenet is very important for understanding the social nature of writing and writing development by students. In Swales' (1990) work, it is emphasized that there is a relationship between genre and the discourse community in which it is used. It is argued that genres help members of a discourse community to accomplish their communicative goals (to report on research, to complain, etc.). Miller (1984) makes

similar claims by stating that genres are social actions that members of a community perform to achieve certain communicative goals (to persuade for example). Martin (1993) too stresses that genres described as staged, goal-oriented social processes. This shows that the tenet of all the proponents of genre theory is that genre is embedded in the social practices of the community which give rise to it. Consequently, genre theory has had a long-standing implication for understanding writing and writing development by students.

The first implication of genre as a social practice is that genre is dynamic (Hyland, 2010). This means that social groups always change in terms of their members, material conditions, etc. These changes influence the practices of the group and by extension its genres. However, genres tend not to change radically. For example, PhD theses from different period are not identical yet are still recognized as PhD thesis. As a result, writing becomes a social action which is embedded in the stability and change of the social group in which writers is a member. Therefore, writers must not only learn the stable elements of the genre but also be sensitive to changes that occur in their discourse community.

The second implication of genre as a social practice is that the relationship between genre and discourse community is mutually constitutive, shaping each other (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 2016). For example, the content, the discourse structure, and the language style of a research article reflect the values that the academic community places on the genre of research article. These values include the novelty, the scientific methods, the appearance of objectivity, etc. (Lancaster, 2016). These values, in turn, shape the way writers conduct their research and write their research article. This means that, as Hyland (2010) points out, a discourse community has values that its members uphold. These values guide writers in the selection of content, vocabulary, discourse structure, style when writing a research article, a thesis, a report, a CV, etc.

The third implication of genre as a social practice is that a social group does not have one single genre to carry out its activity, rather it has a repertoire of genres (Tardy, 2009). These genres are networked together in a variety of relationships: they may respond to other genres from a different community, they may have similar content, discourse structure, etc. This relationship has been described by Swales (2004) as chains, sets or systems because, as Fairclough (2003) puts it, genres are inherently intertextual, linked to other genres. As a result, as writers become members a discourse community, they learn these repertoires of genres.

These three implications of genre as a social practice have been extensively explored by many scholars (e.g., Ndoricimpa & Nduwimana, 2023; Hyland & Show, 2016; Hyland & Diani, 2009; Parkinson, Demecheleer & Mackay, 2017). They carry out this exploration in order to first to describe what constitutes genre knowledge and second to inform writing pedagogy. In describing what constitutes genre knowledge, researchers (e.g., Driscoll, et al, 2020; Tardy, 2009) point out that genre knowledge includes (1) formal knowledge of the target genre - the linguistic features, the structure, the conventions, etc. (2) process knowledge - knowledge of the methods used to produce, distribute and consume the genres; (3) rhetorical knowledge of the target genre – knowledge of the functions, the strategies employed to make the genres acceptable and convincing; (4) subject matter knowledge – knowledge of the disciplinary content and skills.

2.2. Previous Studies

A number of studies on genre knowledge development by university students have been conducted (e.g., Bruce, 2016; Lancaster, 2016; Uzun, 2017; Olinghouse & Graham, 2014; Ndoricimpa & Nduwimana, 2023; Ndoricimpa & Dilip, 2024, Driscoll, et al, 2020; Yasuda, 2011; Mombaers, Gasse & De Maeyer, 2024; etc.). Some of these studies test the assumption that as students are exposed to valued genres of the academic community, they develop genre knowledge, and that genre knowledge promotes writing development (e.g., Driscoll, et al, 2020; Yasuda, 2011; Mombaers, Gasse & De Maeyer, 2024; etc.). Other studies test the assumption that genre knowledge predicts writing quality (e.g., Bruce, 2016; Lancaster, 2016; Olinghouse & Graham, 2014). Both the two groups of studies agree on the assertion that as students develop genre knowledge, they produce a text of high quality.

For example, Driscoll, et al. (2020) carried out an experimental study which was aimed to test the assumption that genre knowledge correlates with writing performance of university students. The finding in this study supported the aforementioned hypothesis. It was shown that as students developed genre knowledge, they produced a high writing performance. This suggests that genre knowledge correlates with writing quality. These findings are similar to the finding in the study by Mombaers, Gasse & De Maeyer (2024). This study was conducted to test the hypothesis that learning from exemplar of text develops genre knowledge and that genre knowledge correlates with writing quality. To test this hypothesis, quasi-experimental research was conducted, in which students were exposed to a number of text exemplars. The finding revealed that the genre knowledge of students increased as a result of their exposure to text exemplars and that their writing quality improved.

Lancaster (2016) carried out an analysis of high-graded and lower-graded papers by upper-level undergraduate students to test the assumption that genre knowledge correlates with writing quality. The findings revealed that high-graded papers contained genres features which were valued in the disciplinary community in which the students were writing. This seems to suggest that there is a relationship between genre knowledge and writing quality. A similar study was conducted by Bruce (2016) to investigate a correlation between genre knowledge and writing quality. It was shown that students who wrote high-graded essays demonstrated genre knowledge. This was revealed through an analysis of genre features in high-graded essay.

In summary, as it is shown in the reviewed studies, it is clear that university students develop genre knowledge as a result of their exposure to the text produced in their discourse community. It is also clear that genre knowledge correlates with writing quality. However, no study has tested the hypothesis that high level of studies correlates with genre knowledge and writing quality. Therefore, studies which test the assumption that as students move from one level of study to the next level of studies, they develop genre knowledge, and that as they develop genre knowledge, their writing quality is high, are needed. Such studies could unravel the development process of genre knowledge of university students and their writing development. They would shed light on whether students develop genre knowledge naturally or whether they need classroom exposure to samples of texts produced in their discourse community.

3. Research Questions

This study intends to test the hypothesis that university students in Burundi develop genre knowledge implicitly or explicitly as they advance from one level of study to the next. It also tests the hypothesis that as university students in Burundi develop genre knowledge, the quality of their writing improves. It therefore provides answers to the following questions:

1. Is there any significant difference in genre knowledge and in text quality across levels studies in TESOL Master's program in Burundi?
2. Is there any correlation between genre features in the introductions to research articles by Master 1 and Master 2 students in TESOL program and the texts' quality?

4. Methods

4.1. Research Design

This study follows an analytical research design. It adopts this design because it tests the hypothesis that university students increase genre knowledge as they advance from one level of study to the next and as they develop genre knowledge, their writing quality improves. The present study is situated in the Department of Languages and Social Sciences (DLSS), English section at Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) du Burundi. The English section at this institution is intended to prepare future teachers of English. Therefore, the language of instruction in this section is English. It has two programs- bachelor's and master's programs in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). This study concerns master's program. This program was selected for different reasons. First, it was selected to test the hypothesis that students increase genre knowledge as they advance from one level to the next. Indeed, it is believed that students at master's level are students who have developed subject knowledge and they can demonstrate this knowledge through writing (Staples et al, 2016). Second, it was selected to test the hypothesis that as students' knowledge increases, the quality of what they write increases. Interestingly, it has been demonstrated that as students advance classes, their writing becomes sophisticated (Olinghouse & Graham, 2015). This means that they are able to write valued genres.

4.2. Participants

Participants in this study include students in Master's 1 and Master 2 in the program of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). They were selected purposefully. They have been learning about English (linguistics, language skills and literature) for four or five years. Therefore, they have developed knowledge about English and how it should be taught. They have also been producing written assignments in the majority of the courses on the program. They have followed writing courses: basic writing in the first year of bachelor's, academic writing 1 in second year of bachelor's, academic writing 2 in third year of bachelor's and advanced academic writing in first year of masters. Therefore, it is expected that they have developed knowledge of the valued genres and their writing is expected to be sophisticated.

4.3. Data Collection Procedure

The data consisted of 34 introductions to a research paper written by first year and second year students in master's program in TESOL. Seventeen introductions were written by first year students (batch 2024-2025) and 17 introductions were written by second year students (batch 2023-2024). They were collected over a period of two years as follows. First, batch 2023-2024 students were taught academic writing through process approach to teaching writing when they were in the first year of master's, first semester. This means that during the course of academic writing, they were shown the process that writers follow in writing major academic genres, such as academic essay, research articles, and dissertations. They were also shown the characteristics of the aforementioned academic genres. This was done in order to let them develop genre knowledge implicitly. When they were in second year of master's, third semester, they were asked to write an introduction to a research article on the topics related to TESOL, ELT and English linguistics. These introductions constituted data in this study. Second, batch 2024-2025 students were taught academic writing through genre exemplars when they were in first year, semester 1 of master's program in TESOL. This means that during the course of academic writing, students were given examples of major academic genres and they were asked to analyze them in terms of generic and rhetorical features, purpose and audience. When they were about to finish the first semester, they were asked to write an introduction to a research paper on topics related to TESOL, ELT, English linguistics. These introductions also constituted data in the present study.

The procedures followed to collect the data enabled the researchers to test the following hypotheses. First, students develop genre knowledge implicitly as they move from one class to the next or from one level of study to the next level and as they develop genre knowledge, they write a text of high quality. Second, students develop genre knowledge explicitly through exposure to text exemplars, and as their genre knowledge increases, their writing improves.

4.4. Data Analysis

The 34 introductions to a research paper were rated on five-point scale for quality and for generic move structure. The quality ratings involved designing a rubric which included the following criteria: mechanics of writing, vocabulary, organization and coherence, content, sophistication of argument and overall quality. Table 1 describes the instructions for rating each criterion.

Table 1

Criteria for Rating the Introductions to Research Papers

Mechanics of writing:	Sentences structures are clear, no grammatical errors, no spelling errors, not punctuation errors.
Vocabulary:	General and technical vocabulary is selected, no collocation errors, no ambiguous words which affect the general comprehension of the study.
Organization & Coherence:	Sentence and paragraph-level transition: Each paragraph is around one main idea. All paragraphs are clearly connected- transition from one paragraph to the next is clear.
Overall organization around the selected topic:	It moves from general to specific.
Content:	The content is clear and comprehensible.

Sophistication of argument:	Attempts to move beyond mere description of topic: The study is described as important, central, interesting, problematic, or relevant in some way. There is an indication of gap in previous research or counter-claim or a question is raised. An outline of the purpose or nature of the study is provided. Ambitious and at least on what persuasive arguments.
Overall quality:	Instructions on this criterion were not deliberately given in order to elicit raters' intuitive sense of the quality of the introductions to a research paper

After designing the rubric for evaluating the papers, we gave it to two experienced lecturers in the Department of Languages and Social Sciences, English section to familiarize with it. After they read the rubric and were familiarized with it, we trained them on how to use it to rate the papers. Finally, they rated the papers on five-point Likert scale for mechanics of writing, vocabulary, organization and coherence, content, sophistication of argument and overall quality. This was done in order to ensure a high level of inter-rater agreement. Table 2 shows the inter-rater agreement between the raters.

Table 2

Inter-rater Agreement

Cronbach's alpha Coefficient	Master 1	Master 2
Mechanics of writing	0.605	0.543
Vocabulary	0.410	0.764
Organization & Coherence	0.504	0.412
Content	0.527	0.211
Sophistication of argument	0.430	0.721
Overall quality	0.480	0.560

As shown in Table 2, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranges from fair (0.211) to substantial agreement (0.754). This means that a moderate agreement was achieved. However, we could have achieved a near perfect agreement by spending a substantial amount of time training our raters, but we did not want the raters to change their typical evaluation practices. Therefore, we took several steps to make sure that this moderate inter-rater agreement is acceptable. First, each introduction to a research paper was rated by two instructors whose ratings was averaged together for a single composite score. This was done in order to obtain a higher dependability index. Last, the raters were of expert status since they have been teaching in the Department of Languages and Social Sciences for ten years; they have a PhD in Applied Linguistics; and they have taught courses related to linguistics, English language teaching, language skills, etc. to students at master's level. Therefore, they understand the way in which knowledge is developed and demonstrated through research papers in this area.

The rating of generic move structure was done as follows. First, it involved following Swales' (1990) model for analyzing an introduction to a research article. According to Swales (1990), an introduction to a research paper has three major moves: (1) establishing a research territory, (2) establishing the niche and (3) occupying the niche. Second, it involved rating these three moves on five-point Likert scale, from absent (1) to excellent (5). This means that if a move is absent, the rating

is 1; if it is present and excellently written, the rating is 5. Finally, the data was computed for comparison of means using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science, version 22).

5. Results

Differences in genre knowledge and text quality between Master I and Master II students are provided in Table 3.

Table 3

The Rating Scores of Generic Move Structure in the Introduction

	Students	Mean	SD	Sig (2-tailed)
Establishing a research territory	Master 1 students	2.176	0.785	0.508
	Master 2 students	2.823	0.528	
Establishing a niche	Master 1 students	2.176	0.951	0.440
	Master 2 students	1.882	0.927	
Occupying the niche	Master 1 students	3.0598	0.556	0.289
	Master 2 students	2.764	0.831	

Master I and Master II students were evaluated for their ability to write an introduction to a research paper that presents the three moves- establishing a research territory, establishing a niche and occupying the niche. Therefore, Table 3 shows the rating scores of the three moves. The results of the scoring indicate that there is no significance difference between Master I and Master II students in their ability to establish a research territory, to establish a niche and to occupy the niche in their introduction to a research paper. Both Master I and II students have a moderate ability to establish a research territory, a fairly poor ability to establish a niche and a moderate ability to occupy the niche when writing an introduction to a research article. However, the research also shows that master 1 students scored slightly higher than did Master II students on the ability to establish a niche (2.1765 versus 1.8824 mean scores) and to occupy the niche (3.0588 versus 2.7647 mean scores). These results seem to suggest that exposure to exemplars of texts help students develop genre knowledge and this knowledge probably increases as students move from one level of study to the next. Further, these results seem to suggest that it may take a long time for students to develop knowledge implicitly without exposure to exemplars of texts as they move from one class to the next.

Table 4

The Rating Scores of Text Quality

	Students	Mean	SD	Sig (2-tailed)
Mechanics of writing	Master 1 students	3.647	0.492	0.718
	Master 2 students	3.706	0.587	
Vocabulary	Master 1 students	3.764	0.562	1.000
	Master 2 students	3.764	0.437	
Organization and Coherence	Master 1 students	3.235	0.664	0.455
	Master 2 students	3.058	0.658	
Content	Master 1 students	2.882	0.600	0.014
	Master 2 students	3.294	0.470	
Sophistication	Master 1 students	2.823	0.728	0.579
	Master 2 students	2.941	0.556	
Overall quality	Master 1 students	3.118	0.697	0.027
	Master 2 students	2.647	0.606	

According to the raters, Master 1 students wrote a high-quality introduction to a research article than these Master II students. As it is shown on Table 4, the raters in the Department of Languages and Social Sciences, English section, rated the introductions to a research paper written by master 1 students as significantly higher than the introductions written by Master II students in overall quality (mean = 3.1176 versus 2.6471, $p < 0.5$). However, the raters, rated the papers written by master 2 students as significantly higher than the papers written by master 1 students in content (mean = 3.2941 versus 2.8824, $p < 0.5$). For other qualities-mechanic of writing, vocabulary, organization and coherence, sophistication of argument, the differences in scores between Master I students and Master II students are not significance. Although it is important to keep in mind that a moderate reliability agreement was achieved between raters, these results seem to suggest that Master I students who were exposed to exemplars of texts in the first semester wrote a paper of higher quality than Master II students who were not exposed to exemplar of texts in the first semester. This means that students, who were exposed to exemplars of texts developed genre knowledge, helped them write a text of higher quality than students who were not exposed to exemplars of texts. In contrast, students, who were not exposed to exemplar of texts developed limited genre knowledge, affected the quality of the text they wrote.

Table 5

Correlation between the Generic Move Structure and Quality of the Introduction to a Research Paper by Master I Students Using Pearson's Correlation Coefficient

Move	Mec	Vocab	Org	Content	Sophist	Overall quality
Establishing a territory	-0.019	0.366	0.169	0.436	0.103	0.309
Establishing a niche	0.141	0.433	0.128	0.477	0.319	0.250
Occupying the niche	0.081	0.447	-0.040	0.397	-0.436	0.142

Table 5 presents the correlation between the moves and the quality of the papers by Master I students. The results shows that there is a negligible negative correlation between establishing a territory and the mechanic of writing ($r = -0.019$). This means that the presence or absence of this move in the introductions to a research paper by Master I students did not influence the raters' rating of the quality of mechanics of writing. The findings also show that there is a low positive correlation and a negligible positive correlation between establishing a territory and the vocabulary ($r = 0.336$), content ($r = 0.436$), overall quality ($r = 0.309$), organization and coherence ($r = 0.169$), sophistication of argument ($r = 0.103$). This suggests that the presence or absence of the move of establishing a research territory slightly influenced the raters' rating the papers' quality in vocabulary, organization and coherence, content, sophistication and overall quality.

The results seem to indicate that there is a low and a negligible positive correlation between the move of establishing a niche and vocabulary ($r = 0.433$), content ($r = 0.477$), sophistication of argument ($r = 0.319$), mechanic of writing ($r = 0.141$), organization and coherence ($r = 0.128$), overall quality ($r = 0.250$). This means that the presence of absence of the move of establishing a niche in the papers written by Master I students slightly influenced raters' rating of the papers' quality in mechanics, vocabulary, organization and coherence, content, sophistication and overall quality. Further, the findings seem to indicate that there is a low and negligible negative correlation between

the move of occupying the niche and sophistication of argument ($r = 0.436$), organization and coherence ($r = -0.040$). This means that the presence or absence of the move of occupying the niche in the papers by Master I students did not influence raters' rating the quality of the papers in organization and coherence and in sophistication of argument. The results also show that there is a low and negligible positive correlation between the move of occupying the niche and vocabulary ($r = 0.447$), content ($r = 0.397$), mechanic of writing ($r = 0.081$), overall quality ($r = 0.142$). This means that the presence or absence of the move of occupying the niche in the papers written by Master I students may have slightly influenced the raters' rating the papers' quality in vocabulary, content, mechanic of writing and overall quality.

Table 6

Correlation between the Generic Move Structure and Quality of The Introduction to a Research Paper by Master 2 Students Using Pearson's Correlation Coefficient

Move	Mec	Vocab	Org	Content	Sophist	Overall quality
Establishing a territory	0.225	0.350	0.032	0.474	0.601*	0.184
Establishing a niche	0.162	0.236	0.217	0.370	0.228	0.366
Occupying the niche	0.105	0.182	0.141	0.508*	0.239	0.321

Table 6 presents the correlation between the moves and the quality of the papers by Master II students. First, the results show that there is a moderate positive correlation between the move of establishing a research territory and sophistication of argument ($r = 0.601$), a low positive correlation between establish a research territory and vocabulary ($r = 0.350$), content ($r = 0.474$), and a negligible positive correlation between establishing a research territory and mechanic of writing ($r = 0.225$), organization and coherence ($r = 0.032$), overall quality ($r = 0.184$). These results seem to suggest that the presence and the absence of the move of establishing a research territory in the papers written by Master II students slightly influenced raters' rating the quality of the papers in mechanic of writing, vocabulary, organization and coherence, content, sophistication of argument and overall quality.

Second, the findings show that there is a low and negligible positive correlation between the move of establish a niche and content ($r = 0.371$), overall quality ($r = 0.336$), mechanic of writing ($r = 0.162$), vocabulary ($r = 0.236$), organization and coherence ($r = 0.217$), sophistication of argument ($r = 0.228$). These results seem to suggest that the presence or absence of the move of establishing a niche in the papers written by Master II students may have slightly influences raters' rating the quality of the papers in mechanic of writing, vocabulary, organization and coherence, content, sophistication of argument and overall quality.

Last, the results show that there is a moderate positive correlation between the move of occupying the niche and content ($r = 0.508$). There is also a low and negligible positive correlation between the move of occupying the niche and overall quality ($r = 0.321$), sophistication of argument ($r = 0.239$), organization and coherence ($r = 0.141$), vocabulary ($r = 0.182$), mechanic of writing ($r = 0.105$). These results also suggest that the presence or absence of the move of occupying the niche in the paper written by Master II students slightly influenced the raters' rating of the quality of the papers in content, overall quality, sophistication of argument, organization and coherence, vocabulary and mechanic of writing.

6. Discussion

This study was intended to propose the best pedagogical pathway to developing Burundi university students' genre knowledge and eventually to improving their quality of writing. Specifically, it aims at investigating the extent to which implicit and explicit genre knowledge development correlates with writing quality across levels of study in Master's program of TESOL in Burundi. Therefore, it provides answers to the following questions:

1. Is there any significance difference in genre knowledge and in text quality across levels studies in Master's program of TESOL in Burundi?
2. Is there any correlation between genre features in the introductions to research articles by Master I and Master II students in TESOL program and the texts' quality?

For the first research question, the results show that, although the differences in genre knowledge between Master I and Master II students are not significant, Master I students scored higher than Master II students on their ability to establish a niche and to occupy the niche. The findings also show that there is a significant difference in text quality between introductions to research articles by Master I and Master II students. Master I students scored significantly higher than did Master II students. Master I students were taught academic writing through genre approach by using exemplars of texts that are written in the academia, specifically texts writing by scholars in TESOL. In contrast, Master II students were taught academic writing through process approach and they were expected to develop genre knowledge implicitly.

Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a difference in genre knowledge and a significant difference in text quality between students who were exposed to exemplars of text and students who were taught through other approaches. Students who were taught academic writing through genre pedagogy, not only developed genre knowledge but also the quality of their writing was higher. This conclusion concurs with the findings in the study by Mombaers, Gasse & De Maeyer (2024). In this study, Mombaers, Gasse & De Maeyer tested the hypothesis that learning from exemplar of text develops genre knowledge that genre knowledge correlates with writing quality. The findings supported the aforementioned hypothesis. It was found that learners, after being exposed to exemplars of texts, their genre knowledge increased and their writing quality improved. This means that the results in the present study show that in Burundi an increase in genre knowledge correlates with improvement in writing quality.

For the second research question, the findings revealed that genre features -establishing a territory, establishing a niche and occupying the niche-positively influenced raters' rating the quality of the introductions to research articles by Master I and Master II students in terms of mechanic of writing, vocabulary, organization and coherence, content, sophistication and overall quality. This suggests that there was a positive correlation between genre features and writing quality. These results concur with the results in the studies by Lancaster (2016) & Bruce (2016). In their study, it was shown that high-graded papers had genre features which were valued in the discipline in which the students were writing. They made this conclusion after an analysis of high graded and low-graded papers written by university students. This means that the results in this study revealed that in Burundi genre knowledge correlates with writing quality and that genre features in a particular text written by

students positively influence raters' rating of the text in terms of mechanics of writing, vocabulary, organization and coherence, content, sophistication of argument and overall quality.

These results have far-reaching implications for writing pedagogy in Burundi. They have shown that genre knowledge correlates with writing quality and that learning through text exemplars increases genre knowledge and improves writing quality as well. Therefore, the best pedagogical pathway to teaching writing at university in Burundi would be through genre approach using text exemplars.

7. Conclusions and Implications

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which implicit and explicit use of text exemplars in teaching academic writing increases university students' genre knowledge and the extent to which increase in genre knowledge improves the writing quality of students. Specifically, this study aims to assess whether there is a significant difference in genre knowledge and writing quality across levels of study in TESOL Master's program of in Burundi. It also aims to investigate if there is a correlation between genre features in the introductions to research articles by Master I and Master II students in TESOL program and the texts' quality. The results for the first objective indicated that there was a difference in genre knowledge and a significant difference in writing quality between Master I and Master II students. It was revealed that Master I students, who were taught academic writing through an explicit use of text exemplars, were rated higher on genre knowledge and writing quality than were Master II students, who were taught academic writing through an implicit use of text exemplars. The results for the second objective indicated that there is indeed a positive correlation between genre knowledge and writing quality.

These results seem to suggest that teaching academic writing using text exemplars has the potentiality to increasing university students' genre knowledge and to improving their quality of writing. Therefore, it can be concluded that a better pedagogical pathway to developing genre knowledge and writing quality is with text exemplars.

This study offers a clear and practical implication for academic instruction in Burundi and similar contexts. In fact, they strongly advocate for the explicit, genre-based teaching of writing. By demonstrating that students who were taught using explicit genre exemplars (Master I) outperformed those taught through a more implicit, process-oriented approach (Master II) in both genre knowledge and overall writing quality, the research directly challenges the assumption that academic writing conventions are naturally absorbed through practice alone. In addition, the results suggest that for students in Burundi's TESOL programs—and likely in other non-anglophone or specific academic settings—making the "hidden curriculum" of genre expectations visible is a more effective pedagogical strategy. Thus, to better prepare students for the demands of their discourse communities, university writing curricula should move towards structured instruction that deconstructs genre models, explicitly teaches their social and rhetorical purposes, and provides guided practice in reproducing these accepted forms.

While providing valuable insights, this study has inherent limitations and delimitations that must be acknowledged. A primary limitation is its reliance on a single, context-specific sample—only 34 introduction sections from TESOL students at one university in Burundi. This small sample size and geographic focus can limit the generalizability of the findings to other academic disciplines,

institutions, or cultural contexts. Moreover, the cross-sectional design (i.e., comparing two different cohorts at one point in time) cannot definitively establish causation or track the development of individual students over time; differences between groups could be affected by cohort-specific factors rather than the teaching methods alone. Also, the researchers deliberately narrowed the scope of the research to focus only on the introduction section of research articles and utilized a specific theoretical lens (genre theory). They also delimited the pedagogical comparison to two distinct approaches (explicit genre-based vs. implicit process-oriented), which does not account for potential blended methods or other instructional variables that could influence outcomes. These boundaries were essential for a focused study but mean the results speak directly only to this defined framework.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors have equally conducted the study, collected data, analyzed and interpreted the data, and written up the manuscript.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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