A Review on the Process-Genre Approach in Second Language Writing Teaching

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Abstract: For second language learners, writing is a complex and challenging skill, and various techniques to teaching writing have been proposed and put into practice over time. Among them, the process-genre approach has gained increasing attention as a comprehensive approach that integrates the insights and benefits of previous writing instruction methods. It views writing as a cognitive process as well as a social activity and incorporates linguistic knowledge in the product approach, writing skills in the process approach, contextual knowledge and writing purpose in the genre approach as a whole in the teaching of writing. The paper first introduces the theoretical development of the process-genre approach, and then reviews some empirical studies from different research domains. The paper also discusses the existing research niche and offers suggestions for future research and practice in this area. The purpose of this paper is to make contributions to both the understanding and the application of the process-genre approach in second language writing teaching through an extensive review on this topic.

Keywords: Second language writing; Teaching method; Process-genre approach (PGA); Literature review

1. Introduction

Writing is an important skill for second language learners, however, it is also a sophisticated activity that involves multiple cognitive, linguistic, and social processes. It has been a major concern to develop effective methods for second language writing teaching. Over the years, different teaching approaches have been proposed and practiced. Among them, the process-genre approach (PGA for short), with its advantage of integrating genre and explicit strategy instruction throughout the recursive processes, has gained increasing attention and popularity. With the effort of domestic and foreign scholars, the theory of PGA has been continuously deepened, and the effectiveness of practical application has been tested. Therefore, this paper provides a review on PGA in second language writing teaching from theoretical and empirical perspectives to help teachers and researchers gain a better understanding of PGA and thus improve both future research and the practice of PGA.

2. Theoretical Research Review

The process-genre approach is a comprehensive teaching model put forward by Badger and White in 2000. It integrates the strengths of three traditional teaching approaches: linguistic knowledge in product approach, writing skills in process approach and contextual knowledge and writing purpose in genre approach.

PGA was first introduced to China in 2001 when Chinese scholar Han Jinlong (2001) put forward the specific and operational teaching steps, supplementing the uncovered area by previous research. He holds that PGA should include four stages: model analysis, imitative writing/ joint writing, independent writing, editing and revising. Zhao Jianqun (2005) is the second important figure in the development of PGA. He discussed the necessity of using PGA and also proposed specific teaching models, which includes three stages: input, output, and final drafting and filing. More Recently, Huang & Zhang (2020) proposed a revised framework of PGA from the genre level and the process level. Afterwards, they put forward the newest adaptation of the PGA framework with an illustration of meta-cognition involved in the pedagogical process (2022).

3. Empirical Research Review

3.1 Type of second language

The research on English writing is the most extensive. In the later part, the review can reflect the huge number of research related to second language writing in English from different perspectives, so there will be no repetition here. There has also been researches on Chinese as a second language, especially for domestic scholars. There are also a few studies that focus on other second languages. For instance, Wardhana's (2022) study filled the gap of Indonesian language, in which the research was conducted at the Bengkulu University.

3.2 Application in general writing teaching

At present, this type of research accounts for the vast majority of existing studies. By comparing two teaching methods, Kitajroonchai et al.(2022) found PGA more effective than the process approach. Xiao & Yuan (2018) found that PGA help improve the overall quality of students' writing, especially in terms of content and grammar. Zhang (2021) and Wu (2022) both proved that PGA in middle school English teaching effectively improves students' writing ability. More specifically, for different sub-genres of writing, PGA is applied to the teaching of argumentative writing, practical writing, letter writing, etc.

3.3 Application in ESP or academic writing teaching

For research on the application of PGA in English for specific purposes (ESP) writing teaching, Li (2004) analyzed its effects in English writing teaching for junior law students in universities. In the application of PGA in academic writing teaching, the literature will be classified according to different educational levels. As for the college level, Wu & Cui (2016) applied PGA to the teaching of English literature review writing; Cao & Yue (2017) studied PGA in medical SCI academic paper writing. For foreign scholars, similarly, the results are positive (Alabere & Shapii, 2019; Bin-Hady et al., 2020). As for the doctorate level, Xu & Li (2018) conducted an action research to examine its feasibility.

3.4 Effect on Certain Aspects of Writing

Previous studies have suggested that PGA is an enabling approach to improving not only L2 writers' writing performance but also other certain aspects of writing including genre awareness (Deng et al., 2014; Han & Hiver, 2018), writing engagement (Rahimi & Zhang, 2021), cooperative learning ability (Wu, 2022), higher order thinking skills (Wardhana, 2022), motivational beliefs (Teng, 2022), and writing self-efficacy and autonomy (Truong, 2022), etc.

3.5 Combination with technologies

In the modern era, some studies have begun to consider the effectiveness of combining PGA with technologies. Shang (2008) designed a process genre based online teaching model based on the campus network. Maolida & Salsabila (2019) probed into the integration of PGA and project ibunka. In the latest research, Liang (2022), in more detail, proposed that the various stages of PGA teaching can be combined with different digital humanities tools.

Conclusion:

Theoretically, PGA is a comprehensive approach for teaching second language writing, which balances the writing process and product, develop students' writing skills and awareness, and improve the writing quality. Practically, studies have proved the effectiveness of PGA in general writing and ESP or academic writing, and PGA have shown positive effects in certain aspects of writing. Meanwhile, some studies have begun to focus on the integration of PGA and technologies.

However, there are some limitations and challenges in both theory and practice. The research niche and prospects for future research are as follows. First, foreign scholars have studied the PGA theory more in depth, while local research frequently bases on findings from earlier studies. Therefore, the domestic academic community should focus more on discovering new advancements in the field. Second, for empirical research, the majority studied English as a second language. Future studies might broaden the context from the different types of second languages. Especially for domestic academics, teaching Chinese as a foreign language is a promising topic worth further exploration. Third, in general writing teaching, there is still a lack of thorough study on teaching certain writing sub-genres. Future studies may attempt to adjust the focus to specific genres of writing in detail. Fourth, academic writing research predominates in comparison to ESP research. However, there is a demand for ESP writing in both classroom environments and occupational contexts. As a result, integrating PGA into the ESP area has practical significance and needs further research. Fifth, research on the combination of PGA and technologies is in the exploratory stage at present. With the ongoing integration of technology and education, researchers should actively use and improve technologies to improve the quality and efficiency of teaching. Lastly, the domain of impact on the professional development of foreign language teachers has not been adequately studied. Miao & Wang (2020) believed that PGA required teachers to consistently hone their skills in developing instructional materials. Therefore, concerning the entire instructional process, research should not only focus on learners, but also from the perspective of teachers.

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