# **Genre-based Pedagogy:**

# A case of an Iranian ESP Business Management course

#### Hadis Toufani Asl

h.toufani@yahoo.com
University of Tehran
Kish International Campus
Iran

Genre-based instruction has been latterly a very common method used in language courses. In spite of the various research conducted on academic genres, there are still very few studies which examine the learners' perceptions of genre-based pedagogy, particularly in courses like English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Therefore, the present study aimed at considering the Sophomore Business Management learners' perspective on genre instruction in their ESP course, at the University of Tehran. The focuses of the present study were the focal genres of textbook and teaching method in terms of the content feature. The data was collected by means of both quantitative and qualitative instruments which were subject to both statistical analysis and constant comparative method of qualitative analysis. Results of the study revealed that the practice of genres were relevant to some of the learners' subsequent academic and non-academic performance. Furthermore, the results regarding the questionnaire section indicated that a number of learners could apply the genre features and they were conscious of them. By and large, it was concluded that the explicit instruction together with the provision of more English-mediated content courses, for practices outside of the classroom, can have a higher impact on ESP programs.

*Keywords*: ESP, genre-based pedagogy, content, textbook, teaching method, activities, learners' perception

# Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) which appeared in the 1960s, have experienced a rapid development and expansion since then. On account of the drift in language learners' needs over the course of time, most countries around the world have established teaching ESP, and its subfield EAP. For those scholars who are involved in doing research in the area of ESP and are concerned with ESP's increasing amount of research and theory, there are ever-changing and growing array of goals and the commonly known are as follows: English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), and the most specific task-oriented ESP such as English for sociocultural purposes (Master, 1997). These permutations, at large, make the description of ESP quite difficult. ESP was firstly defined

as a concept including the needs analysis of learners' purposes and was approached as pantheoretical (Belcher, 2006. Hereupon, as regard the consistently changing learning needs and purposes that ESP targets, it is getting more difficult to define ESP as a single concept and identify its precise framework. There are, however, some basic tenets of ESP that are described by Celani (2008, p. 418):

- 1. Considering learners' reasons for learning and their learning necessities
- 2. Building basic capabilities and abilities for defined purposes;
- 3. Using previous knowledge, or what the learners bring with them to the learning situation, i.e. what learners have, do and can do in the learning process;
- 4. Allowing learners a voice; making language use meaningful; enabling students to see reasons for learning;
- 5. Helping students develop sound individual strategies for learning; changing unhealthy study habits; breaking the old tradition of memorization and repetition of teacher-transmitted knowledge.

These specificities signify the ESP perspective which is the learning for a purpose and learning based on a frame; and it needs to be stated that such a fact clarifies the reasons for learning to both the teachers and the learners.

This complex nature of ESP turns to be even more sophisticated owing to the growing body of materials, methodologies, technologies and theories surrounding it besides an increasing range of means to meet them in a worldwide level (Robertson, 1995).

Those who are immersed in the field of ESP would agree on the point that ESP embodies some outstanding features. Content-based teaching methods, materials, and genre-based instructions are among these aspects that have long been determined as necessary issues concerning the application of specific-purpose instructions. However, the ways that these features are described and realized in the pedagogical practice have continuously been a controversial issue. The present study is, therefore, oriented towards examining the effects of ESP genre-based pedagogy in terms of teaching methods and materials (textbook), on the learners' perception in terms of the fulfillment of their needs.

# **Genre-based Pedagogy**

The concept of genre has been used in the exact identification of the languages of different contexts of use with a precise description of ESP course objectives. As a result, there have been attempts to integrate genre in language curricula and syllabus development specifically in ESP and EAP (Swales, 1990). The value of genre as a teaching tool has long been recognized, although, there are very few studies that examine the impact of genre-based pedagogy on learners' language development. The scarcity of this evaluation has perhaps been a reason why genre-based instruction still remains a controversial issue (Fredman, 1994). The majority of the researchers have pinpointed the positive effects associated with genre-based teaching for non-native speakers (Henry & Roseberry, 1998; Hyon, 2001; Kay & Dudley-Evans, 1998; Mustafa, 1995) and only some of them have been conducted to uncover the restrictions concerning genre-based teaching. Hyon (2001 a), for example, reported that those learners who

were exposed to a genre-based pedagogy could focus on the rhetorical structure of texts more in comparison with the time that they were not under such a treatment; genre-based pedagogy additionally enhanced second language learners' reading confidence and reading speed. Hyon, however, noted that this course was narrowed down so that its ultimate goal was to increase learners' vocabulary knowledge together with having learners' content comprehension amplified.

In another study, Hyon (2001b) examined the long-term effects of an EAP reading course on eight non-native speakers of English. It needs to be mentioned that the EAP course adopted a genre-based approach. Results of this study showed that the genres applied in the class were related to the learners' subsequent reading needs. Additionally, some of the learners could successfully remember those genre features which were practiced throughout the course.

Kay and Dudley-Evans (1998), on the other hand, ascertained mixed results on the teachers' perspectives about the use of genres in writing tasks. They ran a multicultural workshop consisted of 48 teachers who were supposed to cooperate in sharing their command of genre field. It was concluded that some teachers recognized the positive effects of the use of genre-based pedagogy in bringing about a higher degree of learners' discovery of the text organization. Other teachers in the foregoing study, however, were of the opposite view, contending the discouraging nature of a teaching method strictly informed by genre-based pedagogy.

Yasuda (2011) applied the systemic functional linguistic approach (SFL) in examining the way low level language learners develop genre awareness, linguistic knowledge, and writing capabilities in a genre-based writing course. 70 Japanese learners were taught regarding the concept that how different genres are formed by several linguistic resources. The final results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses of Yasuda's research revealed that learners turned to be more aware of the genres after the writing course which they did over a period of fifteen weeks.

In another recent study, Chen and Su (2012) measured the summary writing performance of the Taiwanese foreign language learners in a genre-based approach. The data included the learners' summaries in the pre-test and post-test which were evaluated according to the content organization, vocabulary, and language use. The findings of this study indicated the advantages associated with the use of genre-based pedagogy in enhancing learners' summary writing. Moreover, the results attested a better performance of the learners in the content and organizational components as against their performance in the vocabulary and language use.

In spite of these positive effects accompanied by the use of genres in language classes, there are some limitations cited by the scholars (e.g., Freedman, 1993, 1994). Freedman believed that explicit genre teaching can be dispensable or even they might have perilous influence on the learners' performance when the teachers are not aware of the texts. In ESP and other fields, further studies are required to clarify the effects of a genre-based approach on learners and the efficiency of different approaches for particular group of learners. Henry and Roseberry (1998) argued that the benefits and drawbacks of the genre approaches in ESP and EAP have been theory-based. Hereby, it is more convenient to do empirical evaluation and research and come to the genuine advantages and disadvantages of genre-based approaches in ESP and EAP.

Hence, due to the above mentioned lack, this paper provides new insights into the effects of genre-based instructions on "Iranian" university students who have passed the ESP course at the University of Tehran. The present study aimed to address the following research questions:

- 1. What are the learners' perceptions of ESP in "Iran" in terms of genre-based pedagogy?
- 2. Does ESP in "Iran" contribute to learners' knowledge of genre?

#### Methods

# **Participants**

This study was comprised of 20 "Iranian" learners (females = 11, males = 9). In fact, the course the course consisted 36 learners; yet only 20 of them agreed to participate in this research and completely filled out the questionnaire. Learners were all undergraduate students who were pursuing a bachelor degree in Business Management at the University of Tehran. Consequently, the common characteristic of all the participants was that English language played a major role in knowledge construction in their field. All of the participants were advanced learners, with Farsi or other languages as their mother tongue. The focus of the study was on learners' approaches to genre-based pedagogy rather than on language acquisition, thus the learners' L1 background was mainly irrelevant. The participants' age ranged from 20 to 25 years old.

# **Instrument**

Questionnaire. The main instrument that the participants were supplied with in the present study was the perception questionnaire which was adopted from Tsou and Chen (2014). This questionnaire surveyed the learners' point of view with regard to the probable effects of teaching activities and materials on the success of the ESP course. In the present study, the genres of textbook and teaching activities were selected for analysis and the questionnaire was fundamentally concerned with these two aforementioned genres. In other words, the questionnaire measured the participants' perspectives about the success of the ESP program in terms of the textbook and teaching method genres based on the content feature. This was a 5 point likert scale questionnaire (5 = strongly agree; 1 = strongly disagree). The questionnaire focused on the learners' improvement of all language skills after the program since the teaching method attended to all language skills. The questionnaire can be found in the Appendix.

**Interview.** For the qualitative part of the study, a semi-structured interview was conducted to investigate the learners' knowledge of genre after the course. The interview part included 5 questions as follows:

- 1. Do you remember anything about your ESP course?
- 2. Does the knowledge you obtained from the ESP course assist you with performing similar tasks for the other classes or any other further research?
- 3. In what ways have you employed the learned points in your ESP course?
- 4. Have you ever applied anything you had learned from your ESP textbook or classroom tasks to your non- academic tasks?
- 5. Have you ever applied your learning from the ESP course to your accomplishment of other academic tasks?

### **Procedure**

The data was collected from a sixteen week ESP course. The course was held in the spring semester 2014 at the University of Tehran which lasted for 16 weeks. Each weekly session was held for 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Two genres of textbook and teaching activities were selected as the cornerstone of the course. These two genres were discussed according to the content feature. The content in this course referred to the topical focuses of the genre which are significant components of genre knowledge (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995). The content of the activities was defined as interesting or significant recent occurrences. The textbook, on the other hand, was more attentive to large current topics which were not necessarily related to a recent event. The textbook focused on the presentation of the facts vis - a- vis a specific topic in a patterned way. Nevertheless, the teaching activities included a range of different tasks related to the future needs of the students. The input materials for this class included reading texts and other activities related to their academic specialties. In the class, the listening and speaking language skills were practiced through presentations, classroom discussions, and task performance. Furthermore, corpus activity was used in almost each single session across the teaching process. The corpus tasks were applied in order to help the learners get familiar with obtaining and making use of information from different corpus websites. Inside the class, ESP teachers exhibited the stages and assigned homework for students to do at home. These activities were assumed to be as close as possible to the learners' needs and they were supposed to reflect the authenticity factor in their selection.

Regarding the first section of the process of collecting the data, the questionnaire was emailed to the participants in July 2014, participants were supposed to fill in the questionnaire and email it back to the researcher. On the whole, it took the participants 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Afterwards, the data were imported to the SPSS software (version 21) for the statistical analyses.

For the qualitative section of the data collection, as mentioned previously, an interview was done. This was a direct and straightforward approach in eliciting learners' memories of the course content and its influences upon their subsequent language use, both in academic and non-academic contexts. Learners were asked what, if anything, they could recall about their ESP class, how they could employ their learning from the course to their academic and non-academic language use, and what types of language skills still were required to be enhanced. It needs to be stated that the qualitative section of the data collection coincided with the quantitative one which both occurred in July 2014. The interviewer was not the instructor of the course so that any probable learner's bias towards pleasing the instructor was removed. The interviews were carried out by the researcher who took note of learners' responses to each question. Thereafter, the notes were analyzed for the themes applicable to the questions raised in the interview session. In spite of the fact that the learners' responses, which are quoted in the paper, included false starts and hesitations, they were all eliminated; their grammatical errors were not corrected, though. All of the learners' names have been modified in order for the data to be treated confidentially.

#### **Results**

ESP learners assigned higher scores to different features of the materials and teaching method genres such as clarity of course objectives (P = 60), content (P = 35), activity designs (P = 65), and classroom atmosphere (P = 40). Regarding the autonomy aspect it needs to be mentioned that by virtue of the fact that learners viewed the learning environment in the university to be a positive one, they were eager to learn the language by themselves after the class and take risks in using the language (Questions 3 and 5). The questionnaire also asked for the issue of learners being autonomous, and if they agreed that learner autonomy was an essential and required learning purpose. The results indicated that 85% of the students agreed with the statement (Question 19). Moreover, 80% of the students contended that corpus instruction and other learning activities practiced in Sophomore English classes assisted them to become independent learners (Question 20).

In the survey, more than half (65%) of the participants agreed that the materials used in the class were authentic (Question 17). With respect to the authenticity of tasks, almost all of the learners in the survey (95%) agreed with the statement that the learning tasks in the ESP course were authentic and were very similar to the types of the activities which they needed to carry out in their academic classes and future careers (Question 18). The finding uncovered evidence of some sort proving that the learners determined the tasks to be similar to the ones they had to carry out in their specialist courses and, therefore, felt encouraged to learn related capabilities. This result can be corroborated by the high percent of learners (70%) agreeing that the teaching method could enhance their cognitive processes and the way information can be presented (Question 2).

In universities across "Iran", students are, typically, placed according to their levels of language proficiency only the time they are in their freshman year. In this age and time, there are still not discipline-specific courses that accommodate the homogeneous learners in terms of their language proficiency. Ipso facto, placement tests are not used for ESP courses since the learners are enrolled in different courses regarding their major rather than their level of language proficiency. The majority of the participants (65%) in the present study claimed that there needs to be a placement test for the screening of learners with various language proficiency levels. It seems logical that the teaching and assessment processes can benefit from having the learners with similar rather than mixed level of language proficiency.

The questionnaire also included questions about the transfer of the learned issue. There were four questions which asked learners' ideas about the long-term transfer of what they learned in their ESP course (Questions 28 and 29), as well as the transfer of the learned issues to the subject courses (Questions 30 and 31). The results of the survey signified that 85% of the students identified ESP reading skills useful for their future studies and career, and 60% found ESP speaking skills to be attentive (Questions 28 and 29). This result is motivating in the light of suggesting that only 50% of students reported using ESP reading skills on textbook reading, and 45% of students reported using ESP speaking skills in subject courses (Questions 30 and 31). In addition, 25% of students stated that they "never" or "seldom" have the chance to use ESP skills in textbook reading (Question 30), while 50% of students "never" or "seldom" use ESP

speaking skills in subject classrooms (Question 31). Such a finding illuminate one of the serious restrictions of the ESP course in that learners lack the context (e.g., English-mediated content courses) for output practices outside ESP classrooms. In the universities in Iran, there are very low number of ESP classes which are held using English as the medium of teaching and communication.

In order to provide an answer to the second research question which was concerned with the contribution of the genre-based ESP instruction to the learners' knowledge of genre, a semistructured interview was conducted with the learners.

Specifically, the questions focused on the effect of content of the textbook and teaching activity genres on their subsequent activities.

After the initial step of identifying the considerable meanings in what individuals have said during the interview session, the 'constant comparative method' (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) of analyzing qualitative data was used. This is a method which integrates inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning obtained (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The time each new unit of meaning is chosen for being interpreted, it is compared to all the other units of meaning; and afterwards, it is grouped (categorized and coded) with similar units of meaning. Moreover, a new classification is established provided that there are no similar units of meaning. Following categorizing and coding process, the researchers intends to develop a set of categories that present a logical and sensible reconstruction of the data which was collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The following are some samples of learners' replies to the researcher's interview questions. It needs to be mentioned that the names are pseudonyms in order to keep the interviewees' identities anonymous.

Mina:" we usually talked about the writer, the time and conditions and, only then moved to the determination of the main topic."

Learners asserted that although they can read better, but they are unaware of the approaches that they can apply while reading different texts.

Sina: "I think that reading is very important in our major. I do not remember the exact strategies but I think I know that I have different ways of reading different passages."

Maryam: "Well, I just read and I can't apply the techniques differently."

Some others were more aware of the strategies used in the class:

Sahar: "OK, I think I read as I did before, just that I pay much more attention to the introduction and topic sentence."

Majid: "I know more how to listen and read because I learned where I can find more information. I learned that if I do not know the meaning of some words, I should not remain there and should move."

Mahsa: "At first I was very afraid of class presentations and lectures. I became stressed. But because we practiced it a lot in the class, now I use it a lot because I have to speak in other classes in front of others."

Since the present study proposed to examine the short-term effects of genre-based pedagogy, most of the learners were able to remember the exact details of their ESP course. In actuality, learners' comments and expressions offered extra information into the genre-based pedagogy in their ESP class. Learners' definitions of the textbook passages transpired their familiarity with aspects of this genre. Over and above, they stated that different texts along with different topics related to their major were used during their ESP course; and they also mentioned that they differed in terms of the learning strategies used in the class. Some of the learners made a reference to the fact that the textbook discussed the topic from the general points to more particular aspects.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The present study was conducted in examining the current status of a particular ESP course in "Iran" from the perspective of Sophomore Business Management students. The paper incorporated some very important features of the class such as transferability of learning, authenticity, learners' autonomy, class activities, and the teachers' teaching method. The teachers' choice of textbook and the use of different teaching tasks, e.g. presentations, groupwork, and outside of the class assignments including corpus tasks, reveal the authenticity of the teaching method and materials. This authenticity factor directed the learners toward getting independent researchers who could find the information in either the class discussions or outside the classroom tasks. However, the interview results provides evidence that it would be better for the teachers to teach more explicitly about the different strategies applied in the fulfillment of the language activities, since some of the students did not know about them. This suffices to justify the effectiveness of explicit instruction in raising the learners' awareness of the techniques of successful learning. Learners were aware of the significance of the language skills and their use in their future tasks; nonetheless, they have not had an opportunity to use English language in other subject classes as observed by the comparatively lower percent of agreement in the questionnaire. In essence, the oral language skills of listening and speaking are among the ignored skills in the university classes due to the entrance examinations in which the oral language skills have no specific role.

Little et al. (2008) argue that learner autonomy needs to be considered as an essential goal of language pedagogy by reason of the fact that it not only encourages learners, but also is a prerequisite for lifelong acquisition. Tassinari (2012) proposed a model which defined four elements of learners' autonomy (as cited in Tsou & Chen, 2014, p. 42) to wit: (1) a cognitive and metacognitive aspect such as beliefs and awareness, (2) an affective and motivational aspect such as feelings and willingness, (3) an action-oriented aspect such as skill acquisition and learning behaviors, and (4) a social aspect, such as relationships with learning partners, advisors, and teachers. Tassinari's dynamic model for assessment allows learners to identify and focus on their own needs and goals.

One of the other important findings of both the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the present study was that the majority of the participants preferred the use of interactive tasks in ESP classes. Collaborative group work and pair work in ESP/EAP classes can be employed to practice the presented language and also to facilitate peer feedback which may include peer assessment, constructive interaction, and critical thinking skills as well. These skills are specially required for business management students in that they need to develop their interactional skills too. This finding is supported by the use of only English textbooks in order for the foreign language learners to have more opportunities to hear the target language. After all, textbooks are de facto syllabi and, apart from the teacher, the most important aid in the process of language acquisition. Parenthetically, they may be the only source of information as regards the curriculum for the teacher and the only resource available for learners who are learning a language in foreign language contexts.

Based on the findings of the interview and questionnaire, it can be deduced that an effective specialized English course should be substantially differentiated from other general English courses by focusing on specific contents and materials.

The type of the syllabus needs to be appropriate for the needs of the learners. In other words, a clear framework of knowledge and capabilities should be selected so that it will be appropriate to the overall needs and aims of the learners.

# Breen (2001) argues that:

A syllabus may be formally documented, as in the aims and content of a national or institutional syllabus for particular groups of learners or (less explicitly perhaps) in the content material of published textbooks. Every teacher follows a syllabus, but it may vary from being a pre-designed document to a day-to-day choice of content which the teacher regards as serving a course's particular aims. In the latter case, the syllabus unfolds as lessons progress. (p. 151)

It can be concluded that there exists a drawback concerning ESP courses in" Iran" that everything needs to be approved by many people in various levels of authority which causes the teachers to have less control upon what they teach. The teachers need to be flexible to keep a balance between what they find necessary and what the higher authority considers to be appropriate for learners. Students' needs should be officially considered during the process of designing the course. The teachers assume that they know the needs of the students better than authorities. Therefore, needs analysis should be a central component of the ESP program, and should be given specific attention from the beginning of the course through a series of systematic collection tools. Consequently, the use of genre-based pedagogy can be better adapted and instructed according to the learners' level, interest as well as their academic and non-academic needs.

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Appendix

	Items	Strongly	Disagree	Not	Agree	Strongly
		disagree		sure		agree
1	The course objectives match the		П			
	themes of the syllabus	Ш				
2	The course content is well-prepared					
	and can effectively train students'					
	critical	Ш	Ш	Ш		
	thinking, presentation, and Q&A skills					
3	In-class activities are well-designed					
	and promote positive classroom					
	atmosphere					
4	The teacher frequently collects relevant					
	teaching resource		Ц			
5	The teacher creates a positive learning					
	atmosphere to motivate English					
_	learning in class					
6	The teacher provides clear, concrete	_				
	and systematic explanations on the					
7	course content					
7	The teacher interacts frequently with					
0	students The teacher was a sea the class time					
8	The teacher manages the class time					
9	effectively The teacher frequently uses methods of					
9	discussion and Q&A					
10	The teacher gives appropriate					
10	assignments and assessments					
11	The course material is level-					
	appropriate, valuing students' affective					
	learning		_	_	_	
12	The teacher uses teaching platform and					
	integrates course materials					
	appropriately					
13	Overall, my English listening skill has					
	improved from taking the course this					
	semester					
14	Overall, my English speaking skill has					
	improved from taking the course this					
	semester					
15	Overall, my English reading skill has					
	improved from taking the course this					
	semester					

16	Overall, my English writing skill has				
	improved from taking the course this semester				
17	ESP materials are authentic and				
1 /	helpful				
18	ESP tasks are authentic and helpful				
19	Learner autonomy is an important	_	_		
	learning goal				
20	Corpus instruction is helpful to				
	independent learning				
21	ESP should conduct placement test				
22	ESP is helpful in test improvement				
23	Improved reading				
24	Improved vocabulary				
25	Improved speaking				
26	Improved presentation				
27	Improved listening				
28	ESP reading skills are helpful for				
	future academic studies and				
	Workplace				
29	ESP speaking skills are helpful for				
	future academic studies and				
	Workplace				
30	ESP reading skills on textbook		П	П	П
	reading			Ц	
31	ESP speaking skills in subject				П
	classrooms	 Ш	Ц	Ш	