PROMOTING STUDENTS' WRITING SKILL: GENRE-BASED APPROACH IN INDONESIA EFL CONTEXT

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Abstract

This paper aimed to critically examine the effectiveness of Genre-Based Approach (GBA) to teaching writing in EFL context of Indonesia. Although several studies have discussed the effectiveness of GBA in teaching writing, those studies put emphasize how GBA focuses on genre or text types rather than the basic principles of GBA that aims for socially functioning language skills. This paper draws on the relevant literature to investigates how GBA suits the teaching of writing in EFL context of Indonesia. Moreover, the discussion focuses on the benefits of GBA which mainly derived from five key principles of Genre proposed by Hyland (2007). Through the exploration of existing empirical studies, this paper found that GBA offer three main benefits in teaching writing under the EFL context. These benefits are: (1) the offer of practical writing skill; (2) the build of students' confidence in English writing; and (3) stimulation on students' critical thinking as part of their English literacy. Nevertheless, the benefits of GBA in teaching writing could only be attained if teachers implement GBA according to its full-fledged teaching and learning cycles.

Keywords: *Genre-Based Approach, EFL Context, Students' Writing Skill,*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of genre rooted from the systemic functional linguistics (SFL) developed by Australian linguist, Michael Halliday. The term genre can be simply defined as a term for a grouping of texts which reflect specific use of language as a response to recurring situations (Hyland, 2008). Genre can also be defined as textual result from social interaction in a contextual setting (Lorenzo, 2013). The movement on genre became popular through the development of one of the branches in genre analysis, the "Sydney School", which put emphasis on gradually increasing the complexity of the texts being learned (Flowerdew, 2015). Sydney School movement of genre is focused on the analysis of texts in primary and secondary schooling (Hyon, 1996; Wingate, 2012). The analysis aims to point out the semantic components of a text which then will be focused in the learning process (Martin & Rose, 2003; Wingate, 2012). Furthermore, the Sydney School approach put emphasis on the explicit teaching of these semantics' component or linguistic features of particular genre and relate them to the social functions (Wingate, 2012).

In Indonesia, writing has the least attention in the teaching of English. It stems from the difficulties to develop and learn writing in English since exposure to English is limited. Beside the unconducive EFL environment, another factor that halt the grow of English writing ability is the teachers' performance. In concern with this problem, Genre-Based Approach (GBA) is adopted by Indonesia with the enactment of 2004 curriculum (Departemen Pendidikan Nasional [Depdiknas], 2003). It can be seen from the teaching of English in Indonesian schools is partly the teaching of genre or various texts.

Nonetheless, although the changes of approach in the curriculum, Indonesian secondary education teachers keep the focus on grammar which was the approach of the very early English curriculum of Indonesia. In the classroom, the activity of writing can be seen but the assessment of their writing is based on grammar and structure of their writing instead of analyzing the content and

social purpose achievement of students' writings. It results in the ineffective English skills among Indonesian students at university level stems from a shallow understanding of language. However, it would be improper to accuse this phenomenon as the failure of GBA as an approach in teaching English, especially writing. In teaching writing, Genre approach believed that text types or genres contain social contexts. These genres are then utilised as a medium of teaching English through writing.

Hence, I am going to argue that Genre-Based Approach is effective in enhancing students writing skills in EFL context of Indonesia. In order to support this argument, the essay will critically present three major benefits of GBA in promoting students' writing skill in Indonesia or particularly EFL context. These benefits that are going to be discussed in this essay are derived from five key principles of Genre proposed by Hyland (2007).

DISCUSSION
Benefits of Genre-Based Approach to Student's Writing Skills

As far as the definition of GBA is concerned, the genre approach adopted in Indonesian curriculum is the genre pedagogy that is underpinned by Systemic Functional Linguistics (will be referred as SFL in the essay) view of GBA. This movement is popularly known with the term "Sydney School", which described genre as a 'staged, goal-oriented social process' (Martin & Rose, 2007, p.6) contained in a specific context of culture. In other words, this approach focuses on functional and contextual English language teaching.

It was a correct decision to adopt the SFL approach of GBA since it is mainly focused on the genre of primary and secondary levels of schooling (Hyon, 1996; Wingate, 2012). Hyland (2009) adds that the SFL approach of GBA is the most developed pedagogy among other paths of GBA research since the effectiveness of impact to both L1 and L2 writing in Australia. Furthermore, writing activities gained a significant allotment of attention which stems from the adoption of GBA which emphasise on written form of English.

In terms of benefits, as stated above, these benefits are derived from key principles that apply to all genre-based teaching movements despite significantly different in the implementation. I summarized these principles into three classifications, which are practical language skill especially writing, confidence in English or foreign language writing and the promotion of critical thinking. Also, the key principles will be pointed out in the benefits related to them.

1. Practical Writing Skill

The first aspect that demonstrates the effectiveness of GBA is the offer of practical language knowledge in writing skill. In the first principle of GBA, it is stated that aim of writing is to accomplish social purposes which are particular to the contexts of language use (Hyland, 2007). In order to achieve this, Hyland (2007) further explained that GBA provides exposures to socially acknowledged criteria in writing various texts. As the results, students are going to possess the writing skill which will function effectively in a social situation.

As an example, in EFL context research conducted by de Myskow and Gordon (2010) to investigate the effectiveness of GBA in the teaching of writing university application letter to senior high school students in Japan. The teaching of university application letter is accurate since students would be informed of how to appropriately write an application letter that would have a high opportunity to be accepted. In fact, some of the students are admitted to the university they were applying by submitting the application letter they write in the class (Myskow & Gordon, 2010). Furthermore, beyond only to produce a letter, in the process students could also reflect their progress, achievements and contribution in their schooling life. It is proven by the writing extract of one student which indicates the fulfilment the social purpose of the genre by connecting personal goal with the university's characteristics such as values or attitudes being embraced.

Meanwhile, Scott and Lillis (2007, as cited in Wingate, 2012) assumed that the criteria given in teaching writing might lead to a textual bias or in other words, writing activities become a mere imitation of text types prescribed. Moreover, in a worse case, there is a tendency of students to become dependent on the criteria tha are given in the process of learning (Byram, 2004 as cited in Cornelius & Cotsworth, 2015). These statements are the form of concern that GBA would end

similarly to the Product-based approach where the teaching of writing only reaches outer elements of language. Under this condition of shallow language understanding, students are able to write in English but their ability to apply this writing into social interaction contexts is in doubt.

The case given might come true if GBA is not implemented properly or incomplete cycles as to what was and is occurring now in Indonesia where the capacity of writing a research is still low among teachers, university students and even lecturers. However, as a response, the next principle of GBA state that the "learning or teaching to write is needs-oriented" (Hyland, 2007), which means that in general the classification of genres developed by GBA researchers is determined based on the needs of students in certain schooling levels. For example, in Indonesia, senior high school students are being taught exposition genre (both analytical or hortatory) where they are required to write a thesis statement on some social, political or environmental issues which must be supported by arguments and evidence. The classification of exposition text as secondary school genre is appropriate at that moment since the students are in the last years of schooling where the transition to university is imminent. In future practice, the ability to write exposition genre is advantageous for students who are continuing to higher education as they will be demanded to write a reflection of their position on some happening issues (Emilia, 2011; Wingate, 2012).

In conclusion, GBA attempts to equip students with practical resources of language that could be utilised for real world communication. Hence, in the teaching of writing, students are provided with accepted language criteria in a social situation. Moreover, the genres developed by SFL movement are designed to meet the needs of students in their social engagement. In relation with the practicality provided, GBA benefits students by building students their confidence which will be discussed in the next section.

2. Confidence in Writing

Build on from the idea that GBA offers students practical writing skills which are derived from two of GBA key principles, the next principles result in the build of students' confidence in writing. GBA implementation consists of three stages of writing cycles, which are Deconstruction, Joint Construction and Independent construction (Martin & Rose, 2005 as cited in de Oliviera & Lan, 2014). Those writing cycles represent the "learning to write is a social activity" principle (Hyland, 2007) which requires a supportive environment in the process of writing. In the earlier stage of GBA, which is deconstruction, students are exposed to some models or examples of the text type being learned. In this stage, the activity consists of deconstructions of model texts and discussion of text structure, language features and social purpose of a certain genre (de Oliviera and Lan, 2014; Emilia, 2011). The objective of this activity is to familiarise learners with English text types and purposes that in their life, as a non-native, they never even encounter one (Kim & Kim, 2005; Simon, 2015). Move to the stage of joint construction, students are invited to write the genre they have engage in the modelling stage with the aid of teachers. The built of confidence here emerges from the attempt to write a text but with reinforcement from the teacher who become a bridge between daily language and academic language of schooling (Martin & Rose, 2005 as cited in de Oliviera & Lan, 2014).

However, as students become familiar with the structure and features of text types, GBA is judged to have the tendency to underestimate the skills required to produce content in writing (Badger & White, 2000 as cited in Kim & Kim, 2005), where in some genres like exposition and argumentative writing the value of the content is what matters. Moreover, in the independent construction, GBA limits teachers' intervention as the students are required to develop their writing on their own. It may be true that GBA, in a glance, put the paramount focus on language features and generic structure of genre which might be harmful to students' writing confidence in writing as it is feared they would experience confusion and frustration in writing the content. In most cases in Indonesia, the independent construction is being done as homework where students with less confidence would copy a model text and replaces some part of the content.

In rebuttal to this, the deconstruction and joint construction cycles are in fact the phase where students are being prepared for independent writing in the last cycle of GBA. The target of these two cycles is not only to be aware of the linguistic features and purpose of a certain genre but

also to know appropriate information which should be contained as the contain in student's writing (de Oliviera & Lan, 2014). As an example, the study by Myskow and Gordon (2010), as shown in the previous section, demonstrates how to avoid such failure by investing extra activities (including time) on deconstruction stage where students are given some activities which aims to gather information to be used as the content of their future writing. In results, there will be confidence in students to perform writing in the independent construction cycle where teachers' assistant is reduced for the concern of creativity development. The evidence can be seen from one of the extract of student's writing in Myskow and Gordon (2010) study, where the application letter written by the student consists of connection between students' personal goals and the values embraced by the target university. In concern with independent construction cycle, teacher's role in this cycle might be limited, but it is not a justification to become absent in the process of writing.

In summary, GBA builds students confidence through reinforcing setting of explicit writing cycles which provide students the opportunity to develop their current language knowledge as they progress on writing (Hyland, 2007; Cornelius & Cotsworth, 2015). In addition, besides the elicitation of creativity, the cycles of GBA also provide students the opportunity to learn and develop critical thinking capacity as what will be discussed in the next section.

3. Promotion of Critical Thinking

Another line of thought on the effectiveness of GBA in promoting students' writing skill is that GBA enhances critical thinking, which is very important part of literacy, especially in the era of globalisation. Critical thinking in GBA is drawn from the principle genre that "learning to write involves learning to use language" (Hyland, 2007). Emilia (2011) stated there are three main outcomes of learning under the roof of GBA, which are: "(1) *students learn language*; (2) *students learn through language*; (3) *students learn about language*". In other words, the process of teaching writing should always revolve around the aspects of the language being taught. This principle is demonstrated in the teaching of GBA when students are being exposed to models of genre, they are embraced to analyse language, content and social purposes (Emilia, 2011), which illustrates critical engagement with social and textual practices (Hyland, 2007).

Nevertheless, a comment emerges that by showing students models of texts, rather than promoting critical thinking, GBA is claimed to view students as passive and limit their creativity (Badger & White, 2000 as cited in Kim, 2006). This view on students depicts a contrary of how critical thinkers should engage in learning. Moreover, Hyland (2007), as one of GBA proponent, claimed that GBA does not explicitly preclude the activity to develop critical thinking in the process. Admittedly, in the earlier years, critical thinking is not explicitly taught in GBA cycles of teaching writing. However, it does not mean that students' critical thinking is impossible to be enhanced or trained by employing GBA in the teaching of writing. As stated in the previous section, GBA teaching cycles include the discussion of genre in terms of language features, structures and social purposes. The cycle is where students are led to be critical by not only learning about genre but its usage (de Oliviera & Lan, 2012). GBA help students to go through process of writing (researching topic, outlining, drafting, revising, editing and proofreading) all of which can help sharpen students' critical thinking and critical literacy (Emilia, 2011). In addition to this, genre itself has dynamic forms (evolve) which demand students to be critical in dealing with genre (Myskow & Gordon, 2010).

Furthermore, GBA recently has become a versatile and flexible approach that it could be combined with other approaches or modified to contain critical writing in the learning objectives (Kim & Kim, 2005; Wingate, 2012). Therefore, students' passiveness and limited creativity are not necessarily the results of GBA implementation but, as stated above, the failure of harnessing GBA teaching cycles appropriately. It stems from the teaching of GBA that depends on extra effort from teachers in organising and conduction writing activities.

As a summary, GBA enhances students' critical thinking by encouraging the analysis of language, content and social purposes of genres. Moreover, critical thinking also practised through the process of writing which require students to engage and analyse the three aspects stated before. Although not explicitly emphasised critical thinking in the cycles of writing, GBA could be modified or combined with other approaches to teaching writing which put an obvious focus on

developing critical thinking.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have argued there are three major benefits of GBA in teaching English writing skills. The benefits are, first, GBA offers the practicality of language knowledge being taught for students being prepared to engage effectively in social settings. This benefit is achieved through the teaching of genres which referred as socially admitted language and appropriate to the needs of students based on the level of their education. Second, GBA establishes students' confidence in writing English, a language which does not belong to first language or even second in Indonesia. Students' confidence is shaped through well-designed and explicit cycles of writing activities. Moreover, learning objectives are also clearly stated earlier for students to be able to observe their current level, how far they have progressed and whether they have reached the goals of writing. In addition to confidence, GBA also allows students to express and grow their creativity by allocating independent writing session. Third, GBA provides advancement of students' critical thinking in learning and writing in English. Critical thinking, although not explicitly stated, emerges over the critical engagement of students with the features, structures, content, and social purposes of genres. GBA scaffolds the bridge for students to move from the learning of language which focuses on grammar and memorization to the interaction with language and its application in real communication.

Based on the benefits explained through the essay, I would like to conclude that Genre-Based Approach can be an effective approach to promote students' writing skills in Indonesia or EFL contexts. However, in order to achieve a successful GBA teaching of writing, extra amount of teacher's attention and time allotment is necessary. This is because GBA cycles of teaching writing are originally time-consuming and, as stated above, in GBA teachers are required to thoroughly observe students' writing progress along all the three cycles of GBA.

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