Genre-based Approach to Writing in EFL Contexts

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Abstract

Writing is a challenging and demanding skill for EFL learners in Vietnam. Teaching writing skills at Vietnamese universities is problematic since different approaches to writing have not been implemented effectively. Mainly, a genre-based approach to writing has not yet been implemented in EFL writing classrooms successfully. This paper investigates how the genre-based writing approach has been taught and learned at Van Lang University. The study mentions some critical notions of systemic functional linguistics, genre-based writing approach, and the importance and effects of genre-based approach to writing. 128 students turned in their midterm essays in week 5 of the 10-week writing course. These 128 expository essays were analyzed and synthesized using Microsoft Excel to calculate the differences in move-step structure. The findings indicated that the students had difficulty following the fixed move-step structure, and they also faced challenges of lexico-grammatical usage for the expository. Hence, the study suggests some implications for applying a genre-based approach to writing for EFL teachers and students and suggests further research.

Keywords: writing, genre-based approach, systematic functional linguistics, expository essay, move-step structure

1. Introduction

Among four language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, writing seems to be the most difficult because it requires a writer to master specific vocabulary knowledge, grammar, and schematic structures. Accordingly, the students usually are not motivated in the writing classrooms (Ho et al., 2020). Hence, it is tough for writing teachers to teach writing skills to students with different proficiency levels. Some researchers (Pham & Nguyen, 2020; Pham, Huyen & Nguyen, 2020; Pham, 2021a) use peer feedback activities in the writing classrooms to help improve students' writing outcomes. Another researcher applied collaborative writing to help students work together for a joint product (Pham, 2021b). Some studies have shown three approaches to teaching writing skills: process approach, product approach, and genre-based approach. Remarkably, the genre-based approach has been implemented into teaching writing nationwide in Australia and worldwide. This approach requires writing teachers to be aware of learners' needs and the aims of a writing course. It means that the teachers can enhance the students' communicative proficiency through writing pieces of paper.

Genre theory derived from the theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). SFL was developed by Halliday (1994) and his followers in Australia. Eggins (1994) proposes that SFL indicates how people use language to perform social purposes. It means that this theory helps explain how people use language to get something done purposely in certain contexts. This SFL framework is called functional because it can explain how the language is employed (Halliday, 1994), and SFL regards language as a meaning-making resource (Halliday and Martin, 1993). Hyland (2007) maintains that the genre-based approach to writing in L2 emphasizes communicative methods, which is different from process pedagogies. So, the genre-based approach emphasizes the communicative function of writing papers.

The genre-based approach is very beneficial in the classroom since this approach helps teachers and students work with the whole text and understand how language is used for a real purpose. The genre-based approach to writing underscores the rapport between language and its context, i.e., language employed to get something done in a particular context. A functional language model refers to a network of systems for making meanings for the discourse (Halliday, 1994). The application of the genre-based approach to writing is to see the language used in a meaningful way.

However, there have been some major problems with this kind of genre-based approach application into teaching and

learning EFL writing skills in the Vietnamese context. Writing teachers do not pay much attention to contexts and communicative purposes in the writing teaching process. The contexts and communicative purposes of texts impact the choice of language uses to serve communicative functions. The writing teachers have not realized the relationship between texts and their contexts of use.   The teachers have not pointed out how language is used in authentic contexts in different fields.

Moreover, many writing teachers are not profoundly aware of notions of genre and its application into teaching writing. EFL students are also not trained to write written texts according to a genre-based approach. Therefore, writing teachers have not provided students with sufficient knowledge of genre-based approaches to writing such as social function, generic structure /move-step structure, and linguistic features. Lastly, according to Kay and Dudley-Evans (1998), writing teachers have taught their students how to write their written texts to fulfill "anticipated goal and purpose" and explore how writers structure texts in various cultures (p.310).

From the problems mentioned above, this paper, therefore, aims to review the literature related to the SFL genre-based approach to teaching writing in EFL contexts and then suggest some implications for teaching writing skills at Van Lang university and future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Systemic Functional Linguistics and Genre

Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) is a theory used to explain the relationship between social context and linguistic perspectives (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In SFL theory, language is used functionally and considered a source of meaning-making (Halliday, 1978). There are various sources such as language, picture, sound, symbols, paralinguistic factors, and the like that are used to make meanings for texts. In other words, Berry et al. (1996) state that SFL highlights implications and considers language as a choice, which can be applied to texts. It can be said that the SFL theory is of great significance to the teaching of writing skills because it helps EFL learners easily choose different sources of meanings functionally and purposely according to each communicative situation.

Derewianka (1992) maintains that from a functional approach, language is used to get things done. Based on the purpose of the text, a writer can flexibly select appropriate lexico-grammar to convey what the writer expects readers to do. Martin (1984) insists that genre is "goal-oriented" and related to social purposes (p.25). Writing teachers need to clearly show the aim of each genre so that EFL learners can distinguish the differences between these kinds of writing genres.

The genre has been defined differently by researchers. According to Martin (1984), genres are identified based on language choice appropriate for communicative context to express meanings successfully. Swales (1990) regards genre as a class of communicative events and communicative purposes. Genre consists of some key terms such as particular setting, move-step structure, and socially communicative purposes. According to Thompson (2014), genre uses the resources of a register "to achieve certain communicative goals" (p.52). This definition is rather abstract, but it emphasizes conventions that a writer must follow to achieve particular purposes.

Hyland (2007) proposes that genre is "abstract," but it can be recognized socially thanks to the ways of language used in texts (p.149). It means that different kinds of genres can be identified through the language-specific for each type of genre. It is noticeable that the context of culture is different from the context of the situation. Halliday (2009) maintains that the context of a situation consists of three elements: field, tenor, and mode. These constituents of the register have impacts on language choices. Droga and Humphrey (2003) agree that the context influences the language use of the writer who needs to follow cultural conventions in writing to become "members of culture" (Halliday, 1994, p.25). Based on the ideas of Hammond and Hood (1990), it is essential to learn languages in context, which means that language is used to make meanings in context. Writing teachers need to provide students with authentic study materials that are related to different kinds of writing genres in EFL classrooms.

As cited in Luu (2011), genre consists of both literary texts and recurring patterns of daily, academic and literary texts in a culture (Hammond & Derewianka, 2001). Genres can be either written or spoken, and they are grouped based on the primary purposes. Swales (1990) said that genres that had similar goals belonged to the same text types. Derewianka (1990) categorized six main genres based on their social purposes: narratives, recount, information reports, instruction, explanation, and expository texts. It can be said that these social purposes of different text genres influence linguistic inputs of the text. This means that linguistic conventions can be in the form of schematic structure and linguistic features. Luu (2011) insisted that schematic structure referred to the internal structure or text organization, including the text's introduction, body, and conclusion. In contrast, language features cover some linguistic aspects (grammar, vocabulary, connectors, etc.) that the writers used to make a readable text.

According to Swales (1990), the genre is primarily recognized by its communicative purpose, shaping how a text is realized. Texts which belong to a genre often share similar features such as intended audience, idea organization, and language choices.

2.2 Genre-based Approach to Writing

A genre-based approach emphasizes the rapport between text genres and their contexts (Hyon, 1996). The genre-based writing approach helps students communicate effectively in academic and professional environments (Luu, 2011; Hammond & Derewianka, 2001). There are seven characteristics of the genre-based approach to writing synthesized by Luu (2011, pp.123-124) as follows.

First, the importance of exploring the social and cultural context of language use is highlighted. The context impacts the purpose, generic structure, and linguistic conventions of the text (Hyon, 1996; Hammond & Derewianka, 2001).

Second, the genre-based approach emphasizes the importance of the readers and the linguistic norms that a text needs to obey to be effectively accepted by its readership (Munice, 2002). EFL writers should produce texts that fulfill the discourse community's expectations in terms of generic structure and lexico-grammatical conventions.

Third, this approach underlies writing as a social activity, which means the writer interacts with the readers socially.

Fourth, this approach enables students to deploy language patterns to make a text coherently and purposely. Therefore, learners have to pay attention to the social purposes when they compose a piece of writing.

Fifth, this approach underscores the importance of writer and reader communication in a text (Reid, 1995). Both the writer and reader should ask some questions such as intended readers, writing a text, writer's viewpoint, good writing, language features, generic organization, proficiency levels, and cultural backgrounds.

Sixth, the teacher's role in the genre-based approach is considered authentic and not authoritarian (Rothery, 1996). The teacher guides and gives students academic support during various activities, which helps the students finally control writing genres. Simultaneously, the teacher can recognize the importance of students' contributions to teaching and learning EFL.

Last but not least, the genre-based approach highlights the explicit teaching of the linguistic conventions of the genre for second novice student writers (Christie, 199. In the classroom, teachers following genre orientation often use the teaching-learning cycle consisting of three phases: modeling a "sample expert" text, joint-negotiation of text with the teacher, and independent construction of text by an individual student (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993).

Similarly, Hyland (2007) suggested the five stages of a genre approach to writing: setting the context, modeling, joint construction, independent construction, and comparing. In other words, the *context* stage setting aims to find out the communicative purpose of a particular genre. At the *modeling* stage, teachers can guide learners to recognize the language features of a sample text and the writer's intentions. Third, the purpose of the *joint construction* stage is to emphasize textual characteristics that learners analyzed at the previous step. Learners write their essays with the help of teachers at the *fourth* stage; finally, at the *comparing* stage, the communicative purpose and language characteristics of the genre they have learned can be compared with other kinds of writing genres to find similarities and differences.

2.3 The Importance and Effects of Genre-Based Approach to Writing

Suksawas (2018) reports that English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) are taught and learned from a genre-based approach. Some studies have shown that teaching EFL writing has been impacted by Halliday's genre theory (1985, 1994). This genre-based approach highlights formal teaching and language functions (Hyon, 1996). In other words, EFL learners who would like to interact successfully by using pragmatic knowledge should combine linguistic competence and communicative competence in their writing papers (Paltridge 2001, Yasuda, 2011; Taguchi, 2012 cited in Melissourgou & Frantzi, 2017).

The genre-based approach must focus on linguistic features and the organization of text (Sukawas, 2018). Each writing genre requires distinctive language and generic structure; therefore, EFL writing learners have to be aware of the knowledge related to "a specific form of communication" to communicate effectively in context (Hyland, 2002, p.125). It means that the context decides the use of language and organization of each type of writing genre. Hammond and Macken-Horarick (2001) state that Australian schools teach literacy "explicitly and systematically," which facilitates the teaching and learning of "text-types" (p.116). There should be explicit genre-based writing instruction in the EFL classroom. In fact, according to Hyland (2002), students should be provided with "an explicit knowledge or relevant genre," which helps them interact effectively in their "target context" (p.125). In addition, SFL theorists claim that the fact that "generic structures" along with "their associated grammatical features" should

be taught explicitly helps learners participate successfully in "various disciplines and professions" (Coffin, 2001, p.113). Thus, it is necessary for writing teachers to train their students how to write different kinds of writing genres explicitly and systemically to serve social purposes.

Moreover, Hyland (2004) maintains that genres are specific to particular "cultures and communities" (p.54); therefore, EFL writing teachers need to integrate cultural and linguistic factors into teaching writing from the genre-based approach. Kay and Dudley-Evans (1998) emphasize that the genre-based approach encourages students to join a "particular discourse community" in which they can explore how texts are organized, and this means that students should learn the rules before they can exceed them because the genre-based approach "promotes flexible thinking and informed creativity" (p.310). it is therefore necessary for writing teachers to train the students how to communicate effectively in a particular discourse community by using the genre-based approach to writing EFL flexibly and knowledgeable.

EFL Writing teachers should be aware of language's "formal and functional properties" (Hyon, 1996, p.712). They should help EFL writing learners recognize the predictable and recurring language patterns (Painter, 1986). Lin (2006) suggests that writing teachers can help EFL to master "text types and genres," and then the learners can do things with the language they are taught and used on their own (p.7). In fact, according to Hyland (2007), the teachers can help the learners explain how "target texts" are organized and the reasons why these target texts are arranged in this way (p. 151). Knowing generic structures and language used in various writing genres will be beneficial for the EFL learners' writing skills and proficiency.

Most importantly, Luu (2012, p.123) argues that EFL learners in genre-based writing classes are motivated to exchange meanings and negotiate with classmates, peers, and readers. He also claims that learning in this way can eliminate the learners' "feeling of isolation" and bring about "positive reinforcements" of building the knowledge of linguistic usage, content, and ideas in constructing a text. As a result, writing teachers need to explicitly train sample texts of a particular genre to the EFL learners to facilitate their exploration of the writing genre in terms of generic structure and lexico-grammatical features.

2.4 Previous Studies on SFL Genre-Based Approach to Writing in EFL Contexts

Cited in Sukawas (2018), a significant number of L2 researches pay much attention to improving learners' writing skills in different text types; for example, descriptive essays, argumentative essays, and research articles (Correa & Echeverri, 2016); writing English for Specific Purposes (Correa & Echeverri, 2016); and writing for Standardized tests (Kakali, 2015).

Truong (2017) studied using the genre-based approach in teaching letters for English-majored first-year students at a university in Vietnam. Her study aimed to collect data from questionnaires and test results. The results indicated that low-level learners had problems with idea organization, contextual and paralinguistic factors. She suggested that lexico-grammatical features still remained problematic, which needed a long-term focused genre-based approach. She also highlighted the significance of L1 background knowledge that facilitates the learners' writing EFL.

A majority of the studies have investigated the effectiveness of the genre-based approach on teaching essays in EFL classrooms and supplied proof of learners' improvement in terms of organization, argumentation, thesis constructing, and language (Amogne, 2013; Luu, 2011; Trinh & Nguyen, 2014 cited in Truong (2017). In addition, previous studies have proved the positive effects of genre-based writing instruction (Myskow & Gordon, 2010; Yasuda, 2011 cited in Bae (2012).

Luu (2011) examined the effects of the genre-based approach on students' writing performance and their attitudes. There were 45 freshmen of Ho Chi Minh City University of Finance - Marketing, and they were involved in an experimental genre-based writing class. The findings indicated that most of the students used the main features of the required recount genre related to social purposes, linguistic features, and schematic structure. Luu's (2011) findings revealed that the three phases of the teaching-learning cycle greatly impacted the participants. The participants mastered the main characteristics of the particular genre, and simultaneously they showed their positive feelings for the genre-based writing approach. He suggests that applying the genre-based approach to training and learning writing skills is necessary and useful.

Chen and Su (2011) investigated the teaching efficacy of a genre-based approach to train how to summarize. 41 EFL university students in Taiwan had to summarize *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* in a maximum of 500 words. The study deployed a pre-test/post-test assessment, and all of the students' summaries from the pre-and post-tests were marked according to ideas, structure, lexico-grammatical features. The research results indicated that the genre-based approach impacted the students' ability to summarize a narrative source text. Furthermore, the students got more

benefits from content and structure than from lexico-grammatical use.

Hermansson et al. (2019) examined the impacts of joint construction, which was one stage in the genre pedagogical model of the Sydney School. At the stage of joint construction, teachers and students cooperate to co-organize texts. Ninety primary students were instructed by six teachers based on the genre-based approach, namely joint construction, which was believed as the most compelling part of the Teaching and Learning Cycle by these researchers. The study deployed a pretest-posttest control group design or quasi-experimental intervention to investigate the impacts of genre-based instructions to serve the educational part of the Swedish national curriculum. The findings revealed that the researchers challenged the argument, and their findings were not similar to the belief. Their study indicated that the Joint Construction stage did not significantly impact the students' narrative writing quality or enhance the length of their writing.

Tanaporm and Supong (2019) aimed to investigate the influences of a genre-based approach to training Thai engineers on how to write technically. The research used the lesson plan examined by three professionals for the suitability of technical writing instructions. The 10 Thai participants took the pre-and post-tests with the same discipline and different levels of proficiency. The research findings revealed a difference in scores between pre-test and post-test and a significant disparity at p-value <0.05 (p.002), which was shown from their paired t-test analysis. The findings also represented four interviewed participants' positive attitudes towards how technical writing was taught.

Most importantly, Luu (2011) argues that students could not make a particular text type successfully if they are not instructed explicitly about linguistic conventions related to language features and schematic structure.

From the overview of the literature review above, this study was conducted to examine whether EFL writing learners followed the fixed structure of an expository essay from a genre-based writing approach as Luu's (2011) argument or not.

Like other essays, an expository essay comprises three parts: an introductory paragraph, body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph. The table below shows a typical pattern of organization for a five-paragraph expository essay. The purpose of the expository essay is to explain the writer's position for the essay topic clearly.

Table 2.1. The structure of an expository essay (adapted from Chin et al. to 2012)

The move-step structure of an expository essay		
Moves		**Steps**
Introduction		- Hook - Building sentences - Thesis statement (writer's position)
Body	Body paragraph 1 (Argument 1)	- Topic sentence - Supporting sentences (Using facts, anecdotes, statistics, expert's opinions) - Concluding sentence
	Body paragraph 2 (Argument 2)	- Topic sentence - Supporting sentences (Using facts, anecdotes, statistics, experts' opinions) - Concluding sentence
	Body paragraph 3 (Argument 3)	- Topic sentence - Supporting sentences (Using facts, anecdotes, statistics, experts' opinions) - Concluding sentence
Conclusion		- Restatement of thesis - Summary of body paragraphs - Final thought

According to Chin et al. (2012), in the introductory paragraph, the building sentences introduce the topic and give the background information, and the thesis statements present the essay topic, the writer's position, and the main ideas supporting the position. Second, each body paragraph uses one of the main ideas from the thesis statement to argue that helps the writer's position. Each paragraph comprises the topic sentence, which introduces the first main idea; supporting sentences that present supporting points and provide details by using facts, anecdotes, statistics, and experts' opinions; and the concluding sentence restates the main idea and summarizes the supporting points. Lastly, In the concluding paragraph, a restatement of the thesis states the writer's position again using different words; the

summary of the body paragraphs summarizes the main ideas of each paragraph, and the final thought presents the writer's feelings or prediction about the essay topic.

Chin et al. (2012) suggest that the s should follow the following five steps to outline a five-paragraph expository essay.

Step 1: research the topic.

Step 2: decide your position on the topic and choose supporting arguments.

Step 3: write a thesis statement.

Step 4: write a topic sentence for each body paragraph.

Step 5: write the supporting points for each body paragraph.

This study aims to investigate the genre-based writing approach for writing classes at Van Lang University, and thus the two research questions are raised to serve the study's purposes.

1. To what extent do the students at Van Lang university follow the fixed structure of an expository essay as they are taught?

2. What are the lexico-grammatical errors found in the students' expository essays?

3. Methodology

This study deployed a mixed-method approach to find out the genre-based writing approach at Van Lang University. The study utilized Microsoft Excel to count frequencies and percentages, and the study also analyzed 128 essays from a descriptive analysis from the statistics and essays' contents. One hundred twenty-eight students from two writing classes of Van Lang University turned in their midterm tests which required them to write an expository essay for the given topics during 60 minutes in week 5 for the 2-credit writing course of 10 weeks. Each of the student's essays was marked with the letter E, i.e., essay and numbers. For example, the essay of the first student was written as E1 and did the same for the rest of the other essays collected. The 128 midterm expository essays were collected, and they were marked from E1 to E128. Then, they were synthesized and categorized based on the analysis criteria of move-step structure. Microsoft Excel calculated the percentages and provided the tables presented in the findings and discussion sections below. Along with the percentages from the findings, a descriptive analysis of 128 essays was presented and analyzed in the study to address the two research questions.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Research Question 1: To What Extent Do the Students at Van Lang University Follow the Fixed Structure of an Expository Essay as They Are Taught?

4.1.1 Move-step Structure of the Introductory Paragraph

The findings indicate that the students had difficulty in writing the first move of the expository essay's schematic structure - the introduction. As the data analysis showed, they just wrote down what they think in their heads, and sometimes their written ideas were influenced by spoken language. The first move should comprise building sentences or a hook to lead the readers to the topic. The thesis statement mentions some steps such as topic, writer's position for the topic, and arguments to support the writer's position. However, the students did not follow the move/step structure of the expository essay completely; therefore, their essays' introduction is problematic and ambiguous, which made it the readers hard to see the purpose of the essays as in table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1. Problems with the introductory paragraph

Problems with the introductory paragraph	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of hook	2	1.59%
Lack of arguments	16	12.70%
Redundant information	21	16.67%
Off-topic / digression	56	44.44%
Topic unmentioned	16	12.70%
Question used	5	3.96%
Thesis statement consisting of 2 sentences	10	7.94%
Total	**126**	**100%**

Table 4.1 showed that two analyzed essays (1.59%) lacked the hook whose purpose was to attract the reader to the topic. This step is essential for the first move of the schematic structure of the expository essay because the readers can decide to continue their reading the whole expository essay. As a result, the writers need to provide the introduction with some building sentences, known as the hook, to trigger the reader's curiosity about the discussed topic.

In addition, the data analysis revealed that 16 students (12.70%) did not mention the arguments to support the writer's position on the topic. They are unaware that the purpose of mentioning the arguments is to provide the readers with the main reasons/ideas discussed and elaborated on in the next move - the body. The writers should include three components in the thesis statement (e.g., topic, writer's position, and arguments to support his/her position).

Moreover, because the students did not follow the conventions of schematic organization, they couldn't make themselves understood by giving redundant information that was irrelevant to the topic. Even worse, they digressed from the topic which was being discussed. The findings showed that 21 (16.67%) of the students gave too many unnecessary and unrelated ideas for the topic, and 56 (44.44%) of them were distracted from the topic, which means that the students beat around the bush and did not go directly into the topic. Some of the students' introductions are off-topic since they unfollowed the fixed move-step structure of the introduction.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that ten students (7.94%) had difficulty writing down the thesis statement topic. They could not deploy three elements in the thesis statement, so they sometimes forgot to mention the topic, arguments, or position for the essay topic. The rule to write the thesis statement is that the students had to organize the above three components to write the thesis statement in only one sentence; however, the findings put forward that 10 (7.94%) students organized the thesis statement in two separate sentences. Even some students (3.96%) arranged the thesis statement in the form of questions.

The findings also indicated that the students could provide arguments to support their position on the topic. Still, they could not organize the three elements into a complete thesis statement which might lack topic, writer's opinion, or arguments to support the writer's opinion.

4.1.2 Move-step Structure of the Body Paragraphs

The findings indicated that there were 41 students' essays which lacked topic sentences in different body paragraphs. This means that the topic sentence in each body paragraph was not well-organized and conventionally correct. The students did not make sense of three elements of the topic sentence, including topic, writer's opinion, and one of the three main ideas. The students did not present the three constituents of the topic sentence sufficiently, and even some topic sentences in the form of noun phrases were found in the data. As a result of these, readers found it hard to comprehend what the writer would like to convey in the topic sentence. In other words, these topic sentences were ungrammatical and incomplete, which lead to not making meaning for the written essay.

Also, the findings showed that one student included three topic sentences in one paragraph. It is hard for this student to elaborate on the main ideas of the thesis statement. Even two students used questions in the body paragraph, while the other 27 students provided irrelevant information to the essay topic and main ideas. Surprisingly, only one student quoted the expert's opinion in their essay. Similarly, the students wrote supporting sentences without any detailed information that is expressed by facts, examples, other people's experiences, and statistics. They were unable to organize and arrange ideas cohesively and logically in the body paragraphs; therefore, they provided irrelevant information to the essay because they did not know the steps they must follow to gain communicative purposes in the body move.

Finally, the students could not write concluding sentences for different body paragraphs. They did not know how to restate the topic sentence and give their thoughts in the concluding sentences.

4.1.3 Move-step Structure of the Concluding Paragraph

The findings revealed that there were two essays with no concluding paragraph. It can be explained by the fact that the students did not have much time, only 60 minutes, to take the midterm writing test with an unfamiliar topic, which impacted their time management appropriately to write the conclusion of the essay.

Table 4.2. Problems with the concluding paragraph

Problems with the concluding paragraph		
	Frequency	Percentage
No concluding paragraph	2	0.69%
Lack of thesis restatement	71	24.40%
Lack of body paragraphs' summary	108	37.11%
Lack of final thoughts	16	5.50%
Irrelevant information	29	9.96%
Wrong use of transitional expressions	65	22.34%
Total	**291**	**100%**

Moreover, the findings indicated that 71 students (24.40%) did not restate the thesis statement in the concluding paragraph. Even worse, 108 of 128 students did not summarize body paragraphs' main ideas in the concluding paragraph. 16 (5.50%) of 128 essays lacked final thoughts, which means the students did not give their own thoughts on the topic. 122 essays mentioned the final views of the writer by providing advice, suggesting actions, predicting future consequences, or hoping for something.

Furthermore, there was some irrelevant information in 29 students' analyzed essays. They provided unnecessary content that was not relevant to the essay topic and the writer's position. There were 65 (22.34%) essays that contained errors related to using transitional expressions.

The findings of the conclusion move indicated that the EFL students at Van Lang university faced challenges of following fixed steps of the conclusion move.

4.2 Research Question 2: What Are the Lexico-Grammatical Errors Found in the Students' Expository Essays?

4.2.1 Errors Related to Vocabulary

The findings revealed that the students did not use transitional expressions to link the ideas between paragraphs and sentences together. Some of the students failed to deploy the transitional words for one part of the whole essay. There were some cases in which the students could not use the transitional expressions correctly to express their ideas, and they placed the transitional expressions at the wrong places in the sentence or paragraph. The data analysis showed that the students put "on the other hand" in the first paragraph of the body, which is wrong. The transitional expressions were used wrong and found in the analyzed data, such as "the secondly," "overall," "sum up," "in the other hand," "the last but not least," and so forth. Moreover, the students could not distinguish the differences between 'finally/lastly' and 'in short/sum,' and thus, they made mistakes of placing 'finally/lastly' in the concluding paragraph instead of the third body paragraph. They had to use 'in short/sum' for the concluding paragraph to summarize the essay.

Interestingly, the students did not have a wide knowledge of synonyms of transitional expressions. Most of the students' essays contained nearly the same transitional expressions to connect ideas between paragraphs. They often used 'first/firstly/to begin with', 'second/secondly/ in addition, 'third/thirdly/lastly/finally' in the body paragraph; and they used 'in short', 'to summarize' and 'conclude' in the concluding paragraph. Instead, the students should deploy various transitional words and phrases in their expository essays to repeat repetition and redundancy. Hence, the writing teachers need to provide linguistic input of transitional words to help the students express their ideas in the essays cohesively, coherently, and smoothly.

These findings are very beneficial to writing teachers who will adjust their writing methods from the genre-based approach.

Table 4.2. Transitional expressions found in the students' analyzed essays

Transitional expressions found in the students' analyzed essays

The first body paragraph	First, firstly, first of all, initially, to begin with, The first + Noun
The second body paragraph	Second, secondly, besides, moreover, in addition, on the other hand, next, The second + Noun Beside + Noun phrase Another + Noun The next + Noun
The third body paragraph	After all, last but not least, in short,
The last paragraph	In conclusion, to sum up, in short, conclusively, in sum, in general, after all, in summary, to conclude, The last + Noun

Apart from the errors related to the transitional words and phrases, the findings revealed that the students made mistakes in using informal or spoken language in academic writing. The students could not distinguish the differences between formal and informal language used in academic writing. The spoken language influenced a great number of the students, and thus they tended to use informal and spoken language in their written essays. The findings found that the students' essays with the errors related to spoken and informal language are presented as follows:

- … I want to mention… (E36)

- And now, we will learn about… (E50)

- Here are … (E58)

- I will point out … (E67)

- I will talk about… (E72)

- Let's see how... (E79)

- Let's talk about… (E85)

- Now, I will… (E93)

- Secondly, we talk … (E105)

- We are going to…(E114)

- We can't no say… (E120)

4.2.2 Errors Related to Grammar

In addition to the lexical errors, there were also errors related to grammatical points in the 128 essays that were analyzed in this study. The findings found that the students did not use different kinds of tense correctly in their essays. It means that the students employed a mixture of tenses in their expository essays, and they even felt confused at the choices of tenses for facts and experience. Also, a great number of sentences containing first-person pronouns like 'I' were used in the collected data. The students overused the pronoun in their essays. Still, they were not aware that it was necessary not to use the 'I' pronoun in academic writing to eliminate the writer's subjectivity for the essays. Finally, there were a significant number of contractions in the 128 essays. The students should not use the contracted form in academic writing. Instead, they should use the full form of words to gain a certain formality for their academic essays.

4.2 Discussion

From the findings, it is inferred that the students at Van Lang university face many challenges of writing an expository essay from a genre-based approach to writing. The students did not recognize how important it is to write the expository essay according to the fixed move-step structure that they were taught and trained carefully by their teacher. The results showed they did not follow the move-step structure strictly while writing their expository essays, which led to errors related to lexico-grammar, irrelevant information, cohesion, and coherence. Therefore, their essays were not understood easily and coherently, which caused the communicative purposes of the expository not to be fulfilled.

It is also essential for the writing teachers to implement the genre-based approach to writing expository essays. The students are familiar with the generic structure and lexico-grammatical features of this kind of writing genre. The

results revealed that the students did not master all steps of each move of the expository essay. Thus the writing teachers have to train them how to analyze sample expository essays to help them draw the move-step structure. Based on the sample expository essays with the teacher's support, the students distinguish different moves and various steps to realize these moves using lexico-grammatical features. It is clearly said that the students should have skills to analyze steps such as hook, building sentences, and thesis statement in the introduction move; steps such as topic sentence, supporting sentences, and concluding sentence in the body move; and steps such as restatement of the thesis statement, a summary of main ideas of body paragraphs, and writer's final thoughts in the conclusion move. Suppose the students can recognize these moves and realizations by using different steps and typical lexico-grammatical features. In that case, they have a chance to make significant and coherent expository essays.

Moreover, the writing teachers need to carefully explain to the students that the communicative purpose of the expository essay determines the choices of different moves and steps, along with vocabulary and grammar that help realize the generic structure of the essay.

Finally, the finding results suggested that linguistic input should be provided for the EFL students to apply typical lexio-grammatical features of each kind of writing genre. The teachers should provide their students with sufficient knowledge of grammar and vocabulary to write an expository essay well. Especially, the students need to employ a variety of transitional words and phrases to link ideas in their essays, and they use grammar correctly to avoid making their expository essays incoherent.

5. Conclusions

This study investigated the genre-based approach to writing expository essays to the students at Van Lang University. The findings showed that the writing teachers need to train their students to distinguish three different moves: introduction, body, and conclusion in an expository essay. Besides, the teachers should analyze sample expository essays to recognize different steps used in each of these moves to communicate the expository essay. The lexico-grammatical features typical for this kind of writing genre should be provided for the students to have sufficient linguistic input to write their expository essays after sample essay analysis.

The study results enable writing teachers to apply a genre-based writing approach to teach an expository essay. The schematic structure or generic structure and linguistic features of the expository essay should be taught explicitly to the students. It is noticeable that the teachers help students analyze model expository essays to distinguish different moves (e.g., introduction, body, and conclusion) and various steps in each move to make them aware of the move-step structure of the expository essay. The writing teachers also need to provide lexico-grammatical input to help the students write good essays that serve the expository essay's communicative purpose.

Due to method design and instruments, this study has still had some limitations on the genre-based approach to writing an expository essay. Different research designs and instruments such as observation, questionnaires, or interviews can be used for future research. Future research can investigate this approach to teaching how to write other kinds of writing genres and provide the students with the lexico-grammatical input used for different writing genres to serve communicative purposes.

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