

Effects of Using Tenets of Genre Analysis on Iranian Pre-intermediate EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension

Rezvan Adelnia, English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Najafabad Branch, Islamic Azad University, Najafabad, Isfahan, Iran
adelnia_re@yahoo.com

Hadi Salehi*, Assistant Professor, English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Najafabad Branch, Islamic Azad University, Najafabad, Isfahan, Iran
hadisalehi1358@yahoo.com

Abstract

Genre-based approach has been the focus of interest in the teaching of language since the mid-1980s. Genre is defined in terms of the use of language in conventionalized communicative settings. The present study made an attempt to scrutinize the effects of genre-based pedagogy on Iranian Pre-intermediate EFL learners' reading comprehension as well as the interaction between their reading comprehension achievement and their general English proficiency. To examine the formulated hypothesis, a sample of 80 Pre-intermediate EFL learners attending a language institute was selected. Then, the participants were divided into an experimental group and a control group. The instructional procedures went on six sessions before the posttest was administered. The results of an independent samples *t* test revealed that genre-based pedagogy had a significant effect on Iranian Pre-intermediate EFL learners' reading comprehension. Implications of the study can include, among other things, the incorporation of genre-based pedagogy in the EFL language teaching curriculum in Iran.

Keywords: Genre, genre analysis, genre move, genre-based instruction, reading comprehension, Iranian EFL learners

Introduction

Genre-Based Approach

The term genre is used in different contexts to refer to the convention of certain texts in certain cultures (Hammond & Derewianka, 2001). According to Swales (1990), genre can be considered as "a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes." Genre-oriented approach started in the late 1980s. It was first employed in the ESP context, which marked the "infancy" of the genre movement (Swales, 2004). However, genre and its application in language pedagogy became popular in the 1990s. Genre-based instruction is a "fresh," – new and improved instruction in teaching language skills, an approach that helps language learners to master the English language (Osman, 2004).

Genre analysis is one of the concepts which has been considered in the field of education. Genre analysis has been particularly utilized in the foreign language teaching to improve the reading comprehension of the students. The genre approach is concerned with providing students with explicit knowledge about language. The methodology applied within the genre approach is based on the work of the Russian psychologist Vygotsky (1934/1978) and the American educational psychologist Bruner (1986). Vygotsky stated that each learner has two levels of development: a level of independent performance, and a level of potential performance. The gap between these two levels was called "the zone of proximal development" (ZPD) (Feeze & Joyce 2002).

According to Hyland (2007), genre based instruction (GBI) provides very real benefits to language learners because it pays attention to language, content, and contexts. It includes the

following features which offers some advantages in the EAP/ESP classroom: *explicit* (clarifies what must be learned to support the acquisition of writing skills); *systematic* (offers a logical frame for focusing on both language and contexts); *needs-based* (makes sure that course objectives and content are based on students' needs); *supportive* (assigns language teachers a vital function in scaffolding students' learning and creativity); *empowering* (gives access to the patterns and possibilities of variation in valued discourses); *critical* (offers resources for learners to comprehend and challenge valued texts); and *consciousness-raising* (raises teachers' understanding/knowledge of the texts to efficiently help learners in writing). Genre-based teaching offers learners an explicit understanding of how texts in target genres are structured and why they are written in certain ways. This feature of genre-based instruction is the concern of the present study, since it focuses on understanding the text. It is very effective in preparing L2 students to successfully adapt to any academic setting across various disciplines (Park, 2006).

Phrases of Teaching and Learning Cycle and the Genre Based Approach

When it comes to explaining writing development in the genre approach, Hammond (1992, as cited in Burns, 2001) proposed "a wheel model of a teaching learning cycle having three phases: modeling, joint negotiation of text by learners and teacher, and the independent construction of texts by learners" (p. 202). Modeling, Hammond noted, is the time when the target genre that students should construct is introduced to the students. At this stage, discussion focuses on the educational and social function of the genre, and analysis focuses on the text structure and language. Joint negotiation of text refers to the stage when learners carry out exercises which manipulate relevant language forms. It fosters a negotiating process between the teacher and the students. It involves reading, research, and disseminating information, and the text of the genre is dependent on those activities. The independent construction of texts is the final phase; in which learners produce actual texts through activities such as choosing a topic, researching, and writing (p. 202).

Swami (2008) investigated the effectiveness of using genre-based approach to teaching writing through the use of model texts. He aimed to identify the moves of the adjustment letter, the allowable moves order and the strategies used to realize the moves. From a language teaching perspective, it is essential to view genre as consisting of a series of moves (Swales, 1990). He believed that a move is considered as a part of a text which achieves a particular purpose within a text. Apart from the analysis of moves, this study also viewed the learners' writing in terms of content, structure and language. This study considered the application of genre-based approach to teaching of writing in the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) context, especially for learners aiming to use English in the professional setting. The genre-based approach to language teaching attempts to teach learners the 'moves' of a genre and to raise awareness of the linguistic features associated with the moves as a way to overcome learners' difficulties in writing appropriately and effectively. This study addressed the concern to help learners to make their choices in deciding what kind of information should be put in their writing to create meaningful and purposeful texts.

Literature Review

A number of genre analysis strategies were presented to demonstrate how learners can be taught to modify and blend their choices of words according to the contexts in which they write. 65 Business majors participated in this study. The control group ($N = 30$) was taught through the usual lecturing style while the experimental group ($N = 35$) was taught using the genre-based approach. Following the multiple trait scoring of the learners' texts, the texts were analyzed for content, structure and language while the moves were analyzed using the moves score. The

results of the study indicated that learners do write better when they are made aware of the rhetoric structure and providing models seem to increase the salience of the communicative moves considered by the learners for inclusion in their texts.

Tangpermpoon (2008) studied integrating approaches to improve students writing skills for English major students. He explained that Writing is considered as the most difficult skill for language learners because they need to have a certain amount of L2 background knowledge about the rhetorical organizations, appropriate language use or specific lexicon with which they want to communicate to their readers. To assist language instructors to improve learners' writing competence and produce good writing, He aimed to present the combination of genre, product, and process approaches in a writing class. To better understand the topic, this paper will be divided into two main parts. The first section of this study provided a brief literature review of each traditional writing approach including the strengths and drawbacks as well as an adapted use of each. The second part included the importance of using the integrated approaches for English major learners in different levels. The results showed that integrating the two approaches showed greater effect than using only one approach.

Kongpetch (2006) studied using a genre-based approach to teach writing to Thai students as a case study. He stated that Thai university students are required to write expositions for different purposes, for example, for their class assignments and independent study research projects. Yet, many are not able to write them successfully as they encounter problems such as organization of ideas and appropriate rhetorical style. This study discussed issues that arose in using the genre-based approach to teach writing to students at the Department of Foreign Languages, Khon Kaen University, in the northeast of Thailand. It also provided insight into the impact of the genre-based approach on students' writing and the implications for applying it to other Thai educational contexts.

Burns (2001) described one series of tasks and classroom procedures, which were highly genre-oriented, aimed at the formation of a job application letter, a task very relevant to the learners (P. 203). She demonstrated how learners were able to successfully produce a job application letter. These results supported the effectiveness of the genre approach: the focus on a genre and the linguistic structure provides learners with a clear idea of what language features should be expressed and how the content should be organized.

Badger and White (2000) experimented using the genre and process approaches together as an alternative in a model called the process genre approach. Through this research, they affirmed that this dual approach works well if the writing cycle begins with models, description of the key linguistic features, discussion of the social situation in which it happens, and analysis of the recommended rhetorical patterns of each genre. Student writing is then subjected to the sequence of drafts in the process approach (p. 157).

For instance, when a university student creates an advertisement describing his or her used laptop in order to sell it, the following should be considered: this writing is intended to sell the laptop; it should be attractive to some people who are interested in buying it; it must consist of certain information; and it should follow traditions in which laptop descriptions are offered. Then, the person should follow several procedures such as drafting, revising and editing as well as using rhetorical language skills best suited to this genre (Badger & White, 2000, p. 158). This demonstration shows how the process-genre approach embraces teaching the appropriate language along with using a set of revision processes by which a final draft can be produced. As illustrated in the laptop example above, this combined approach ensures that the writing task is reviewed from both the viewpoint of the writer and of readers at the same time.

Wennerstrom (2003) did an experimental study in academic classes using short tourist information texts in English. Participants in this research were divided into two groups: a group which used the genre-based instructions and a group which did not employ the genre approach in the same writing task. After three weeks, participants took a test. The genre group did better than the non-genre group, and the data showed that knowledge of the typical structure of the content made it easier for learners to arrange their ideas in terms of both achieving their communicative goals and producing more well-organized writing. It proved that the learners' understanding of both the rhetorical structure and the linguistic features was increased by the genre-based instructions (Henry & Roseberry, 1998).

Iranian EFL learners, specifically at high school level, mostly have problem in dealing with reading passages. So it is the teacher art to provide good support and to choose the best way to teach reading. One of the major problems is that the EFL teachers usually fail to apply an appropriate method to teach reading. Despite the demand for proficient EFL readers it seems that the outcome of the Iranian high school graduates is not sufficient in terms of reading ability and except some top students the rest of the graduate students are not proficient enough in dealing with texts.

One of the issues which has attracted the attention of many researchers is the challenges and difficulties the students experience in reading comprehension which seem to be the backbone of their language proficiency. In effect, teaching English language to the high school students in the context of Iran regards reading skill as one of the crucial skills to be instructed. Hence, reading comprehension plays a significant role in the general proficiency of students. Considering the challenges and difficulties of the high school students stimulate the researcher that maybe the root of these challenges is on the teaching model. It denotes that teaching reading comprehension through the tenets of genre analysis may improve the reading comprehension of the Iranian high school students.

When the most outstanding advantages of using genre-based approach to teaching reading are known, the conduction of this investigation can be considered reasonable and justifiable. Specially, when it comes to Iranian high school students, i.e. none of the studies in the literature has explored the influence of using genre-based approach to teach reading. In fact, the researcher of the present study intended to explore the possible effects that a specific method of teaching reading might have on the way Iranian high school students tackled a piece of reading text in English.

The present study was administered to fill the above-mentioned gap by reporting on a study which compared genre analysis approach to teaching reading to Iranian high school students with traditional approaches to teaching reading. Thus, an attempt was made to answer the following research question:

Q. Does using genre-based approach to teaching reading significantly improve reading ability of Iranian EFL learners?

To answer this question, the following null hypothesis was formulated:

H0: Using genre-based approach to teaching reading does not significantly improve reading ability of Iranian EFL learners.

Methodology

Participants

In this study, 80 Pre-intermediate EFL learners were chosen based on their performance in a general proficiency test; namely, Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT). They were then

divided into an experimental and a control group, 40 each. The participants' age ranged between 18 and 22.

Instruments

In order to come up with satisfactory answer to the research question, a corpus consisting of 10 authentic reading comprehension passages which were retrieved from <http://www.readworks.org/>, the OQPT, a reading test as pre and post-test, and a model of genre-based approach, were used as the research instruments.

The OQPT is a standardized language proficiency test, consisting of 60 multiple-choice questions on vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension. This test has been extensively used by L2 researchers all over the world, and enjoys a good level of reliability and validity.

The pretest and posttest of reading comprehension were also multiple choice questions, following a number of four reading passages. The reliability of the test was calculated through K-R21 formula, and the coefficient turned out to be .85 for the pretest and .90 for the posttest.

Procedure

The participants of the study were 80 Pre-intermediate Iranian EFL learners. The participants were assigned to an experimental and a control group. At the outset of the study, in order to choose and make sure of the homogeneity of these participants in terms of their general language proficiency, the OQPT was run among 100 EFL learners studying at a language institute in Isfahan.

As the topic of this study suggests, this research was going to study any possible impact of using genre-based approach on improving reading comprehension of Iranian Pre-intermediate EFL learners; therefore, in order to make sure of the homogeneity of the participants in terms of their reading comprehension, a reading test was run among them. As it was said above, the reading test was designed based on the reading passages used in the corpus.

As the next step, in order to find the effect of genre based instruction on reading comprehension of EFL learners, the treatment was conducted. The same reading passages were taught to the participants in the two groups. However, there were some differences in the way the materials were presented.

The treatment for experimental group was as follow: first, the teachers activated students' background knowledge about the main idea of each passage, by clarifying the main idea of the passage and by identifying their different sections they helped students to get the conceptual knowledge of the texts. In fact, different aspects of the genre of the exposed materials (collocations, genre types, lexical and grammatical features as well as the similarities and differences among the exposed texts, were discussed in the experimental group).

For the control group, the instructional procedures were different. For this group, the usual method of reading instruction used in Iranian language classes was practiced. To this end, the mentioned corpus was presented without highlighting the hierarchical and generic structure of the text. The passages were introduced in three phases of pre reading, while reading and post reading stages. Each of the passages from the corpus was introduced to the students without any special background about the previous or forward moves. These activities were followed by teaching the meaning of words, explaining the structural points where needed and translating different parts without any attempt to establish coherence between different parts of the passage. After all the passages were taught, the participants sat for a posttest.

Data Analysis

The reading corpus was taught to two groups under study using a three-phase model which is usual in different reading-based courses. These phases included pre-reading, during or while-reading and post-reading stages. Both groups received the same instruction with the same credit hours and the same topics. The experimental group; however, was instructed using an innovative model in which the students' attention was directed to different aspects of the genre of the exposed materials (collocations, genre types, lexical and grammatical features as well as the similarities and differences among the exposed texts). However, the control group just received the instruction in three phases without being instructed in terms of genres, collocation, or being consciously raised in terms of the linguistic features of the exposed texts.

Results

The hypothesis of this study claimed that there is no significant difference between the performances of students who receive a traditional approach in teaching reading comprehension and those who are instructed using genre-based approach. To test this hypothesis, the participants in the experimental group were exposed to genre based teaching of reading, while control group received traditional approach of reading. After the treatment was over, a reading test was given to the participants of the two groups and their performance was compared. However, before any comparison was made, the scores of the control group in the post test were checked for distribution normality.

Table 1. One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for Control Group Posttest

		Ctl	post
		test	
N		40	
Normal Parameters ^a	Mean	60.4250	
	Std. Deviation	11.76018	
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.138	
	Positive	.138	
	Negative	-.117	
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.873	
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.431	

a. Test distribution is Normal.

According to Table 1, the significance level is .431 which is higher than .05, so it can be claimed that the scores are normally distributed. Figure 1 shows the normality of distribution of the data.

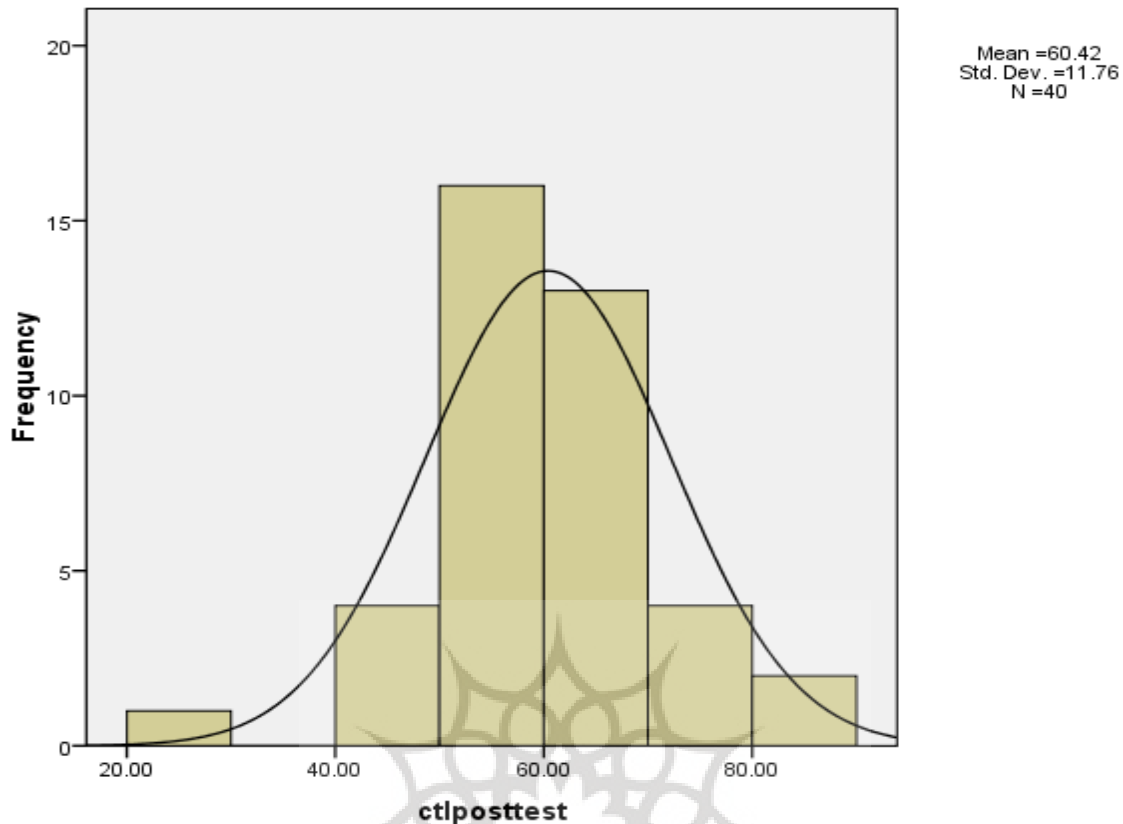


Figure 1. The Histogram of the Posttest Scores of Control Group

Having set the distribution normality of the posttest scores the mean scores of the experimental and control group were compared. The results are presented in the following section.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Reading Posttest of Experimental and Control Groups

groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest EXP.	40	67.5000	16.06397	2.53994
CTL.	40	60.4250	11.76018	1.85945

According to the statistics presented in Table 2, the mean score of the participants in the post test was 67.50 and that of control group was 60.42 that is a mean difference of 7.08 which seems to be significant. Figure 2 compares the performance of the participants in the post test.

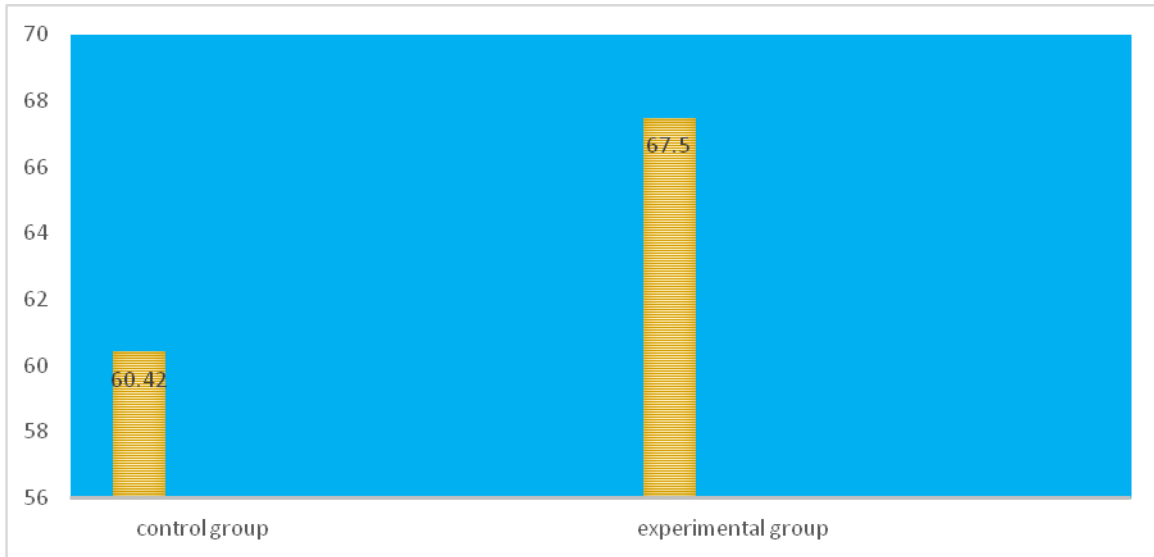


Figure 2. Mean Difference between Performance of the Experimental and Control Groups

Table 3. Results of the Independent Samples t-Test of the Posttest Scores of Two Groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
posttest Equal variances assumed	.910	.343	2.248	78	.027	7.07500	3.14783	.80815	13.34185
Equal variances not assumed			2.248	71.476	.028	7.07500	3.14783	.79913	13.35087

According to the results presented in Table 3, the identified level of significance is smaller than the observed level of significance is $.000(.05 > .000)$; therefore, it can be understood that using genre based approach has a significant effect on the performance of EFL learners in reading classes, and also it can be claimed that genre based approach to reading leads to a significant difference between the performance of control and experimental groups in reading post-test.

Discussion

During the last twenty years, reading has attracted much attention. Generally, reading has been perceived as the most needed skill in students' higher academic pursuit (Jordan, 1997, p.145), and this is true of Iranian students. Flowerdew, and Swales (as cited in Hyon, 1996), primarily outlined the genre approach with focus on the formal distinctiveness of genres in order to help students gain understanding of the communicative purposes and linguistic features of texts that they are required to write in their professional discourses, while these experts paid less attention to the specific roles of content and their social environments (p. 695). They regarded genres as devices for examining and teaching the written texts that students needed to master in specific settings.

Therefore, an assigned genre seems to serve as an influential tool for both the learning and teaching of reading for both students and teachers. Furthermore, the genre approach encourages students to participate in the world around them, to comprehend reading as a tool that they can utilize, and to realize how readers manage content to promote logical organization. It also allows students to become more flexible in their thinking and eventually to realize how authors organize their reading comprehension. These debates shed more light on the significance of reading skills. Thus, it is hoped that the present study resolves some of the above-mentioned controversies related to reading comprehension of EFL learners. In so far as the question of the study is concerned, the results of an independent samples t-test showed that there was a significant difference between the performance of the participants of the experimental group and the control group in terms of reading comprehension, when genre-based was applied to teach reading.

The reason can be found in the advantages presented by Hayland (2004) who believes that genre-based instruction makes it clear what is to be learned to facilitate the acquisition of reading comprehension. Furthermore, Hayland (2004) also believes that provides a coherent framework for focusing on both language and contexts. In addition, genre-based ensures that course objectives and content are derived from students' needs. Another reason for that may be due to the fact that genre-based gives teacher a central role in scaffolding student learning and creativity, and this approach provides access to the patterns and possibilities of variation in valued texts.

The above mentioned arguments support the effect of genre-based teaching of reading from different dimensions. In short, as the goal of reading a text is to do something with the information, the results of the present study revealed that genre-based teaching of reading has a significant and positive impact on promoting EFL learners reading comprehension ability. The results of this study lend support to the study by Rozimela (2014). In that study the researchers tried to find out the relationship between genre awareness and reading comprehension of EFL students. His study illustrated that there is a significant relationship between genre awareness and reading comprehension of EFL students. Furthermore, the results of his study showed that the students with higher genre awareness significantly outperformed on reading comprehension.

In addition, this study is in the same line with the study by Sadeghi, TaghiHassaniand Hemmati (2013) who aimed to investigate the effects of genre-based instruction on ESP learners' reading comprehension. The results of the reading comprehension test, analyzed through a t-test and independent samples test suggested teaching based on genre had a significant role in enhancing EFL learners' reading comprehension ability and the descriptive and inferential statistics showed learners improved significantly in reading comprehension compared with that of non-genre-group.

Finally, the results of the present study support the findings of Shabani Minaabadand Fallahe Khoshkholgh's (2012) research in which they attempted to scrutinize the effect of genre-based pedagogy on English for specific purpose learners' reading comprehension as well as the

interaction between their reading comprehension achievement and their general English proficiency. The investigation reveals that genre-based pedagogy has a significant effect on English for specific purpose learners' reading comprehension and proves the interaction between English for specific purpose learners' reading comprehension achievement and their general English proficiency.

On the other hand, against this study, some proponents have indicated that the genre approach is more suitable for learners at beginning or intermediate levels of proficiency in a second language rather than those at advanced levels, in that it releases students from deep anxieties about their reading tasks. When people learn something new, they commonly want to find some cases that they can refer to or consider as samples. There is no doubt that reading tasks can be more demanding than other language skills, so students at low level of proficiency absolutely need something that they can rely on since they have little exposure to English reading.

In addition, the findings of this study are against some ideas, for instance it is said that despite genres' beneficial roles, there are two demerits about the genre approach. One is that it neglects the skills required to produce content, and the other concern is that it ignores learners' self-sufficiency (Byram, 2004, p. 236). Finally, Bawarshi (2000) said that, at its best, genre based approach helps learners to identify and interpret literary texts, while at its worst; it interferes with the learners' creativity (p. 343).

Conclusion

The study was in fact an attempt to shed more light on reading comprehension and test the point whether using genre based instruction as a teaching technique could bear any influence on the reading enhancement of Iranian EFL learners. According to the results of the statistical analyses used in this experiment, it can be concluded that the idea of effectiveness of genre based instruction on the reading ability was supported. The language teachers can make use of genre based instruction in their classes and train students about what genre based instruction is. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to help students become more aware of their own learning. The finding of the study can be used by language practitioners and curriculum developer to consider students' need of genres in the process of need analysis.

For choosing the instructional material again those which are more genre-based can be used to have a better educational context in which EFL learners' reading comprehension can be developed. Finally, teachers as the most important stakeholders can use the findings of the present study to improve the EFL learners' reading comprehension. The present study and studies like this which support the idea of effectiveness of genre based instruction on developing reading can persuade teacher trainers, English teachers, course book writers and curriculum designers to be more aware of the benefits of genre based instruction and to incorporate the tenets of genre based into their lessons, course books and curricula to help learners be aware of the positive and influential features in reading classes.

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