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# The Comparative Impact of Genre Scaffolding and Grammatical Scaffolding on EFL Learners' Coherence in Writing

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**Abstract**

This study was an attempt to investigate the comparative impact of genre scaffolding and grammatical scaffolding on EFL learners' coherence in writing. To fulfill the aforesaid purpose, 60 advanced female EFL learners were selected among a total number of 115 through their performance on a TOEFL and subsequently a TWE. Based on the results, the students were randomly assigned to two experimental groups with 30 participants in each. Both groups underwent the same amount of teaching time during 10 sessions of treatment which included genre scaffolding for the first group and grammatical scaffolding for the second. A posttest (another TWE) was administered at the end of the treatment to both groups and their mean scores on the test were compared through an independent samples t-test. The result ($t = 3.712$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$) led to the rejection of the null hypothesis, thereby demonstrating that the learners in the genre scaffolding group benefited significantly more than those in the grammar scaffolding group in terms of improving their coherence in writing. The effect size was also estimated to be 1.03 which is generally considered a large.

**Keywords:** genre, writing, scaffolding, zone of proximal development, coherence in writing

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## Introduction

Writing is the process of generating a text as a communicative bridge between the reader and the writer. Learning to write is thus an indispensable part of language learning while there is little doubt that it is the most difficult skill for L2 learners to master (Charles, 2007; Cortes, 2004; Granger, 1998; Granger, Hung, & Petch-Tyson, 2003; Neff, Ballesteros, Dafouz, Martínez, & Rica, 2004). Tribble (1996) describes the nature of this difficult process perhaps very lucidly by stating that, "Learning to write is a difficult and lengthy process, one that induces anxiety and frustration in many learners" (p. 12). All this of course is by no means an exclusively L2 problem as "Native speakers of different languages are usually incapable of writing fluently and accurately in their own language without receiving proper instruction" (Rashtchi & Keyvanfar, 2007, p. 164).

Raimes (1983) argues that the prime reason to include writing in an ELT syllabus would be that practicing this skill helps students learn better and more since it reinforces their knowledge of grammatical structures, idioms, vocabulary, genres, and ways of developing and connecting ideas to each other. Sattayatham and Honsa (2007) go further by maintaining that when EFL learners write, "they necessarily become involved with the new language as the effort to express ideas and the constant use of eyes, hand, and brain is a unique way to reinforce learning" (p. 19).

Research into writing demonstrates that students need to be exposed to and have practice with various genres (Wright, 1996; Cumming, 1989; Olshtain, 2001; Ur, 1996).

## Genre

Alongside focusing on the essential linguistic components of lexis and syntax and also themes such as development of argument, writing courses could provide the opportunity to raise genre awareness among learners (Liu & Braine 2005; Raimes, 1983; Reid, 1994; Swales, 1990). "Exemplars of a genre", writes Swales (1990, p. 58), "exhibit

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various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content, and intended audience".

Bhatia (1997) defines genres in terms of the use of language in conventionalized communication settings and writes that, "They are meant to serve the goals of specific discourse communities, and in so doing, they tend to establish relatively stable structural forms and to some extent, even constrain the use of lexico-grammatical resources" (p. 181). But for most researchers (Berkenkotter & Huchin, 1995; Biber, 1988; Dervitt, 1993; Fahnestock, 1993; Flowerdew, 1993; Freeman, 1993; Martin, 1984; Milles, 1984; Swales, 1990; Widdowson, 1998), the communication purpose is the main feature while form and structure are the secondary features of a genre.

Swales (1990) defines genre as "a class of communication events, the numbers of which share some set of communication purpose which are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rational for the genre" (p. 58). He further holds that, "In addition to purpose, exemplars of a genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience" (p. 58) and that, "Except for a few interesting and exceptional cases, genres are communicative vehicles for the achievement of goals" (p. 46).

Other scholars prefer to see genre as a social process which is staged and goal-oriented rather than as a description of text forms (Flowerdew, 1993; Martin, 1993). "A new rhetoric view", on the other hand Hyland (2002, p. 17) argues, "seeks to establish the connections between genre and repeated situations and to identify the way in which genres are seen as recurrent rhetorical actions".

Some researchers believe that genres have a dynamic nature. According to Fahnestock (1993, p. 270), genres "are not fixed algorithms" and because a genre "is a means of achieving a communication goal that has evolved is response to particular rhetorical needs, it will change and evolve in response to changes in these needs" (Dudley-Evans, 1994. p. 219).

**Genre- and Grammar-Based Teaching**

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Genres are hugely important in the practical business of writing as genre-based instruction is described as a tool for empowering students with linguistic resources for social success (Boughey, 1997; Christie, 1987; Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Knapp & Watkins, 1991; Kress, 1993; Martin, 1993). They are "resources for getting things done, and we all have a repertoire of resources we can call on for recurring situations, from shopping lists to job applications" (Hyland, 2003, p. 19).

Furthermore, Jones (2007) writes that, "In the teaching of writing, the genre-based approach encourages studying text models thus helping students to understand and write in the genres that are crucial for success in different fields" (p. 127).

At the same time, from the perspective of grammar as a resource in shaping accurate and effective texts, it seems clear that focus on form should to some extent be an integral part of the instructional design for second language writing classrooms (Widdowson, 1988). Awareness of this can assist teachers in deciding how to incorporate grammar into writing instruction. Moreover, attention to form through using linguistic forms such as transitional expressions accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately is an undeniable aspect of developing one's writing skill (Ponsot & Dean, 1982).

Whether it is grammar- or genre-based teaching of writing, the underlying assumption is that teaching courses should empower the learner to write texts as easy to read as possible. In other words, whatever the genre of the writing, readers often desire quick access to what the writer has to say – with perhaps the exception of literary texts as indeed Bhatia (1993, p. 49) states that, "Poems and other genres whose appeal may lie in the verbal pleasure they give, can be separately characterized by the fact that they defy ascription of communicative purpose". Other than the above case, it appears that readers want the text to be coherent (McNamara, Kintsch, Butler-Songer, & Kintsch, 1996) bearing in mind that an essential aspect of readability is coherence (Adelstein & Pival, 1980).

**Coherence in Writing**

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Albeit stated three decades ago, the words of Witte and Figley (1981, p. 201) perhaps continue to apply, "Numerous exercises teach clause and sentence structure in isolation, ignoring the textual and situational consideration for using that structure; therefore, considering coherence in the curriculum as an inseparable criteria in teaching writing is an indisputable issue". Research into students' writings shows that one of the major problems is the lack of coherence in the flow of ideas throughout an essay (Enkvist, 1990; Guo & Wang, 2005).

Richards, Platt, and Platt (1985, p. 45) define coherence as "the ideas in the writing stick together; they flow smoothly from one sentence to the next in logical order and from the reader's viewpoint, coherence makes the writing easier to follow". According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), coherence in written texts is a complex concept which involves text-based and reader-based features. While suggesting that a coherent text has two characteristics: cohesion which refers to the ties between sentences, and register which refers to the coherence within a context, they argue that, "A text is a passage of discourse which is coherent in these two regards: it is coherent with respect to the situation, and therefore consistent in register. And it is coherent with respect to itself, and therefore cohesive" (p. 23).

Coherence can be viewed as a discourse processing concept (Hellman 1995) where the coherence of a text arises from the processes of text production and comprehension (Sanders & Noordman 2000). In this process, the semantic or ideational relations within the text, on the one hand, and the pragmatic or interpersonal relations, on the other, engender coherence (Taboada & Mann, 2006).

Focus on coherence can shift students' attention from sentence-level grammar to discourse features such as textual structuring and unity, which are crucial to creating meaning in texts (Raimes, 1985). In the words of Richards (1985), "Coherence refers to the relationships which link the meanings of utterances in a discourse or of the sentences in a text; a paragraph has coherence if there is a series of sentences that develop a main idea" (p. 45).

**Scaffolding**

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Whether it is writing or any other skill and/or component which happens to be the focus of a language teaching program, finding teaching strategies that enhance students' intake has been a long-term aim of researchers. Among the numerous such attempts, a large number of educators and researchers have used the concept of scaffolding over the past two decades, as a metaphor to describe the role of teachers or more knowledgeable peers in guiding learners' development (Daniels, 2001; Hammond, 2002; Krause, Bochner, & Duchesne, 2003; Stone, 1998).

Scaffolding instruction as a teaching strategy originates from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and his concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) "in which he proposed that such zones exist when a less developed individual or student interacts with a more advanced person or teacher, allowing the student to achieve things not possible when acting on his/her own" (van der Veer as cited in Bagheridoust & Rajabi-Eslami, 2010, pp. 146-47). His sociocultural theory proposes that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. Vygotsky "theorized that learning occurs through participation in social or culturally embedded experiences" (Raymond, 2000, p. 176).

The term scaffolding, although never used by Vygotsky, was introduced by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) in an attempt to operationalize the concept of teaching in the ZPD (Wells, 1999) which is defined as the distance between what a student can do with and without help (Vygotsky 1978) Supporting students' active position in their learning and assisting them in becoming self-regulated learners is at the heart of Vygotsky's concept of the ZPD.

Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective emphasized that the learner does not learn in isolation, rather, in social interactions taking place in meaningful contexts. In Vygotsky's own words (1978), "Every function in the cultural development of the child comes on the stage twice, in two respects; first in the social, later in the psychological" (p. 67). He further writes that, "All higher

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psychological functions are internalized relationships of the social kind, and constitute the social structure of personality" (p. 67).

In pedagogical settings advocating scaffolding, students are supported through learning activities which serve as linking bridges to get them to the next level. Thus, learners construct new understandings through their prior knowledge and the support provided by more capable others (Raymond, 2000). To this end, Wells (1999, p. 221) argues that, "The instructor is also charged with providing support until the learner can move through all tasks independently" and "The teacher's role is to provide the path to independence, a goal of all educators" (Bodrova & Leong, 1996, p. 3).

As scaffolding is founded upon the notion of the teacher's handing over and the student's taking over, assistance provided should always be only adequate and timely (Gibbons, 2003; van Lier, 1996). This is why breaking content into manageable pieces seems to be a common feature of scaffolding (Berk, 2002; Eggen & Kauchak, 1999; McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002) thus highlighting the quality of the dialogical interaction between the teacher and the learner (Bodrova & Leong, 1996; Fleer, 1992; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).

In spite of the general consensus that Vygotskian sociocultural theory and ZPD are the foundations of the concept of scaffolding (Berk, 2001; Daniels 2001; McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002; Wells, 1999), the interpretations of the exact ways that scaffolding relates to Vygotsky's theorizations have been different ranging from understanding scaffolding as a direct operationalization of Vygotsky's concept of teaching in the ZPD (Wells, 1999), to the view that scaffolding only partially reflects the domain of the ZPD (Daniels, 2001). The interpretation of the scaffolding metaphor in educational research is thence highly diverse and "is sometimes used loosely to refer to rather different things" (Hammond, 2002, p. 2). Scaffolding has been interpreted in a wide sense as "a form of support for the development and learning of children and young people" (Rasmussen, 2001, p. 570). The term can be used as an umbrella metaphor to

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describe the way that "teachers or peers supply students with the tools they need in order to learn" (Jacobs, 2001, p. 125).

Despite the above controversy, examining different approaches to teaching writing carried out by different researchers (Calkins, 1986; Gebhard, 2006; Hedge, 2000; Meyers, 2006; Raimes, 1983) shows that providing students with scaffolds helps them not only with the task at hand but also later on in their educational careers. Also, "Scaffolding students' learning, if conducted correctly, would result in the elimination of problems such as disengagement and boredom" (Byrnes, 2001, p. 37).

With respect to what has been discussed so far, the problem under discussion in this study was to see if there was a difference between the impact of genre and grammatical scaffolding on coherence in writing. To this end, the following null hypothesis was raised:

$H_0$: *There is no significant difference between the impact of genre scaffolding and grammatical scaffolding on the coherence of EFL learners' writing.*

## Method

### Participants

To accomplish the objectives of this study, 115 adult female advanced EFL learners who had been studying English at Tehran's Simin Language School for at least four years were given a TOEFL for the purpose of ultimately selecting 60 students who were adequately homogeneous in terms of their language proficiency. This test had already been piloted among 26 learners with almost the same English proficiency level as the target sample.

After administering the proficiency test, the 78 students whose scores fell one standard deviation above and below the mean sat for a subsequent writing test (the Test of Written English or TWE), to make sure that there was no significant difference among them regarding

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their writing ability. Once their writings were rated, 18 outliers were removed and the remaining 60 students were randomly assigned to two experimental groups of 30 in each. Furthermore, a *t*-test was run between the mean scores of the two groups on the TWE prior to the treatment to demonstrate the homogeneity of the two groups in this regard.

**Instrumentations and Materials**

A number of tests, teaching materials, and course books in addition to the rating scale and marking codes were used during this study which are described below.

**Tests**

To fulfill the purpose of this study, the researchers used three tests: two tests for homogenizing the participants at the outset and one for evaluating the them towards the end.

***General Proficiency Test (TOEFL)***

The researchers used a TOEFL which consisted of 140 multiple-choice items including 50 items on listening comprehension, 40 on structure and written expression, and 50 on reading comprehension to select those learners whose scores would fall in the range of one standard deviation above and below the mean and would subsequently have to sit for the next phase of the selection.

***Test of Written English (TWE)***

Once the above learners (78 in number) were selected, a TWE was administered to them so that the researchers could rest assured that the participants did not differ significantly in their writing, that is, the skill through which the dependent variable of this study was being measured, either. This test required the participants to write at least 150 words within a 30-minute timeframe about the following topic: *In your opinion, what is the most important characteristic (for example, honesty, intelligence, and sense of humor) that a person can have to be successful in life? Use specific reasons and examples from your experience to explain your answer. When you write your answer, you are not limited to the examples listed in the question*.

***Posttest***

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Following the termination of the treatment, all the 60 participants in both groups took another TWE which was on the following topic: *Many people have personal goals, such as making the honor roll, playing a musical instrument, or being a top scorer in a video game. To be successful in reaching goals, it helps to have certain qualities. Some of these might include self-discipline, determination, or a positive attitude. Think about a goal that you would like to achieve. In a well-developed composition, state your goal. Describe at least two qualities you will need to reach your goal, and explain why each quality is important to be successful.*

***Rating Scales***

For rating the TWE, the rating scale by Hamp-Lyons (1989) was utilized which is used as a rubric for a summative score. Based on this scale, the scores fall between the ranges of 0-6 and, according to the explanation provided for each score, the 60 students whose scores were four and above were selected as advanced students to participate in the study.

As the dependent variable of this study was textual coherence and not general writing ability and the former is one of the five criteria used in the TWE rating, the posttest papers of all the participants in the study (both experimental groups) were rated only based on this construct, that is, textual coherence. According to Hamp-Lyons' (1989) rating scale, there are six criteria (spelling and punctuation, organization and development, thesis support, grammatical accuracy, coherence and unity, and word choice and syntactic variety) and the maximum overall score would be six. As each criterion receives equal weight in scoring, coherence would thus receive a maximum score of 1 (6 / 6 = 1). This is how the two raters scored the posttest papers on a scale of 0-1.

**Course Books and Teaching Materials**

All participants in both experimental groups received an instruction based on *Advanced Writing* by Birjandi, Alavi, and Nodoushan

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(2004), and Barron's *TOEFL Essay* as their course books. Furthermore, *Sample Essays for the TOEFL Writing Test* was used as self-study and reference for sample essays needed during the class instruction. *Practical English Usage* by Swan (1980) was the reference book from which the grammatical points and transitional expressions had been extracted and used in the second experimental group receiving grammatical scaffolding.

**Procedure**

In the beginning, 115 female advanced students sat for a sample TOEFL test to assure the researchers in choosing homogenous participants. The test was administered in two different days to two groups consisting of 50 and 65 in each, since it was not possible for all the students to take part in the exam together; furthermore, the physical space and facilities for such a large administration was not available. As stated earlier, the sample test had primarily been piloted among 26 students, following which an item analysis and reliability check were conducted and three faulty items were discarded.

Next, 78 students out of the original 115 with their scores between one standard deviation above and below the mean took part in the TWE which was rated by two raters: one of the researchers and one of her colleagues using the same rating scale. Inter-rater reliability was also checked for both raters and the 60 students who scored between four and six were chosen for the treatment.

After being homogenized, the learners were randomly assigned to two experimental groups consisting of 30 participants in each: the participants in the first experimental group received genre scaffolding and the second one grammatical scaffolding as treatment. Both groups underwent the same amount of instruction by the teacher (one of the researchers): a total of 21 90-minute sessions which lasted for 10 weeks and one extra session. As the teacher had to work on the other aspects of course as well during the term, a total of 10 sessions were allocated to the specific treatments of this research.

Following the usual introductions and the ice-breaking activities of the first couple of sessions together with the routine

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procedure being established, the first session of these 10 sessions began with a warm-up which took three minutes on average, making the learners acquainted with the topic and the process intended for that specific session. In this phase, the teacher would start introducing a specific topic and wait to elicit students' information about it. Sometimes, some questions were asked by the instructor to lead them to a specific path pertaining to the topic of discussion in that session. In both groups, attempts were made to put them on the right track with the warm-up section. This warm-up activity was conducted in all the treatment sessions in both classes.

The learners were informed that each session, they had to work on a sample article in that after the teacher's instruction, they had to produce a piece of writing based on the taught points each session. Moreover, a very short discussion about the TWE was held since the participants were interested to know about their drawbacks and the way their essays were scored. All the learners were supposed to work individually in producing their paragraphs while working in pairs in doing some of the other tasks.

The writings of the learners were collected and marked by the teacher after the class hours. Hence, in the sessions that followed the first session of the treatment, their paragraphs with the researcher/teacher's feedbacks in the margins and marking codes would be delivered to them before the warm-up.

During the 10 sessions of the treatment, for teaching genre in the first experimental group (genre scaffolding), 10 sample texts (two adopted from Bhatia (1993, pp. 184-190); one from Henry and Roseberry (1999, p. 199); one from Swales and Feak (1995, pp. 52-53); and six others downloaded from the internet) were prepared to be used in the modeling phase. Regarding grammatical scaffolding in the second experimental group, 10 sample essays from *Sample Essays for the TOEFL Writing Test* were chosen by the teacher/researcher.

The following is a detailed description of the treatment in both experimental groups specifying, at the same time, the differences between the two.

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The process of scaffolding used in both groups can be summarized in four phases:

- **Building knowledge of the field**

This was the preparation stage. Accordingly, the first activity was to prepare students to get into the topic of the text which was introduced in the warm-up. The next step was to give students the experience about the content of the text by exposing them to the model text. Based on Vygotskian principles, another important aim of the context exploration phase is to establish the learners' actual development or starting point. This was done by writing a very short paragraph on the board by the instructor, which was the gist of the sample text that was supposed to be studied in the modeling phase (the complete version of the text would be used later in the modeling of text stage). These summaries were prepared by the instructor beforehand having the gist of the sample text for the genre scaffolding group and a summary of the whole essay used in the grammatical scaffolding group having at least two transitional expressions.

The activity in the genre group would be generating a discussion that drew attention to generic features such as lexical and sentence patterns used in introduction moves since the emphasis was on the introduction move in the whole research.

In the grammar group, the way that the sentences were connected by transitional expressions and then their overall meaning were discussed. Because this was the preparation stage, the instructor tried to enlarge the students' vocabulary as well as to make students interested in reading the text.

The building knowledge of the field stage took an average of 6-9 minutes.

- **Modeling of text**

In the next stage which lasted around 40 minutes, procedural knowledge or text organizations were introduced. The aims of this phase were to familiarize the learners with the target text-type

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including transitional expressions or three main moves embedded in the introduction move and to draw attention to organizational and linguistic features commonly found in texts belonging to it. Model texts played a crucial role in this phase, providing, in Vygotsky's terms, the necessary object-regulation. Using such model texts, pedagogical activities to make explicit the features of the text-type were carried out. These included a gamut of established communicative activities, or information gap exercises, but the tasks were deliberately constructed in such a way as to highlight the salient lexical and grammatical features. Thus, the tasks aimed to be at least implicitly analytical in nature, and not just to facilitate interaction as an end in itself.

For working on genre moves, the introduction section of articles or research papers were chosen to be emphasized, following the pattern in Table 1 using the rhetorical pattern of the create-a-research-space (CARS) model (Swales & Feak, 1995, p. 244).

**Table 1. Moves in the introduction section**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Move 1** | Establishing a territory |
| a. | By showing that the general idea is important, central, interesting, problematic, or relevant in some way (optional) |
| b. | By introducing and reviewing items of previous research or texts in the area |
| **Move 2** | Establishing a niche |
| a. | By indicating a gap in the previous research or text , or by extending previous knowledge in some way (obligatory) |
| **Move 3** | Occupying the niche[a] |
| a. | By outlining purposes or stating the nature of the present research or text (obligatory) |

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b. By listing research questions or hypotheses (PISF)[b]
c. By announcing principle findings and ideas (PISF)
d. By stating the value of the present research or text (PISF)
e. By indicating the structure of the text (PISF)

*a*- In ecology, a niche is a particular microenviroment where a particular organism can thrive. In our case, a niche is a context where a particular piece of writing makes particularly good sense.
*b*- PISF = probable in some fields, but rare in others.

In this pattern, the work of others was considered primary and the writer's own work secondary. A model text was copied regarding each group for all learners and it was given to them in this phase. The students engaged in the activity of deconstructing and modeling the text to appreciate how the text achieved its functions. The students modeled the text by firstly discussing vocabulary and expressing the same experience in their owns. Thus, the students were able to understand how the sentences and paragraphs functioned in context. The teacher gave some fundamental hints wherever it was needed. For instance, it was discussed why the writer started his/her writing by mentioning these points and why not other points.

In the genre group, moves and their communicative purposes while talking about the corresponding relation between labeling of the moves and their communicative purpose (with more emphasis in the first three sessions of treatment to establish the names of the moves among the learners) and also the sequence of moves and the linguistic features of moves were discussed. Then, the students were provided with the first task regarding Move 1 in introduction including some questions regarding the text and the move structure. Also, after fulfilling the related task, each move in the introduction (mentioned in Table 1) would be underlined with different colors to be distinguishable.

The second task pertained to Move 2 which was a hinge that connected Move 1 (what has been done) to Move 3 (what the present

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article was about). They had to underline Move 2 in their model text and would be allowed to answer questions regarding this move. The third and final step in a typical introduction was to make an offer to fill the gap that was created in Move 2.

In the third task, they had to circle if the sentences in Move 3 were purposive (i.e., the author indicate his/her main purpose or purposes) or descriptive meaning that the author describes the main feature of his/her article. These enabled them to understand that there were different linguistic strategies to realize the moves and their communicative purposes.

Building on the knowledge that certain moves occur in a particular order and others need not or could be omitted, the instructor elaborated on obligatory and optional moves thus asking the students to identify and mark the moves independently. This was followed by comparing the move sequence and linguistic variation. All these provided them with a holistic perspective of the genres. In the first and second sessions of the scaffolding process, the discussion part was mostly led by the teacher/researcher because the learners were not acquainted with the moves and their labels but from the third session onwards, their talking time was increased during the discussion.

In the grammar group, a copied model text which was the introduction paragraph of the essays in *Sample Essays for TOEFL Writing Texts* was used. They would study the paragraph while they were asked to underline the transitional words and phrases. Then, the first task had to be done, in which they had to select the functions of the transitional words from the suggested list of functions. It should be noted that in the first session of the semester after the introduction, a comprehensive list of the transitional words and expressions alongside their functions had been delivered to all students.

After determining the functions of the transitional words, the second task was commenced in which 10 separate sentences had to be connected using five proper transitional words from the chart consisting 10 suggested such words. The third task followed the second, a paragraph with gaps to be filled with sensible transitional

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words was given to them while no suggested options were presented to them so that they themselves had to choose the best ones to fill the blanks.

- **Joint construction of the text**

Self-confidence is very important in developing language skills; so in this stage, the teacher worked to build the students' self-confidence in writing. Here, referring to the model text, and making use of the knowledge and awareness gained from the exploration of the text, the students worked with the help of the teacher/researcher to construct their own texts. For this purpose, the instructor gave the opportunity to the students to cooperate in pairs so that they could learn from others. The example activities for the written cycle were focused on collaborative writing.

As is the case with process approaches, the texts had to go through a few rounds of drafting, editing, and re-drafting. The model texts continued to provide object-regulation, while others-regulation came from not only the teacher but also from other students, as more expert peers guided others, or as students referred to each other to features in the models, and to points raised in the text exploration stage.

In the genre group, students had to work in groups of four or sometimes pairs (considering the time limitation and the number of students present in each session) thus producing an introduction move while paying attention to all the three moves which had been practiced. One topic for this phase was suggested by the teacher every session but the learners were also encouraged to choose their own favorite topics too.

In the grammar group, the process was almost identical except that the learners had to write an introduction paragraph using the studied transitional words for connecting sentences in the current session. The teacher provided her oral feedback and support all through the time they were producing their paragraphs in groups.

This stage took around 15 minutes on the whole.

- **Independent construction**

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At the end of the process of teaching and learning, the individual achievement of each learner had to be measured. As the name suggests, it required learners to work individually and independently to produce individual pieces of writings. Ideally, this was carried out only after the students had successfully produced a jointly constructed text or understanding of a text. So one of the purposes of this stage was to know how far the students mastered the strategy individually and how students could have assumed responsibility for their own learning while the help of teacher and the other peers had been tapered off. This phase then provided the opportunity for self-regulation, the crucial final stage in Vygotsky's model of learning. Students had to produce the text of the introduction move in the first experimental group, whereas in the second group, they had to produce a text using the transitional expression which they learned during that specific session. On completion of several activities and making the important points clear and discussing the students' problematic areas, the teacher/researcher – as stated earlier – would ask the students to independently construct a written paragraph in the end and hand them in to the teacher who would give them back to the learners the next session alongside her feedbacks. The selection of topics and the process of writing were similar to what had already been mentioned at the end of joint construction phase.

This phase also lasted for approximately 15 minutes.

On the whole, the types of scaffolding involved in this study were as follows:

- Developing contextual and metacognitive awareness (schema building) thus drawing students' existing background knowledge;
- Using sample texts as model, a number of which would be familiar to students in their daily lives; and
- Introducing and reiterating a metadiscourse, that is, providing students with a language they could use to talk about the specific topic, genre, move, and grammar point.

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At the end of the 21 sessions, both groups sat for the same posttest, the results of which were used to investigate the hypothesis raised in this study.

## Results

### Participant Selection

To select the participants required for this study, the researchers used a sample piloted TOEFL. The section below describes the details of the two consecutive processes of piloting and actual administration to ensure homogeneity in the two experimental groups prior to the treatment.

### Descriptive Statistics of the TOEFL Piloting

Following the piloting of the test, the mean and standard deviation of the raw scores and the reliability were calculated. The mean and standard deviation were found to be 528.00 and 79.69, respectively. Table 2 below shows the descriptive statistics of the TOEFL in the pilot phase.

**Table 2 Descriptive statistics of the TOEFL piloting**

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation | Skewness | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Std. Error |
| TOEFL Pilot | 26 | 412 | 652 | 528.00 | 79.692 | .154 | .456 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 26 | | | | | | |

Item analysis was also conducted revealing that three items were faulty and thus discarded. The Cronbach alpha formula was employed to calculate the reliability of the test scores and an acceptable reliability of 0.70 was obtained. With the above results, the

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researchers rest assured that they could administer this sample TOEFL (excluding the three faulty items discussed above) for the participant selection.

**Descriptive Statistics of the TOEFL Administration**

Next, descriptive statistics was conducted after the actual administration of the test. Table 3 shows these statistics with the mean being 532.71 and the standard deviation 96.14, respectively.

**Table 3 Descriptive statistics of the TOEFL administration**

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation | Skewness | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Std. Error |
| TOEFL | 115 | 363 | 650 | 532.71 | 96.143 | -.585 | .226 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 115 | | | | | | |

The reliability of the TOEFL in this actual administration for homogenization of the participants was calculated and an index of 0.75 reassured the researchers of the reliability of the test.

In the next phase, 78 students whose scores fell one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected among the 115 to sit for the subsequent TWE. Table 4 below displays the descriptive statistics of the scores of these 78 students on the TOEFL.

**Table 4 Descriptive statistics of the scores of the selected 78 students on the TOEFL**

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation | Skewness |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

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| | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Std. Error |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pre-TWE | 78 | 490 | 650 | 593.62 | 38.731 | -1.013 | .272 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 78 | | | | | | |

The next step was the administration of the TWE to the above 78 students. As described earlier, two raters were used in this study. Hence, prior to the administration of the TWE, the two raters' inter-rater reliability was established on a sample group of 30 students with very much the same English language background of the 78 students about to sit for the TWE. Table 5 below displays the descriptive statistics for the two sets of scores given by the two raters to the sample.

**Table 5 Descriptive statistics of the two raters' scores given to the sample**

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation | Skewness | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Std. Error |
| Rater 1 | 30 | 3.00 | 5.00 | 4.0994 | .48574 | -.288 | .272 |
| Rater 2 | 30 | 3.00 | 5.50 | 4.1346 | .52948 | .034 | .272 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 30 | | | | | | |

As indicated in Table 5, the skewness ratio for both sets were within the normal range of ±1.96 (-0.288 / 0.272 = -1.06 and 0.34 / 0.272 = 0.125); thence, running a Pearson Correlation Coefficient which is a

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parametric test was legitimized. Table 6 below shows the results of the inter-rater reliability.

**Table 6 Inter-rater reliability between the two raters scoring the TWE papers**

| | Rater 1 | Rater 2 |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | | |
| Pearson Correlation | 1.000 | .793** |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .000 |
| N | 30 | 30 |
| 2 | | |
| Pearson Correlation | .793** | 1.000 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | . |
| N | 30 | 30 |

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

As is evident, both raters enjoyed a significant correlation; thus, the researchers were ascertained that both raters could score the papers at this stage and also at the posttest level.

Table 7 below shows the descriptive statistics for the TWE scores gained by the 78 students.

**Table 7 Descriptive statistics of the TWE scores of the 78 students**

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation | Skewness | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Std. Error |

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| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pre-TWE | 78 | 3.0 | 5.0 | 4.026 | .4895 | -.360 | .272 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 78 | | | | | | |

Out of the 78 students who sat for the TWE, 60 whose scores were within 4-5 were ultimately selected; the descriptive statistics of the scores of this group appear below in Table 8.

**Table 8 Descriptive statistics of the TWE scores of the 60 selected participants**

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation | Skewness | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Std. Error |
| Pre-TWE | 60 | 4.0 | 5.0 | 4.217 | .2964 | 1.024 | .309 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 60 | | | | | | |

**Dividing the Participants into Two Groups**

The next step was to randomly divide the 60 participants in two experimental groups: one undergoing the genre scaffolding instruction and the other the grammar scaffolding. Table 9 shows the descriptive statistics of these two groups based on their performance on the previously administered TWE.

**Table 9 Descriptive statistics of the TWE scores of the two groups at the outset**

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation | Skewness | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Std. Error |

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| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PreTWE-Genre | 30 | 4.0 | 5.0 | 4.250 | .3149 | .888 | .427 |
| PreTWE-Grammar | 30 | 4.0 | 5.0 | 4.217 | .3130 | 1.172 | .427 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 30 | | | | | | |

To make sure that the two groups manifested no significant difference at the outset in terms of their general writing, the means of both groups had to be statistically compared. As neither of the distributions manifested normality with their skewness ratios (0.89 / 0.43 = 2.08; 1.18 / 0.43 = 2.74) exceeding the acceptable ±1.96 range, running an independent samples *t*-test which is the commonly employed parametric test under such circumstances was not legitimized. Hence, the researchers resorted to the nonparametric Mann-Whitney. Tables 10 and 11 show the results for this statistical procedure.

**Table 10 Mann-Whitney test: Ranks**

| Group | N | Mean | Sum of ranks |
|---|---|---|---|
| PreTWE Genre Group | 30 | 31.43 | 943.00 |
| PreTWE Grammar Group | 30 | 29.57 | 887.00 |
| Total | 60 | | |

**Table 11 Mann-Whitney test: Test statistics**

| | Score |
|---|---|
| Mann-Whitney U | 422.000 |
| Wilcoxon W | 887.000 |
| Z | .479 |

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| | |
|---|---|
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | .632 |

a. Grouping Variable: Group

According to Table 11, the results of the Mann-Whitney test indicated that at the 0.05 level of significance, there was no significant difference between the mean rank of the group set to receive genre scaffolding (31.43) and that of the group which was to undergo grammatical scaffolding (29.57) on the proficiency test (U = 422.00, $N_1$ = 30, $N_2$ = 30, $p$ = 0.632 > 0.05); consequently, any probable differences at the end of the treatment could be attributed to the effect of the treatment.

**Posttest**

The researchers administered the writing posttest in the two experimental groups once the treatment was completed. First, the descriptive statistics of this posttest administration are reported. As shown in Table 12 below, the mean and standard deviation of the genre group were 0.84 and 0.14, respectively. In the grammar group, however, the mean was 0.70 while the standard deviation stood at 0.16.

**Table 12 Descriptive statistics for the posttest in both groups**

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation | Skewness | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Std. Error |
| Posttest –Genre | 30 | .63 | 1.00 | .8420 | .13662 | -.283 | .427 |
| Posttest – Grammar | 30 | .50 | 1.00 | .6980 | .16272 | .098 | .427 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 30 | | | | | | |

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As Table 12 reveals, the mean of the genre group (0.84) was higher than that of the grammar group (0.70). However, further statistical analysis was required to see whether this difference was significant or not.

**Testing the Hypothesis**

To verify the null hypothesis of the study, the researchers conducted an independent samples *t*-test. Prior to this, the normality of distribution of these scores within each group had to be checked.

Going back to Table 12, the skewness of the genre group was -0.66 (-0.283 / 0.427) while that of the grammar group was 0.23 (0.098 / 0.427). Both values fell between ±1.96 meaning that they were both normal distributions and thus running a *t*-test was legitimized.

As Table 13 below indicates, with the *F* value of 4.23 at the significance level of 0.44 being smaller than 0.05, the variances between the two groups were significantly different. Therefore, the results of the *t*-test with the assumption of heterogeneity of the variances were reported here. The results ($t = 3.712$, $p = 0.00 < 0.05$) indicate that there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups at the posttest.

**Table 13 Independent samples *t*-test of the genre and grammar groups on the posttest**

| | 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- | Mean | Std. | Lowe | Upper |

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| | | | | | tailed) | Difference | Error Difference | r | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Equal variances assumed | 4.23 | .044 | 3.712 | 58 | .000 | .1440 | .0388 | .0664 | .2216 |
| Equal variances not assumed | | | 3.712 | 56.31 | .000 | .1440 | .0388 | .0663 | .2217 |

It can thus be concluded that the presupposed null hypothesis was rejected meaning that the difference observed between sample means was large enough to be attributed to the differences between population means and therefore not due to sampling errors.

Following the rejection of the null hypothesis, the researchers was interested to know how much of the obtained difference could be explained by the variation in the two levels of the independent variable. To determine the strength of the findings of the research, that is, to evaluate the stability of the research findings across samples, effect size was also estimated to be 1.03. According to Cohen (1988, p. 22), a value exceeding 0.8 is generally considered a large effect size. Therefore, the findings of the study could be considered strong enough for the purpose of generalization.

**Discussion**

In recent years, there have been numerous studies showing that scaffolding generally bears a more positive impact on learning outcomes (Land & Zombal-Saul, 2003; Pedersen & Liu, 2002; Reiser, 2004; Roehler & Cantlon, 1997). Accordingly, the researchers set out their work with the above paradigm in mind that the collaborative aspect of learning as one of the main stages of scaffolding further enthused learners to achieve more and also decreased stress among

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participants enabling them to perform better at the end of the group work and, eventually, gain more.

In line with the findings of previous researches which established the advantageousness of the four stages of the curriculum cycle, namely developing control of the genre, modeling the text type, joint construction, and independent construction of text (Gibbons, 2002; Hyland, 2003; Kim & Kim, 2005), this study too indicated that adopting the scaffolding method through the four aforementioned stages for teaching genres enabled students to autonomously produce a text based on the taught genre moves.

As Hyland (2004) notes and as reconsolidated in this study, some of the merits of the genre pedagogy are that it clarifies what is to be learned and also facilitates the acquisition of language skills. To this end, the teacher clearly observed in the course of the study that using the genre scaffolding method could provide learners with enough time to become familiar with the intended topic in each session and that they could go through a model text to be practically acquainted with text type and its proponents.

Furthermore, the learners in the genre group demonstrated that during the modeling phase, in particular, they generally appreciated the model or examples showing specifically what they had to do linguistically. Studying given genres also provided them with an understanding of why a communication style is the way it is through a reflection of its social context and its purpose. It further gave them the opportunity that Hyon (2002) noted, that is, a rise in their awareness about probable reader expectations and their familiarization with the notion and function of genre through move analysis. At the same time, it is also important to understand how genres influence the way different coherence patterns are created at the text and sentence levels.

Finally, a point applied to both groups which the researchers deem noteworthy here is what Roehler and Cantlon (1997) have stated on the balance of support and challenge being the prerequisite of the effectiveness of scaffolding. The necessity, or perhaps the indispensability, of this balance in real-life was observed in both

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groups: when there was a high challenge with little support, students became frustrated; contrarily, a low challenge with high support during the various stages – especially the modeling and joint construction – made the task too effortless. However, it was vivid that when there was a high challenge and high support, learning became more probable in both groups.

**Conclusion**

This study vividly showed that using the scaffolding method in the process of teaching can enhance students' alacrity and participation in the learning process. This is perhaps the case as scaffolding seeks to remove the pressure of not knowing something or being forced to go far beyond their existing knowledge.

Moreover, since genre structures are not acquired through any specific process of language learning in an EFL setting, the necessity is felt to provide learners with essential tasks, samples, exercises, and instructions to familiarize them with the moves and their communicative purposes consequently. Genre awareness could be raised through different kinds of tasks (such as those mentioned by Caudery, 1998, Flowerdew, 1993, and Swales, 1990) or by means of genre analysis in the classroom for revealing each genre and necessary moves.

This study revealed that coherence as one of the main factors in each piece of writing is enhanced through the awareness of genres which in turn makes learners aware of successful communication in a discourse community. There is of course no dispute over the importance of coherence in writing and that in teaching writing, one goal should be to enable learners to write coherently. Accordingly, teaching genre structures should be a part of the pedagogical curriculum to help students empower themselves in the act of writing more coherently.

To introduce genre scaffolding within ELT writing programs (or mainstream them in contexts where they already exist), teacher training centers and institutions obviously need to familiarize teachers with such techniques. This training could be done both for teachers

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who are being trained to become teachers or those already engaged in the practice of pedagogy in the form of in-service courses.

In this study, a specific topic related to the issue to be discussed in class was introduced in the warm-up phase to elicit the students' information on that topic and to activate prior knowledge in the beginning of each session. Teachers can of course use cues, questions, and advance organizers to activate prior knowledge. Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) report that research shows that cues, questions, and advance organizers should focus on what is important. They further note that, "Higher level questions produce deeper learning than lower level ones and waiting briefly before accepting responses from students has the effect of increasing the depth of students' answers" (pp. 113-114). Therefore, by asking such questions, teachers can assist the process through which students can incorporate new knowledge into old knowledge. This they could do by asking students to reflect on their own experiences that relate to topic of the session, reviewing key vocabulary prior to starting modeling stage, and directing students to relevant additional materials before coming to class each session.

Furthermore, one theme which is contributory to scaffolding is cooperative learning which itself has been reported extensively as a successful modality in the literature (Cowei, Smith, Boulton, & Laver, 1994; Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, 2000; Marashi & Baygzadeh, 2010; Slavin, 1992; Wei, 1997). To this end, cooperative learning should be emphasized in teacher training workshops as an effective feature thereby facilitating scaffolding.

Syllabus designers and materials developers have to provide the content of teaching material with comprehensible and proper tasks and exercises to familiarize learners with different genres and their moves along with their communicative purpose. It is thus recommended that more built-in support structures were applied in a lesson in the form of well designed tasks thus enhancing the students' learning. This will allow teachers to teach less and let students learn

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more through constructing their own knowledge and thinking about various choices and alternatives possible.

In the process of conducting this study, certain suggestions for other studies in line with the one at stake came to the researchers' mind which are:

1. In this study, genre scaffolding and grammar scaffolding were compared with one another in terms of their impact on coherence in writing. Another study could be conducted to find out whether a combination of both scaffoldings would benefit learners too or not.
2. While this study focused on coherence in writing as its outcome, other studies within the same design and caliber could seek other features of writing such as the use of cohesive ties, syntactic accuracy, lexical variety, thesis development, etc.
3. The materials used in this study were all taken from pedagogical texts; other types of texts such as newspaper articles which are perhaps more challenging than materials planned for the pedagogical purposes can be selected in further research studies with the same design.

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