

GENRE-BASED APPROACH AND POSTMETHOD PEDAGOGY: DEVELOPING AN (ESP) ENGLISH COURSE OF BUSINESS WRITING IN EFL CURRICULUM CONTEXT

Muchamad Adam Basori

Abstract

Language use in classroom teaching contexts can surprisingly increase an instrument of power of language educational enterprise. This phenomenon is indicated in the author's classroom teaching designed in English for Specific Program (ESP) for non-English students. This paper critically presents an English curriculum in English as Foreign Language (EFL) context when English writing for Business designed in the basis of beliefs underpinning the curriculum and the context analysis (student and the institutional context and learner needs), goals and objectives, syllabus, activities development, and assessment procedure and task.

Business English Writing (BWE) firstly shows an increase of students' learning interest in which their learning interest meets goals and objectives underpinned with genre-based approach and postmethod pedagogy. The course then develops two activities both to gain a sense of responsibility in a collective manner and to exploit learning potential individually. In the end of teaching, the teacher develops a reflective approach assisting evaluation and initiating change in his classroom.

This study was designed in a qualitative method, which focused on six groups. Each group consisted of two students in ESP classroom of the Department of Management, Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University, Malang. The study also used a purposive sampling focusing on reduced variations, simplified analysis, and facilitated group interviewing.

The beneficial contribution of the course is that the teacher (author) can potentially act his teaching profession autonomously within the academic and administrative constraints imposed by the institution, curriculum and textbook. The students have benefited from the course in which opportunities widely open for learning strategies identification in relation to strengths and weaknesses. The strategies finally promote academic autonomy and liberatory autonomy.

BELIEFS, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: A BRIEF REVIEW

This course was based, firstly, on beliefs about language. These beliefs are that language is rule-governed and has relatively fixed structures for specific functions. However, language is also seen as interactions in the form of different written functions embedded in the social contexts in which they are used. In addition, this course considered that learners are recipients who construct knowledge based on their own personal experiences in which teachers help them with their individual knowledge construction processes. These processes of learning strategies involve cognition and metacognition so teachers can assist learners to be self-reflective. A teacher is viewed as a group organiser who develops an environment in which students work collaboratively on group tasks.

The course aimed to compose and revised students' written documents using business writing principles, correct grammar and business formats. The course also aimed to build up strategies for students to structure and implement a job search and built up knowledge of effective self- reflection and collaborative interaction. The course goals were then analysed in accordance with student's needs undertaken at the beginning of the course producing a practical detailed objectives. By the end of the course, the students would be able to:

1. recognise the formats of a written report and a business letter and understand their functions;
2. identify organisational patterns and lexico-grammatical features of business reports and letters;
3. compose formal and informal reports; a letter of orders and order acknowledgements; a letter of inquiries and a letter of inquiry replies;
4. write an effective job application letter;
5. recognise the elements of an effective resume;
6. understand how to use different resume formats;
7. identify errors and edit their writing;
8. create a journal entry that reflects their own individual critical awareness, and
9. collaborate effectively with their groups who provide feedback on one another's work and occasionally write together.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study was conducted during the course and based on problems of writing business letters found in certain groups of students. The writer considered solving all the problems, but he chose one of the most significant problems encountered by most students in his class. The problem is “How can the teacher apply a genre-based approach and postmethod parameters?”

PURPOSES OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study was to examine goals and objectives of business writing problems faced by ESP (English for Specific Purposes) students in mainstream business studies at Faculty of Economics and Management, Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University (UIN) Malang. He also wanted to see whether there were characteristic discourse patterns of Business English Writing (BWE) students which could be sources of their writing problems. The statement of the problem drew from his own experience as an ESP teacher in the University, where he had started to wonder how BWE students cope with business writing challenges in business English nowadays. He discovered that several students knew very little about what to write business English letters, and he developed his teaching in accordance with a genre-based approach and postmethod parameters.

CONTEXT AND NEEDS ANALYSIS

This is a curriculum design for the course of Business English Writing (BEW) at a university classroom for Economics students majoring in Business Management. The entry level of English as foreign language was low-intermediate, and the exit level would be expected to upper-intermediate. The students who are in their late teens and early twenties have a basic knowledge of general English at beginners' level and specific content-based business writing knowledge as a prerequisite for this course. As a prerequisite, they take a compulsory general English course from the first to the second semester,

immediately prior to the BEW course. This BWE course serves as the bridge between their subject knowledge and their English proficiency to further develop their advanced English competency in most business situations. It is assumed that students will need to be able to practise and improve basic business writing skills and techniques for business English used in a wide range of business settings and situations. They want these basic skills to be relevant to their general discipline of Business Management, particularly how the knowledge and skills are applicable to find a job and become a business entrepreneur. The duration of the course was 16 weeks, with a 90-minute lecture and classroom activity on Tuesdays and a 120-minute workshop on Fridays. The workshop was designed to be held in the workplace where students practically applied their knowledge in practice. The course was conducted at the department of Business Management, Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University Malang (UIN MALIKI). The classroom setting was based on Paltridge's recommendation (2001, p. 40) in which classroom activities done through modelling, guided practice, and then construction of texts. There were between 40 to 60 students, sitting in rows facing the teacher. The students were not assisted by computers, but teachers accessed computers in their offices. The University, unfortunately, did not provide online databases or resources, e-reserve, and e-journals.

Before the course commenced, a classroom teacher (the author) conducted an interview strategy to collect information from learners at the beginning of the course. This information undertaken at need analysis processes enabled the teacher to customise course design of BWE. This strategy (Feez, 1998, p. 39) was intended to enable students to express their personal language learning objectives and the teacher and the students to identify obstacles to learning and consider approach for dealing with these.

Needs analysis was conducted by means of interviews, which were viewed as the best way of identifying learners' abilities, attitudes and preferences. The interviews were implemented in groups of two students within twelve students in class to collect information before the course began. Since this course run parallel to students' subject courses in the Department, they related their subject knowledge to the Business Writing English context. They found the knowledge easier to learn when they had begun with what they knew and when they started applying the basic skills. The interviews were also be used to

establish the language skills that students needed most and relevant business topics to their field of study.

SYLLABUS-BASED STUDENT'S NEEDS

This syllabus is for the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course focusing on business English writing. The course approach is genre-based (Feez, 1998, p. 24) and postmethod parameters: *particularity, practicality, and possibility* (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 171) maximising learning opportunities to an effective methodological mediation. Related to students' needs, *particularity* emphasises writing business texts on using local sociocultural contexts because the students did want their writing skills to optimise their learning experiences parallel to their field of business study. Meanwhile, experts' teaching theories versus teachers' theory then should evolve *practicality*. It bridges language-learning experts' theories to teachers' interpretation in a way of theorizing practices. In other words, teachers are no longer perceived as a person who responsibly applies the theories, but theorizes teaching practices at classroom. Then *practicality* objectives will only help students develop knowledge and skill, attitude, and autonomy in a way of reflecting students' learning rooted in the field of business study and their local sociocultural contexts. Reflected by all root means of business study, the learners will learn *not about* business writing literacy, but *from* local sociocultural contexts of business writing. At the same time, students are autonomous because of learning growth shaped in their subject of business study to liberate their learning business writing culturally at classroom. From *particularity to practicality*, BWE has *possibility* motivating students of their own cultural business concepts, appropriating the language and using in their own terms based on their needs and values, intertwines the teacher's strategic ways of business texts and students' needs in which the texts are negotiated, intimating learners' resilient business writing abilities to creatively fashion a voice for the students themselves from amidst of teachers' domination.

The genre-based approach is based on stages of teaching-learning activities (Feez, 1998, p. 28-31) so students will have learning strategies based on tasks, focusing aspects of language use within social and

cultural contexts of production and interpretation of particular genres (Paltridge, 2001, p. 6) of knowledge construction. Related to the belief of knowledge construction, this course is designed to scaffold tasks in the business writing genre in which (Gibbons, 2002, p. 10) the teacher is responsible for initiating learning steps, building on what a student can do to complete the tasks in learning activities. The tasks then lead students to critique established practices (Basturkmen, 2006, p. 142; McPeck, 1981, p. 152-153) that help them modify the practices to better suit their needs. This opens up doors to them, making it easier for them to function in or gain access to business writing in the workplace.

TEACHING METHOD

This course was conducted in using a method adhered to the basic principles associated with business writing. The basic principles referring to established methods categorised by Kumaravadivelu (2006, p. 90-92) are *language-centered*, *learner-centered*, *learning-centered*. Language-centered method is intended to provide opportunities for learners to practice preselected, presequenced linguistic structures through form-focused exercises in class, assuming that learners will learn language chunks as a linear. A set of grammatical structures and vocabulary items are carefully selected in their usability, and graded in their difficulty. The teacher introduced, analysed, explained discrete linguistic items and assisted his learners to practice them until they internalised them. Learner-centered method, however, is principally concerned with learners' wants and needs. In relation to need analysis prior to the course commencement, the students were concerned with preselected, presequenced linguistic structures and communicative notions/functions through meaning-focused activities, assuming that they prioritized to learn form and function at the first place, ultimately leading to target language mastery used in business study and that the learners would intentionally be able to make use of both formal and informal repertoire to meet their needs in the application of business writing in a real situation. Furthermore, another method (learning-centered) that concerns with cognitive processes emanating students' intention would cognitively be regarded in the participation of open-ended meaningful interaction through problem-solving tasks in class. The learners were required to make sentences meaningful even

though they still deployed interlanguage to achieve linguistic and pragmatic abilities, assuming that they learnt language and incidentally grammar construction recurred when the learners paid attention to the processes of meaning-making, even if they were not explicitly focused on the formal properties of the language used in business.

The BWE students course were subjects of this study in which exploratory qualitative research decisively interprets phenomenon of business English writing. Firstly, all students at BWE course were introduced to the communicative purpose of a report document, which was to write an application letter and a resume, and to compose informal and formal reports as well as letters dealing with orders and order acknowledgment, inquiries and inquiry replies. However, six groups consisting two students were required to write a letter application and a resume to a company. The students will be drawn into fieldwork 'on the job training' in certain public or private companies that groups of five students prefer. This fieldwork will provide language-learning tasks that will inform their journal entries. Company officers, who will supervise the students in the workplace, have an authority in Human Resource Department (HRD) for training development and have an administrative authority for incoming and outgoing mails and letters. Secondly, students investigate the organisational pattern and lexicogrammatical features of the workplace reports and letters. They are given a model of the texts by an officer and are asked to deconstruct the texts. These activities will lead to a contextualised framework study of language functions. Thirdly, students are asked to write reports and letters and edit them. Coherence is focused on in this activity, as this learning experience will raise their critical awareness of the overall coherence and organisational pattern of the texts. Fourthly, the students, who are supervised in the workplace, work individually on writing an unsolicited report and letter within a group. Their writing is then sent to intended company authorities. The authorities will provide feedback for the report and letter. Finally, students are asked to learn the differences between and similarities among reports and letters used in the workplace for linking texts.

The sequencing of material for this course is primarily constructed according to this text-based syllabus (Richards, 2001, p. 151) in which the business text types used are based on learners' needs, prerequisite

learning and ‘part-to-whole’, in which the course begins a focus on individual components before whole texts. The students’ immediate needs are driven to be able to use a text-type (Flowerdew, 2005, p. 137) so when it is embedded in a real-life context with which they are familiar, students can use it for advancement in the workplace. They also have opportunities to practise the text-types meaningfully outside the classroom.

Assessment of students’ performance is based on students’ self-reflection writing in a journal. Their target performance will be assessed at the end of the semester. A final test will be conducted to provide information about the students’ overall achievement, and evaluation of the course as a whole will also be carried out.

Most of the materials are contrived because they are focused on the features being taught (Tomlinson, 2001, p.68). Materials such as textbooks are used in classroom exercises and are followed up in homework. The selected materials are adapted in relation to the ordering of teaching items based on text-types. Students working in groups, as teamwork for discussions (Bremner, 2010, p. 128), use textbooks for their guidelines. However, they finally write a report and a letter individually.

The following three textbooks are required for this course. These are Baron’s *Business English: A complete guide to developing an effective business writing style - Fourth Edition (2004)*, used as an introduction to grammar and sentence structures as well as business correspondence; the *Writing Guidelines for Business Students – Fourth Edition (2009)* used as guidelines on how to write business letter formats, and the *New International Business English*, (Jones & Alexander, 2000) which covers on communication skills in English for business purposes. The selected textbooks include awareness of cultural variation (Hedge, 2000, p.357) which is important in learning business writing. These books are recommended as the primary materials for this course.

ACTIVITIES DEVELOPMENT

There are two activities developed in the lesson plan. The first activity is conducted based on the first cycle of genre-based approach (Feez, 1998, p. 28). It is the building the context in which students explore the texts in the target situation of a company. However, in the second activity, it is based on learning-centred approach (Gibbons, 2002, p. 10). It is the modelling and deconstructing the text, joint construction of the text, independent construction of the text, and linking related texts.

The two activities have related to the goal and objective as well as beliefs and context. The goal is that students will compose and revise business letters. The objective is that students will be able to recognise the letter formats and functions. The beliefs about learning and learners as well as teaching are well connected with the two activities. Students can learn experiences of the letter formats and functions through jigsaw.

The jigsaw classroom is a cooperative learning technique with a three-decade track record of successfully reducing racial conflict and increasing positive educational outcomes. Just as in a jigsaw puzzle, each piece--each student's part--is essential for the completion and full understanding of the final product. If each student's part is essential, then each student is essential; and that is precisely what makes this strategy so effective. (Aronson, n.d.).

Most activities in the lesson plan involve students in a group-work participation. Groupwork promotes learner autonomy (Harmer, 2007, p. 167) so the students in this course get benefit from it.

ASSESSMENT PROCEDURE, TASK AND DISCUSSION

This course uses alternative and summative assessment. Alternative assessment will be implemented in the form of journal entries. A journal is a purposeful document of students' writing that demonstrates their efforts, progress and achievement in given areas (Genesee & Usphur cited by Brown 2004, p. 256; Graves, 2000, p. 212-213) so students' efforts, progress and achievement in each stage of learning activities are described in a one page self-reflection. Their journals will be assessed once every two weeks. Students are asked to write a one page self-reflection for each stage to respond to their learning activities in classroom and in the workplace. A range of class activities focusing on participation and

work progress can be provided for assessment, such as asking students to grade their efforts made in class and attitude to learning based on checklists (Huerta-Macias, 2002, p. 339-340) that will be used. Their classroom activities will be assessed based on the checklist once every second week. Students can also be asked to reflect upon how well they use the target language to complete tasks, and identify what they are not able to do (Graves, 2000, p. 212) so this assessment will be used when they are on the job training in the workplace. When the students are on the job training, the supervisor will assess their progress and achievement based on the assessment criteria and instruments provided by the teacher.

At the end of this course, summative assessment in the form of a final test will be used to examine the extent to which students have learned what has been taught (Brown, 2004, p. 48) so this assessment will provide information on the overall quality of a learner's performance in the course. Brown also stated that achievement test can serve the diagnostic role of indicating what a student needs to work on in the future. Therefore, in this context diagnostic assessment is integrated into the final test.

The progress and achievement results of students' performance show what students learned and how the course is successfully helping the students to make progress (Graves, 2000, p. 313). When assessing achievement indicates that students are not doing well, the students need moderation that will provide a second chance of resubmission of their journal entries. They are given a month for doing it and will be graded based on Pass/Fail.

COURSE EVALUATION

In alternative and achievement evaluation of the course, it is usually the teacher and the students who evaluate the course effectiveness. The University may not evaluate the effectiveness of the course as the University can trust teachers themselves to conduct evaluation to their course.

Aspects of the course evaluation will be assessed, such as (Graves, 2000, p. 214) aims and objectives, the course content, students' needs, the course organisation, the materials and methods, the learning assessment plan and the course evaluation plan. The course evaluation for alternative assessment is

designed to evaluate the course effectiveness and to change ineffectiveness if the course goals and objectives do not meet students' needs. However, the purposes of achievement assessment are conducted to evaluate overall students' knowledge and skills related to business writing; to assess students' task fulfilment in the workplace; to make decisions if the course should continue or not, and to provide information whether students should continue or not to practise knowledge in the workplace.

The course evaluation will be conducted by means of a class survey at the end of the course. The survey provides a six-point scale with questions in a variety of categories and open-ended comments by the students.

When results of the course evaluation are administered, alternative assessment used in this course will be used to retain effective aspects of the course and to alter ineffective aspects during the course. However, the results of achievement assessment will be used to develop the course in the future. Finally, the purpose of this course evaluation is to assist the teacher to make decisions based on valid and reliable information on both alternative and achievement assessment.

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