The Effects of a Writing Approach Fitting
the Competency-Based Approach and the LMD System
National seminar: EFL Course Design and Implementation
within the LMD System
University of Biskra, Dec 11-12.
By
Saliha CHELLI & Nachoua HA SSINA

Abstract

Command of good writing skills is increasingly seen as vital to equip learners for success in the twenty-first century (Hyland, 2004, p.xiii). However, how to achieve better results in English teaching and how to develop students' writing competence remains arduous for teachers of English. The main purpose of this paper is to report on the researcher's experiment on the effectiveness of the process genre approach on foreign language written productions, and more specifically those of first year students at Biskra University. This research was motivated by the researcher's perceptions about university students' difficulties in writing. In fact, producing a fluent, coherent and accurate piece of writing is considered a challenge in foreign language learning. In order to confirm or reject the hypothesis that the implementation of the process genre approach would bring positive results, a group of students (n = 40) was selected for the study. This investigation was carried through the comparison of pre and post writing tests in addition to two pre questionnaires and two post interviews. Writings were evaluated in terms of fluency, accuracy and complexity based on Wolfe Quintero et al. (1998) and other authors such as Ortega (2003), Ellis and Yuan (2004), Ishikawa (2006) and Larsen Freeman (2006) who used the T-Unit as a measure of analysis. The tests revealed that the participants achieved statistically greater levels in fluency, accuracy and complexity. Besides, the analysis of the self- report questionnaire also proved the efficacy of the genre approach if compared to the other approaches. The findings of this research indicate that such a socio-cognitive approach can help students develop their writing competence better than the product approach used previously because on the one hand they experience a whole writing process, and on the other one, they learn about the organizational structure as well as the linguistic features of a certain genre. Therefore, it is suggested that the process genre approach be incorporated in the Algerian University syllabus.

Key words: process genre approach, writing, fluency, accuracy, complexity

1. Introduction

Writing, which was once considered the domain of the elite and well-educated, has become an essential tool for people of all walks of life in today's global community (Weigle, p.2). It is now widely recognized that writing plays a vital role not only in conveying information, but also in transforming knowledge to create new knowledge. It is thus of central importance to students in academic, second and foreign language programmes throughout the world, including Algerian university students who need this skill not only in the different subjects in which writing is required, mainly in exams, but also in order to communicate with the external world and to go for further studies. However, after having analysed the results of the reform undertaken in both middle and secondary education through the implementation of the competency-based approach, we noticed that the students we receive at the university are still facing the same problems in writing as most of them are considered as poor writers (as shown in the pre-test and the results obtained from questionnaires). Hence, this study was designed to investigate the effects of the process genre approach on students' writing proficiency, seen as the most compatible with the competency-based approach and also the LMD system, to prove that where secondary school teachers has failed can be achieved at the university level successfully taking into consideration the methodology to be used in training students to write more effectively. For this purpose, it was hypothesised that the implementation of the process genre approach would enhance students' writing proficiency in terms of fluency, accuracy and complexity.

If we refer to the literature review concerning the different approaches to writing instruction, we will find that all of them have been criticized and no single approach fits all kinds of learners. However, in the post-method era, there is a tendency to combine more than one approach seeking better results in language learning and also in writing. For instance, Hyland (2004, p. xi) asserts that 'writers need realistic strategies for drafting and revising, but they also must have a clear understanding of genre to structure their writing experiences according to the demands and constraints of particular context'. So, this calls for a combination of both the process and genre approach for a more effective teaching of writing. The model of the process-genre approach is described in terms of a view of writing and a view of developing writing. In this approach, writing is viewed as involving knowledge about language , knowledge of the context in which writing happens and especially the purpose of writing as in genre approaches, and skills in using language as in the process approach. In this way students will have the opportunity to enjoy the creativity of writing and to become independent writers (as in the process approach) but they also understand the linguistic features of each genre and emphasize the discourse value of the structures they are using (as in the genre approach). As a synthesis of what we know about the process- genre based approach, we can deduce that the principle of this approach can be summarized in the following points:

Balancing form and function, scaffolding language and learning, providing meaningful response and formative assessment

On the one hand the competency-based approach is a cognitive approach indebted to Bloom's taxonomy according to which the learner achieves lower-order objectives before he/she can achieve higher-order objectives. Besides, it is a problem solving approach because it places the learner in situations to test/check his/her capacity to overcome obstacles and problems. Moreover, the competency-based approach is social constructivist in that it regards learning as occurring through social interaction and it encourages the learner to be creative by using newly constructive knowledge through the process of social interaction. On the other hand the LMD system is also based on social constructivism in that it requires from learners to construct knowledge by themselves through social interaction. This will enable them to build competencies and therefore to be autonomous in the future, able to compete either in the field of work or in life in general. Therefore, the following questions have been formulated:

1. Does the implementation of the process genrre approach approach enhance students' writing in terms of fluency?

2. Does the implementation of the process genre appoach enhance students' writing in terms of accuracy?

3. Does the implementation of the process gnere approach enhance students' writing in terms of complexity?

2. Litterature Review

An Overview of the Process Genre Approach

The table below summarizes the characteristics of the process and genre approaches to writing:

Attribute	Process	Genre
Main idea	Writing is a thinking process concerned with the act of writing	Writing is a social activity concerned with the final product
Teaching focus	Emphasis on creative writer	Emphasis on reader expectations and product
Advantages	How to produce and link ideas makes processes of writing transparent	How to express social purposes effectively makes textual conventions transparent

Table 1: Process Aproach/ Genre Approach

As presented in the table above, the process approach gives importance to the process followed by expezrienced writers. This means that in order to produce a piece of writing, the student should pass through the following phases which are clearly explained in the table below:

Step	Description	Strategies
Prewriting	An activity that causes the writer to think about the subject. The writer organizes his thoughts before he begins to write	Drawing Talking Brainstorming Graphic organizer Research listing Field trips
Drafting	The process of putting ideas down on paper. The focus is on content not mechanics.	Taking notes, Organizing thoughts into paragraphs, writing a first draft.
Revising	The process of refining the piece of writing. The writer adds to a writing piece. He organizes it. He shares it and gets input from peers or teacher	Peer editing Conferencing Share chair or author's chair
Editing	Mechanical, grammatical and spelling errors are fixed in the writing piece.	Checklists Rubrics Editing checklists Proof reading
Publishing	The writing piece is prepared in final form (it is polished), including illustrations. The writer shares it with others	Reading aloud Reading to a group Displaying in the room Printing the books Web publishing

Table 2: Stages of the Writing Process

The idea of integrating the two approaches to writing can be explained as follows: first the process-genre based approach allows students to progress in their improvement of cognitive skills as they are involved in higher-order skill as analysis, synthesis and evaluation of their pieces of writing and those of their peers. These skills are seen as vital for problem solving and decision making. Second it facilitates experiential learning emphasizing personal involvement, self-initiation and evaluation by the learner. The writing process provides the learners with the opportunity to reflect, discuss, analyze and evaluate their experiences individually, in pairs or with the teacher. Second, in addition to the view of the genre approach being an extension of the product-based approach in that it is based on modelling. We can also add that it is based on social constructivism as the students interact with social situations, and thus construct knowledge. In this case, the knowledge constructed consists of the way students become able to choose suitable language and organize it according to the situation encountered in every day life either orally or in writing.

Third, the process genre approach promotes active learning in the classroom, a strategy that involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing. Some of the learning strategies used are group brainstorming, pair and group work and so on. Fourth because teaching strategies used in writing promote experiential and active learning, students develop a deep rather than a superficial approach to learning writing which encourages learner autonomy, thinking skills, reflection and analysis. This is embedded in the social constructivists approach to leaning which propounds that through communication with peers and through authentic and realistic assignments,

students are able to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. This is corroborated by Entwistle and Enwistle (1991) who view learning as a social activity either in an intellectual or professional context and suggest that a deep approach can be fostered when students are given the opportunity to discuss their work with other students in their small 'intellectual community'. This social-cognitive approach promotes learners' intellectual abilities leading them to autonomy which is advocated by both the competency-based approach and the LMD system.

There are a number of studies (Fei Wen Cheng, 2008) that show how this social-cognitive approach to teaching writing can be translated into classroom activities with beneficial results. These studies combine instruction in cognitive strategies for decision-making in writing with explicit teaching of genre knowledge or with socialization type activities to raise awareness of key discourse practices in a genre.

3. Participants

A control group was taught according to the product approach and the one used in the experiment consisted of forty first year students (n= 40) non- randomly selected due to the use of the quasi-experimental design appropriate to a formal institutional setting. Besides, an experimental group (n=40) was taught writing according to the process genre approach. The subjects represented two homogeneous group as they were aged between 18 and 21 and also had the same educational background as all of them received the same instruction in English in both middle and secondary schools under the new reform which adopted the competency-based approach as an alternative to the communicative approach.

4. Data Gathering Tools

First, an experiment was conducted on a group of first year students (n=40), implementing the process genre based approach in writing considered as a kind of treatment, believing that it would bring positive results as stated in the hypotheses. Second, an interview has been conducted with the students used in the experiment; The purpose of this methodology is to advocate quantitative and qualitative findings in order to claim that improvement of students' writing proficiency can be achieved through the three hypotheses cited above.

5. Implementation of the Process Genre Approach
5.1. Procedure

The experiment stretched from March 2011 to the second week of May 2011, two sessions or three hours per week, a total of approximately thirty six hours. Drawing from the literature review, the aims of the study were to implement the process-genre approach. In addition to this we stressed collaboration and cooperation as well as interaction between the informants and the teacher during the writing sessions, as group and pair work were used. Proponents of collaborative learning claim that working in small groups not only increases interest among the participants but also promotes

critical thinking. 'shared learning gives students an opportunity to engage in discussion, take responsibility for their learning and thus become critical thinkers' (Totten, Sills, Digby and Ross, 1991). It was also used in assessment during which students interacted in order to help each other improve the first draft through peer revision and the provision of feedback.

As stated above the experiment consisted of twelve lessons, including the following aspects:

1. **Preparation**: In this stage, the teacher provides a situation in order to prepare the students for the writing task such as a descriptive or an argumentative paragraph. This activates the students' schemata and get them involved in the chosen task**.** In this phase, the teacher can prepare activities related to the genre as building vocabulary lists or practising a grammatical structure.

2. **Modelling and reinforcing**: In this stage, a model is presented to the students whose role is to find out the purpose of the text and the audience it is intended for. Then, they try to identify the different parts of that text and how it is structured. This is called deconstruction of the text. According to Hyland (2003, p.139) 'The model offers both teachers and students clear pathways in learning to write. It gives clear goals and a sense of how language, content, genre and process are connected and relate to their work in the writing class. During the modelling and deconstruction stage, the teacher's role is directive as he or she presents examples, identifies the stages of the text and introduces activities to practice salient language features (ibid, p.138)

3. **Planning**: In this step, the teacher provides the students with activities about the topic. This can be done through discussion, reading other texts of the same genre.

4. **Joint construction**: In this stage, the teacher and students engage in the joint construction of a new text of the same genre. They work with the teacher and their peers following the process of writing which includes brainstorming, drafting, revising and editing. This paragraph provides a model for the students to rely on in the next step.

5. **Independent construction**: In this step, students write a paragraph on their own on a topic either given by the teacher or suggested by them. This should be done in the classroom so that they will have the opportunity to receive feedback from their peers or the teacher who acts as a monitor, advisor and assistant. It is in this stage that the teacher has the ability to assess students' learning (formative assessment as seen in the third chapter)

6. **Revision**: In this final stage, the students revise their drafts after having received feedback from either the teacher or their peers.

To become competent writers, students need to acquire discourse knowledge about the different purposes and forms of writing as well as knowledge about the topics. An evidence-based practice for acquiring knowledge about specific types of writing is to provide students with examples or models of specific writing.

5.2. The Treatment

The experiment consisted of applying the process genre approach. For this purpose, writing genres were to be used in addition to making students follow the writing process which aimed to provide them with strategies used by expert writers. This would increase their knowledge about the writing procedure and develop their cognitive abilities.

A genre is a style of text of written language where each piece has a purpose and an audience (what is the writing for and who is it written for). The key to the concept of genre is the purpose the piece of writing serves. The treatment consisted of eighteen lessons following the aspects mentioned in diagram as shown below:
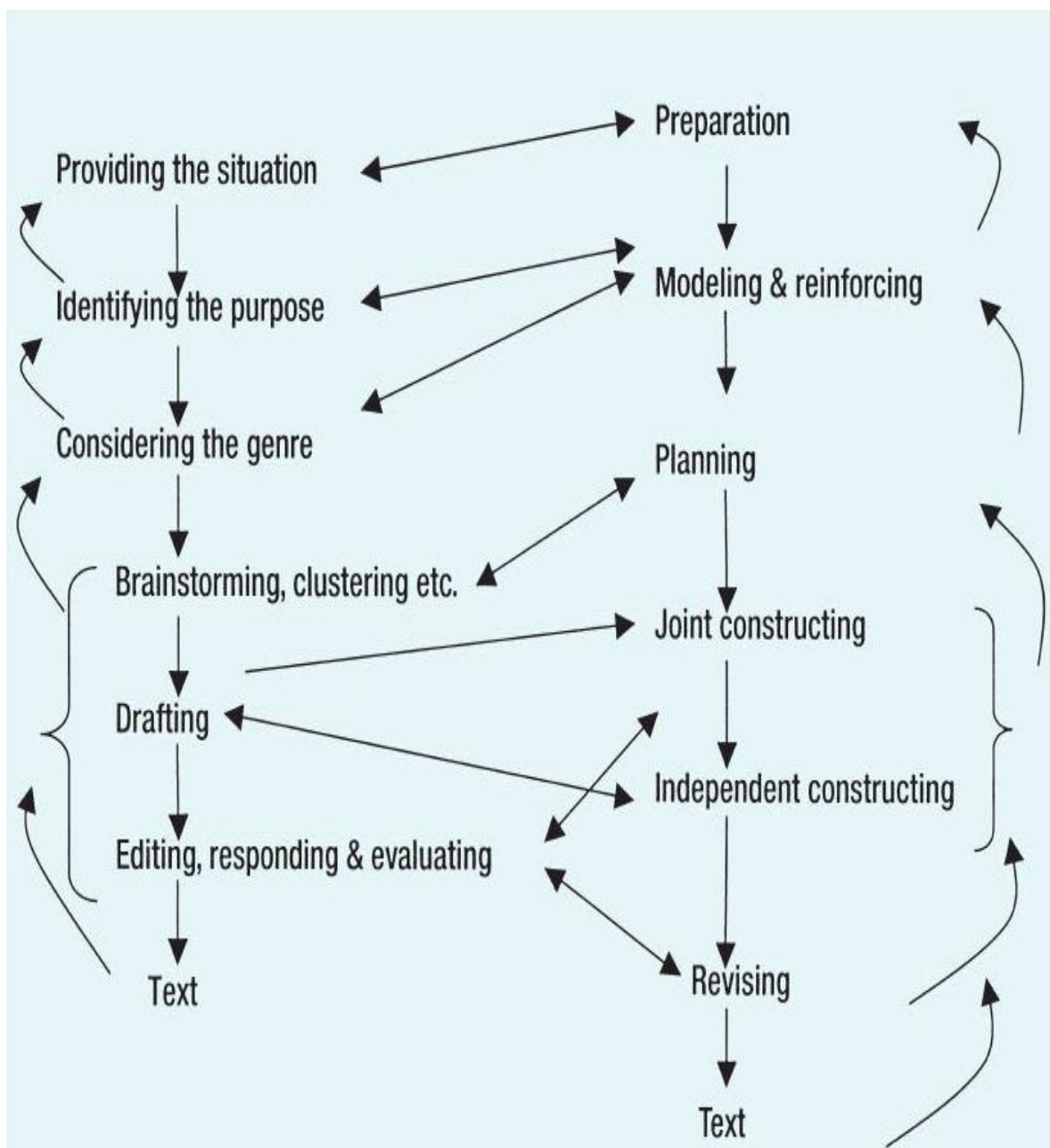

FIGURE 1: APPLICATION OF THE PROCESS GENRE APPROACH

Figure 1: Application of the Process Genre Approach

6. QUANTITATIVE EVALUATION OF THE RESULTS

6.1. Comparative Evaluation between Experimental and Control Groups

6.1.1. Comparative Evaluation between Experimental and Control Groups in Fluency

N	Control Group			N	Experimental Group		
	Tests	*Means*	*Std Deviation*		*Tests*	*Means*	*Std Deviations*
	Pre-test	12.56	2.69		Pre-test	12,17	3.27
40	Post-test	13.17	3.13	40	Post-test	17,81	2.89
	difference	0.61	0.44		difference	5,64	-0.38

Table 3: Comparative Evaluation between Experimental Group and Control Groups in Fluency
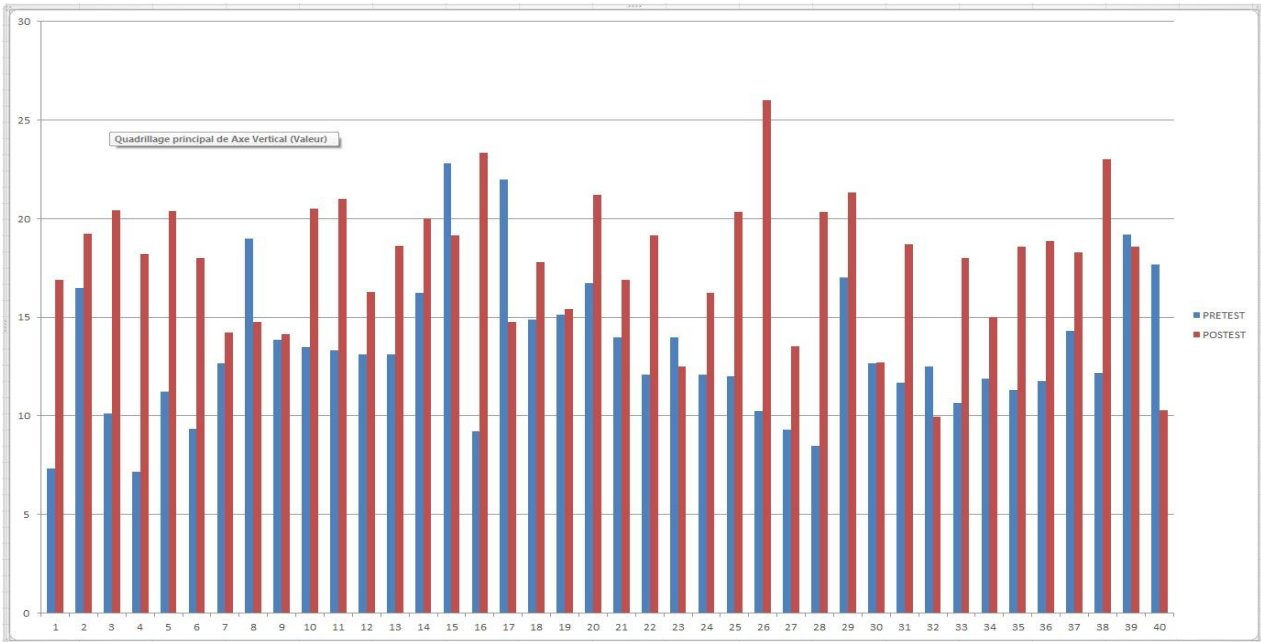

Figure 2: Comparative Evaluation of the Control and Experimental Groups in Fluency

As we can notice in table 3 above, the control and experimental groups achieved nearly the same means in fluency, 12.56 and 12.17 respectively. The means of the pretest indicate clearly that their performance in this area is approximately the same since their educational background is similar. However, after the exposition of the control group to the product approach and the experimental group to the progress genre approach, the former recorded a slight increase in the means score while the latter increased significantly form 12.17 to 17.81, a difference of 5.64 if compared to 0.61 of the control group as it is shown in table 6.82 and 4.64 between the two groups. This confirms clearly the effects of the process genre approach on the informants' writing development in this area.

.

6.1.2. Comparative Evaluation between Experimental and Control Groups in Accuracy

N	Control Group			N	Experimental Group		
	tests	mean	Std deviation		Tests	Mean	Std Deviation
	Pre-test	1.97	0.97		Pre-test	1,71	0,46
40	Post-test	1.82	0.57	40	Post-test	1,07	0,25
	difference	0.15	0.4		difference	0,64	0,21

Table 4: Comparative Evaluation between Experimental and Control Groups in Accuracy

Concerning the second variable in this evaluation, the pretest means of accuracy for the two groups, as it appears in table 4 above, are nearly the same as the former obtained 1.97 and the latter 1.71. According to these scores both groups have difficulties in producing paragraphs or more precisely T-units free from errors. The high occurrence of errors reveal the informants' low level in terms of accuracy. But after exposing them to two different approaches as stated above, we notice that the number of errors in the control group decreased of a value of 0.15 whereas those of the experimental group decreased of a value of 0.64 which is greater than that of the former with a difference of **0.75**. This proves that students exposed to the process genre approach performed better than those exposed to the product approach though even the experimental group informants need to do better to attain an adequate level in this area
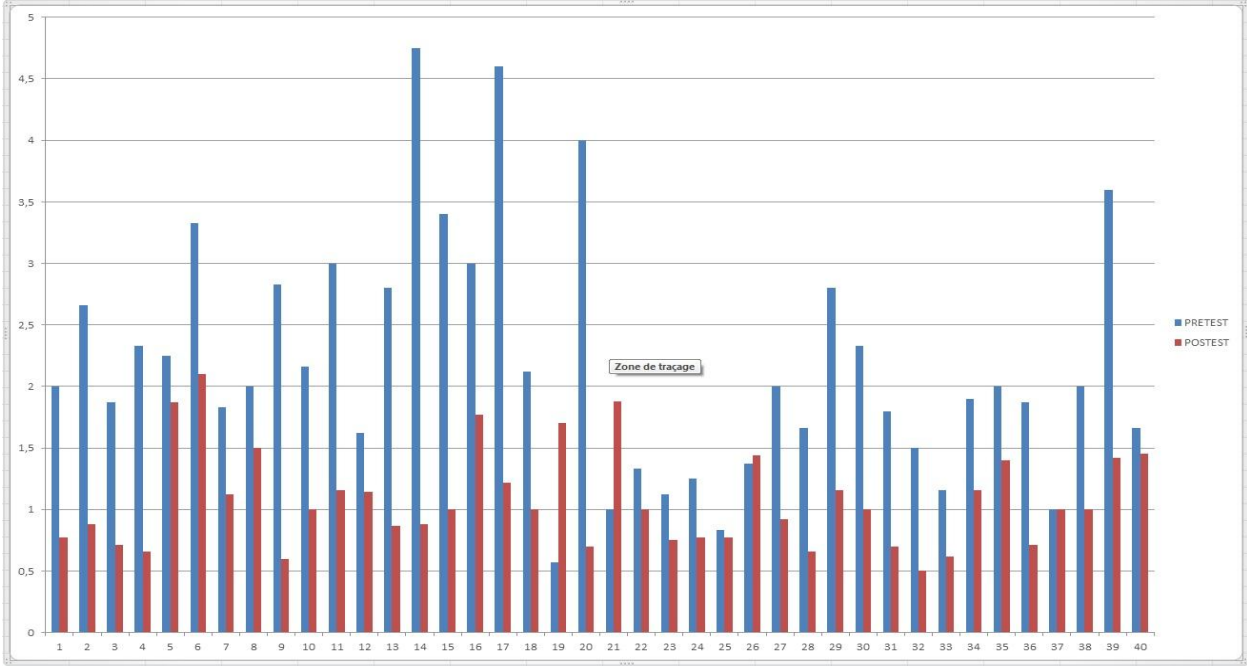

Figure 3: Comparative evaluation between Experimental and Control Groups in Accuracy

6.1.3.Comparative evaluation between Experimental and Control Groups in Grammatical Complexity

	Control Group				*Experimental Group*		
N	*Test*	*Mean*	*SD*	*N*	*Test*	*Mean*	*S/deviation*
	Pre-test	1.56	0.45		Pre-test	1,58	0,34
40	Post-test	1.64	0.36	40	Post-test	1,83	0,38
	Difference	0.08	-0.09		Difference	0,25	0,04

Table 5: Comparative evaluation between Experimental and Control Groups in Grammatical Complexity

In this area, too, pretest means for the two groups are similar. But, when we compare the posttest means, we find that the experimental group outperformed the control group in grammatical complexity, as it is shown in table 5 above as the former recorded a difference of 0.25 in means sores between the two tests while the latter's performance remained the same with a difference of just 0.08. The two groups performance can be seen clearly in figure 6.19 However, even the experiment group needs to progress more in this area because the informants have to use more complex sentences in their writings. This can be done through the introduction of activities which can help them to improve in this area.
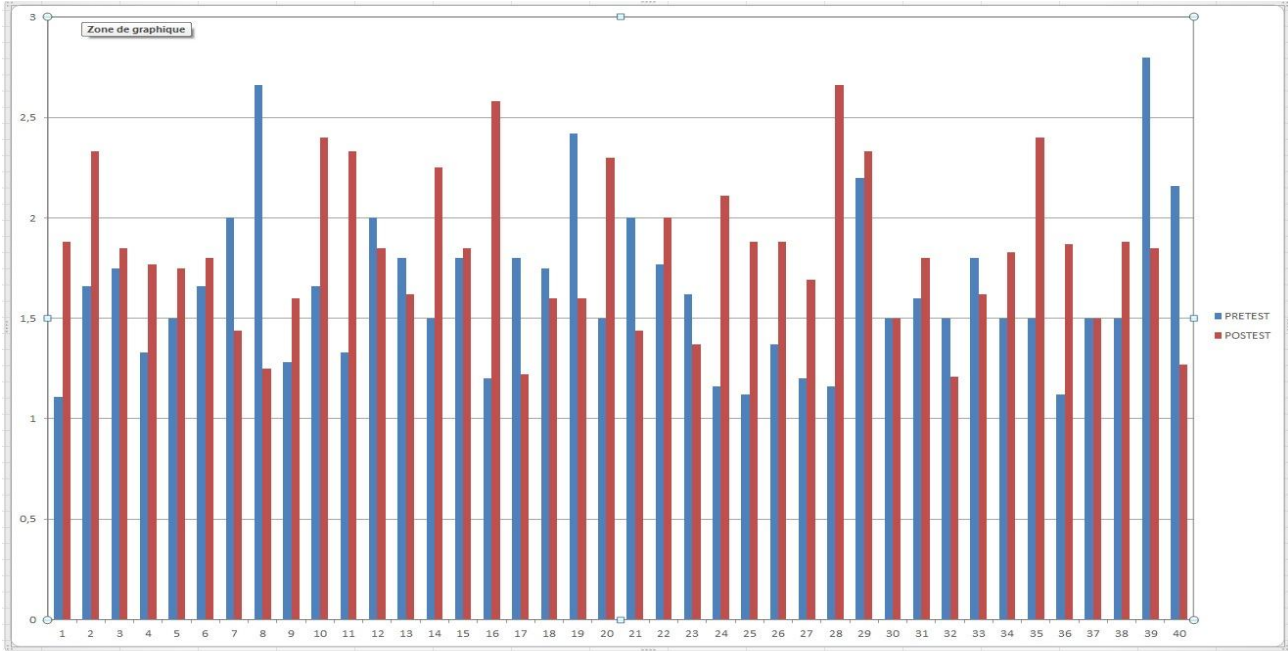

Figure 4: Comparative evaluation between Experimental and Control Groups in Grammatical Complexity

6.1.2.Comparative evaluation between Experimental and Control Groups in Lexical Complexity

	Control Group				Experimental Group		
N	*Test*	*Mean*	*S/deviation*	*N*	*Test*	*Mean*	*S/deviation*
	Pre-test	5.41	1.25		Pre-test	5,40	1.36
40	Post-test	5.79	1.26	40	Post-test	6,95	1,29
	difference	0.38	0.01		difference	1,55	- 0,83

Table 6: Comparative evaluation between Experimental and Control Groups in Lexical Complexity
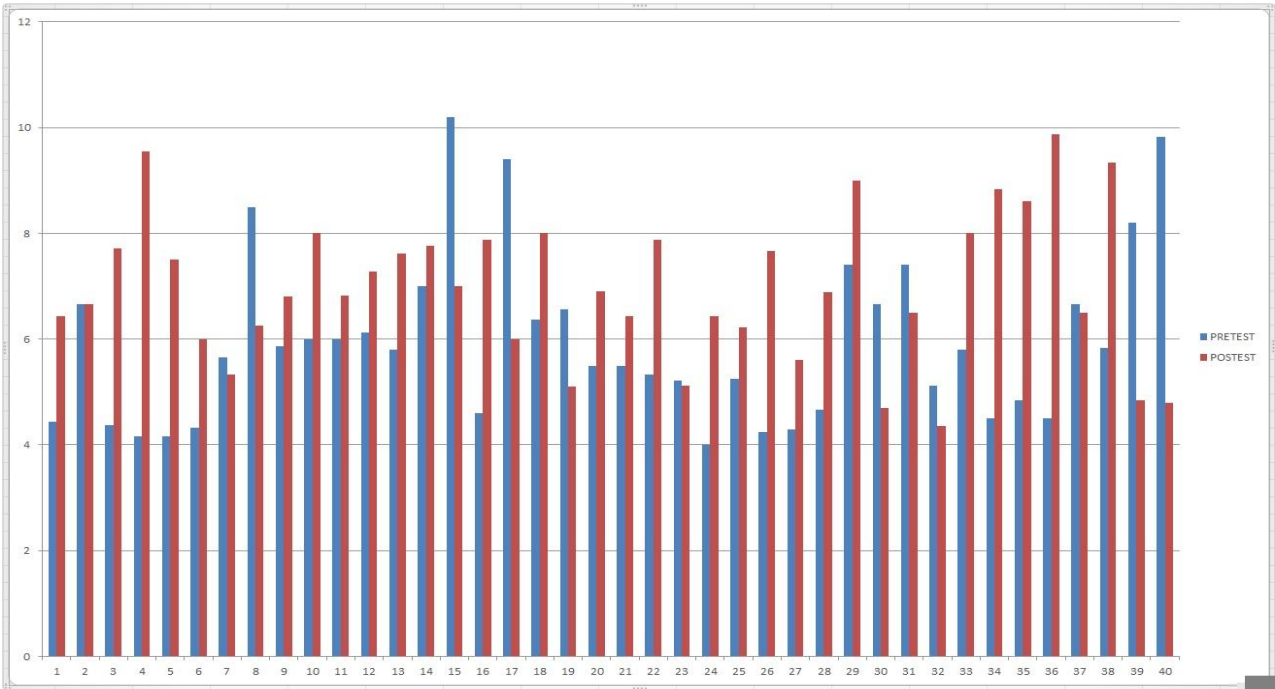

Figure 5: Comparative evaluation between Experimental and Control Groups in lexical Complexity

Referring to table 5 above, it is apparent that both groups have the same pretest means in terms of lexical complexity. Therefore, this can help us to compare them after the experiment to prove its efficiency or its failure. The experimental group results show that participants increased their means in lexical complexity from 5.40 to 6.95, the difference (1.55) is significant as a result in this area. However, the control group results remained the same. The difference in means scores between the posttest experimental group and that of the control group is **1.17**

The significant increase in the experimental group's results in fluency, accuracy, grammatical complexity and lexical complexity confirms by and large the assumptions of this research. The positive impact of the hypotheses prove the efficiency of the process genre approach, a socio-cognitive approach appropriate to be used under the competency-based approach and also in the LMD systemto help students develop their writing proficiency.

Qualitative results realized through two interviews show to a great extent the success achieved in this research as, on the one hand, the participants expressed their satisfaction with the instruction they received. All of them revealed that they gained knowledge about different types of texts and developed awareness about the way a paragraph is organized and the necessity of writing more than one draft in a process during which they received feed back and interacted positively to improve their writing. This allowed them to develop not only their writing strategies, but also linguistic ones in terms of fluency, accuracy, grammatical complexity and lexical complexity. However, they complain that they still need to be more accurate as they are still making errors and that their writings still lack complexity as they tend to write simple sentences not rich enough in terms of vocabulary.

On the other hand, the writing teacher confirmed the effectiveness of the process genre approach in that students' paragraphs developed if compared to those produced before the treatment. In addition to this she found that a change towards a methodology suitable to the reform at the university is required because what is needed is to promote collaborative learning and prepare autonomous learners able to express themselves through writing either in a formal or an informal situation. However, we should admit that in spite of the positive results recorded in this study, learners still need teachers' commitment to overcome their problems.

7. Results

Both the quantitative and qualitative results drawn from this study, as described and discussed in this chapter, confirm to some extent the effectiveness of having implemented the Process-Genre Approach to writing instruction to first year students in our department. In fact, this approach enhanced students writing in terms of fluency, accuracy, grammatical complexity and lexical complexity as proved by descriptive and inferential statistics used to test the hypotheses predicted in this study. On the one hand, the Genre Approach has the potential and good influence to develop students' English competencies by understanding different genres through direct and explicit techniques. The good influence can be identified in the enhancement of their participation in speaking and writing in joint construction and then in individual construction.

On the other hand, the Process Approach enhanced learners' critical thinking through the different stages of the writing process during which students gained much self-confidence and developed different writing strategies enabling them to be effective problem solvers in future life. Thus, the combination of the process and genre approaches offers the learner the opportunity to develop not only his linguistic competencies, but also his critical thinking through meaningful activities such as meaningful reading, questioning, classroom discussion, and written assignments, including revision and feedback. All of these are considered as powerful vehicles in promoting critical thinking, necessary for the development of an intellectual being. However, the implementation of such an integrated approach requires some preparation, not only in designing

classroom activities that meet the students' needs, but also in creating a democratic atmosphere facilitating their engagement in learning by doing as advocated by the CBA and thus enabling them to gain competencies.

8. Conclusion

After a deep examination of the evolution of the approaches used in teaching writing, we came to the conclusion that the process genre approach is the one which complies with the principles of both the competency-based approach and the LMD system because on the one hand they are cognitive, problem solving and social constructivist in that they encourage the students to construct new knowledge through social interaction. On the other hand, the process genre approach, a combination of two approaches: the process approach and the genre approach, encourage students to improve their cognitive skills as they are involved in such higher skills as analysis, synthesis and evaluation of their pieces of writing or those of their peers in the process of writing. These skills are vital for problem solving and decision making. In addition to communication with the teacher and their peers, students deepen their knowledge and understanding of the subject matter and also of the different genres of writing needed in everyday life. All of this will lead them to success when being able to take responsibility for managing their own life, situating their lives in much broader social contexts and act autonomously.

References

- **Grabe, W & Kaplan, R.B**. (1997). Theory and practice of writing. (pp.1-30). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- **Hyland, K**. (2003). Genre-based pedagogies: A social response to process. Journal of Second Language Writing, 12:17-29.

- **Hyland, K**. (2004). Second language writing. In Jack C. Richards Cambridge Language Education Series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- **Totten, S., Sill, T, Digby, A & Ross, P**. (1991). Cooperative learning: A guide to research. New York: Garland.

- **Weigle, S. C**. (2002). Assessing writing. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.