

# Impact of Genre-Based Instruction on Development of Students' Letter Writing Skills: The Case of Students of Textile Engineering

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## Abstract

The current study investigated the effectiveness of genre-based instruction on the development of EFL learners' writing skills. Participants were 34 undergraduate students majoring in textile engineering at an Iranian state university, and they had enrolled in the English for specific academic purposes course. Participants were taught how to write 4 types of business letters, highlighting the presentation of appropriate moves and lexicogrammatical features. Furthermore, a letter writing attitude questionnaire was administered to the participants at the end of the semester. Participants' abilities in writing letters were measured across the 4 letter writing tasks. Results revealed that those who had been exposed to the genre-based instruction made great improvement in different aspects of writing letters such as content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Correspondingly, raising the participants' awareness of the genre-based features of the letters contributed to their positive attitudes and production of high-quality texts.

**Keywords:** English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP); Genre-Based Instruction; Letter Writing Skills; Textile Engineering Students

## 1. Introduction

As in many countries, teaching English for specific purposes (ESP) has a marginal status in Iranian tertiary education. In the first year of their undergraduate studies, students of various disciplines such as humanities, architecture, engineering, and sciences have to take three credit hours of ESP which uses a text-centered approach and can be described as exam-oriented (Mazdayasna & Tahririan, 2008). As it has been echoed in the literature, ESP courses are not designed and/or implemented consistently in terms of syllabus, materials, methodology, language proficiency, and particularly the type of teacher (Atai, 2000; Mazdayasna & Tahririan, 2008; Robinson, 1991). These classes are conducted by EFL teachers or content specialists.

In the second year of their undergraduate studies, Iranian students have to take a two-credit hour English for specific academic purpose (ESAP) course which

is usually conducted by subject specific teachers. The methodology used in most of these classes is the grammar translation method which is limited to learning technical vocabulary and translating texts. The reading selections are loaded with technical and highly specialized words without providing the learners with opportunities to use this specialized vocabulary in innovative activities or providing the learners with an opportunity to recycle the words. Cotexts and such devices as graphs, diagrams, and semantic maps are not included in many of the ESAP textbooks. In spite of the fact that ESAP courses constitute an essential part of the Iranian university curriculum, the teachers have generally designed the programs based on their intuitions and without conducting needs analysis (Atai & Shoja, 2011).

An overwhelming number of L2 teachers admit that teaching writing skills, especially to nonnative students, is more difficult in comparison to teaching other language skills. Writing is a complex skill comprising language, feeling, personal experience, and the communication of personal thoughts. In college composition classes, both for native and nonnative students, those who teach freshman composition courses have always observed signs of frustration and discontent among students who have trouble communicating their thoughts and ideas on paper. Writing in a foreign language creates stress and tension (Spratt & Leung, 2000).

In recent years, there has been considerable interest in the genre-based approach to the teaching of English. One of the main concerns of this approach is to make explicit to teachers and students knowledge about how the type of text or genre will vary according to purpose, topic, audience, and channel of communication (Henry & Roseberry, 1998; Marshal, 1991). Martin (1999) defines genre as “a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture” (p. 25). Most importantly, the main goal of genre analysis is to identify the moves and strategies of a genre along with the key linguistic features (Henry & Roseberry, 2001). Swales (1990) defines “move” as “part of a text whose purpose is to fulfill the overall purpose of a genre” (p. 43). In other words, “a move can be thought of a part of a text written or spoken, which achieves a particular purpose within the text. The move contributes in some way to fulfilling the overall purpose of the genre” (Henry & Roseberry, 2001, p. 154). In this approach, in addition to learning different moves of the text, the learners try to learn the type of language used in each move. Henry and Roseberry (2001) assert that, “in order to teach effectively, L2 teachers need to know which linguistic features are associated for each strategy in a particular move of a particular genre” (p. 155). Henry and Roseberry (1998) conducted an experimental study in using short tourist information texts in English. The genre group performed better than the nongenre group, and the results showed that knowledge of the typical structure of the content

made it easier for the learners to arrange their ideas in terms of both achieving their communicative goals and producing more well-organized writing.

Bhatia (1993) studied the move structure of job application letters to confirm that writers tend to use similar patterns of move structure. It would be possible to distinguish other universal subgenres within the genre of business letters such as requesting information, offering prices, placing orders, promoting sales, and so on which can be easily classified (Miller, 1984). Jalilifar and Beitsayyah (2011) conducted a genre analysis on enquiry letters across English and Persian. The results revealed that, with a few exceptions in some substeps, the two corpora were relatively similar in the exchange of information, though they differed considerably in the use of positive and negative politeness strategies and in applying different forms of directives.

The increasing number of nonnative graduate students in different fields of study demands the need for a shift of focus from grammatical to the communicative properties of the language. The difficulties students encounter mostly in ESAP courses are not totally related to their defective knowledge of the system of English, but from their unfamiliarity with the use of language and conventions of each specific genre. Even those who have good command of grammar rules and lexicon may fail to communicate appropriately and effectively in particular social interactions. Atkinson (1990) believes that considering conventionalized properties of written language is important for a better understanding of the writing process. Thus, a genre-based approach to L2 writing emphasizes the central role of discourse and properties of written language in different contexts of use.

The contributions of the genre-based approach to writing have been proved in many studies in different contexts. However, to date, few research studies have been conducted to examine the impact of genre-based instruction on the development of Iranian ESAP learners' letter writing skills. Based on the assessment of the students' necessities, lacks, and wants, the current study attempted to seek the impact of this approach on five aspects of content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Most importantly, the attitudes and beliefs of the students were explored by distributing a questionnaire at the end of the semester. Hence, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the genre-based instruction help the students to improve their letter writing skills?
2. Which aspects of letter writing skills (i.e., content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics) can be improved more effectively through the genre-based instruction?

3. What are the attitudes and beliefs of the students regarding a genre-based approach?
4. Is there any relationship between the students' performances on the five aspects of letter writing and their attitudes towards their improvement in these aspects?

## **2. Method and Materials**

The participants were 34 undergraduate university students majoring in textile engineering. They were a cluster of 27 females and seven male students with an age range of 20-25 years. They had enrolled in the corresponding ESAP course in the fall semester of 2014-2015 and were in their third semester at Yazd University.

The following instruments were utilized in this study:

- Four different tasks for assessing the students' performances
- A letter writing attitude questionnaire

During the semester, the participants had to write four different types of letters (i.e., inquiry, reply, order, and job application) in order to assess/evaluate their performances. They were given the following writing prompts along with appropriate explanations as mentioned in the following section:

- ✓ Imagine that you are writing to a manufacturer who would supply you with a wide range of sweaters. Give brief information about your business activity and size of your business and then state where, how, and when you learnt about the addressee. You can even politely suggest your terms of payment and quantity discount and state if your terms were met, you would be more likely to place an order. You should request for the latest catalogue and price list and ask the addressee to provide enough information about the products.
- ✓ Write a reply to an inquiry letter about a special product. Thank the writer for his enquiry. Let the enquirer know whether you have the product or can provide the service he is asking about. If you do not have what the enquirer has asked for, suggest an alternative or refer him to another company which can help him. Encourage your prospective customer to do business with you. Remember to enclose the current catalogue and price lists if your enquirer asked for. It would be a good idea to encourage further enquiries.
- ✓ Write a letter placing an order to a company. Confirm the agreed discount and the terms of payment. Discuss about the date and method



of delivery. It is a good idea to advise the company on how you want the goods packed and sent.

- ✓ You have read an advertisement in a newspaper for a job position relevant to your field of study and interest. Write a letter stating your qualifications and applying for the position. You try to convince the addressee that you are a good candidate to take the job. You can explain about your previous experience if you had and why you left the job. At the end of the letter, offer the addressee to supply more information if necessary.

Most importantly, an attitude questionnaire was designed by the researchers to explore the opinions of the participants regarding their letter writing course. In the process of designing the abovementioned questionnaire, the writing attitude questionnaire by Elashri and Ibrahim (2013) was utilized to develop some questions in the study. The questionnaire had four sections and consisted of 24 items. The first session which consisted of six items (items 1-6) explored the opinions of the participants concerning their specialized writing course at the beginning of the course. The second section which consisted of five items (items 7-11) explored the opinions of the participants concerning the content and methodology of the current ESAP course. The third section which consisted of five items (items 12-16) explored the opinions of the participants with respect to their improvement in the five aspects of content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Finally, the last section which consisted of eight items (items 17-24) explored the opinions of the participants concerning their letter writing skills at the end of the semester. They were required to express their opinions about each statement by marking the options on a five-point Likert scale as follows: 5 (*Strongly Agree*), 4 (*Agree*), 3 (*Not Sure*), 2 (*Disagree*), and 1 (*Strongly Disagree*).

Once the first draft of the questionnaire was prepared, a pilot study was performed on five students in order to elicit information concerning the content of the items and their clarity. After revising the questionnaire based on the pilot study and deleting four additional items, the final version of the questionnaire was translated into Persian and administered to the participants.

As mentioned earlier, the aim of the current study was to create a learning-centered environment with the goal of developing the participants' letter writing skills. The content instructor along with the researchers discussed some issues related to the needs, wants, and lacks of the participants (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Based on the textile engineering students' immediate and delayed need to increase their knowledge of writing business letters, the specialized course was designed to fulfill their needs. In order to teach business letters in English, a genre-based instructional (GBI) approach was adopted and, subsequently, relevant

materials were selected and designed by the researchers. The materials used in the past by the subject-specific specialist were outdated and not prepared based on the GBI principles. According to Foz-Gil and Gonzalez-Pueyo (2009), much of the materials in the GBI approach to teaching L2 writing includes some structural moves such as referring to the source of information, establishing credentials, soliciting action, and polite ending that bring together the generic and linguistic features practiced in the unit.

Correspondingly, the first researcher prepared the following instructional materials for the current study: PowerPoint slides, sample letters, and pamphlets on grammar. Most importantly, the PowerPoint slides were prepared highlighting the number of moves which the participants had to bear in mind while writing a letter (see Appendix). In the slides, each move was described along with its function so that the participants could comprehend the role of that particular move in question. Next, some examples for each move were provided in the form of a sentence or phrase along with the relevant expressions for each move. These illustrations could facilitate the participants' writing process. The materials included in these slides were obtained from the book entitled *Oxford Handbook of Commercial Correspondence* (Ashley, 2003). Five different PowerPoint slides were prepared which are as follows:

1. Introducing the main parts of a letter (heading, date, salutation, etc.)
2. Letter of inquiry
3. Reply to inquiry
4. Order letter
5. Job application letter

The abovementioned slides were utilized to make the participants familiar and impart instruction concerning the different types of business letters. As an illustration, the fourth slide which was about order letter comprised some obligatory and optional moves, namely opening, confirming the terms of payment, confirming the agreed discount, confirming the dates and methods of delivery, as well as packing. In addition, one pamphlet including a number of model letters and another highlighting common grammatical structures were distributed to the participants.

The required data were collected over the fall semester of 2014-2015. All the participants received instruction from the EFL teacher (the first researcher of this study). Throughout one semester, the participants were given instruction on the four types of letters as well as the different parts of a letter, namely heading, date line, inside address, salutation, and so on. The methodology used in the class for each

type of letter consisted of certain phases which were designed in light of Bhatia's (1993) model of generic competence.

At the beginning of each session, the participants were presented with sample letters written by native speakers. They were instructed how to read and understand the letters. Next, they were shown an additional authentic letter. The instructor provided explanations concerning each move, its communicative functions, and the lexicogrammatical aspects utilized in the letter with the help of a video projector. In addition, the instructor along with the participants discussed the relevant moves, their communicative purposes, specific vocabulary, and the linguistic features associated with the moves of each type of letter. Furthermore, the participants were provided with another authentic letter and were asked to identify its corresponding moves. In addition to these in-class activities, each participant was asked to write one letter at home, taking into consideration the appropriate moves, vocabulary, along with correct grammatical sentences and submit the letter to the teacher in the next session in order to receive feedback from the teacher. The writing tasks were delivered to the participants in the next session, containing feedback on how to develop a letter and how to use correct grammatical structures in conjunction with appropriate moves.

The participants' writing tasks were scored via Jacobs et. al.'s (1981) scoring system. This analytical scale divided the participants' writing skills into five sections: content, organization (performing genre moves), vocabulary, language use, and mechanics, along with some criteria to score them. Thirty points were assigned for content, 20 for organization, 20 for vocabulary, 25 for language use, and 5 points for mechanics, resulting in a maximum possible score of 100 for each letter.

Two raters, the first and the second researchers of this study, discussed the scoring profile and scored 15 writing tasks in order to have a consistency method of scoring. Next, each rater scored all of the letters independently. The average of the total scores and the average of each aspect of the participants' writing skills (i.e., content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics) assigned to each letter was the final index for all the writing tasks. All the participants' writing performances across the four tasks were scored by two raters in order to apply interrater reliability. The results of the interitem correlation between the two raters indicated a high degree of consistency between the two raters, ranging from .91 to .99 on the four tasks. Moreover, one-way repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to measure the efficacy of the genre-based instruction on the development of the participants' letter writing abilities. Furthermore, repeated measure ANOVA was computed in order to examine the participants' development on the five aspects of writing tasks across the four letter writing performances.

The information from the questionnaire was transferred to SPSS in order to conduct further analysis. The reliability of the attitude questionnaire was also confirmed by Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The Cronbach's alpha value (.88) indicated a high degree of internal consistency, that is, reliability. In order to investigate whether there was any significant relationship between the participants' performances on the five aspects of writing skills and their attitudes towards their development on these aspects of writing skills, Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted.

### 3. Results

The first research question investigated the impact of the genre-based instruction on the development of the participants' letter writing skills across the four tasks. One-way repeated measures ANOVA was conducted. As Table 1 illustrates, the lowest mean score (36.86) was for the first task, and the highest mean score (76.98) was for the fourth task.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics of Participants' Performances Across the Four Tasks*

Tasks	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Task 1	36.868	15.496	34
Task 2	61.515	11.272	34
Task 3	70.588	8.694	34
Task 4	76.985	17.373	34

Likewise, Table 2 shows that there was a statistically significant effect for time, and Wilks' Lambda = .147,  $F(3, 31) = 59.981$ ,  $p = .000$ , multivariate eta squared = .853 indicated a large effect size. The results revealed that the genre-based instruction could significantly improve the participants' letter writing abilities:

Table 2. *Multivariate Tests*

Effect	Value	<i>F</i>	Hypothesis <i>df</i>	Error <i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	Partial Eta Squared
Wilks' Lambda	.147	59.981	3.000	31.000	.000	.853

In order to answer the second research question, one-way repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to measure the participants' development on the five aspects of writing skills. The descriptive data in Table 3 reveals that the participants' mean scores increased across the four writing tasks. The results of the multivariate tests (see Table 4) revealed that the participants' performances on the five aspects of content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics significantly improved through the genre-based instruction ( $p = .000$ ). The qualitative analysis of the participants' writing tasks and the results of partial eta

squared indicated that the participants improved their writing performances with respect to vocabulary, organization, and content:

Table 3. *Mean Scores on Five Aspects of Writing Skills Across Four Tasks*

Mean	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4
Content	11.515	19.353	21.750	25.677
Organization	8.279	14.353	16.029	17.368
Vocabulary	7.735	11.544	14.294	15.824
Language use	7.485	14.000	15.956	15.765
Mechanics	1.853	2.265	2.559	2.353

Table 4. *Multivariate Tests*

Items	Effect	Value	<i>F</i>	Hypothesis <i>df</i>	Error <i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	Partial Eta Squared
Content	Time	.245	31.895	3.000	31.000	.000	.755
Organization	Time	.207	39.569	3.000	31.000	.000	.793
Vocabulary	Time	.136	65.518	3.000	31.000	.000	.864
Language Use	Time	.309	23.155	3.000	31.000	.000	.691
Mechanics	Time	.493	10.635	3.000	31.000	.000	.507

In order to answer the third research question, an attitude questionnaire, including 24 items, was distributed to the participants to explore their opinions concerning the course. Table 5 presents the percentage frequencies for each item. In order to facilitate the interpretation of the nominal categories, *Strongly Agree* and *Agree* were reduced to *Positive Responses* and *Strongly Disagree*, as well as *Disagree* was reduced to *Negative Responses*.

Questions 1-6 elicited the participants' opinions regarding letter writing at the beginning of the semester. Their responses to Q1 revealed that a substantial number of the participants (67.7%) disliked writing business letters at the beginning of the semester and only 5.9% responded positively. A considerable number of the participants (64.7%) reported that they felt nervous whenever their instructor asked them to write a letter; 29.4% of them were not sure to answer this question and only 5.9% reported that they did not feel nervous. A solid majority of the participants (82.4%) reported that they were not provided with any kind of instruction concerning writing skills (cf. item 3) in their previous ESP class. Correspondingly, 88.3% of the participants reported that they never had any form of writing practice

in their previous ESP class (cf. item 4). Moreover, a good majority of the participants (82.5%) responded that their minds went blank whenever they began writing (cf. item 5). An overwhelming number of the participants (70.5%) felt that writing is a skill which is difficult to learn (cf. item 6). To sum up, the participants' attitudes towards their letter writing tasks were not positive at the beginning of the course.

Table 5. *Results of Responses Pertaining to Letter Writing at the Beginning of Semester*

Questions/Items		<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Not Sure</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	Total
Q1. I hate letter writing.	Frequency	0	2	9	12	11	34
	Percent	0.0	5.9	26.5	35.3	32.4	100.0
Q2. I feel nervous when teacher asked me to write a letter.	Frequency	0	2	10	16	6	34
	Percent	0.0	5.9	29.4	47.1	17.6	100.0
Q3. I never had any form of instruction on writing in my previous ESP class.	Frequency	1	2	3	11	17	34
	Percent	2.9	5.9	8.8	32.4	50.0	100.0
Q4. I never had any form of writing practice in my previous ESP class.	Frequency	1	2	1	11	19	34
	Percent	2.9	5.9	2.9	32.4	55.9	100.0
Q5. My mind seems to go blank whenever I begin writing.	Frequency	0	4	2	20	8	34
	Percent	0.0	11.8	5.9	58.8	23.5	100.0
Q6. Writing is a difficult skill for me to learn.	Frequency	0	2	8	18	6	34
	Percent	0.0	5.9	23.5	52.9	17.6	100.0

The next five items on the questionnaire (cf. items 7-11) explored the participants' attitudes towards the genre-based approach utilized to teach business letters in the current ESAP course (see Table 6).

Table 6. *Results of Responses Pertaining to Genre-Based Instruction*

Questions/Items		<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Not Sure</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	Total
7. The class activities such as model-texts and slides which were provided by the instructor were useful.	Frequency	2	3	6	15	8	34
	Percent	5.9	8.8	17.6	44.1	23.5	100.0
8. The teaching method of having students analyse sample letters in class, and then, asking the students to write letters proved fruitful.	Frequency	2	4	5	17	6	34
	Percent	5.9	11.8	14.7	50.0	17.6	100.0
9. Highlighting the moves and steps for each letter with the help of slides facilitated the task of writing letters.	Frequency	1	1	5	21	6	34
	Percent	2.9	2.9	14.7	61.8	17.6	100.0
10. I can write letters because I can recall the moves of each type of letter.	Frequency	3	3	8	14	6	34
	Percent	8.8	8.8	23.5	41.2	17.6	100.0
11. I have benefitted by writing a letter as homework every week.	Frequency	1	4	9	15	5	34
	Percent	2.9	11.8	26.5	44.1	14.7	100.0

A considerable number of the participants (67.6%) responded positively concerning the class activities such as model-texts and slides which were utilized to raise their awareness of different genre moves (cf. item 7). A good majority of the participants (67.6%) agreed that the teaching method of having them analyse sample letters in class, and then, asking them to write letters proved fruitful (cf. item 8). Similarly, a solid majority of the participants (79.4%) admitted that highlighting the moves and steps for writing each type of letter facilitated the task of writing the letters (cf. item 9). In addition, a considerable number of the participants (58.8%) responded positively that they could write letters because they were able to recall the specific moves pertaining to the letter in question (cf. item 10). Likewise, more than half of the participants (58.8%) believed that they benefited by writing one letter as homework every week (cf. item 11).

Items 12-16 on the questionnaire explored the participants' attitudes and beliefs concerning their improvement in the five aspects of content, vocabulary, organization, language use, and mechanics (see Table 7). An overwhelming number of the participants provided positive responses concerning their knowledge about the content and structure of the letter, using appropriate vocabulary, and organization (85.3%, 76.4%, 70.6%, respectively; cf. items 12-14). They were successful in producing high-quality letters. Nearly, half of the participants (44.1%) admitted that their knowledge about grammar and mechanics improved (cf. items 15-16):

Table 7. *Results of Responses Pertaining to Improvement on Five Aspects of Writing Skills*

Questions/Items		<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Not Sure</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	Total
12. I think my knowledge about the content and structure of each type of letter has been improved.	<i>F</i>	0	1	4	18	11	34
	%	0.0	2.9	11.8	52.9	32.4	100.0
13. I can use appropriate words in my letter writing	<i>F</i>	0	2	6	23	3	34
	%	0.0	5.9	17.6	67.6	8.8	100.0
14. I can organize the content of the letter efficiently.	<i>F</i>	0	2	8	19	5	34
	%	0.0	5.9	23.5	55.9	14.7	100.0
15. I can use correct grammatical structures while writing letters after receiving instruction on grammar.	<i>F</i>	0	8	11	13	2	34
	%	0.0	23.5	32.4	38.2	5.9	100.0
16. I think my knowledge about mechanics has been improved during the semester.	<i>F</i>	1	11	7	14	1	34
	%	2.9	32.4	20.6	41.2	2.9	100.0

Items 17-24 elicited the participants' opinions regarding the genre-based instruction at the end of the course. Table 8 displays the analysis of their responses on the questionnaire:

Table 8. *Results of Responses Pertaining to Genre-Based Instruction at the End of Semester*

Questions/Items		<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Not Sure</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	Total
17. I think I like writing letters after receiving genre-based instruction.	<i>F</i>	3	1	9	16	5	34
	%	8.8	2.9	26.5	47.1	14.7	100.0
18. I feel relaxed whenever the teacher tells me to write a letter.	<i>F</i>	2	4	7	17	4	34
	%	5.9	11.8	20.6	50.0	11.8	100.0
19. This course provided adequate opportunities for writing letters.	<i>F</i>	1	3	8	17	5	34
	%	2.9	8.8	23.5	50.0	14.7	100.0
20. I think writing high-quality letters is important for my academic career.	<i>F</i>	2	2	4	20	6	34
	%	5.9	5.9	11.8	58.8	17.6	100.0
21. I feel satisfied when I read my letters before my classmates.	<i>F</i>	2	3	8	13	8	34
	%	5.9	8.8	23.5	38.2	23.5	100.0
22. I feel confident writing letters.	<i>F</i>	1	3	9	18	3	34
	%	2.9	8.8	26.5	52.9	8.8	100.0
23. I need to write letters in my prospective career.	<i>F</i>	3	2	8	13	8	34
	%	8.8	5.9	23.5	38.2	23.5	100.0
24. After receiving the genre-based instruction and practicing writing letters, now, I can write a letter in comparison to the beginning of the semester.	<i>F</i>	2	3	11	16	2	34
	%	5.9	8.8	32.4	47.1	5.9	100.0

A substantial number of the participants (61.8 %) were in favor of writing letters at the end of the semester after being exposed to the genre-based instruction during the semester (cf. item 17). Correspondingly, a considerable number of the participants (61.8 %) responded positively that they felt relaxed whenever their teacher told them to write a letter in comparison to the beginning of the semester (cf. item 18). Likewise, a considerable number of the participants (64.7 %) responded positively with respect to the adequate opportunities provided for them to write letters (cf. item 19). Similarly, a solid majority of the participants (76.4%) reported positively that writing high-quality letters is important for their academic career (cf. item 20). Moreover, a substantial number of the participants (61.7%) felt satisfied when they read their letters before their classmates (cf. item 21). Correspondingly, a substantial number of the participants (61.7%) admitted that they gained confidence to write letters (cf. item 22). Interestingly, 61.7% of the respondents reported that they needed to write letters in their prospective careers (cf. item 23). Finally, half of the participants (53%) reported that after receiving the genre-based instruction and practicing writing letters, they could now write letters in comparison to the beginning of the semester (cf. item 24).

The fourth research question examined the relationship between the participants' performances on the different aspects of writing skills on the fourth



writing task and their attitudes concerning the development of their writing skills which was elicited with the help of a questionnaire at the end of the semester. Pearson product-moment correlation was computed. There was a strong positive correlation between the participants' performances on the fourth writing task concerning vocabulary ( $r = .678, p = 0.000$ ), content ( $r = .616, p = .000$ ), organization ( $r = .566, p = .000$ ), and language use ( $r = .464, p = .006$ ), as well as their positive responses on the questionnaire regarding their improvement during the semester after being exposed to the genre-based instruction. The results suggest that as the participants' abilities to write letters improved during the semester, they gained confidence and responded positively concerning their capability to write letters effectively and efficiently. Nevertheless, with respect to the fifth aspect (i.e., mechanics), the correlation was not significant ( $r = .226, p = .198$ ).

Table 9. *Correlation Between Performances on Fourth Writing Task and Participants' Responses on Questionnaire*

Attitudes	Fourth Writing Performance	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Aspect 1	Mean - Content	.616	.000	34
Aspect 2	Mean - Organization	.566	.000	34
Aspect 3	Mean - Vocabulary	.678	.000	34
Aspect 4	Mean - Language use	.464	.006	34
Aspect 5	Mean - Mechanics	.226	.198	34

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study was an attempt to show the benefits of a genre-based approach to teach letter writing to textile engineering students at the tertiary level. The teaching method focused on explicit instruction and developing the participants' metalanguage. Throughout the semester, the participants were made aware of the purpose, structure of the letter in question, and the purpose of each of section of the letter, in conjunction with the lexicogrammatical features which are employed for articulating each move.

The results obtained from this study confirm the idea that providing appropriate writing environments using the genre-based instruction can be very beneficial in producing high-quality writing tasks (Kongpetch, 2006; Luu, 2011; Swami, 2008). Based on the results, the genre-based instruction could significantly improve the participants' abilities across the four writing tasks (Wilks' Lambda = .147,  $F = 59.981, p = .000$ ). Most importantly, the results of the multivariate tests (see Table 4) revealed that the participants' performances on the five aspects of content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics significantly improved via the genre-based instruction ( $p = .000$ ). During the semester, the

participants were made aware of the generic options to establish the move structure patterns and strategies employed to articulate the communicative purpose of each type of letter. Likewise, the focus of class instruction was to teach the participants the different types of business letters and their constituting moves along with the most common lexicogrammatical features associated with the moves. Most importantly, the participants were convinced that receiving feedback from the teacher on their writing tasks activated their common sense/background knowledge and linguistic competence to correct their own errors. The findings confirm the results of earlier studies in which the participants benefitted from receiving the genre-based instruction concerning content, organization, and language use in their writing tasks (Burns, 2001; Elashri & Ibrahim, 2013; Henry & Roseberry, 1998; Luu, 2011; Swami, 2008).

Likewise, the results of this study revealed that the participants remarkably improved their writing products in terms of quality at the end of the semester. This is due to the fact that the participants received feedback and comments regarding the moves and steps which they had to bear in mind while writing each type of business letters. Most importantly, the findings of the questionnaire showed that the participants' writing experience was limited before receiving the genre-based instruction; however, the range of experiences in the genre-based writing class helped them to gain an explicit understanding of the proper form of content, organization, vocabulary, and language use to achieve a certain functional goal. The participants reported that as they became more aware of the form-function relationships in business letters, they began to more consciously focus on what language they used, what content they included, and how the written text was organized. There were significant changes in the progress of the participants' writing performances during the 15-week genre-based writing course. In this study, the class activities were designed in such a manner that the participants became familiar with the most common types of business letters, and they were encouraged to see writing as a process of self-discovery. A comparison of the participants' performances on the fourth task and their positive responses on the questionnaire revealed that as their abilities to write letters improved during the semester, they gained confidence and responded positively regarding the development of their writing skills. The findings suggest that the linguistic resources for writing the content of a letter such as lexis, grammar, and discourse structure have to be brought to consciousness and taught to novice nonnative writers (Martin, 1999).

A few limitations in this study are worth mentioning due to administrative and logistical difficulties. Due to financial restrictions, it was not feasible to divide the participants into two groups (i.e., control and experimental) for one semester. Second, the findings are limited to 34 sophomore intermediate students majoring in

textile engineering at an Iranian state university and they had enrolled in a course called ESAP. Nevertheless, the results may be considered as valuable in an ESAP context. As the findings revealed, explicit genre-based instruction and developing learners' generic competence can help them improve their style, content, and organization of writing business letters. This study also emphasizes more practices of the genre-based instruction at the tertiary level which may pave the way for the ongoing improvement of ESAP courses and designing courses to fulfill the students' immediate and delayed needs.

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**Appendix**  
**Moves and Steps Realized in Inquiry Letter**

<b>Structural Moves</b>	<b>Description of Their Function</b>	<b>Examples of Sentences, Phrases, &amp; Expressions for Each Move</b>
Move 1: Referring to the source of information	The writer states where, how and when s/he learnt about the addressee: a) at a trade fair b) in a publication c) through an institution, organization or person	I/We saw (product) displayed/demonstrated on your stand at X Exhibition that was held in . . . With reference to your advertisement in the (name of publication) . . . We have seen/read your advertisement in the (name of publication) . . . You were recommended to us by . . .
Move 2: Establishing credentials	The writer gives a brief introduction of the Business s/he represents by giving some information about: business activity + size of the business size of the market	We are a SME in the sector of . . . We are one of the main producers of . . . We are a large store/shop/chain of retailers involved in . . . We are (leading) dealers in . . . Our business is involved in . . . There is a steady/large demand here for (product) that you manufacture . . . Demand for this type of (product) is not high, but sales this year will probably exceed € . . .
Move 3: Soliciting action	This is where the writer makes the actual enquiry, requesting catalogue, price list, product details, samples, and so on. b) quotation, terms, and information about other transaction details c) the visit of a representative	Please send us . . . Could/Would/Will you please send . . . Please let us have details of . . . I/We would appreciate a sample of . . . Please quote us for . . . We are (also) interested in . . . I/We would (also) like to know whether . . . Could you please tell/inform us . . . Could you please give me/us further information about . . . I should appreciate it if you arrange for your representative to call . . .
Move 4: Suggestion	Suggesting terms, methods of payment, and discounts	Could you let us know if you allow cash discounts?

		As we intent to place a substantial order, we would like to know what quantity discounts you allow.
Move 5: Polite ending	<p>The writer ends the letter with a polite and conventional expression</p> <p>Indicate the possibility of substantial orders or further business.</p>	<p>Thank you for your attention</p> <p>We/I look forward to hearing from you.</p> <p>We/I would be grateful for an early reply.</p> <p>If the product is satisfactory, we will place further orders with you in the future.</p> <p>If the prices quoted are competitive and the quality up to standard, we will order on a regular basis.</p>