

## THE USE OF AN INTEGRATED GRAMMAR-GENRE-BASED WRITING APPROACH TO TEACH BUSINESS WRITING SKILLS

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### **Abstract**

Teaching intermediate Business English writing skills without a proper module or approach to a group of Low English Proficiency (LEP) students, who are facing serious problems in terms of language and writing skills, can be very challenging and demanding for teachers. Thus, to overcome these problems, this researcher had conducted an intensive, 6-month research with the objective of creating and testing out a specific, comprehensive and integrated writing approach called the Integrated Grammar-Genre-based Business Writing Approach (IGGBWA). This approach was created based on sound grammar, genre and writing theories and concepts. Based on this approach, a prototype module called the Integrated Grammar-Genre-based Business Writing Module (IGGBWM) was developed to teach the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry's English for Business Level Two programme. This research was also aimed at studying changes in the attitude and motivational level of the students after being exposed to the IGGBWM. An intact group of 38 students was exposed to the IGGBWA and IGGBWM through an Action Research programme by way of a Mixed Method approach. Data were collected via four quantitative instruments (Language Ability, Sentence Maturity, Business Document Writing Skills and Survey Questionnaire) and four written tests. Another two sets of qualitative instruments (Group Journal Writing and Written Response Questionnaire) were used to furnish the relevant data to shed more light on the quantitative data. Mean T-unit Length was used to measure the development in syntactic complexity in the students' written product. The findings were motivating; the students, in general, showed a slow yet steady improvement in two major areas: EfB language ability and Business writing skills. In terms of the language ability, an 84.00 % improvement was noted; in

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terms of the improvement in the general EfB writing skills, a positive 23.00 % improvement was noted. The ability to write complex sentence structures, however, was not satisfactory. The analysis of qualitative data showed students had become more receptive towards EfB and writing skills and concerned about the role EfB played in determining their career development. This research has a huge potential: It can contribute much in terms of a specific approach and module to those who teach LEP students writing skills. However, further research must be carried out to study the effectiveness of the IGGBWA in the long term and at different levels, learning, and teaching environments.

Key terms: Low English Proficiency, Mixed Method, Action Research, Sentence Maturity, Mean T-unit Length, Genre, Grammar and Writing Principles

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Research Problems**

This article focuses on the PhD research I carried out to improve the English language and writing standard and skills of my students at Shen Jai School of Commerce (SJSOCI) in Ipoh, Malaysia between 2009 and 2012. Shen Jai School of Commerce is a typical college which caters for the needs of the students in terms of commercial or skills-based subjects such as accountancy, English for Business and Bookkeeping. The school is one of the regional centres for the United Kingdom-based London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) commercial course provider. The school recruits students and conducts a wide variety of industry-oriented commercial programmes for its students on behalf of the LCCI. I was assigned to teach the English for Business (EfB) programme for Level Two students. A typical EfB exam consists of written, spoken and listening skills papers. English for Business is a typical ESP programme and it needs a specific approach to teach it. Being new to the teaching of EfB then, I faced a real uphill struggle because there was no information, typical material and methodology available on how to teach the highly standard and professional subject though LCCI provides general guidelines on the syllabus and papers. It is up to the individual school or teacher to create ways and means to teach it effectively. I found that the students as well as the teachers at SJSOCI were

facing typical problems. The students were facing two specific problems: one, language problem: weak grammar and sentence structuring skills; and two: poor LCCI text processing, composing and organizing skills. In short, they lacked the effective ability to digest exam questions and to produce, language-wise, a well-written, presentable, cohesive piece of work reflective of the selected business genres as required by the LCCI. The second problem was with the teachers. There were four EfB teachers including myself and each was practising their own methods without any professional guidelines. Teaching methodologies and approaches play a key role in any teaching practice and as a new comer to the field of ESP, I was clueless on how to approach the subject. An intensive search through the literature and discussion with teachers did not provide any fruitful or practical approach to meet my students' as well as my needs. I felt, in my typical situation, that methodology had been ignored. This plays in to the Widdowson's (1983:87) claim that , "methodology has generally been neglected in ESP". On teaching methodology, it is argued that 'methodology is of crucial importance. Since ESP courses aim to develop linguistic skills relating to particular spheres of activity, not only the nature of the linguistic items introduced, but the ways in which they are introduced and how they are practised are highly significant (Wright, 1992:5). Therefore, I carried out an action research on how best to teach the subject.

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### The Integrated Grammar-Genre-based Business Writing Approach (IGGBWA)

To overcome these serious problems, I experimentally developed and tested out a specific approach for teaching language and business writing skills simultaneously in the SJSOCI context. This approach was based on solid input from theoretical and practical principles from past researches with the specific focus on the teaching of grammar, genre and writing principles. This specific, comprehensive grammar-genre-based business writing approach is called The Integrated Grammar-Genre-based Business Writing Approach (IGGBWA) and it has four key goals:

- i) To develop students' grammatical knowledge and awareness about the role of grammar in their writing;
- ii) To develop students' genre knowledge and awareness about various genres;
- iii) To develop students' genre-based business writing skills and strategies; and

- iv) To develop, implement and assess the relevant teaching approaches to teach grammar genre-based business writing principles

### The Concepts behind the research

This research was carried out based on a Mixed Method, Action Research design and it was through the Action Research approach that the contents of the IGGBWA was finally finalized and reported. The following theories and principles (in addition to the grammar, genre and writing theories), provided the other foundation principles for the IGGBWA-based writing module and the module is called the Integrated Grammar-Genre-based Business Writing Module (IGGBWM): Theories of Second Language Acquisition, Assessment methods, Systemic Functional Grammar, English for Specific Purposes, Learning Theories, Product-Process Approaches, Concept Teaching (CT) and Problem-based Teaching (PBT) theories and Integrated Grammar Teaching theories. The research was carried out in two phases through which quantitative and qualitative data were collected systematically. Through this research, two key issues were investigated simultaneously. They were the improvement and development in the

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- 1). overall Business English writing skills, and
- 2). nature of the attitude and motivation of the students towards the EfB learning process.

In order to create the final IGGBWA, a basic yet specific grammar syllabus, a list of cohesive devices (CD) and 11-step genre-based writing strategies were drawn up by way of a pilot test to guide me to conduct the grammar and writing lessons. The syllabus and teaching strategies were assessed, improved and further strengthened through the Action Research approach in two cycles. The integrated grammar-genre-based business writing strategies were divided into three major stages: Pre-writing, Editing and Writing Stages. These three stages were practised in each part of the grammar- genre-teaching cycle. This teaching strategy was adapted from the Anderson's (1985) model of language production. Thus, I set out to conduct an action research to create and assess a tightly-planned approach called IGGBWA to teach sentence construction as well as specific business writing skills using an integrated, prototype, grammar-genre-based business writing module (IGGBWM) with specific teaching approaches (Concept Teaching and

Problem-based Teaching approaches) to enhance the business writing skills and strategies of the students in an exam environment. Concept Teaching and Problem-based Teaching approaches played a key role in this business writing teaching situation and context.

Teacher-as-well-as-student-centred lesson plans were also appropriately planned and extensively used in this research to greatly enhance the teaching and learning process.

#### Perception / attitude and motivation study

Perception or nature of attitude and motivation of the students as regards the learning of EfB was important and if there were changes in the attitude of the students, I wanted study *how* the changes were linked to the students' overall achievement in writing development. This attitude and motivation study was to done by way of a survey questionnaire, analysis of group journal writing and written responses questionnaire. By way of analyzing the survey results, written elements in the group journal and written response questionnaire, I assessed students' opinions, perception, hopes, fears, frustration, happiness and anxiety as regards their entire EfB learning process during the research period. The data were then linked to the study of students' overall improvement in writing skills, which was the ultimate aim of the research.

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#### Research Objectives and Research Questions

The specific objectives of my research were as follows:

1. To design a module for the teaching of business writing skills and strategies based on the Integrated Grammar-Genre-based Business Writing Approach (IGGBWA);
2. To implement the designed module (IGGBWM);
3. To evaluate the module through the assessment of the overall writing skills; and
4. To evaluate students' attitude and motivation on the learning of business writing skills before and after the experiment.

The above objectives of the study were translated into the following Research Questions:

1. How should the module based on the Integrated Grammar-Genre-based Business Writing

- Approach be designed to help students improve their writing skills in a business writing course?
2. To what extent do students improve in their writing skills as they undergo the training?
  3. What are the students' perceptions (attitude) before and after the course on business writing?
  4. To what extent is the level of motivation affected by the specific approach used in the learning of business writing?

#### The limitations to the research

In the initial stage of the research, I found that my students were so confused with memo and letter writing formats that they had finished the memo with a letter writing format and letter writing with a memo format. They did so because they were mindlessly memorizing the formats without reflecting over it. This was the major limitation to my research. Bhatia (1993) says students have the tendency to be overly prescriptive, emphasising on the rules of construction of a particular genre above others. Kay and Dudley-Evans (1998) have expressed similar concerns: they were concerned that the learners may end up in producing a genre-based writing as a mindless imitation in producing a written text. Consequently creativity is stifled, depriving them of the ability to respond more effectively in a changing social context or workplace environment.

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#### Literature Review

Extensive literature review provided me with some clear cut, specific ideas and guidelines and principles on how to create the IGGBWA and conduct a research based on it with the assistance of IGGBWM to improve my students' business writing skills. The literature review done had exposed some lacks in the past researches which I saw as a gap to be filled with the creation of new approaches of teaching business writing skills. I gathered three ideas from the literature review: Firstly, grammar, genre and writing theories have specific roles to play in the teaching of grammar and genre-based writing skills *integratively*; secondly, opportunities for further research existed because the past researches had focused mainly in the context of teaching *General English and general writing skills integratively*; none had focused on the teaching of Business English writing skills with the effective *integration* of grammar-genre teaching principles. That is, no research had successfully advocated any specific approach where grammar and genre

principles can be taught *integratively* to enhance the business writing skills of students especially in an exam context. Thirdly, most of the past researches dealt at the macro-level textual features of genres such as moves and organization than on their use of language at a micro-level; I was, however, looking for different micro-level approaches or new methods and ideas on how to teach basic linguistic features such as nouns, verbs, phrases and sentence structures to a group of Malaysian LEP students as suggested by Chin (2000) so that these methods can form the fundamental platform for the learners to understand and analyse genres and questions in the LCCI context more thoroughly.

#### Research Methodology and the Theoretical Framework for the IGGBWA

For the formulation of this approach, I took into consideration the following major concepts and theories related to grammar, genre and writing: Theory and the teaching of grammar principles, theory and the teaching of genre writing principles and Theory and the teaching of writing skills and strategies. This was done to show that grammar and writing problems were not limited to SJSOCI alone but in fact, they are a global phenomenon (see figure 1).

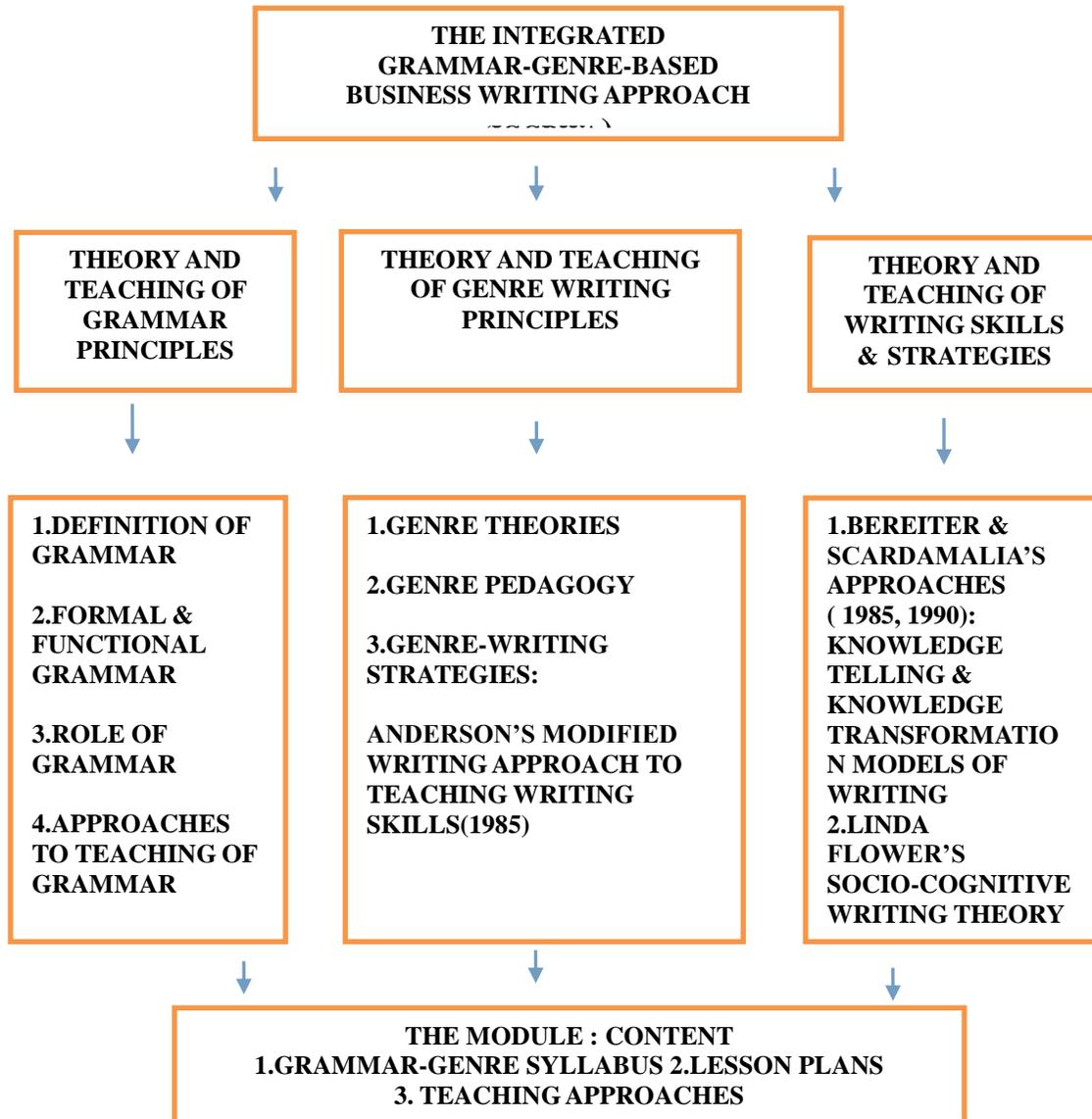


Figure 1: The Theoretical Framework for the IGGBWA

## Research Design

I used an action research approach on a particular group of students based on the explanatory, mixed method design (Creswell, 1994). Under this mixed method design, collecting of quantitative and qualitative data was done on two different phases. Action Research design is a research design which has an applied focus and it addresses a *specific, practical* issue in an academic environment and seeks to obtain solutions to that problem or issue (Schmuck, 1997). McNiff (1988b) says action research involves the understanding of the self through a “reflective, spiral of planning, acting, observing, reflecting and re-planning”. It focuses on applying the four components of the action research cycle of planning, acting, monitoring and reflecting (Kremmis and Taggart, 1982:7) in the research process. Mixed method as a research method is widely used by researchers because quantitative and qualitative research approaches, when carried out independently or separately, have their own strengths and weaknesses. Thus research outcomes based on any single method can be severely limited. To overcome the inherent weaknesses of an independent or singular approach, researchers use the mixed method approach. It is a research approach in which quantitative and qualitative techniques are mixed in a single study. The mixed method approach, however, has its own strengths and weaknesses too; while the strength is, through this method, broader and more complete range of research questions can be answered as the researcher is not confined to a single method or research (strength), the greatest weakness is, it is more time-consuming as the researcher has to juggle with a wide variety of steps included in the combined approach.

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## Sources of Data, Locale of the Study and Sampling

The sources of data for this research came from a group of students whom I had been assigned to teach. The class consisted of 38 students between the ages of seventeen and nineteen. The class consisted of 14 male and 24 female students. These students came mainly from Chinese secondary schools after their Unified Examination Council (UEC) or Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) exams. They spoke very little English and were full time students at Shen Jai School of Commerce, Ipoh (SJSOCI). They were there to undergo an intensive, exam-oriented, 12-month, LCCI-conducted Level Two course. They had signed up for EfB as one of their exam subjects. Their study period

at SJSOCI was from June 2011 till May 2012. They were exposed to this prototype IGGBWA-based research programme between mid-August 2011 and mid-March 2012. The students were informed of the research to be carried out and they were happy to participate; after all, they were going to be treated in a special way in the use of a prototype grammar-genre-based writing programme. Research Question Two guided me in collecting the quantitative data on writing development, that is, it was obtained through the evaluation of student's overall performance in business writing in terms of language ability and text processing skills. A series of four written tests (Pretest, Midterm Progress Test One, Midterm Progress Test Two and Posttest) were administered along the equivalent time series design with teaching intervention in between the tests. The sole purpose of these tests was to study if the students were making progress in terms of producing quality written sentences and texts in line with LCCI requirement after each teaching intervention. In addition, quantitative data collection also involved the administration of a survey questionnaire which was used in the thematic content analysis. To get the data to answer the Research Question Two, three separate sets of instruments were created and used. The first instrument was used to collect information on the language ability of the students in terms of sentence accuracy, use of grammatical principles, use of cohesive devices and use of lexical resource. The second instrument was used to study the sentence structuring skills of the students (sentence maturity or complexity) and the third instrument was employed to study the overall generic writing skills of the students in terms of text processing, composing and organizational skills of the genres (that is the layout, style, content and mechanics). In order to construct and validate of each of the instruments further, the following six points from Brewerton and Millward (2001) were considered, that is, the instruments constructed must be:

appropriate to the research objectives; able to produce a form of data appropriate to addressing the research question(s); practicable given time, resource constraints and the feasibility of using it within a chosen or given context; adequately piloted; ethically sound; agreed and accepted by the supervisor and finally one the researcher feels really comfortable with;

Perception / attitude and motivation study: A Thematic Approach

Research Questions Three and Four dealt with student attitude and motivation and they guided me

in collecting the qualitative data. Attitude and motivation play a key role in the language learning process and hence these dimensions, which are difficult to measure quantitatively, could only be analysed qualitatively. Thus the purpose of the qualitative study was to detect changes in the attitude of the students in terms of the overall EfB learning process before and after the business writing programme had been introduced. The students' change of attitude and motivation level was studied over the same period of six months by way of a survey (quantitative approach) before and after the study period, group journal writing and written response questionnaire. The survey results were evaluated in tandem with group journal writing and written response questionnaire results as all these three units of analysis dealt with the same, five, related themes: one, the learning of the EfB programme; two, the kind of EfB materials used; three, EfB teaching methodology applied; four, the role of the EfB teacher, parents and friends in the EfB learning process ; and finally, the EfB learning environment. Thus, the main purpose of this phase was to offer certain explanation for certain developments in the quantitative phase. This phase studied how students' attitude was shaped by the new writing programme based on the grammar-genre-based module.

Tools for data analysis: Descriptive Statistics

Data were obtained and organized and this was followed by the laborious process of analysis and interpretation. An analysis of data was done to address all the Research Questions. The quantitative data collected were analysed by way of descriptive data analysis method using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software.

Results and findings

Students' Development in the Business Writing Ability

Research Question Two discussed the data on the development in the business writing ability of the students traced overtime through three instruments. The development in the students' writing ability very much depended on the materials and the teaching approach used to implement them.

## 1. Language Ability (LA)

Instrument One dealt with the language ability (LA) of the students. By way of measuring the language ability, it was found that there was a slow yet steady improvement in four areas: sentence accuracy, effective use of grammatical principles, use of cohesive devices and use of lexical resources:

Statistical values in terms of the overall language ability:

	LA PRE	LA MTPT1	LA MTPT2	LA PT
MEAN	9.16	14.32	15.79	16.84
STD DEVIATION	3.67	5.48	6.45	6.86

Note:

LA PRE : language ability: pretest

LA MTPT 1 : language ability: midterm progress test one

LA MTPT 2 : language ability: midterm progress test two

LA PT : language ability: post test

Performance in terms of the overall language ability:

It can be noted that there is an 84.00 % increase (overall progress) between the Pretest and the Post test after a period of six months. This shows that students, in general, had mastered their basic language skills by internalizing the grammar-syntax areas.

Each of the four areas (sentence accuracy, grammatical accuracy, use of cohesive devices and lexical resources) covering the language ability was in turn analysed individually to show more details on the students' language performance and the results are given below. The four areas are:

### Sentence Accuracy (SA)

Sentence Accuracy refers to the structuring of sentences along the syntactic principles so as to produce sentences which exhibit order, clarity and logicity in line with the communicative needs of the writer and audience. The sentence must have the basic SV order.

Statistical values in terms of the sentence accuracy:

	SA PRE	SA MTPT1	SA MTPT2	SA PT
MEAN	2.97	4.00	4.02	4.60
STD DEVIATION	1.19	1.59	1.70	1.80

Note:

SA PRE : sentence accuracy: pretest

SA MTPT1 : sentence accuracy: midterm progress test one

SAMTPT2 : sentence accuracy: midterm progress test two

SA PT : sentence accuracy: post test

Performance in sentence accuracy:

It can be seen that there is a 55.00% improvement in the sentence accuracy area of the language. Students had slowly improved in the basic sentence structuring skills within the six months of the teaching and learning period based on the IGGBWM and IGGBWA.

### Grammatical Accuracy (GA)

Grammatical Accuracy refers to the proper handling of the basic grammatical concepts especially parts of speech, phrases, clauses, tenses, articles, agreement of the verb with the subject and active and passive sentences to provide a smooth flow of the communicative

meaning intended.

Statistical values in terms of the grammatical accuracy:

	GA PRE	GA MTPT1	GA MTPT2	GA PT
MEAN	2.97	4.02	4.00	4.57
STD DEVIATION	1.19	1.61	1.73	1.78

Note:

GA PRE : grammatical accuracy: pretest

GA MTPT1 : grammatical accuracy: midterm progress test one

GAMTPT2 : grammatical accuracy: midterm progress test two

GA PT : grammatical accuracy: post test

Performance in grammatical accuracy:

The table above shows a 54.00% improvement in terms using grammatical principles to write better sentences between the Pretest and the Post test.

Use of Cohesive Devices (CDs)

Cohesive Devices are connectives which help to show semantic relations between an element in a text and some other elements that is crucial to the interpretation of it, so that that the text can be understood as connected discourse rather than as autonomous sentences.

Statistical values in terms of the use of cohesive devices

	CD PRE	CD MTPT1	CD MTPT2	CD PT
MEAN	0.28	2.34	3.76	3.23
STD DEVIATION	0.13	1.72	2.12	2.05

Note:

CD PRE : cohesive devices : pretest

CD MTPT1 : cohesive devices : midterm progress test one

CD MTPT2 : cohesive devices : midterm progress test two

CD PT : cohesive devices : post test

Performance in the use of cohesive devices:

Data given above shows there is a whopping 1054.00% improvement in the students' performance in this area of language ability. Students had shown spectacular improvement in understanding and exploiting the list of cohesive devices provided. This was the most impressive development among the SJSOCI students in this research in general. During the pretest, some 80.00% of the students *did not* use CDs due to the lack of knowledge on them. The students were hence drilled on the use and importance of using CDs thereafter and the above result shows that they had internalised the system and usage. They were also given a CD list for internalization. During the pt, some 80.00% of the students had actually *used* CDs at least once successfully.

Use of Lexical Resources (LR)

Lexical Resources refers to the use of wide range of lexis to convey the specific meaning required by the audience to understand the context of task.

Statistical values in terms of the use of lexical resources:

	LA PRE	LA MTPT1	LA MTPT2	LA PT
MEAN	2.92	3.86	3.97	4.44
STD DEVIATION	1.12	1.39	1.55	1.87

Note:

LR PRE : lexical resources: pretest

LR MTPT1 : lexical resources: midterm progress test one

LR MTPT2 : lexical resources: midterm progress test two

LR PT : lexical resources: post test

Performance in the use of lexical resources:

Data above above shows there is a 52.00% improvement in the students' performance in this area of language ability between the Pretest and Post test on the use of lexis.

## 2. Sentence Maturity

Sentence Maturity refers to the *ability* of the students to combine various sentence structures (simple, compound, complex and compound-complex) effectively to express their views better.

Statistical values in terms of the sentence maturity:

	MTL PRE	MTL MTPT1	MTL MTPT2	MTL PT
MEAN	10.46	13.02	8.39	8.27
STD DEVIATION	2.00	2.82	2.81	1.73

Note:

MTL PRE : mean T-unit length: pretest

MTL MTPT1 : mean T-unit length: midterm progress test one

MTL MTPT2 : mean T-unit length : midterm progress test two

MTL PT : mean T-unit length: post test

Performance in sentence maturity:

The data above shows there is a drop of 21.00 % between the Pretest and Post test. This result shows students had not thoroughly understood the complex nature of phrases and clauses which could help them to form more complex sentences in writing.

## 3. Overall Development in the EfB Genre Writing skills (WS)

Overall Genre Writing Skills refers to the holistic ability of the students to read and answer LCCI written exam questions effectively and appropriately in line with the LCCI exam requirements.

To do this they should be able to read and process the question properly and use various composing and organizational and language skills to write the required answer.

Statistical values in terms of the the overall genre writing skills:

	WS PRE	WS MTPT1	WS MTPT2	WS PT
MEAN	44.00	59.00	60.00	54.00
STD DEVIATION	14.57	16.16	16.15	12.10

Note

WS PRE : writing skills: pretest

WS MTPT1 : writing skills: midterm progress test one

WS MTPT2 : writing skills: midterm progress test two

WS PT : writing skills: post test

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Performance in the overall genre writing skills:

Data above shows the students' performance in the overall genre writing skills. As regards the writing skills exhibited, unlike the other language skills described above, there is only a small upward jump of 23.00 % in the improvement between the Pretest and Post test.

The link between the qualitative data and quantitative data

I posed the following question in the initial stage of the research: *Besides the availability of the IGGBWA for me, in what other ways did the students play (or perceive) their part to improve themselves in this research?* In short, how was the writing quality, through my teaching, influenced by the students' perception? This question was posed because language learning process is a two-way process: teachers as well as the learners have specific roles to play in helping each other. So, a qualitative perception and motivation study through Research Questions Three and Four as part of the overall research was conducted and the purpose was to provide the qualitative answer to

the above question. This specific research had examined how students' attitude and motivation were shaped by the new writing programme structured along the grammar-genre-based writing principles. In particular, the qualitative data evaluated the link between attitude change and the overall EfB learning process along five, specific themes. Students' overall responses showed that they wanted to learn GE and EfB because of career and personal development. I had lectured the students on the specific roles played by GE and EfB at the beginning of the research so as to motivate student learning. The aim of the motivational lecture was to give them a purpose to learn GE and EfB. Aligning the students to the scope of EfB course is important as Gardner (2006: 241-243) posits that students who have higher levels of motivation would do better than students with lower levels especially when they have reasons (motives) for engaging in the relevant activities, expends effort, persists in the activities, attends to the tasks, shows desire to achieve the goal, and enjoys the activities. As Gardener (2006) stated, my students seemed to have responded positively by way of actively engaging in a wide variety of academic activities to improve themselves. Along the way, they had realized the importance of social context and working in a group (Clement et al. 1994; Smith, 2001; Dornyei and Murphey, 2003; Krashen, 1977; Dornyei, 1996) and hence galvanized support from peers (Wentzel, 1998). They also seemed to have had a matured sense of learning due to maturation (Long, 2005) as the students at SJSOCI became very independent and highly disciplined so much so that they continued learning on their own without the presence of the EfB teacher in the classroom. One fundamental outcome of this study culture is student autonomy (Garcia and Pintrich, 1996) where the students did EfB related activities and tasks without being told. They also had learnt to appreciate the role of the teacher (Breen and Mann, 1997; Noels et al., 1999; Dornyei, 2001) in helping them to master the writing skills. In short, it can be concluded that the attitude and motivation of the students had improved on the learning of EfB after they had been exposed to the grammar-genre-based writing programme. In sum, it could be said that a business writing module had successfully been developed and implemented with mostly positive results in writing development and attitude and motivational change.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, it could be said that I have been basically successful in implementing a specific, grammar-genre integrated, modular-based writing programme (IGGBWM) based on the IGGBWA. This approach had not only improved my students in terms of learning language and writing skills under a specific examination environment but also in motivating them to stay more positive throughout.

A)The following points describe the improvements made

### i) Improvement of students

A marked improvement in the use of cohesive devices (CD) and other language elements was noted between the Pretest and Post test. The mean CD use in the Pretest was 0.28 but in the final Post test, the mean use was 3.23. It was noted in the Pretest that that some 80.00 % of the students did not use CDs well in their text but in the Post test, some 80.00 % of the students had begun using the CDs. For other language elements (grammar and lexis, for example), there was more than 50.00 plus % improvement. The improvement in the areas of use of cohesive devices and other language elements had proven that the writing module (IGGWBM) and the writing approach (IGGBWA) along with the teaching methods (CT, PBT) have *generally* been successful. As far as other sentence structuring skills are concerned, students made a very slow yet steady progress. It showed a lack of confidence in them. In addition, more students had learnt to produce better documents to express their composing ideas more concisely showed that they had improved their ability and confidence level in handling the language elements.

### ii) Integrating GE and ESP principles in the teaching and learning of Efb

The IGGBWM was created to *blend or integrate* the teaching of General English (GE)

grammar principles and EfB writing skills effectively and appropriately so that the writing needs of the students can be met. This is in line with what Brunton (2009:9) had reported: good results in ESP writing cannot be achieved if basic language skills are taught separately or in isolation without relevance to each other because “ESP builds upon what has been learnt and studied in earlier General English classes”. A General English syllabus was created and inserted into the module to facilitate the language learning process. Under the General English syllabus, attention was given to proper sentence and paragraph production as “...organization at both the sentence and the text level is also important for effective communication of meaning, and ultimately, for the quality of the written product” (Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1987:12). The findings show the progress made: Language Ability results show that the students had secured an impressive an 84.00 % increase after a period of six months. Data also shows the students’ performance in the overall genre writing skills. Though the improvement was slow, nevertheless, the IGGBWM had proven that EfB writing principles *can* be blended successfully with GE principles to develop business writing skills.

### iii) Genre sensitization

This research had successfully highlighted to the students the existence of different sub-genres along with their ‘internal systems’ and the specific genre writing skills required of them. During the research, when given writing assignments, students exhibited appropriate writing skills, formats and styles for letters, memorandums, listing and reports respectively. In other words, genre sensitisation had been done successfully as students had come to realize that specific sub-genres have specific ‘systems’. This research also suggests that the teaching of genres can be helpful in teaching writing skills as proposed by Linli Xu (2005:26), who has this to say: “Genre-based teaching approaches are finding their place in writing courses for developing students’ sensitivity or awareness to diverse genres and they are facilitating students writing tasks of different genres”.

### iv) Awareness of lexico-grammar principles

The certain improvement in the grammatical accuracy and wider use of lexical resources showed

that the students can improve on the use of lexico-grammar elements in genre.

v) Recognizing the key role of grammar in writing

Perhaps the most encouraging conclusion that can be made is the awareness of the students on the role grammar played in developing their specific EfB writing skills.

vi) The role of model answers in increasing grammar awareness

Some teachers at SJSOCI were vehemently opposed to the using of model answers when teaching EfB writing skills. Model answers do have a role to play (Myles, 2002) and the LCCI supplies plenty of model answers every year for students to practise. The results show students positively viewed the model answers from which specific sentence writing skills were developed.

vii) Positive attitude for effective learning of EfB

The findings showed that students in general stayed positive during the learning process due to pep talks and systematic teaching approach and looked forward to improving their EfB further for their career and personal developments.

## B) Implications of the Study

The research is, thus, expected to have far-reaching implications for students, other language practitioners (ESP and non-ESP) and myself who are involved in the teaching of English for Business, especially in an exam environment at SJSOCI or elsewhere. This research is based on the Action Research method and it could lead to self-reflective inquiry as a manner of rationalizing and learning from the process of teaching and learning. The information can be utilized by teachers to improve on and understand their own practices and finally, to explore and also to improve the environment in which these practices are carried out (Carr and Kemmis, 1983:152). Given below are the general implications.

i) Implications for teachers

Teachers play a key role in the implementation of any programmes for their students. The analysis of survey questionnaire and group journal writing data show that students truly appreciated the role played by the teachers. They wanted the teacher to give more exercises,

better explanation, teach slowly, check their assignments often and offer the right feedback frequently. Though students had generally improved in their language and writing skills, this research results showed two areas where teachers can contribute more effectively: sentence maturity and text processing, composing and organizing skills.

#### ii) Implications for students

Students in general showed improvement but they must play their role too. The results typically show that the students must actively seek to improve themselves by way of setting goals, creating study plans, understanding the basic language, text processing, composing and organizing concepts and methods and holding discussions with their peers as well as their teachers.

#### iii) Implications for the School Management

From the research it can be seen that firstly SJSOCI should allocate more time for the writing lessons. Secondly, the School should send the teachers out for more training focusing on specific areas such as module design, assessment, SFG and teaching and questioning techniques. Thirdly, the School should get more relevant EfB writing materials for students as reference materials, that is, the library should be stocked up with EfB books relevant to writing skills.

#### iv) Implications for the LCCI policy making body

As the LCCI is an important external stakeholder, this research has two important suggestions for them: Firstly, the LCCI could reduce the number of genres approved for teaching and testing from seven as it is now to four for Level Two students. This researcher suggests that only these four are tested with an option for reports (as report writing plays key role in presentations and Press releases). Testing just four genres at Level Two will go a long way in helping the students as well as the teachers to learn and teach EfB more effectively.

Secondly, the LCCI questions and model answers should be as comprehensible as possible to meet ESL students' language needs. It must be noted that the LCCI questions are set in England in or near native-like manner (L1) for use in some 120 countries worldwide, where English is not learnt as an L1. ESL students, therefore, could be disadvantaged if the native-like language content or exam rubrics pose a problem.

### C) Contributions of the Study

Three groups of people are expected to benefit from this research in four ways: ESP and non-ESP practitioners and the students and myself.

#### i) The Teacher as a reflective practitioner

The research shows that reflection is a key survival strategy for a successful teaching. Reflective teaching is a cyclical process, because once he has started to implement changes, the reflective and evaluative cycle begins all over again. In my case, the following five questions guided me during the research period and for the reflection process:

1. *What are you doing?*

In order to answer this question, I was fully aware of and noting down every step of the teaching process.

2. *Why are you doing it?*

Every topic, every lesson, every exercise, every concept and every explanation had to be linked to the overall purpose of writing improvement and this had to be conveyed to the students so that they knew why they were learning the particular area.

3. *How effective is it?*

Assessments had to be carried out on a daily basis at the end of the each lesson to monitor the students' learning process.

4. *How are the students responding?*

The students' oral and written responses as well as body language were keenly noted and reflected on so that the teacher could respond in kind.

5. *How can you do it better?*

The best way to improve teaching, in my opinion, is to care for the students' improvement. The teacher must, all the while, think that the student must not leave the classroom empty handed or learnt nothing useful. He must walk the extra mile, to explain something which could be simple to the teacher but a headache for the class. Teachers must love their students and show keen interest in making them successful.

ii) A source of information for LCCI- based EfB teachers

One particular group of teachers who can gain invaluable insights into the new teaching of EfB writing programme is the LCCI teachers who teach the EfB programme in some 120 countries especially in the Asiatic region: Malaysia, Vietnam, China, Thailand, Indonesia and Korea where the standard of written English for Business does not meet the criteria set by the international body. The invaluable information from this research on syllabus, materials design, assessment and teaching techniques can be added to the resources available for use by the teachers to enhance the teaching and learning skills.

iii) Contribution to Knowledge: A proposed comprehensive, integrated theoretical approach for teaching business writing skills

I also firmly believe that this research can make a very significant contribution both to other ESP practitioners and to the field of ESP itself, with the biggest contribution being in terms of providing a different kind of approach for teaching ESP business writing skills, especially for beginners and LEP students. This approach was something I had been struggling to identify and get when I was told to teach EfB at SJSOCI. The approach and the resulting module, which includes some new techniques, can guide a novice or an experienced teacher where to start and what to teach and how to assess a business writing programme and conduct written tests (see figure 2).

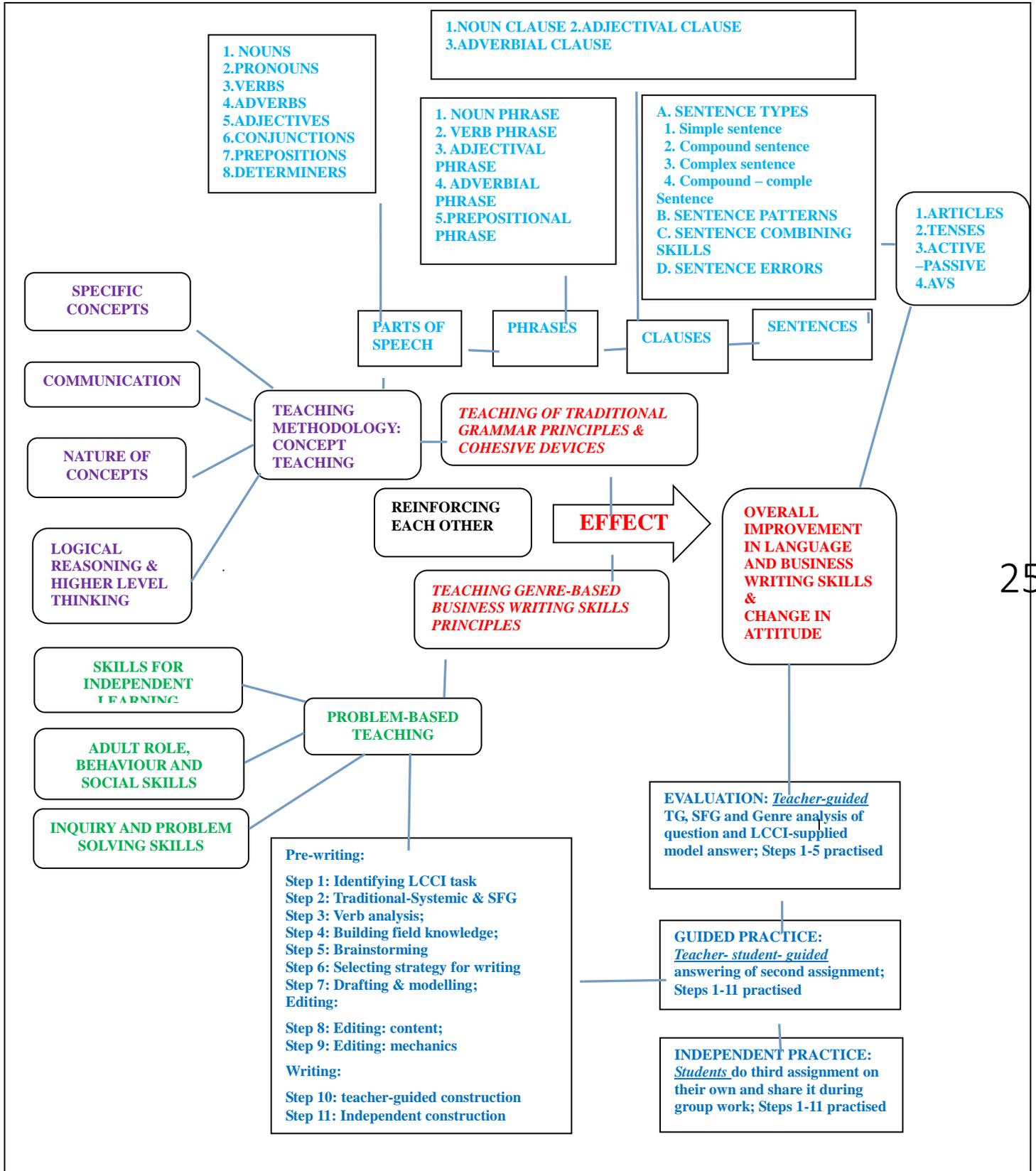


Figure 2: A proposed comprehensive, integrated theoretical approach for teaching business writing

THE USE OF AN INTEGRATED GRAMMAR-GENRE-BASED WRITING APPROACH TO TEACH BUSINESS WRITING SKILLS

Bartholomew Michael

skills

iv) Invaluable information for students

The analysis of data from the survey, group journal and written response questionnaire showed that the students were the biggest beneficiaries of this writing research. They got the opportunity to reflect on their weaknesses and strengths as regards the EfB learning process, learnt new linguistic items and writing skill and strategies which they had never heard of before. And above all, the students had progressed towards being more independent, autonomous, self-regulated, responsible and were able to understand the role played by EfB in their career and personal development.

D) Suggestions for Further Research

i) The need for a longitudinal study

The students in this research were exposed to a grammar-genre-based business writing approach and module only for a very short period of six months. Furthermore, they were taught only for three hours per week. Though the students showed significant improvement in terms of language and writing skills and psychological attributes within a short period of time, how well they would have performed had they been exposed to the same programme, say, for twelve months, eighteen months or twenty four months? It is possible that more language items and writing activities could have been added in the teaching and learning process and this would have improved them further.

ii) The need to test out new teaching approaches

As Fullan (1982) has stated, one dimension of educational change is the possible use of new teaching approaches. Only CT and PBT approaches were used in this research. Further researches must be done to find out if other teaching methods such as co-operative learning, case study, content-based and task-based learning approaches can be exploited.

iii) Research

This Action Research was conducted on students who were sitting for Level Two of the EfB written examination. The LCCI actually conducts EfB examination in five levels: Preliminary Level, Level One, Level Two, Level Three and Level Four. This writing programme should be conducted with modifications for other levels to see if it can be bring

out similar if not better progress to the students.

iv) Further research on sentence combining techniques

Another area for further research should be on the sentence combining techniques. It is important to develop sentence combining skills among the students. In my case, due to time factor, I provided only limited activities in this vital area. An in-depth review conducted by Andrews et al., (2004) made researchers come to a clear conclusion that sentence combining is an effective means of improving the syntactic maturity of students in English between the ages of 5 and 16. In terms of practice, a very practical implication of the results of the review is that it would be helpful if the future development of teaching materials and approaches included recognition of the effectiveness of sentence combining. The sentence maturity analysis showed that students at SJSOCI were in need of further input in this area of sentence combining.

v) The need to create quality survey questions

The students, through the survey, journal writing and written response questionnaire expressed many ideas which actually need further inquiry and consideration. For example, despite creating an effective language and writing programme, a small group of students remained negative or turned negative after being positive in the beginning. These students were too shy to answer the oral questions and remained silent during the lessons. Even during the group work, it was observed that these students played a minimum role. Some of them remained even negative throughout the course. This particular group did participate in the entire research but remained unimpressed with the importance of learning the language. This sort of phenomenon should be probed further.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, it could be said quite confidently that this research had attempted to report how a modular-based business writing programme based on the Integrated Grammar-Genre-based Business Writing Approach was designed and implemented with a degree of success. This study provided the opportunity for much reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of a teacher-designed programme. Reflective inquiry could lead to further improvement of the rationale of the practice and an understanding of teaching and learning practice could provide further foundations in building more approaches for success on the part of both teachers and students. In line with the spirit of an action research, much details about the cycle of preparing, teaching, learning and outcomes had been meticulously dealt with and presented in this in depth endeavour.

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