

A Mixed-Methods Investigation of the Effect of Scaffolding Genre Knowledge on EFL Graduate Learners' Academic Writing Skill: Achievements and Perceptions

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Abstract: This mix-methods study aimed to explore the impact of scaffolding genre knowledge on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) graduate students' academic writing skills. The initial population included 100 (62 females and 38 males) M.A. Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) students who took advanced writing course. They were selected from Islamic Azad University, Tehran and Alborz branches. The method for sample selection was convenience sampling. Oxford placement test (OPT) was employed to homogenize the sample, and 50 advanced learners, including 31 females and 19 males, were selected based on its results. Next, they were divided into an experimental group and a control group in which the experimental group was taught based on scaffolding genre knowledge, and the control group received instruction according to the class regular syllabus. After that, IELTS academic writing task 2 was used as the pretest. The treatments lasted for 16 sessions, and each session took 90 minutes. Upon finishing the treatment, the same IELTS academic writing task 2 was run as the posttest. Then, the researcher-made questionnaire was administered to the experimental group's students to measure their perceptions quantitatively regarding genre knowledge. To explore the students' perception concerning the instructions qualitatively, the semi-structured individual interviews were administered to ten students who were chosen from the experimental group. The results showed that scaffolding genre knowledge had significant impact on the Iranian EFL learners' academic writing skill. Furthermore, the qualitative findings showed that the learners adopted positive views toward scaffolding genre knowledge in developing their academic writing skills.

Keywords: EFL Context, Genre Knowledge, Graduate Students, Scaffolding, Writing Skill

Introduction

Writing requires a complicated form of reflection through which one might better recognize the distinctions and intricacies in processing language and the rules guiding the writing process (Clay, 1983 as cited in Maleki & Yazdani Moghadam, 2017). It can be more demanding in the second language (L2) than the first language (L1) as it demands specific abilities, like vocabulary, structure, and spelling (Alfaki, 2015; Wei et al., 2020). Nevertheless, some evidence indicates that there are additional difficulties that can occur, including those related to cultural differences, selecting effective writing techniques, familiarity with the genres, and academic L2 proficiency (Ortega, 2015).

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Regarding the significance of writing skill, Hyland (2003) contends that having proficiency in academic writing can be a definitive evidence of EFL/ESL students' academic achievements. Writing is thought to be the demanding and crucial skill for higher education students (Richards & Renandya, 2002). In addition, writing is regarded a challenging task for EFL/ESL students (Fajrina et al., 2021) in which they should write properly to help them fulfill the academic requirements in a language they might not be as fluent in or familiar with (Abas & Aziz, 2016; Rao, 2007). Students in higher education across the world should improve their proficiency in ESL/EFL academic writing, and for graduate students, mastering the writing skill will result in higher academic achievement and better college scores. The significance of writing is much more critical in university contexts since EFL/ESL students are progressively asked to undertake their studies in L2, and they must to be knowledgeable enough to effectively produce particular writing genres, such as essays, critical evaluations, and scientific papers. Likewise, writing to academia means the way to meet the professional criteria and academic qualifications (Dudley-Evans & St. Joun, 1998; Hyland, 2013). In spite of its significance, in Iranian EFL higher education settings, writing may appear to be the language skill that has been neglected the most. Based on Bakhshi et al. (2019, 2020, 2021), one of the challenges of the Iranian graduate students writing up their thesis and conducting their research studies, particularly the qualitative research, is the lack of academic writing proficiency. Consequently, to recover the educational loss, some teaching approaches, like product-oriented, process-oriented, genre-based approaches are implemented till now. Due to its theoretical strength and demonstrated effectiveness in practice, a genre-oriented method has recently gained more recognition regarding various types of writing's discourse and rhetoric.

Over the past thirty years, L2 classrooms have paid a lot of attention to the genre use in language classes (Rasyidah, 2019). In this respect, Hyland (2002, p. 113) introduced two aims that include "desire to understand the relationship between language and its context of use" and "to employ this knowledge in the service of language and literacy education". For teaching writing in English as a second language (ESL) contexts, particularly in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, genre theory has been extensively used as a valuable resource (Nueva, 2016; Derewianka, 2003). In the L2 writing field, genre-oriented methods have maintained to be an efficient instruction via raising the awareness of learners to discourse characteristics (Cheng, 2011). Learners generally acknowledge the methods or instances indicating specifically what they should perform linguistically. Learning a particular genre also enables students to recognize an interactional style by reflecting on its social setting and purpose (Elashri, 2013).

Different studies on ESL/EFL writing proficiency have also persuaded the researchers to use genre knowledge as an overt instrument for boosting writing abilities since suitable composed texts, based on Hyland (2003), could be accomplished by understanding of genre stages and how to begin them. Tardy (2016) believes that "excluding genres from the classroom is not really an option, as they are the primary means through which humans communicate in writing" (p. 129). The idea that a strong English academic writing relies in part on students' genre awareness and ability to use this information in their writing has been supported by a number of EFL/ESL writing research to date (Hyland, 2007, 2008, 2013; Maleki & Yazdani Moghadam, 2017; Mustafa, 1995; Martin, 1989, 1993; Myskow & Gordon, 2009; Negretti & McGrath, 2018). Because the evidence for the genre-based method has been proved to be so unquestionable, many researchers combine their process-oriented model toward writing skill by focusing on the generic elements of the writing assignments in ESL/EFL classes (Walsh, 2004). In fact, genre-oriented strategies have proven to be an effective process for students in higher education by detecting textual elements in L2 writing (Cheng, 2011; Hyland, 2007; Swales, 2004). The genre-based writing approaches are varied for various educational contexts (Rasyidah, 2019). With regard to ESP school of thought, instructions start by assuming that learners' existing norms and literacy greatly diverge from the abilities they actually require in reality (Hyland, 2002, 2003). Therefore, genre-oriented education could build on learners' knowledge of the different kinds of discourses (Rasyidah, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

A genre-based approach within the discourse framework is theoretically supported by at least two theories, notably Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis (NH) and Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism. Regarding the NH, based on Schmidt (1990), noticing played a crucial part in EFL acquisition because it assisted in converting input—the language a student faces, whether comprehensibly or not—into intake as the comprehended input (Maleki & Yazdan Moghadam, 2017). Considering pivotal role of noticing in L2, Swain (2000) and Qi and Lapkin (2001) argued intake can deeply help students to do language processing. As a result, in an L2 writing class, a discourse-rhetoric genre-oriented method might support learners in converting potentially incomprehensible input into pedagogically comprehensible intake. This is because writing is considered a cultural achievement learned and enhanced via consciousness and is viewed as a requirement for awareness for learning within the NH framework (Schmidt, 1990; Schmitt, 2002).

Regarding the second theory, a genre-oriented approach is consistent with the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) concept and the need to scaffold the novel acquisition process for the inexperienced student via proper treatment and modeling by an experienced instructor based on social constructivism (Maleki & Yazdani Moghadam, 2017). Sociocultural Theory (SCT) considers learning to be both cognitive and social phenomenon (Lantolf, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). Essential interconnected concepts in SCT, mediation and internalization, ZPD, the agency, and participation provided a critical objective to examine the knowledge co-construction and meaning in a collaborative dialogue setting. An important notion in the ZPD is scaffolding or “assisted performance” (van Lier, 2004, p. 147), defined as assistance provided by others who are more capable of helping learners develop in such a way that they cannot do it alone (Lantolf, 1996). From the ZPD's view, growth in L2 not only points to enhanced linguistic performance, but also refers to the level of accountability assumed by the learners in the L2. The growing responsibility of the learner can be seen from the kinds and modifications of help that a learner requires to carry out (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). In such a manner, the ZPD indicates how the dynamics of interaction affect the nature of feedback and scaffolding and how useful it is for learners that provides a useful view on the collaborative dialogue experience of learners. Furthermore, the re-conceptualization of the ZPD by Gutierrez (2008) involves us to expand our perspective of the ZPD simply from a productive adult-centered scaffolding space into a “transformative room”. In this context, the different levels of commitment or involvement of learners in collaborative learning operations should be seen as vital to their teaching and as revealing their social, cultural, and historical learning aspect.

Literature Review

Genre Knowledge

The resources one has at their disposal to appropriately respond to the repeated demands of a given discourse community are known as genre knowledge. With this specific knowledge, the author of a text might specify its type and the strategies that will best fulfill its objective (Olive et al., 2009). Since genres may imply modifications based on the short-term objectives of the participants in a particular discourse community, genre knowledge is flexible. However, because it must rely on a community's common knowledge, practices, and cognition, genre knowledge is contextual. Additionally, it necessitates adherence to community norms about register and meaning-making, adhering to accepted procedures at both the structural and contextual levels. Last but not least, genre knowledge necessitates acknowledging how frequently genres are recreated (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995 as cited in Uzun, 2017). In line with Berkenkotter and Huckin's approach, Tardy (2009) claims that formal, process, rhetorical, and subject-related knowledge are all genre awareness elements. By enhancing the integration of these four domains, genre knowledge could be improved. According to Tardy (2009), a genre's lexico-grammatical conventions make up its formal features. On the other side, one's understanding of the procedures commonly used in the creation of a genre and its

acceptance by the intended audience is referred to as process knowledge. Rhetorical knowledge is usually characterized by a high degree of reader awareness and is focused on the genre's communication goals. Last but not least, subject-matter competency concerns the content that the genre's author will produce. This content must be related to a particular community or discipline (Tardy, 2009).

Empirical Studies

In a quantitative and cross-sectional study, Uzun (2017) investigated the correlation between genre awareness and writing skill that was carried out in an ELT department where writing literary analysis essays was a common assignment for students. Thirty literary analysis essays from 2nd ELT students were collected as the research is correlational in nature. A checklist created and approved by Uzun (2016) in the similar setting was used to assess how closely literary analysis essays adhered to genre conventions. The Jacobs et al. (1981) ESL Composition Profile was used to evaluate essay writing skills. Through correlation analysis, the correlation between genre knowledge and writing ability was inquired. The results showed that the group who adhered the least to the literary analysis essay's genre rules performed the worst in terms of writing, and the group that adhered the most to them did the best. In a similar line, Driscoll et al. (2020) undertook a mixed-methods study to evaluate genre as a significant component for comprehending and supporting writing development. Five different general education writing (GEW) courses from four various American higher education institutions were included in their investigation. They employed a strategy based on rhetorical genre studies to study how genre awareness affects students' writing development. Importantly, this approach assisted them in locating curricula that highlighted the several possible elements that could influence the writing improvement so that they could research these aspects' potential effects. The findings suggest that GEW courses could help greatly learners enhance their writing in the areas of audience, sources' role, genre use, contextual understanding, genre-related association, and style. The results showed that the students, in the universities under investigation, indicate having substantial improvements in their writing during the semester. Additionally, in her qualitative, longitudinal research of a student, Beaufort (2007) came to the conclusion that genre knowledge helps learners analyze writing tasks while they get ready to write in various settings. She also asserted that students will succeed more in living up to the standards established by new discourse communities if they are aware of how genres differ across fields. Similarly, according to Lindenman (2015), her students made obvious connections between many kinds of writing they had engaged in, some academic and some not. Specifically, these students concentrated on typical goals, like searching for funds for both academic and extracurricular activities, or typical rhetorical devices, like beginning a text intended for busy audience with a summary of the conclusion to make sure that readership would not lose the argument's primary point. Both academic and nonacademic works by students that were written in very different situations for very different audiences indicated the recognition of these goals and techniques. Her research demonstrated that in order to find these commonalities, students had to classify texts using cognitive techniques. She claimed that these procedures highlight the value of students' classifications of genres rather than those of researchers. She showed that senior undergraduate writers, not first-year writers, showed this growth of genre understanding. In a parallel line of research, Zhang and Zhang (2021) looked at the efficiency of genre-based teaching on learners' overall progress in EFL writing, particularly their writing comprehension and argument-making skills. While the control group underwent the regular writing instruction, the experimental group received a genre-oriented writing style. Examining the changes in the students' performance involved using the pre- and post-writing test data, surveys, and stimulated recall interviews. The results showed that the experimental groups had seen more changes in their understanding of argumentation as a result of the genre-based writing training than the control participants. The experimental group showed significant improvement, especially in the manner they expressed their understanding of discourse move organization and argumentative language elements. Additionally, they displayed improved reflection on their understanding of reasoning. The experimental group's increased usage of discourse move structures and overall improvement in writing quality are indications that the genre-based approach assisted in the development of their argumentative writing.

As far as the researchers reviewed the related literature, there is no study to investigate the impacts of scaffolding genre knowledge on EFL learners' academic writing skills in the Iranian EFL higher education context. As a result, this study was an attempt to bridge this gap. The significance and originality of this study lies in the focus on the scaffolding genre knowledge of the graduate students in academic writing classes in the Iranian higher education context. The findings could possibly enrich the field of genre-oriented writing with valuable scaffolded tasks that demonstrate various types and degrees of help that can be offered by EFL teachers. As a result, this study aimed to answer the following questions:

Research Question One: Does scaffolding genre knowledge have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' academic writing skill?

Research Question Two: How does and to what extent scaffolding genre knowledge enhance students' development of academic writing?

Research Question Three: What are the participants' perceptions on scaffolding genre knowledge in the course of learning academic writing?

Methodology

Design and Participants of the Study

A mixed-method explanatory sequential design was used in this study, starting with a quantitative phase before moving on to a qualitative phase to clarify and support the quantitative results (Creswell, 2012). The initial population of the study was 100 (62 females and 38 males) EFL students selected from M.A. TEFL students who took academic writing course. They were selected from Islamic Azad University, Tehran and Alborz branches. The method for sample selection was convenience sampling (Ary et al., 2019). The sample was selected based on availability and language proficiency. However, because of the requirements for university registration, randomization was basically impossible. Thus, the research sample consisted of intact classes. To homogenize the sample, Oxford placement test (OPT) was employed, and according to its scores, 50 advanced learners, including 31 females and 19 males, whose marks fell one standard deviation above or below the mean, were regarded the participants. After that, they were assigned into an experimental group and a control group. Their first language was Persian, and their age was between 26 to 30 years old.

Instruments

Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

The participants' proficiency levels should be homogeneous prior to the start of the treatment sessions. The Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was applied to evaluate the students' current level of proficiency. It is practical for classifying learners into varying levels of proficiency and simple to implement. It is divided into three parts: Part 1 examines learners' grasp of grammar; Part 2 evaluates their vocabulary; and Part 3 assesses their writing skills. Additionally, the OPT test's reliability index was assessed, and it was .80 (Wistner et al., 2009). Additionally, the construct validity for this placement test has been reported (Wistner et al., 2009).

Writing Test

To measure the writing ability of the participants, the IELTS academic writing task 2 (2021) was employed as the pretest and posttest. The rationale behind using this test was that it is regarded as a Standard English Test which is developed by Cambridge University. The writing test was piloted with the ten students who were similar to the participants regarding age and proficiency level. The results showed that the test enjoyed the reliability standard ($r=.89$). In addition, five experts in the field

confirmed the test's content validity. Two qualified raters reviewed and rated the tasks. The participants' responses were assessed by the raters according to four factors: (1) task accomplishment, (2) coherence and cohesion, (3) lexical resource, and (4) grammatical range and accuracy. Scores were awarded on a scale of 1 to 9. The collected data was analyzed to assess the test scores' inter-rater reliability using the Pearson correlation, and the results showed the raters' significant agreements on pretest ($r(45) = .721, p = .000$) and posttest ($r(45) = .793, p = .000$).

Scaffolding Genre Knowledge Questionnaire

To measure the perceptions of the participants quantitatively regarding scaffolding genre knowledge in the academic writing classes, a researcher-made questionnaire was developed by the researchers. It consisted of 10 Likert-based items. Likert-based procedure was used due to its convenience for responding the items by the participants. Five subject-matter experts confirmed the questionnaire's content validity. Its reliability was checked through the pilot study using Chronbach's alpha, and the results showed that the questionnaire enjoyed the acceptable reliability ($r=.86$).

Semi-structured Interview

An in-depth, semi-structured interview was used to elicit the perceptions of the participants regarding scaffolding genre knowledge in the academic writing classes. Upon administering the posttest, the interviews were undertaken with 10 learners (4 males and 6 females) who were purposefully chosen from the experimental group. The purpose of the interview was to extract more in-depth data on the learners' views towards implementing scaffolding genre knowledge in academic writing class. The interview sessions were held face-to-face, and the language of the interviews was English. They were conducted within two months, and each session took about 20 to 25 minutes. The questions of the interview were extracted from the results of questionnaire, and it was 6 open-ended questions. Five subject-matter experts confirmed the questions' content validity. The participants gave their consent for the interviews to be audio recorded and then transcribed.

Data Collection Procedure

Quantitative Phase

One hundred students were selected from M.A. TEFL students who took academic writing course according to accessibility and language abilities as the initial sample. They were selected from Islamic Azad University, Tehran and Alborz branches. After homogenizing the participants based on OPT results, 50 EFL students, including 31 females and 19 males, whose marks fell one SD above or below the mean, were regarded the participants, and then assigned into an experimental group and a control group. While the control group was instructed in accordance with the standard course syllabus, the experimental group got teaching based on scaffolding genre knowledge. The students' permission to participate in the current study was initially confirmed through a consent form. The IELTS Academic Writing Task 2 was then given as the pretest. The IELTS academic task 2 was selected since the goal of the course was academic writing instruction. The treatments were held during 16 sessions, each lasting 90 minutes.

In the experimental group class, the students received instructions about notions, such as genre, register, discourse, audience, and purpose of academic texts. The instructor introduced different academic texts to her class to teach the conventions and features of academic genre through scaffolding genre knowledge. The tasks' centrality in genre-based approaches is emphasized (Swales, 1990; Tardy 2009). Depending on the genre school, tasks have frequently included genre analysis, albeit with differing emphasis. The seminal works of Hyon (2001) and Cheng (2011) mention the learning that occurs as a result of these tasks in L2 learners: Students can understand the contextual idiosyncrasies underlying texts, strengthen their writing skill, and perform various genres by implementing genre analysis (Yasuda, 2011). Therefore, the researchers in the present study designed

the specific genre-based tasks to be performed by the students during the treatment sessions. In these tasks, the students were introduced to the rules and conventions of academic English discourse, organizational techniques, and stylistic idiosyncrasies. They were also given instructions on how to approach project proposal parts in terms of move/step structures. Then, in order to simplify careful work on framing each part, templates of pattern phrases relevant to academic genre-based functions were incrementally included (Kuzmenkova, 2014). Formulating the rhetorical objective, stating the processes for a specific move, describing how they were realized linguistically, and finally placing them in a logical order were all required steps in the work. The tasks of identifying steps and clarifying their linguistic expression deserved special consideration because not all conventional names of steps can be easily recognized by novice L2 writers. As a result, the students should clearly state the objective of their communication, locate the best language to represent it, compare many L2 expressions for the same intention, and choose the one that best serves their needs. The students were also urged to describe recurring patterns in various sections, read relevant EFL/ESL original research papers, and study the language in context. Finally, the students were instructed to outline steps in their classmates' compositions, analyze them to highlight appropriate variations, and practice correcting poor samples to consolidate the work on their drafts. The majority of the extra assignments were writing, editing, and rewriting that was either supervised or independent.

It is proposed that learning be seen as a collaborative effort between the teacher and the student and that this language use should take the form of a dialogue between the two parties. In this sense, Bruner (1985) used the term "scaffolding" to describe the function of the instructor in the learning cooperation. As a result, the researchers applied collaboration with their students to scaffold the tasks. In this regard, the first researcher as the instructor collaborated with the learners one by one through checking their tasks and writings to identify their errors and challenges to co-construct the academic genre knowledge.

The control group was taught according to the regular syllabus. *The Academic Writing skills* coursebook was used. This coursebook takes students through a step-by-step process. It is appropriate for students new to academic writing who need general training in academic essay writing skills. Every session the instructor taught one chapter of the book, and asked the students to perform the book's activities and practices.

To examine the impact of the instructions on EFL students' academic writing performance, the IELTS Academic Writing Task 2 was held as the posttest after the treatments. Then, the questionnaire was administered to the experimental group's learners to examine their perceptions quantitatively towards scaffolding genre knowledge.

Qualitative Phase

The semi-structured individual interviews were administered to 10 students (4 males, and 6 females) who were chosen from the experimental group. The learners were purposefully selected from high achievers, medium achievers, and low achievers based on their writing pretest and posttest performance. Before undertaking the interviews, the interviewees were made aware of the aim and the timing of the interviews. The first researcher of the study conducted the interview sessions, and each interview lasted between 20 and 25 minutes. Then, all interviews were recorded and, with the participants' consent, were also transcribed. To remove the affective barriers and concerns of the students, they were assured that the results of the interview did not have any effect on their educational records.

Data Analysis Procedure

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were applied. The scores were obtained and entered into the statistical program SPSS. The median, maximum, and minimum scores were tallied for the descriptive statistics. Considering the nature of the research topics, the data gathered through this study was

examined utilizing ANOVA and an independent-samples t-test. In addition, thematic analysis (TA) was applied to find the pertinent codes and categories within the qualitative data in order to analyze it.

Results

Test of Data Normality

The pretest results were examined for normality of distribution prior to the testing of the hypotheses. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was therefore conducted. Based on Pallant (2005), the distribution is normal and an ANOVA can be performed if the Kolmogorov-Smirnov result is insignificant. Otherwise, the Kruskal-Wallis Test, a different non-parametric test, is the best option.

Table 1

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test of Normality on the Data Sets

	Statistic	DF	Sig.
Pretest	.095	50	.200*
Posttest	.100	50	.200*

* This is a lower bound of the true significance.

The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test were not significant, as indicated in Table 1. The normalcy criteria were thus satisfied. The pretest's and posttest's scores were, therefore, compared using a one-way between-groups ANOVA with a post-hoc test. The following formula was applied to determine the effect size as well:

$$\text{Eta squared} = \text{Sum of squares between groups} / \text{Total sum of squares}$$

First Research Question

To address the first research question that is "Does scaffolding genre knowledge have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' academic writing skill?", firstly the pretest results of the participants were compared to ensure that the groups had not been significantly different with regard to writing proficiency prior to the treatment. First, the descriptive statistics are discussed and then the inferential test of ANOVA is presented.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of the Group's Scores on the Pretest

Group	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Control	25	41.87	2.87	36.00	47.00
Experimental	25	41.48	3.08	37.00	47.00

The mean and SD values for the control group are 41.87 and 2.87, respectively, based on Table 2. The experimental group's equivalents are 41.48 and 3.08, respectively. However, there seems to be no significant difference between two groups.

Table 3

Test of Homogeneity of Variances for the Pretest

Levene's Statistic	DF1	DF2	Sig.
1.387	2	61	.264

Levene's homogeneity of variances test examines whether the variance in the two groups' scores is the same. When the significant value (Sig.) for the Levene's test is greater than .05., the homogeneity of variance has not been violated, according to Pallant (2005). Based on Table 3, the Sig. value in this instance is .264. The homogeneity of variance assumption has not been violated because this is more than .05.

Table 4

Results of ANOVA for the Pretest Scores

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.287	2	1.742	.154	.872
Within Groups	637.842	54	11.248		
Total	641.129	56			

$$\text{Eta squared} = 3.28 / 641.18 = .005$$

The accuracy scores of the participants before the treatment were compared using ANOVA, as shown in Table 4. The scores for the two groups did not differ statistically at the p .05 level: $F(2, 54) = .15$, $p = .87$. The effect size was .005, which is regarded as being small. The results for the posttest are presented as follows,

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics of the Group's Scores on the Posttest

Group	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Control	25	48.70	3.64	35.00	57.00
Experimental 1	25	61.90	4.95	52.00	77.00

As demonstrated in Table 5, the mean and SD values for the control group are 48.70 and 3.64, respectively. These values are 61.90 and 4.95 for the experimental group.

Table 6

Test of Homogeneity of Variances for the Posttest

Levene's Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
.762	2	54	.482

The Sig. value is .482, as displayed in Table 6. The homogeneity of variance assumption has not been violated since this is more than .05.

Table 7

Results of ANOVA for the Posttest Scores

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2439.654	2	1221.167	71.995	.000
Within Groups	962.357	54	17.554		
Total	3402.011	56			

$$\text{Eta Squared} = 2438.53 / 3401.73 = .71$$

A one-way between-groups ANOVA was employed to compare the participant scores following the treatment, as shown in Table 7. The scores for the three groups differed statistically significantly at the p .05 level: $F(2, 54) = 71.99$, $p = .000$. The effect size was .71, which is regarded as a very large effect size (Cohen, 1988). The null hypothesis, according to which scaffolding genre knowledge has

no significant effect on the learners' academic writing ability, is thus rejected. Therefore, scaffolding genre knowledge has a significant impact on Iranian EFL students' academic writing abilities.

Answering the Second Research Question

To address the second research question that is “How does and to what extent the implementation of scaffolding genre knowledge enhance students' development of academic writing?” and to ensure the significance of the mean scores, one-sample t-test with theoretical mean (3) was used.

Table 8

The Results of One-sample T-test of Participants' Perspectives towards Scaffolding Genre Knowledge

N	Sub-scales	t	F.	Sig.	Mean Dif.
1	Scaffolding genre knowledge could help me develop my academic writing.	3.971	74	0.001	0.467
2	Scaffolding genre knowledge could contribute to raise my academic genre awareness.	5.969	74	0.001	0.773
3	I could implement the academic genre features in my academic writings through scaffolding genre knowledge.	3.140	74	0.001	0.413
4	Scaffolding genre knowledge could meet my academic writing needs and demands.	5.386	74	0.001	0.707
5	I could improve my academic writing fluency through scaffolding genre knowledge.	5.793	74	0.001	0.813
6	I could improve my academic writing accuracy through scaffolding genre knowledge.	2.057	74	0.001	0.253
7	Scaffolding genre knowledge could improve my interest in academic essay writing.	4.926	74	0.001	0.693
8	I could overcome my academic writing challenges through scaffolding genre knowledge.	3.074	74	0.001	0.400
9	Scaffolding genre knowledge was effective to improve my autonomy in academic genre writing.	5.973	74	0.001	0.733
10	Scaffolding genre knowledge was more efficient than the conventional genre knowledge instruction.	6.745	74	0.001	0.840
Total	-	20.016	74	0.001	0.609

As the findings of Table 8 show, from the participants' perspectives, out of 10 items related to the main research question, 9 items had a significantly higher mean than the standard score (standard score equal to 3) and the level of significance was less than 0.05. And only item 3 has a lower mean than the theoretical mean, and the difference between the means obtained from items and the theoretical mean is not statistically significant. In examining the research question and comparing the mean with the theoretical mean, this question has a mean higher than the standard score and the difference between the obtained mean and the theoretical mean is statistically significant. Therefore, it can be said that from the participants' perspective, scaffolding genre knowledge could develop EFL students' academic writing.

Third Research Question

To address the third research question that is “What are the participants' perceptions on the scaffolding genre knowledge in the course of learning academic writing?” thematic analysis was used to explore the related codes and categories within the qualitative data. The results are presented as follows,

Creating Interest among Learners

Most of the students believed that scaffolding genre knowledge could develop their interest and motivation regarding academic writing. Some of them maintained that through scaffolding genre

knowledge their willingness towards writing academic essays improved remarkably. Ali in this regard noted,

In this course, I could be familiar with the features and conventions of academic writing. Before this course, I was not interested in academic writing, but now, I feel that writing an academic essay is my passion. Therefore, one of the advantages of this course is developing our interest in academic writing.

He believed that scaffolding genre knowledge could enhance his passion towards academic writing and consequently, writing an academic essay could be an interesting task for him. Mina one of the learners pointed out, "I personally did not like academic writing; however, after passing this course, writing an academic essay become a favorite task for me."

Developing Writing Academic Performance

Most of the participants noted that scaffolding genre knowledge could develop their academic writing performance, and they could write their academic essays easily after receiving this instruction. They believed that knowing the features and conventions of academic writing could help them improve the academic writing ability. Reza in this respect said that,

The important point in academic writing performance is knowing the rules and features of academic genre to compose an acceptable academic essay. In this course, we could learn many things about academic genre, and this knowledge can help us to write a better essay. Scaffolding genre knowledge is very helpful to boost our academic writing performance.

He maintained that this course is beneficial for him to improve his academic writing performance and he could acquire many things regarding academic writing genre. Sara in this regard pointed out, "learning the characteristics of the academic genre could enhance my academic essay ability dramatically. Now, I can write an academic essay more accurately regarding the general features of academic writing genre." She believed that this course could help her to improve the accuracy of her writing performance and it also could improve her academic genre knowledge.

Overcoming Academic Writing Challenges

Some of the participants believed that scaffolding genre knowledge could help them overcome the challenges of academic writing. They mentioned that these challenges impeded their academic writing performance and through this course, they could remove these challenges and improve the quality of their academic writing. Zahra in this respect noted,

I have different challenges in academic writing, such as organizing my ideas, using proper vocabularies and expressions, implementing the formal tone. After passing this course, I could use the proper academic vocabularies and expressions in my essays, and I could also implement the appropriate tone throughout the academic text.

She maintained that overcoming the academic writing challenges was one of the advantages of this course in which scaffolding genre knowledge could develop her writing performance. Ali one of the participants in this respect pointed out, "I experienced many challenges in my academic writings, which hindered my academic writing performance. However, this course could help me remove most of the challenges to write a better academic writing." He could overcome his academic writing challenges after receiving scaffolding genre knowledge.

Developing the Academic Writing Autonomy of the Learners

Most of the participants maintained that scaffolding genre knowledge is beneficial to boost their academic writing autonomy. They believed that upon finishing the course, they could write their essays independently in which scaffolding could develop their academic writing autonomy. Arman in this regard noted,

As a matter of fact, developing the sense of independence was one of the merits of this course. During this course, I could gradually improve my academic writing, and I reach to a point that I can write my essay without the help of my instructor. Scaffolding genre knowledge can be a best choice to develop our independence in academic writing.

He maintained that scaffolding genre knowledge could improve his academic writing autonomy. He could write his writing without the help of the instructor by using genre knowledge. Mahdis in this respect mentioned, "I could develop my academic writing autonomy through this course and boost my independence in academic writing." Therefore, the participants believed that this course is beneficial to improve their academic writing autonomy that is very significant feature of this course.

Discussion

The results showed that scaffolding genre knowledge had significant impact on the Iranian EFL graduate learners' academic writing skill. This finding lends support to the findings of several studies (e. g., Bazerman, 2013; Graham, 2006; Lu, 2010; Nowacek, 2011; Tardy, 2009; Wardle, 2007; Yancey et al., 2015) in which they found that developing genre knowledge is key to enhancing EFL/ESL learners' writing performance. This finding adds to this conversation by suggesting scaffolding strategy for genre instruction in the advanced writing course can be used to co-construct the genre knowledge between students and the instructor.

The results are in agreement with those of Driscoll et al. (2020) who looked at genre as a crucial element for comprehending and encouraging writing improvement. In light of their findings, they propose an extended perspective of Tardy's four genre knowledge elements. Their findings demonstrated a correlation between genre knowledge and writing improvement during a semester. They argued that three particular strategies, namely writing for an audience outside of the classroom, explicitly integrating source texts into ongoing disciplinary discussions, and encouraging two various types of metacognitive awareness might enhance these genre components. Additionally, the findings are consistent with those of Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) who examined survey data from the learners enrolled in advanced writing courses. Their research showed that the learners went through three developmental stages as they developed their disciplinary writing. Moreover, the results are also consistent with Wardle's (2007) and Nowacek's (2011) results, which contend that engaging learners in a genre-oriented approach and teaching them about genres may be crucial supports for enhancing fundamental genre knowledge, as well as long-term writing improvement. All of these studies highlight the crucial part that developing students' genre knowledge can play in their improvement. But they do not go into great length on how genre knowledge emerges in the context of general English writing or what types of genre knowledge might be possible for general English writing. Furthermore, the results are also in agreement with the those of Almacioğlu and Okan (2018) who designed an alternative and efficient genre-based writing education for EFL learners in order to meet their academic needs. The results of their study showed that most students, at least, gained the declarative type of metacognitive awareness, and they could improve their writing performance.

Regarding the results of second and third research questions, the learners perceived scaffolding genre knowledge as a practical and useful procedure for advanced writing course, and they adopted a positive view towards this type of instruction which complement the findings of the quantitative results. The findings are in line with Almacioğlu and Okan (2018) in which their results showed that the students adopted a positive view towards genre-based approach in developing their writing skill. Their findings provided evidence for their development in their writing performance, in genre knowledge, and in their view towards writing skill. Negretti and Kuteeva (2011) claim that increasing students' genre knowledge results in the development of metacognitive writing awareness, giving them the ability to recognize rhetorical devices, discourse communities, and text structure in relation to the writing goal. Based on the findings of interviews with the learners, the participants believed that increasing their genre knowledge could lead to developing their autonomy in writing

skill in which they could reflect on their written products and find their weaknesses in their writings. This sense of autonomy showed that scaffolding genre knowledge could develop their metacognitive awareness toward writing elements. Furthermore, the participants maintained that scaffolding genre knowledge could develop their academic writing performance, and they could write their academic essays easily after receiving this instruction. This finding complements the quantitative results and lends support to the findings of several scholars (e.g., Bazerman, 2013; 2015; Driscoll et al., 2020; Graham, 2006; Lu, 2010; Nowacek, 2011; Tardy, 2009; Wardle, 2007) who found developing genre knowledge enhanced the learners' writing performance in different contexts. In addition, most of the students believed that scaffolding genre knowledge could develop their interest and motivation regarding academic writing. This study supports the findings of Rezvani and Saeidi (2019), who discovered that a genre-based strategy significantly impacted Iranian EFL students' motivation to write. Contrary to the social constructivism perspective, which places more emphasis on the connections between writing activities and the social and cultural settings that affect people's "motivation" to write, cognitively oriented scholars consider writing as a series of connected, varying complex processes (e.g., Harris & Graham, 1992, 1996; Hayes, 1996 as cited in Hidi & Boscolo, 2007). As the result, from the findings, it could be inferred that scaffolding strategy in teaching writing skill could enhance the interest and motivation of the learners toward writing skill.

In addition, the findings lend credence to the theoretical frameworks of the study. The first one was Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (NH) (1990) which denotes *noticing* had an integral role in the process of EFL acquisition as it aided convert intake—the information that was understood—from input, which is the language that a learner encounters, whether comprehensibly or not. In the present study, through genre-based instruction, the learners could notice the features and conventions of academic writing genre and implement their obtained genre knowledge in their writing products that enhanced their academic writing ability. As a result, they could convert the input into intake, which supports the noticing theory. On the other side, the second theoretical foundation of this study was social constructivist notion of ZPD and the necessity of scaffolding a beginner via proper treatment and modeling by a teacher (as an experienced person) that was proposed by Vygotsky (1978). The findings of this research showed that using scaffolding strategy could be helpful to enhance the academic writing proficiency of EFL graduate students, which also supports ZPD theory.

Conclusion and Implications

This mix-method study aimed to explore the effects of scaffolding genre knowledge on EFL graduate students' academic writing skills in the Iranian EFL higher education context. The findings showed that scaffolding genre knowledge had significant impact on the Iranian EFL graduate learners' academic writing skill. Additionally, the results of the questionnaire and the interviews indicated that the learners perceived scaffolding genre knowledge as a practical and useful procedure for advanced writing course, and they adopted a positive view towards this type of instruction, which complement the findings of the quantitative results. Students learn new genres through practice, according to Freedman (1993) and Freedman and Medway (1994), and explicit genre education in the classroom is essential. Others argued that genres could not be specifically taught in writing courses since they are learnt through involvement in the numerous communities in which learners are engaged (Russell, 1997). Additionally, writing teachers lack the practice techniques and "insider" knowledge of the genres required to present disciplinary genres (Freedman, 1993). It is unlikely, as these researchers argue, to anticipate that students will learn this knowledge in English writing classes or that they will have a comprehensive recognition of disciplinary writing—and thus, disciplinary genre—in these courses. In light of the results, it can be concluded that scaffolding genre knowledge may be a useful strategy for enhancing the EFL graduate students' academic writing in the context of Iranian higher education.

This study could have some pedagogical implications. The findings implied that EFL learners should improve genre awareness and genre knowledge to comprehend and write texts in various discursive settings. A genre-based approach could aid EFL/ESL learners to boost genre knowledge

and metacognitive skills that reconnect the personal, cognitive aspect of writing to the social, discursive essence of academic communication. Moreover, the qualitative results implied that scaffolding genre awareness and genre knowledge could be mostly metacognitive, and implementing the metacognition framework to explore L2 academic writing could present new perspectives and practical implementation for EFL teaching writing. Additionally, students might also acquire at least two other kinds of metacognitive awareness, including the writing strategies awareness applied to fulfill specific writing tasks and the awareness of their own levels of competence in special process-based writing genres or subject areas. The use of source texts by EFL students may also help them get familiar with various genres and understand the significance of these texts in the formation of their own works and in broader discipline communications. As a result, one of the crucial components that English teachers must consider when implementing genre-based writing pedagogy in an EFL/ESL setting is the introduction of various skillfully written reading texts that incorporate the distinctive elements of the respective text-types into their own classroom. In the current research, one of the challenges of the learners in developing their writing abilities was the lack of text-type awareness with respect to language elements and text features; as a result, they were unable to recognize how to convert their ideas into a text that was comprehensible. Therefore, material developers, while designing and developing instructional materials of writing course, should pay adequate attention to text selection that serves as a model for learners.

The present study suffered from some limitations. The participants were M.A. TEFL students who took academic writing course in which their age, sex, and educational background were not considered since convenient sampling was implemented. Thus, the results could not be generalized to other contexts, such as language institutes and other groups of EFL learners. Therefore, future studies could replicate the present study in different contexts using different EFL learners. Moreover, this study applied scaffolding genre knowledge as the method of genre-based instruction, which has been thought to be fruitful for learners' academic writing. Future studies could implement other methods of genre instruction in EFL/ESL writing classes. Finally, writing tests, a survey, and an interview were used in this research to evaluate the efficiency of scaffolding genre-oriented instruction in improving the academic writing skills of EFL graduate students. Other data collection methods, such as focus group interviews and observation, may be used in future investigations.

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Hereby the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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