



## **The Impact of Genre-based Instruction on Academic Writing & Self-efficacy: The Case of Graduate Students' Thesis Proposal**

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### **Abstract**

This study was conducted to explore the effects of genre-based writing instruction on thesis proposal writing self-efficacy and writing quality. Twenty-two graduate students majoring in Teaching English as a Foreign Language participated in the study. Drawing on Bandura's (2006) guidelines, we developed a proposal writing self-efficacy questionnaire, which students completed at the beginning of the semester and the end of one semester. They wrote a preliminary proposal at the beginning of the semester, that is, before being exposed to a genre-based approach. For one semester the students' awareness was raised concerning the generic structures of the sections included in the thesis proposal and relevant lexico-grammatical features were highlighted. Students initially showed strong writing self-efficacy, which significantly increased at the end of the semester. They also showed remarkably significant improvement in their proposal writing skills. Students' pre-instruction skills perception was higher than their proposal quality, which may be attributed to their lack of knowledge of academic writing conventions. However, after receiving genre-based instruction, their proposal quality surpassed their level of self-efficacy. The results of this study are discussed, and implications of the study are provided.

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## **1. Introduction**

Academic writing is recognized as a major literacy skill crucial for graduate students. Graduate students need to produce well-structured and cogently written thesis proposals as expected by the examining committee as part of their graduation process. To succeed in doing so, they need to get engaged in the complex activity of writing for academic purposes, which requires a high level of commitment. Research suggests that psychological factors play an influential role in leading individuals to take determined measures to perform activities. Among the psychological factors, self-efficacy has been well-documented to contribute to enhancing students' performance (e.g., Bai, Wang, & Nile, 2021; Bandura, 1986, 1997, 2006; Deuling & Burns, 2017; Pajares, 2003; Schunk, 2003; Sparks & Ganschow, 2001). Although researchers have profusely shown the connections between self-efficacy and performance, they have mostly tended to conduct correlational studies rather than experimental ones. Besides, to the best of our knowledge, very few studies have explored the effects of genre-based academic writing instruction on students' proposal writing self-efficacy (PWSE) and proposal writing skills development.

According to Hyland (2016), genre-based writing pedagogy is intended to raise students' consciousness explicitly and systematically on how language is structured to enable them to achieve specific social purposes. By extension, arming students with genre literacy well serves them to gain enough confidence to undertake greater responsibility and satisfy the requirements of educational settings, and, consequently, be recognized as a discourse community member. As an attempt to familiarize novice writers with the genre of proposal writing, the present study presents a brief account of genre-based implementation aimed at raising students' self-efficacy indicated to cause performance advancement.

### **1.1. Genre-based Academic Writing Instruction**

In the realm of writing instruction, genre-based approaches view writing as a means for communicating with specific readers via emphasizing certain social conventions in text organization so that targeted readers can recognize the intended purpose (Hyland, 1996). In other words, a genre is seen as a social action intended to convey a specific purpose to specific readership (Paltridge, 2013); hence, it addresses non-linguistic criteria of audience and purpose other than linguistic patterns (Devitt, 2004).

However, it appears a daunting task for novice writers in EFL contexts to incorporate these variables to express their communicative purposes. Unlike ESL writers, EFL writers experience learning to write within the traditional classroom where language and its contextual aspects are taught separately, and grammatical aspects are emphasized over pragmatic aspects of language (Yasuda, 2011); hence, recognition of the link between the above-mentioned variables appears challenging for EFL students. According to Yasuda (2011), to tackle this problem, "discussing the relation of lexis, grammar, and discourse structure to genre is crucial" (p.112). Likewise, Hyland (2007) asserts that genre-based pedagogies can "provide students with targeted, relevant, and supportive instruction" (p.148), and reveal why writers "make certain linguistic and rhetorical choices" (Hyland, 2003, p.19). Equipped with this knowledge, hence, students can participate more efficaciously in real out-of-class writing activities.

There are two opposing perspectives about the usefulness of genre-based instruction. While a number of researchers (e.g., Alinasab, Gholami, & Mohammadnia, 2021; Hyland, 2007; Lee

& Swales, 2006; Tardy, 2009; Yasuda, 2011) are optimistic about learners' faster awareness of a genre through explicitly teaching its conventions, some researchers (e.g., Dias, Freedman, Medway, & Pare, 1999) believe in its restricted effect due to its decontextualized class-based implementation, which may even create an obscure picture of the genre for students. As a consequence of this controversy, further research in this regard seems justifiable. Furthermore, as Huang (2014) calls for more empirical studies on the effect of explicit genre-based instruction and in line with Alinasab, Gholami, and Mohammadian (2021), who truly point out that genre-based academic writing instruction is missing in Iranian educational settings, we opted to run a program on graduate students' genre literacy development.

## 1.2. Self-efficacy

Apart from the genre-based perspectives with regard to academic writing pedagogy, personal motivational variables play an inherent role in raising students' learning achievement (Dörnyei, 1994). Among the psychological tendencies, students' self-efficacy, as a core motivational construct, has been well documented to intensify motivation and behavior (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015).

Bandura (1986), in his social cognitive theory, refers to self-efficacy as an individual's self-evaluation and self-belief in their capacity to accomplish a demanding task or an activity of interest. This self-belief plays an essential role in the way learners make a conceptualization of their prospective success and, consequently, the amount of effort and persistence they invest in accomplishing a task of high calibre even in the face of adversities (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015, Deuling & Burns, 2017).

According to Bandura (1986), a person with stronger self-efficacy performs better regardless of his actual capability. In other words, higher levels of self-belief overshadow lower levels of ability and motivate the person to approach a challenging task as achievable, while lower levels of self-efficacy cause the person to view the task as beyond their capability (Bandura, 1997; Zulkosky, 2009). Therefore, self-efficacy constitutes the key gravitational force towards obtaining knowledge and skill of composing academic texts of high calibre. It is specifically true in EFL contexts where students' academic self-efficacy can be comparatively low due to their lack of sufficient access to native scholars to interact with and receive feedback from them. By implication, it is critically important to recognize the way the concepts of self-efficacy and writing competence in EFL educational contexts are related and can be enhanced.

Bandura (1986, 1997) identifies four sources for self-efficacy: enactive experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and emotional and physiological states, which can be a kind of criterion for predicting outcomes in various domains, academic performance being a case in point.

As echoed in the literature, investigation findings on self-efficacy, as a personal motivational construct, have grown interest in the field. Some studies (e.g., Bouffard, Bouchard, Goulet, Denoncourt, & Couture, 2005; Brady Amoon, 2011; De Clercq, Galand, Dupont, & Frenay, 2013; Fang, 2014; Feldman & Kubota, 2015) have demonstrated moderate to strong correlation between sense of efficacy and academic progress; for instance, Bouffard et al. (2005) found out that those in the high self-efficacy group answered more questions correctly and rejected correct responses less frequently. In another study, Brady Amoon and

Fuertes (2011) concluded that self-efficacy positively correlated with achievement, and self-efficacy and self-recognized capabilities significantly predicted academic achievement.

On the contrary, some studies (e.g., Cho & Shen, 2013; Crippen, Biesinger, Muis, & Orgill, 2009; Gebka, 2014; Khan, Cansever, Avsar, & Acemoglu, 2013; Phan, 2010) have reported no significant correlation between sense of efficacy and academic progress. For instance, Cho and Shen (2013) found out that self-efficacy was not correlated with performance significantly. In another study, Crippen et al. (2009) showed self-efficacy had no significant correlation with performance, and structural equation modeling did not find the impact of self-efficacy on the link between mastery goal orientations and outcome attainment crucial.

Given the inconsistency in research findings on the link between self-efficacy and academic attainment, more research is still warranted. Parallel studies should be carried out specifically in an Asian context since research has mostly focused on European and north American contexts ( Bai, Wang, & Nie, 2021; Richardson, Bond, & Abraham, 2012, as cited in Honicke & Broadbent, 2016).

## **2. Aim of the study**

The present study implemented genre-based instruction to familiarize students with the concept of genre in general and enable them to compose thesis proposals with respect to rhetorical organization, lexicogrammatical features, and non-genre aspects including word choice, language use, and mechanics. As performance is postulated to be mediated by level of self-efficacy, the associations between students' self-efficacy for academic writing and proposal writing skills was also explored. Thus, two research questions were addressed in this study:

- 1) Do TEFL graduate students' PWSE and proposal writing skills improve by implementing genre-based instruction of thesis proposal writing?
- 2) Is PWSE related to academic writing skills when writing a thesis proposal, and if it is, in what aspects?

## **3. Method**

### **3.1. Participants**

Twenty-two TEFL graduate students who had enrolled in an ESP course in an Iranian state university participated in this study (age range = 22-26 years old, male=4, female=18). They were in their second semester of their MA career, and reported that they had never experienced any genre-based writing instruction during their undergraduate or graduate studies.

As with all graduate studies, TEFL graduate students' real academic writing journey begins with writing a thesis proposal. However, TEFL students have to learn English academic writing genres, the disciplinary cultures of which vary from their L1. Therefore, in line with Tardy (2009), stressing the need for raising students' genre literacy, we opted to involve the motivated TEFL graduate students in an explicit genre-based proposal writing program to examine the extent to which it helps them to "participate effectively in target situations" (Hyland, 2003, p. 27).

The students were assumed to be approximately at an equal level of general English proficiency since, as undergraduate students, they had all already taken introductory courses for English majors such as Language Laboratory (eight credits), Reading Comprehension (six

credits), Grammar (eight credits), and Advanced Writing (two credits). Besides, this was evident in the proposals they wrote pre-instruction,  $M = 65.7$ ,  $SD = 8.6$ .

### 3.2. Instruments

#### 3.2.1. Pre- and Post-Instruction Texts (Proposal-writing Tasks)

To obtain data regarding the impact of the explicit genre-based instruction on the students' academic writing skills, they were each assigned to compose a thesis proposal once pre-and once post-instruction as a requirement for course completion. The topics of the proposals were kept constant the two times to ensure comparability (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007). On account of the small number of sessions during the semester (fourteen sessions), students were assigned to include the most typical sections of a proposal, i.e., Abstract, Introduction, Literature review, and Method, as they are more generic in nature. This study incorporated thesis proposal genre as graduate students' first academic writing challenge, and they can, later on, build on its similarities with other genres in their academic writing pursuits.

#### 3.2.2. Self-efficacy Questionnaire

Self-efficacy emerges differently in different disciplines and activities and thus must be measured via a task with an adjusted demand. Since, according to Honicke and Broadbent (2016), "there is no single valid scale of ASE, with scales being derived based on the domain specificity being studied" (p.80), the researchers made a PWSE questionnaire (Table 1), the statements of which attempt to tap into students' beliefs in their capabilities in writing a thesis proposal as a genre.

**Table1** *Proposal Writing Self-efficacy Questionnaire*

- |   |
|---|
| 1- I can abide by the expectations of expert readers by expressing the communicative purpose in the proposal. |
| 2-I can convince the reader in the introduction section of the proposal why my research is worth doing.       |
| 3-I can express the study purpose in my proposal introduction section clearly.                                |
| 4-I can express prior research gap(s) in my proposal literature section clearly.                              |
| 5-I can clearly express some prior research gap(s) in the literature review section.                          |
| 6-I can describe the data collection procedure clearly.   |
| 7-I can describe the data analysis procedure clearly.   |
| 8-I can reflect the purpose, method, and implications of the study clearly in the proposal abstract.          |
| 9- I can follow the generic structure of the introduction section in the proposal.                            |
| 10-I can follow the generic structure of the literature review section in the proposal.                       |
| 11- I can follow the generic structure of the method section in the proposal.                                 |
| 12- I can follow the generic structure of the abstract section in the proposal.                               |
| 13-I can use appropriate academic vocabulary to suit the proposal writing style.                              |
| 14-I can use appropriate vocabulary to create an imaginable picture of an idea in the proposal.               |
| 15-I can avoid word repetitions while writing the proposal.   |
| 16- I can write my proposal according to English grammar rules.   |
| 17- I can make appropriate use of tenses in different sections of the proposal.                               |

18-I can organize paragraphs effectively while writing different sections of the proposal.

19-I can use words and phrases that signal transitions effectively in the proposal (e.g., in addition, nevertheless).

20-I can use hedges appropriately while writing the proposal (e.g., perhaps, might, to a certain degree).

21-I can use boosters appropriately while writing the proposal (e.g., certain, obviously, always).

22-I can use English spelling rules accurately.

23-I can use English capitalization rules accurately.

24-I can use English punctuation rules accurately.

According to Bandura (2006), a self-efficacy questionnaire should concern students' self-perceived beliefs in their capabilities to follow the intended genre structure, and the content of the statements must correspond to the criteria for scoring the writing task. Therefore, most of the statements were derived from the moves and steps of the different models taught throughout the semester, and some (statements 4, 6, 7, 8, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, and 21) were adapted from the questionnaire designed by Kavanoz and Yulsel (2016) addressing scholarly writing in English. There are 24 statements as listed in Table 1. The 24 statements address a range of aspects: statements 1-8 concern content, statements 9-12 concern organization (generic structure), statements 13-15 concern vocabulary, statements 16-21 concern language use, and statements 22-24 concern mechanics. Following Bandura (2006), each statement was accompanied by "a 100- point scale, ranging in 10-unit intervals from 0 ("Cannot do"); through intermediate degrees of assurance, 50 ("Moderately certain can do"); to complete assurance, 100 ("Highly certain can do")" (p.312).

To ensure the questionnaire's content validity, four experts' judgment was obtained for its corroboration. Following their recommendations, three statements were excluded, and two statements were revised. Afterward, a pilot study was carried out on five students with similar backgrounds as the participants in this study to elicit their opinions concerning the clarity of the instrument items. All the students confirmed its clarity. Internal consistency of the questionnaire was confirmed through the correlations computed between the individual statements and the mean both pre-instruction (Table 3) and post-instruction (Table 4).

The questionnaire was administered to the students once before and once after the instruction. The rubrics were explained to the class by the researchers.

### **3.3. Instruction**

One month before the beginning of the semester, each student was assigned to select a topic of their interest and check it with the teacher (second author), and write a thesis proposal to submit to the teacher in the first session. Indeed, students were warned their tasks would be checked for plagiarism through iThenticate, and ones suffering from more than 10% similarity would have to be done over. They also filled out the self-efficacy questionnaire (Table 1) in the first session.

The fourteen-session intervention included several typical sections of a thesis proposal: Introduction, Literature review, Method, and Abstract sections construed as different genres, as each one has a distinct communicative purpose (Bhatia, 1993). For the purpose of instructing the generic structure of a proposal, a framework providing the related moves and steps was required. Based on our study of the literature there existed no single well-established framework addressing the moves and steps of whole sections of a proposal. Therefore, we

resorted to different models providing move-step patterns (Table 2) as guides for instructing each section of a proposal.

**Table 2** *Models Employed for Genre-based Instruction of a Proposal*

Sections	Models employed
Abstract	Lore's (2004,p. 283)
Introduction, Literature review	Swale (1990,p.141)
Method	Pho's (2008, p.8)

The instruction of each section of the proposal genre took nearly three sessions. The moves and steps of each section, along with the typical linguistic features, were illustrated by the teacher using PowerPoint slides. Elaborating on the communicative functions of the moves and steps of each section, the teacher raised the students' awareness that some steps are optional and may not appear in a text and that sometimes some moves and steps are not easily distinguishable due to syntactic structures such as embedding, etc.; therefore, the functional rather than formal values are to be realized (Bhatia, 1993). Afterward, students were provided with the relevant section of a well-written sample of a thesis proposal in the field of applied linguistics, awarded Excellent Award by the examining committee. The students worked in pairs or small groups and tried to identify the moves and steps, which were finally checked as a class. Consequently, they became familiar with the way the communicative purpose of each section of the genre is expressed. In addition, the students' attention was called to non-genre issues such as vocabulary, verb tense, cohesion, coherence, and punctuation rules.

Furthermore, students were assigned a topic to write, for example, the Introduction section as homework. In the next session, a few students were called to the front of the class to present their homework using PowerPoint slides and elaborate on the organizational structure (moves and steps), content, and vocabulary of their assignments, and the teacher provided some complementary comments. The teacher also collected all students' writing tasks for correction. In the next session, the teacher delivered the writing tasks containing feedback and comments on organizational structure, content, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Finally, for approximately twenty minutes until the end of each session, students had discussions with the teacher regarding the written feedback they had received and their writing problems.

Following the genre-based instruction of proposals they went through during the semester, they filled out the same questionnaire in the last session and were also assigned to write another proposal on the same topics as their pre-instruction proposals and submit them to the teacher within one month.

Each proposal the students delivered before and after the instruction was first checked for plagiarism through iThenticate. A few proposals, which had beyond 10 percent similarity index, were returned to the students for revision. At the end of the semester, the proposals were mingled with no sign on them telling pre-from post-instruction tasks. The authors and a third rater, experienced in rating academic writing tasks, graded the proposals (from 0 to 100) with an inter-rater reliability of 0.84. The writing tasks were analytically graded based on Jacobs, Zinkgraf, Wormuth, Faye Hartfiel, and Hughey's (1981) composition profile containing five aspects of texts, namely content (30%), organization (20%), vocabulary (20%), language use (25%), and mechanics (5%). Then, the raw scores, together with the scores obtained from the

PWSE questionnaire, both pre- and post-instruction (from 0 to 100), were transferred to SPSS for analysis.

The Pearson correlations were computed between each questionnaire statement and the questionnaire mean pre-and post-instruction, whereby mean and standard deviations were also obtained. In addition, each questionnaire statement and the questionnaire mean pre-instruction was correlated to the pre-instruction proposal scores using Pearson correlations. The same procedure was replicated for the post-instruction measures.

Furthermore, paired-samples t-tests were also computed to examine the effect of genre-based writing instruction on students' PWSE and their proposal writing skills. Ultimately, separate correlations were conducted between the questionnaire constructs (content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics) and the corresponding constructs in students' proposals.

#### 4. Results

##### 4.1. Questionnaire Internal Consistency

To substantiate the internal consistency of the questionnaire (Table 1), Pearson correlations were conducted between the individual statements pre-instruction and statements' mean pre-instruction (Table 3). The same correlations were replicated for individual statements post-instruction and statements' mean post-instruction (Table 4). The alpha values ranged from  $r=0.375$  to  $r=0.936$ . All values were statistically significant, which indicated that the questionnaire enjoys a high degree of internal consistency. A conclusion can be drawn that the students' grades showed their honest beliefs and were in agreement with their PWSE level assessed across the questionnaire statements.

**Table 3** Correlations between Individual Statements Pre-instruction and Statements' Mean Pre-instruction, Writing Pre-instruction, and Statements' Mean Post-instruction

statement	Pre-instruct. PWSE. mean	Pre-instruct. writing	Post-instruct. PWSE. mean
1	.992 **	.547**	.797**
2	.872**	.397	.882**
3	.885**	.618**	.744**
4	.815**	.259	.827**
5	.873**	.498*	.766**
6	.916**	.571**	.736**
7	.909**	.664**	.820**
8	.931**	.705**	.793**
9	.936**	.443*	.879**
10	.907**	.371	.887**
11	.858**	.417	.690**
12	.933**	.518*	.807**
13	.822**	.484*	.729**
14	.861**	.454*	.833**
15	.565**	.743**	.466*
16	.832**	.766**	.740**
17	.795**	.751**	.683**

18	.883**	.504*	.733**
19	.696**	.632**	.456*
20	.787**	.438*	.743**
21	.714**	.403	.675**
22	.889**	.593**	.733**
23	.725**	.306	.589**
24	.707**	.074	.564**
mean	-	.596**	.882**

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

**Table 4** Correlations between Individual Statements Post-instruction and Statements' Mean Pre-instruction, Statements' Mean Post-instruction, and Writing Post-instruction

statement	Pre-instruct. PWSE. mean	Post-instruct. PWSE. mean	Post-instruct. writing
1	.539**	.737**	.300
2	.650**	.857**	.422
3	.465*	.663**	.190
4	.276	.375	.137
5	.534*	.565**	.221
6	.303	.528*	.110
7	.615**	.813**	.425*
8	.458*	.646**	.263
9	.769**	.846**	.320
10	.714**	.861**	.348
11	.755**	.823**	.357
12	.587**	.700**	.109
13	.792**	.771**	.239
14	.592**	.668**	.449*
15	.622**	.671**	.416
16	.646**	.667**	.656**
17	.383	.500*	.470*
18	.368	.559**	.134
19	.450*	.385	.051
20	.552**	.558**	.421
21	.647**	.788**	.332
22	.822**	.754**	.403
23	.728**	.519*	.212
24	.766**	.692**	.567**
mean	.882**		.489*

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

#### 4.2. Academic Writing Self-efficacy Change

To explore the difference in students' degree of PWSE between pre-and post-instruction, paired sample t-tests were conducted. An examination of the data indicated that there was no violation

of the normality assumption. For each statement, as well as the mean, a paired sample t-test was performed. The results are provided in Table 5. The questionnaire mean remarkably increased from pre-instruction,  $M=68.84$ ,  $SD=13.73$  to post-instruction,  $M=85.68$ ,  $SD=6.30$ ,  $t(21)=9.07$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.79$ . The PWSE increase was significant in all statements, except in statements 20, 21, and 23.

The mean values for the 24 statements in the questionnaire ranged from 36.82 to 93.63 pre-instruction and from 66.36 to 95.45 post-instruction on the questionnaire, with potential ratings from 0 to 100. All the post-instruction mean values were bigger than that pre-instruction (Table 5).

**Table 5** Results of Paired-sample t-tests Comparing Students' Degree of PWSE between Pre- and Post-Instruction

Statement	Pre-instruct.		Post-instruct.		Std. Error Mean	t	Sig. (2-tailed)	$\eta^2$
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation				
1	55.45	20.86	82.72	11.20	3.84	7.09	.00	.70
2	58.18	19.18	84.54	10.56	2.83	9.30	.00	.80
3	68.63	16.41	86.36	10.02	3.28	5.39	.00	.58
4	36.81	20.56	78.63	12.06	4.14	10.09	.00	.82
5	60.45	15.87	82.27	7.51	2.98	7.30	.00	.71
6	70.00	16.03	88.63	5.60	3.30	5.63	.00	.60
7	56.81	17.83	82.72	10.77	2.99	8.66	.00	.78
8	80.45	14.63	94.54	6.70	2.91	4.83	.00	.52
9	58.63	20.30	86.36	11.35	2.62	10.55	.00	.84
10	51.36	19.58	83.63	10.48	2.93	10.98	.00	.85
11	65.00	16.83	86.36	7.26	2.96	7.20	.00	.71
12	77.72	15.09	92.72	7.02	2.77	5.41	.00	.58
13	62.72	17.50	78.18	9.57	2.43	6.34	.00	.65
14	55.00	17.38	66.36	12.92	2.96	3.83	.00	.41
15	67.27	12.41	75.45	10.56	2.04	4.00	.00	.43
16	73.18	16.44	83.63	12.16	2.41	4.32	.00	.47
17	82.72	16.08	90.90	10.19	3.13	2.61	.01	.24
18	59.54	18.12	82.72	7.67	3.74	6.19	.00	.64
19	79.54	15.57	92.72	8.27	3.50	3.76	.00	.40
20	93.63	9.53	95.00	5.97	2.00	0.68	.50	
21	91.81	13.32	95.45	8.00	2.23	1.62	.11	
22	79.09	14.44	83.18	11.29	1.42	2.88	.00	3.53
23	92.72	10.31	93.18	10.41	1.22	0.37	.71	
24	75.45	16.54	89.54	7.85	2.99	4.71	.00	.51
Mean	68.84	13.73	85.68	6.30	1.85	9.07	.00	.79

\*df = 21 in all statements

Some of the students had remarkably lower PWSE mean values than the others, as illustrated in Figure 1.

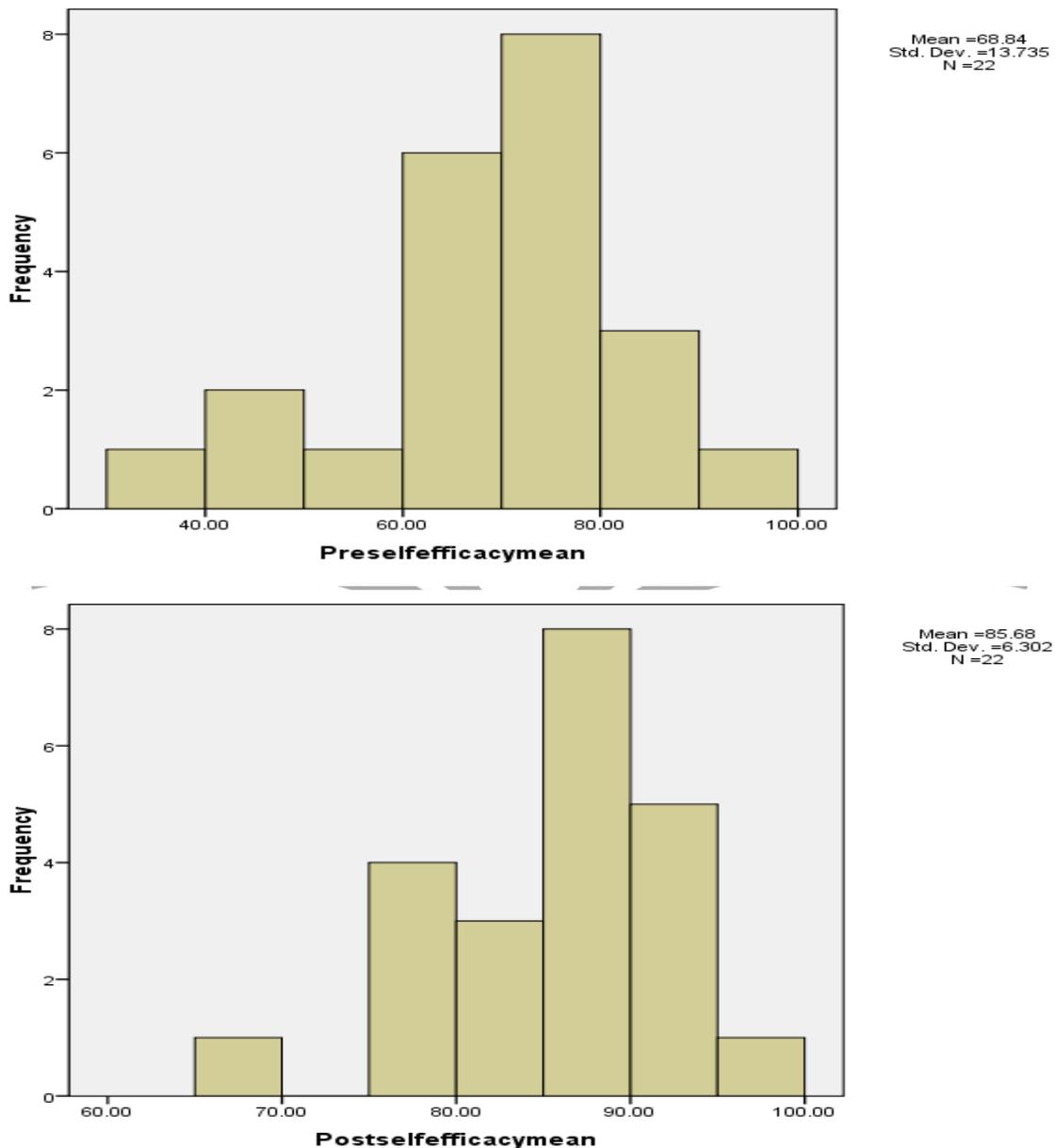


Figure 1. Bar graphs of questionnaire mean values of the students pre- and post-instruction.

### 4.3. Academic Writing Skills Change

The academic writing skills in the proposals pre- and post-instruction were analytically evaluated and scored based on Jacobs et al.'s (1981) ESL composition profile. As may be seen from Table 6, the results from paired sample t-tests showed the students considerably improved their writing performance in all the aspects ( $p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 6 Paired Sample T-tests for Students' Writing Skills Pre-and Post-Instruction**

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	Sig. (2-tailed)	$\eta^2$
Content	Pre-	17.77	2.32				
	Post-	23.90	2.28	.37	16.41	.00	.92
Organization	Pre-	10.90	2.89				
	Post-	17.13	2.00	.38	16.01	.00	.92
Vocabulary	Pre-	14.90	2.02				
	Post-	18.90	1.65	.40	9.99	.00	.82
Language use	Pre-	20.36	2.62				
	Post-	22.00	1.74	.36	4.42	.00	.48
Mechanics	Pre-	1.72	1.12				
	Post-	3.45	.80	.22	7.85	.00	.74
Total	Pre-	65.72	8.69				
	Post-	85.36	5.49	1.19	16.49	.00	.92

\* df = 21 in all aspects.

Students' improvement was notable from most to least as follows: content, organization (moves and steps), vocabulary, mechanics, and language use. As the course's most highlighted goal was the generic organization of academic texts, the students appear to have truly considered a link between the organization and content aspects to express the communicative purposes of their proposals. Expectedly, the results showed the same effect size ( $\eta^2 = 0.92$ ) for these two aspects.

#### 4.4. PWSE and Proposal Writing Skills

Correlations were launched between the PWSE mean pre-and post-instruction and the writing performance pre-and post-instruction. Results are shown in Table 3 (pre-instruction) and Table 4 (post-instruction). PWSE mean pre-instruction emerged to be strongly correlated to PWSE mean post-instruction ( $r = 0.882$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ).

PWSE pre-instruction and writing performance pre-instruction had a significant, strong correlation ( $r = 0.596$ ,  $p < 0.003$ ), while PWSE and writing performance post-instruction had a significant, moderate correlation ( $r = 0.489$ ,  $p < 0.021$ ). Thus, PWSE and writing performance were associated, but less pronounced than the association of PWSE pre-and post-instruction. Students' pre-instruction proposal quality as assessed by the raters was lower than their skills

perception as revealed by their PWSE, whereas post-instruction, their proposal quality surpassed their level of PWSE.

Correlations were carried out between PWSE statements and academic writing performance. Pre-instruction, half of the 24 statements (1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 12, 15-19, 22) were strongly significantly correlated, and the rest were mildly significantly correlated with academic writing performance (Table 3). These twelve statements were all covered in the 21 statements in which PWSE significantly increased (Table 5). Post-instruction, statements 16 and 24 were strongly significantly correlated with academic writing performance, while some statements (1,2,7,9,10,11,14,15,17,20,21,22) demonstrated mild correlations (Table 4). To put it in a nutshell, only statement 24 had a shift from weak to strong, while statements 6, 8, 12, 18, and 19 diminished from strong to weak, and statements 1, 7, 15, 17, and 22 diminished from strong to moderate concerning correlation with writing performance.

Furthermore, correlation analyses were calculated pre- and post-instruction to establish the relationships between the aspects of writing and the corresponding aspects in the self-efficacy questionnaire. Results are illustrated in Table 7.

**Table 7** Correlations between the Corresponding Aspects in Writing and Self-efficacy.

Aspects	Pre-instruction	Post-instruction
content	0.496* (p < 0.019)	-0.065 (p=0.773)
organization	0.382 (p=0.080)	-0.017 (p=0.941)
vocabulary	0.498* (p=0.18)	-0.093 (p=0.682)
Language use	0.558** (p < 0.007)	0.065 (p=0.773)
mechanics	0.347 (p=0.113)	0.640** (p < 0.001)

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

As the above Table presents, the correlations varied pre- and post-instruction. Correlations were mild pre-instruction for content ( $r = 0.496$ ,  $p < 0.019$ ), organization ( $r = 0.382$ ,  $p < 0.080$ ), vocabulary ( $r = 0.498$ ,  $p < 0.018$ ), and mechanics ( $r = 0.347$ ,  $p < 0.113$ ), but large for language use ( $r = 0.558$ ,  $p < 0.007$ ). It signifies that the students more accurately judged their competence regarding the aspect of language use than the other aspects. However, post-instruction correlations turned out to be small and negative, except for the case of mechanics, which became large post-instruction ( $r = 0.640$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). It can, thus, be interpreted that except for the case of mechanics, students did not grow confidence in their capabilities to fulfil these aspects.

## 5. Discussion

As mentioned earlier, this article has attempted to explore the effect of explicit genre-based writing instruction on TEFL graduate students' proposal writing self-efficacy (PWSE) and academic writing skills in writing thesis proposals. A secondary aim was to examine the relationship between their PWSE and academic writing skills while writing thesis proposals.

The students submitted the proposals which they had written before the beginning of the semester, and also the proposals they wrote within one month after the end of the semester. In addition, they filled out an PWSE questionnaire before and after the writing instruction. Jacob et al. (1981) stress that internal consistency is a major aspect of a testing instrument that reveals the reliability of scores. In this study, there were significant positive correlations between the questionnaire statements and the mean values pre-and post-instruction, which demonstrated that the questionnaire is a reliable one.

The first research question sought to examine whether PWSE changes after genre-based instruction. Most of the students already displayed high levels of PWSE before instruction ( $M=68.8$ ,  $SD=13.7$ ), and the level of PWSE increased post-instruction ( $M=85.6$ ,  $SD=6.3$ ). Although there were large variations among the individual students, students' PWSE as a group was strong. The high level of self-efficacy in this study is in line with earlier research (e.g., Dinther, Dochy, & Segers, 2011; Han & Hiver, 2018; Schunk & Cox, 1986; Zimmerman & Ringle, 1981). Based on the social cognitive theory, which identifies self-efficacy as originating from four sources (Bandura, 1997), our instruction embraced two sources which increased the confidence of our novice writers: "social persuasion" and "vicarious experience". Social persuasion involved the feedback, comments, and suggestions that the students received from the teacher in both oral and written medium during the semester. Students' vicarious experience was shaped as they watched and maybe cooperated with their peers in generating ideas, collecting information, and organizing their proposals. In this way, they also had the chance to draw comparisons between their writing tasks and their peers.

The first research question further investigated whether genre-based instruction led to students' progress in academic writing skills while writing their thesis proposals. The analytic scores of the various aspects of writing skill were compared with each other pre- and post-instruction; paired sample t-test substantiated that the genre-based instruction was influential in raising students' awareness to produce relatively well-structured thesis proposals at the end of the course ( $p < 0.000$ ). This finding is corroborated by a body of previous research (e.g., Cheng, 2008; Flowerdew, 2016; Huang, 2014; Tardy, 2009). The results are postulated to have been reached in part due to the fact that the students were exposed to some well-written proposals and tried to recognize the way organizational patterns and lexico-grammatical features were utilized for fulfilling the intended communicative purposes. This finding is in line with Hyland (1996) and McConlogue (2015), stating that reading positively influences composing skills at different proficiency levels, accruing to students' more profound understanding of rhetoric and structure. Having students focus on the organizational patterns, linguistic functions, word choice, and mechanical rules in the assigned texts in light of the provided models (Table 2), the teacher guided them to develop and organize their specific communicative purposes in the different sections of their proposals. Consequently, students were familiarized with the criteria for better writing. Furthermore, the teacher provided students with feedback in both oral and written medium, which facilitated more accurate and cogent composition of their proposals. This finding is in line with Gass (2003), who asserts that negative evidence is a required factor for learning.

In addition, the students' proposal writing development in this investigation can be accounted for by the strong self-efficacy belief they initially held in their writing competence. It motivated them to set higher goals (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994) and motivated the amount of effort they devoted (Bai et al. 2021; Pajaras 2003) to hold on to the demanding task of writing a proposal. However, this finding is contradictory to Vancouver and Kendall (2006) and Vancouver, Thomson, and Williams (2001), who argue that high levels of belief in one's capabilities lead to a reduction in one's future performance.

The second research question sought to investigate the link between PWSE and academic writing skills while writing a thesis proposal. The results of correlation analysis showed a strong relationship pre-instruction and a moderate relationship post-instruction. Thus, it can be concluded that writing self-efficacy is associated with writing competence which is consistent with previous research (e.g., Bruning, Dempsey, Kauffman, McKim, & Zumbrunn, 2013; Graham, Daley, Aitken, Harris, & Robinson, 2018; Sanders-Reio, Alexander, Reio, & Newman, 2014). Pre-instruction, twelve PWSE statements were strongly correlated with proposal scores, whereas post-instruction, two statements turned out to have strong correlations with proposal scores. This finding concurs with Pajaras (2003), who truly pointed out that "it does not seem though confidence in writing skills is nurtured as students' progress through school, even in the face of the skills being developed" (p.152). Correspondingly, this result demonstrates the unique finding that although before the instruction, the participants had stronger PWSE than actual writing skills, this reversed post-instruction. In other words, their writing skills surpassed their PWSE, though PWSE mean increased significantly.

Correspondingly, separate correlations (Table 7) were run between the specific academic writing aspects and self-efficacy for those aspects. The correlations post-instruction declined unexpectedly, and even appeared negative, except for the case of mechanics, which showed a drastic increase. This finding is in line with Coutinho and Neuman (2008), arguing that "studies that utilize challenging, demanding or difficult tasks usually yield negative relationships between performance goals and self-efficacy" (p.136). An explanation for this finding of the study might be that grasping the social nature of genre, the students realized the strict judgment of discourse community members; hence, they reevaluated, modified, and toned down the ratings of their writing aspect-specific capabilities. Therefore, a conclusion can be drawn that the students had initially "overestimated" their self-efficacy for academic writing (Stipek, 2002) due to either the Hawthorne effect or their lack of knowledge of distinguishing between general writing skills and proposal writing skills.

This study suffered from a few limitations which should be mentioned. First, the employed convenience sampling, consisting of only 22 students and no control group, and ignoring the intervening effect of gender confines the generalizability of the findings to a narrow range of contexts. Second, due to space limitations, we did not include details of the models employed in the instruction nor the students' attitudes regarding the materials and the method of teaching. In addition, working on proposals as the focus of study, the discussion and conclusion sections, normally fundamental in more challenging genres such as research articles and theses, which students will encounter in their academic research lives, were disregarded, detracting from the comprehensiveness of this study. It will be appropriate in subsequent investigations to remedy

these deficiencies. Further, in this study, the various writing aspects were analytically measured throughout the whole thesis proposal; this can be done separately for each section.

Finally, serving as a baseline, this investigation proposes further research into discovering the most frequent revision strategies students in EFL or ESL contexts employ to improve the quality of their academic texts concerning rhetorical structures. In addition, the association between the employed strategies and academic writing self-efficacy seems to be a promising research avenue informing academic writing practices.

## **6. Conclusion and implications**

This study intended to investigate the influence that explicit genre-based instruction renders on TEFL graduate students' PWSE and, consequently, on proposal writing skills. Our findings overall support the positive effect of the explicit presentation of generic structures of academic texts along with an explanation of their rhetorical functions on students' academic writing skills mediated by their level of PWSE. By implication, PWSE is presumed to affect academic writing skills through its impact on the amount of effort and academic goal settings. Additionally, the teacher's role was un-ignorable in effectively presenting the course and providing fruitful feedback and suggestions, which promoted students' PWSE and academic writing skills.

By implication, teachers should be cognizant of students' academic needs and their psychological disposition such as their academic self-efficacy, which may render influences on their academic tendencies. Therefore, teachers' role stands out in students' motivation promotion. Teachers should be equipped with sufficient expertise to be able to provide students with constructively positive feedback to raise their confidence and language awareness in fulfilling the challenging task of writing for academic purposes. For instance, in the confrontation of students' errors in their writing tasks, teachers should attempt to find fault with their insufficient amount of effort and praise them for the level of effort they engage (Adelson, 2007; Bandura, 1997). Indeed, students should also be encouraged to analyze their errors and instigate deeper engagement to ascertain better how particular linguistic structures serve particular social contexts of use. According to Goh (2008), when learners find the pedagogy beneficial, "they will be even more motivated to persist in their efforts to work harder" (p.200).

In contrast to ESL contexts, EFL contexts do not allow students to interact with knowledgeable native speakers to improve their academic writing skills; consequently, feedback sources are confined to teachers and academic environments. By way of compensation, policymakers should arrange to provide more programs for teacher professional development and include genre-based academic writing in curricula for students to become more efficacious and competent in the process of writing for their academic expedition.

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