

## IMPROVING STUDENTS' DESCRIPTIVE WRITING SKILLS THROUGH THE GENRE-BASED WRITING APPROACH

Jusnaini Hasni\*<sup>1</sup>, Ana Elvia Jakfar<sup>2</sup>, Lijah Adena Hasibuan<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Department of English Language and Culture, Universitas Teuku Umar (UTU), Meulaboh, Aceh

<sup>3</sup>Department of English Education, Institute of Teacher Training and Education (STKIP), Padang Lawas, North Sumatera

\* Corresponding Author: [jusnainihasni@utu.ac.id](mailto:jusnainihasni@utu.ac.id)

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### ABSTRACT

All university students are required to have adequate English writing skills. This is true, particularly for students in Agro-Marine field, because they are expected to write and present scientific information in a structured and accurate manner. However, a number of students have challenges relating to English writing skill. This research aimed to investigate the implementation of Genre-Based Writing (GBW) in improving the descriptive writing skills of Agro-Marine students at Teuku Umar University. Fifty participants from the faculties of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Marine Sciences took part in the study. The method used in this study was descriptive approach. The data were collected from the participants' writing tests for the pre-test and post-test, as for the assessment, a rubric consist of content, organization, vocabulary, grammar and mechanics. The researchers also conducted a semi-structured interviews and observations before, during and after the implementation of the genre-based writing. The data was examined by using descriptive qualitative framework proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) which divided the process into three steps such as data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing. The result showed that participants' text structure, coherence, and linguistic precision improved from 50 to 76,25 after the implementation of the genre-based writing. The results suggest that GBW is an effective pedagogical approach for enhancing Agro-Marine students' writing skills.

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### INTRODUCTION

In this era of globalization, writing in English has become an essential academic requirement. Students ought to be able to articulate, engage in dialogues, and contribute collaboratively to scientific knowledge across numerous specialized disciplines. In other words, Agro-Marine students must possess clear and coherent English writing skills. As they must document environmental observations, explain practices in aquaculture and

agriculture, and disseminate their research, these skills become vital. Students' writing proficiency, in addition to their ability to engage with global research networks and access international literature, significantly determines their employability in agriculture, fisheries, and marine science. Agro-Marine students still struggle with writing coherent English essays despite the value of these skills.

Writing in English is viewed as complicated since it demands simultaneous command over multiple aspects such as accuracy in grammar, structure, appropriate organization of the content, and organization of content. English as a foreign language students with no experience in academic writing will find these skills extremely problematic. As noted by Bitchener (2010), a great number of non-native speakers of English exhibit considerable struggle regarding the choice of lexical items and the accuracy of grammar and coherence of text, which poses a big impact on the communication of the ideas. Similar struggles are being faced by Agro-Marine students of Universitas Teuku Umar who have certain opportunities to be instructed in the English language. The absence of chances to engage in English writing in the real world leads to stilted writings, vague descriptions, and inconsistency in the employment of language features. Such leads to underachievement in academic writing and lower self-efficacy in articulating science.

Academic writing is a genre in its own right and demands knowledge of its genre practices in terms of its form and language resources to accomplish the intended communicative purpose of it. Hyland and Tse (2004) explain that students do not meet the required standards of academic writing as a result of a lack genre awareness, and this is a reflection of a lack of knowledge about the particular genre's structure and function. This is the case for Agro-Marine students, as descriptive writing involves the accurate and clearly articulated communication of scientific observations. However, students do not receive adequate training in the genre-based approach, which explains why they are unable to employ appropriate language in relation to the discipline and articulate their descriptions in a structured way.

Pham and Bui (2021) conducted an applicable and pertinent empirical study on Genre-Based Approach (GBA) application in EFL writing classes at Van Lang University, Vietnam, which supports these claims. This study focused on 128 students' expository essay writing throughout 10-week classes. Findings showed students' writing and unawareness of writing conventions and proper essay structure, as well as insufficient lexico-grammatical accuracy. The challenges were derived from lack of genre awareness and formal training in genre organization. The conclusion of the study showed that

explicit modeling, systematic scaffolding, and adequate experience are required for GBA. It is pedagogically an effective approach that provides valuable information for the ongoing research. The challenges they observed are comparable to the linguistic and structural problems encountered by Universitas Teuku Umar's Agro-Marine students. It also underscores the necessity of structured genre-based instruction in discipline-specific contexts.

The Genre-Based Writing (GBW) approach is one educational approach that has demonstrated promise in fixing these problems. Genre-Based Writing (GBW) is founded on the theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). This theory is based on the importance of language integration, context, and purpose. According to SFL, effective communication is defined by the writer's ability to choose specific language features based on the context (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). This perspective indicates that GBW advocates the direct instruction of vocabulary, elements of cohesion, specific grammatical structures, and the organization of texts within a given genre. This pedagogical technique assists students in ascending cognitive difficulty through the phases of knowledge acquisition, text construction, collaborative, and solo construction (independent) in order to build mastery of the genre's conventions of writing.

The foundational principles of the Genre-Based Writing (GBW) method also recognize the role of authentic texts in the attainment of advanced writing skills. In Martin and Rose (2008), the authors explain how students learn the organizational structure of texts using the SFL framework in genre pedagogy. This strategy is aimed at achieving certain communicative objectives. In this approach, students engage with a number of example texts, learn to recognize certain linguistic features, and reproduce particular organizational structures in their own writing. This approach is particularly useful in the case of assignments that require descriptive writing. This is because it describes how students learn to effectively construct paragraphs, organize ideas coherently, and employ appropriate jargon that relates to the discipline, a skill that is often required in agro-marine studies.

For Agro-Marine students, Genre-Based Writing (GBW) has the potential to bridge the gap between linguistic theory and disciplinary practice. Unlike the conventional view of writing as a collection of grammatical rules, Genre-Based Writing (GBW) considers it a systematized activity shaped by specific social purposes and scientific content. Descriptive writing in the agro-marine context typically requires students to describe and characterize biological processes, environmental patterns, or technical processes, which require a specific vocabulary and logical sequencing. The implementation of Genre-Based

Writing (GBW) adjusts writing instruction to integrate and apply subject-matter knowledge, thereby heightening the importance and relevance of writing in students' assignments.

The value of Genre-Based Writing (GBW) and its positive outcome across multiple educational contexts integrating and learning the writing process are being universally recognized (Emilia, 2010; Tardy, 2009; Musthafa, 2010; Widodo, 2012). The effectiveness of GBW in improving fluency and coherence as well as the overall appropriate structure is documented in literature (Emilia 2010, Tardy 2009, Musthafa 2010, Widodo 2012). Despite the growing body of literature, there is still a lack of research on the incorporation of the Genre-Based Writing (GBW) into agro-marine projects. Most studies have only focused on vocational contexts other than general education, EFL instruction, or agriculture and marine sciences. This disparity is concerning because agro-marine students require discipline-specific writing skills, especially in the creation of procedural and descriptive texts that successfully communicate scientific findings and technical information.

To fill this gap, the current study examines how Universitas Teuku Umar (UTU) Agro-Marine students use the Genre-Based Writing (GBW) technique to enhance their descriptive writing skills. The study evaluates how Genre-Based Writing (GBW) improves language accuracy, word choice, coherence, and text structure. These all are essential elements of academic writing required for scientific communication (Nasution et al, 2023). By incorporating Agro-Marine content into the Genre-based Writing (GBW) instructional cycles, this study shows how contextualized genre-based training can meet the academic and language needs of students in specialized domains. The findings contribute to the body of existing work by offering discipline-specific insights and practical implications for developing an English curriculum for agro-marine students at Teuku Umar University.

Therefore, this part provides the theoretical and empirical underpinnings for using the Genre-Based Writing (GBW) as a teaching method to improve Agro-Marine students' writing skills. The research does indeed bridge the gap by bringing the Genre-Based Writing approach theory into the field of Agro-Marine by demonstrating the need for better academic writing, which, in turn, will increase students' involvement in global academic discourse in science.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study conducted a R&D design approach adapted from Borg and Gall (1983), to assist in developing, executing, and assessing the effectiveness of the Genre-Based

Writing (GBW) strategy to improve the writing proficiency level of agro-marine students of Universitas Teuku Umar. Conducting such an approach, the researchers were able to formulate instructional models, and assess their viability in the real world and improve them in the cycle of field testing. The modified Borg and Gall stages used in this study were divided into 4 main parts: needs analysis, intervention development, implementation, and evaluation. These phases ensured that the GBW intervention aligned with the real challenges students encountered when organizing their ideas, selecting appropriate language components, and producing coherent descriptive texts. This research framework offered a comprehensive foundation for examining the pedagogical effectiveness of GBW in the context of agro-marine education.

The participants for this research included fifty students from the Faculty of Fisheries and Marine Sciences and the Faculty of Agriculture of Universitas Teuku Umar. Using purposive sampling, the researchers ensured that the selected students exhibited the academic and disciplinary attributes of the Agro-marine group. These factors considered the students' academic background, their registration in the English courses, and their urgency in learning distinct types of writing. This sample was sufficient for collecting qualitative data and at the same time, it permitted the researchers to track the students' progress through the Genre-Based Writing (GBW) intervention.

To provide an in-depth evaluation of students' writing skills and the application of the Genre-Based Writing (GBW) approach, the data was gathered using a variety of qualitative techniques. Some of the method used are examination of students' written work, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. The analysis of students' writing assignments, the researchers focused on identifying changes in writing content, organization, vocabulary used, grammatical error, and mechanics by comparing writing samples from before and after the intervention (pre-test and post-test). Classroom observations were conducted to observe the students' participation, their use of genre elements, and their interactions while working on writing assignments. Semi-structured interviews were used to know students' perceptions of the learning process, the intervention, and their challenges in writing descriptive text.

The gathered data was examined by using the descriptive-qualitative framework proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which comprises three interconnected stages, these are: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. The data reduction stage involved organizing, labeling, and condensing raw data from observations, interviews, and writing samples in order to identify emerging themes that indicates to the improvements in genre knowledge and writing quality. Then, the data

display provides the comparison table of the pre and post-test, the graph trends, summary of the observation and interviews throughout the process. In the final step, conclusions were derived from the data presented.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Result**

After the pre-test, the genre-based writing approach was conducted in four stages. In the first stage, the students were given the lesson about the concept of descriptive text, understanding the context of using it, vocabulary building, and strengthening the knowledge background. The activity during this step were discussion about the topic related to Agro-Marine, brainstorming the idea, reading the related text, mastering the vocabulary, and knowing some technical terms related to the topic. This step aimed to build the knowledge of the students about the topic, social context and the language features will be learnt.

In the second stage, the students were provided with a sample of descriptive text. The sample used as a model to identify the social function, generic structure and the language features of the text. The researchers guided the students to analyze the general structure of the text, which consist of identification and description. The students also analyze the language features of the text such as the use of simple present, adjectives, and the use of specific vocabulary. Through this stage, the participants are expected to develop an understanding of how ideas are organized and how description is constructed.

During the third stage, the students constructed a descriptive text under the guidance of the researcher. Now, the students already understand the concept of descriptive text, the general structure and its language features, and also they have memorized the vocabulary related to the topic. In this stage, the participants were encouraged to apply their understanding of the context by writing on their own. The researcher provided continuous scaffolding through feedback, questioning, and correction to support the participants.

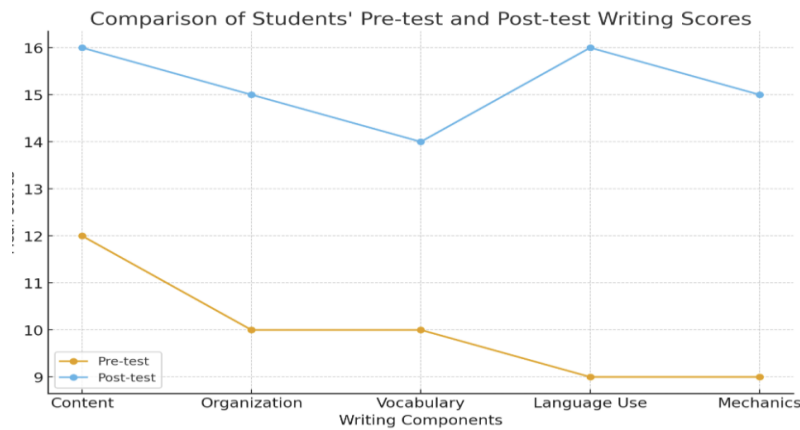
The evaluation stage was conducted to assess the effectiveness of the genre-based writing. Evaluation was carried out through a post-test, supported by the classroom observation and participants responses. The result of the post-test then compared with the pre-test score to identify students' improvement after the implementation of the genre-based writing.

To illustrate the improvements systematically, Table 1 presents a comparison of students' writing scores before and after the intervention.

**Table 1.** Comparison of pre-test and Post test score

Writing Component	Maximum Score	Pre-test			Post-test		
		Mean	Min	Max	Mean	Min	Max
Content	20	12	5	16	16	10	20
Organization	20	10	5	15	15	10	19
Vocabulary	20	10	2	12	14	7	20
Grammar	20	9	3	13	16	8	20
Mechanics	20	9	2	16	15	10	20
<b>Total Score</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>50</b>			<b>76.25</b>		

Before the intervention, majority of students struggled with descriptive writing skills. Their writings were often riddled with grammatical errors, incorrect language usage, poorly constructed paragraphs, and fragmented ideas. The average pre-test score of 50 indicated these difficulties, according to Brown's (2004) writing rubric, which assessed vocabulary, organization, content, language use, and mechanics. The trend is provided in the picture below:



**Picture 1.** Comparison of Students' Pre-test and Post test Writing Score

After the intervention, the score rise increasingly from 50 to 76,25. The result revealed a clear consistent upward trend in students' writing performance. In the content component, the pre-test mean score was 12 with score range from 5 to 16. After the implementation of the genre-based writing, the post-test mean score rise to 16, with the range between 10 and 20.

Next, the positive trend also showed in the organization component. The pre-test mean score is 10, with range of 5 to 15, increased to 15 in the post-test with range score of 10 to 19. The students show a better performance from unorganized idea into a better organization writing text.

In vocabulary component, students' mean score also improved from 10 in the pre-test, with score range 2 to 12, to 14 in the post-test with range of 7 to 20. One student wrote, "*There are goldfish*" before the implementation approach, he changed the sentence to "*The farmer cultivates the goldfish with the rice*". Other student wrote "*rice field*" in the pre-test and wrote "*wide rice field*" in the post-test. The researcher also found some technical word in the post-test such as "*aquatic habitat*" and "*aquaculture*". It indicated the positive expand in the vocabulary use of the students.

Meanwhile, the most significant improvement was in language use component. The pre-test mean score was 9 range of 2 to 16, increased to 16 in the post-test with range of 8 to 20. This improvement indicated a significant progress in grammar accuracy in students' writing test. A student wrote in the pre-test "*The farmers is always kep the field clean*", after the implementation she write "*The farmers always keep their field area clean*". While other student wrote "*This beautiful rice field*" in the pre-test and change it to "*This is a beautiful rice field*". It showed a good improvement in the students' writing skills.

The mechanic component also showed a notable improvement, with the pre-test of 9 with range between 2 to 16, rise to 15 in the post-test with range 10 20 20. The finding demonstrated that the students had better control of spelling, punctuation and capitalization. For example, they write "*kep*", "*beautiful senery*", "*godfish*" in the pre-test, and change it to "*keep*", "*beautiful scenery*", "*goldfish*" in the post-test. It showed they improve the spelling control in the text.

### **Classroom Observation Result**

Based on the classroom observations conducted during the implementation, the teaching and learning process showed positive developments in students' writing performance. The students were actively involved throughout the process. Most of them enthusiastically participated in discussions, rise their hand to respond to the lecturer's question and contributed ideas during the activities. They also able to produce a descriptive text with clearer organization, more appropriate vocabulary and improved grammatical accuracy. They rise their hand enthusiastically when the researcher asked them to present their text. This demonstrated that they are enjoy and have gained more confident in expressing their ideas.

### **Interview result**

The interview result indicated that most of the students give positive perception toward the implementation of genre-based writing. The students said that through this

approach, they understand how to describe something in more systematic way, especially in agro-marine field. They also acknowledged that their vocabulary related to specific term in their field improved significantly. One student said

*"The sample text about agriculture helped me understand on how to organize idea in appropriate way".*

another student also said

*"It feels easier to write when I have many vocabulary related to my subject".*

Overall, the interview findings suggest that agro-marine students perceived the genre-based writing approach as an effective and relevant way to support their understanding and improved their confidence in writing descriptive text.

## **Discussion**

After analyzing the results of this study, namely, writing assessments, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations, it can be concluded that the implementation of Genre-Based Writing led to a noticeable improvement to the students enrolled in English class from the faculty of Agro-Marine of Universitas Teuku Umar. The four phases of Genre-Based Writing Strategies such as building knowledge of the field, modeling of text, joint construction, and independent construction effectively addressed students' writing difficulties. Based on the results of the study, the Genre-Based Writing approach can be considered as an effective strategy to be implemented in the classroom.

Writing content emerged as one of the most significant improvements based on the data. The students' ability to develop relevant ideas and elaborate on discipline-specific topics increased greatly after the GBW intervention. During the building knowledge of the field stage, students were exposed to contextual agro-marine content, such as descriptions of aquaculture methods, marine biodiversity, and environmental monitoring programs. This exposure enabled students to integrate disciplinary knowledge into their texts, and the writing assignments gained greater significance.

Students usually produced descriptive texts that were superficial, ambiguous, and unrelated to the assigned topic prior to receiving GBW instruction. They experienced difficulty integrating the knowledge learned from the agro-marine classes with an English writing component. In contrast, students were able to write descriptions with greater detail and breadth after having been exposed, in a structured manner, to actual Agro-Marine material and guided instruction. Hyland (2004) confirms this. It asserts that students' writing performs better when they possess sufficient prior knowledge of the subject. Increased content relevancy also boosted students' confidence, as demonstrated

by researchers' remarks that "*learning felt easier when writing topics were directly connected to the field.*"

Improvement in organization was one of the most significant changes, which increased from 10 to 15. There was a noticeable disparity in coherence and consistency in the writing; a lack of logical flow and sequencing was present in the paragraphs written by students. Coherence and consistency were exposed to the students in the modeling step, which included well-structured descriptive writing samples. As a result of explicit instruction of the structure of texts, students were able to integrate paragraphs in a logical manner, and did so with sequencing.

In the discussions, students segmented their writing pieces with their instructor's guidance and organized the output into integrated paragraphs. While discussing the arrangement of the topic sentences, supporting details, and transitional phrases, the students demonstrated high levels of engagement and collective problem solving. These students witnessed the effect of collaborative scaffolding noted by Vygotsky (1978) about the Zone of Proximal Development, where students outperform expectations with the guidance of more experienced students or teachers. There was a statistically significant increase in the organizational skills of the participants, illustrating that the GBW strategy enhances students' metacognitive awareness towards the organization of the text.

In vocabulary development component, from 10 to 14, students' vocabulary grew, indicating their increasing mastery of pertinent and sector-specific terms. Descriptions were unclear and less appropriate for academic contexts if the vocabulary use is not correct. For instance, students used ambiguous terms like "*fish environment*" instead of more precise terms like "*aquatic habitat*" or "*water quality parameters.*"

The expansion of the students' vocabulary is one good effect from the GBW approach through the use of modeled genre text. The text emphasized on the use of accurate and comprehensive descriptive phrases. The interviews data also revealed the fact that the students' technical vocabulary was reinforced as a result of their constant exposure in the written tasks and class discussions. This is the fact that the students were more comfortable with the technical vocabulary. This finding supports Nation (2013) that the more students are exposed to a particular set of vocabulary in relevant context, the more vocabulary they are likely to acquire.

Language use, including grammar and syntax, also showed substantial improvement of 9 to 16. Students often produced grammatical errors such sentence fragment, shifts in tense, and subject verb agreement errors before the intervention. These

problems were partly caused by the lack of specific grammar instruction in the regular teaching curriculum.

During the collaborative and individual stages, the GBW technique provided plenty of opportunities to practice the construction of accurate grammatical sentences. Through repeated drafting and revision, students were able to improve their grammatical accuracy. This finding supports Hyland (2007), he states that grammar instruction is more effective when integrated within genre-based activities rather than taught in isolation. Based on the interviews, grammar-related anxiety decreased. This indicates that genre-based scaffolding provided students with more autonomy over the grammar they used.

Mechanics of writing, including punctuation, capitalization, and spelling, showed improvement with the score of 9 to 15. During the writing process, continuous, iterative feedback was given, which allowed students to fix mechanical errors during each draft of a piece. The iterative process confirms Emilia's (2011) theory of writing improvement through sustained editing and contemplation.

Participating students said that writing agro-marine real-world situations content was more interesting and enjoyable. The affective and behavioral impacts of the GBW approach were viewed positively, as reflected in students' increased motivation and engagement. Classroom observations further confirmed higher levels of participation, particularly during discussions of technical and field related terms. Overall, the motivation and self-confidence of students were positively impacted in addition to the positive development of language. According to Bandura's (1997) framework on self-efficacy in educational settings, these affective factors are critical for long-term writing improvement.

The result of this study is in line with Widodo (2012), he found that GBW was effective in improving the writing skills of Indonesian EFL students by providing explicit instruction on text organization and linguistic features. Similarly, Musthafa (2010) reported that GBW helped students in technical disciplines produce more coherent and genre-appropriate texts. These studies underscore the potential of GBW to address the specific needs of Agro-Marine students at Universitas Teuku Umar.

Despite its effectiveness, GBW's implementation ran into some problems. The primary issues were the students' limited time for extended writing practice and their poor prior grammatical knowledge. These findings support Iftitahul's (2022) finding that students concentrating on science and career-related subjects often require additional assistance with grammar due to their limited exposure to it during their regular

schooling. Time constraints also caused issues during the independent building phase because some students required additional time to compose, revise, and polish their texts.

The results sparked curiosity and interest in the field of curriculum development and the teaching of writing in other subject areas. Universitas Teuku Umar students come from various background field and different level of English need, this approach can be implemented according to the students' need. Second, discipline-specific writing pedagogy is more impactful over general writing pedagogy, as this study highlighted, for students who are in professional studies in agriculture, fisheries, and marine sciences.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study found that the Genre-Based Writing (GBW) approach influences the English writing capabilities of Agro-Marine students at Universitas Teuku Umar. The result of the study showed the significant improvement of the students' writing skills. The data gathered from the writing test, the observation and the interview. The students stated that learning activity become more interesting by using this approach. This study shows that the Genre-Based Writing approach showed positive effects to the improvement of agro-marine students' English writing abilities

However, this study was limited to a small sample size from one university without a control group. Therefore, the finding cannot be generalized. Future research should expand the use of GBW in other fields such as in economics fields, involve larger sample, testing it in different writing genres and utilizing digital writing tools to support learning process.

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