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An Empirical Reserch on Genre Approach to English Academic Writting in China's University

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An Empirical Research on Genre Approach to English Academic Writing in China's university

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Abstract:

With more and more academic international exchanges, English research paper in all fields has become a main tool to show our achievements to the world. So academic writing is the basic proficiency for research. Many universities in China make English academic writing as the compulsory course for MA and P.h.d students. But English academic writing is till a weak point in English teaching. The present situation in most of Universities are: academic writing courses was taught by ESP teachers who are not English majors, so they do not know language teaching methodology. Though genre approach is especially popular in the field of academic writing, ESP teachers still use product approach in English academic writing in China. Genre writing has been popular and applied to English writing teaching for English majors in China in recent years.

English academic writing, as one of foreign language proficiencies for Chinese students, requires learners to grasp formal writing styles, textual, contextual and communicative knowledge. Thus, the aim of English academic writing is not only to improve students' basic writing proficiency, but also cultivate their creative idea so that they are able to communicate effectively in specific context.

The theoretical foundation of this research are: Swales (1990) proposed "move" and "step" in second language writing; Bhatia (1993:62) proposed seven "steps" in business genre: establishing credentials, introducing the offer, offering incentives, enclosing documents; soliciting response, using pressure tactics, ending politely; Cope and Kalantzis (1993:11) proposed a wheel model of writing teaching, which has three phases: modeling, joint negotiation of text and independent construction, etc.

This research applies genre approach to English academic writing teaching in a university of China. The research questions are as follows, 1) Do genre approach and

product approach contribute to the improvement of English academic writing? 2) Whether genre approach is more effective than product approach in improving students' abilities in organizing English academic writing and using various language structures right? 3) What are the students' attitude towards genre approach to English academic writing? The research subjects are 30 material technology major MA students from Henan Polytechnic University, China, who were divided into two classes randomly in order to make this research, one class is as experimental class, the other is as the control class, each class has 30 students. The experimental class was taught in genre approach while in control class, students were taught in product approach, the experiment was carried out from March, 2015 to July, 2016. The research instruments include two tests(pre-test and post-test), the teaching experiment, two questionnaire and an interview which are designed to find out students' attitudes towards genre approach. The findings of this research can be summarized as students can learn English academic writing and generic knowledge on material technology field as well as academic writing skill through genre approach's writing steps such as: reading model texts, group discussion, imitating, drafting, revising and final drafting; genre approach can arouse students' interest in English academic writing, cultivate their genre awareness and thus improve the overall writing proficiency.

KEY WORDS: genre approach; academic writing; genre analysis

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Motivation

Academic writing is an important and essential skill of language learning and an inseparable aspect of communicative competence. Most teachers are aware of the crucial importance of academic writing and would like to teach writing well but they can not spare enough time in the class for academic writing practice. In most Chinese colleges, the situation in much worse for non-English majors because there is no special academic writing class for them. It is difficult and impossible for teachers to involve writing, reading, speaking and listening in class. Most class time has to be devoted to learning vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure and text analysis. A majority of teachers have to assign writing tasks for homework. As a result, students' first drafts are often the final drafts.

With more and more academic international exchanges, English research paper in all fields has become a main tool to show our achievements to the world. So academic writing is the basic proficiency for research. Many universities in China make English academic writing as the compulsory course for MA and P.h.d students. But English academic writing is till a weak point in English teaching. The present situation in most of Universities are: academic writing courses was taught by ESP teachers who are not English majors, so they do not know language teaching methodology. Though genre approach is especially popular in the field of academic writing, ESP teachers still use product approach in English academic writing in China. Genre writing has been popular and applied to English writing teaching for English majors in China in recent years.

Research in L2 writing has gone through the past few decades. Since the early 1970s, product approach has dominated much of the writing teaching in EFL. It focuses on the final product of writing: the essay, the report, the story and what that product should look like. Students were required to produce writing according to the models, which are paid much under product-based class. A list of criteria(spelling errors, grammatical mistakes, lack of coherence and variation in sentence type) are taken into consideration when students' compositions are marked by teachers. Since the product approach emphasizes correctness in

the texts, there is no enough attention paid to social context in which the texts are produced(Badger, 2002) . In the mid-1970s, product approach has dominated much of the writing teaching in EFL. The process approach became a focus due to the limitations of the product approach. Unlike product approach, process approach views writing as a process but not a product. It explores the nature of writing, which enables students to know how a piece of good writing is produced. Process approach places its emphasis on the composing process such as prewriting, drafting and revising. It led to a shift in perspective from a view of writing as a linear process to the recognition of its recursive nature. Nevertheless, people have found the weaknesses of process approach as well, and then began to explore new findings.

Compared with the two approaches mentioned above, genre approach is relatively a new concept. Genre approach is pretty popular in Australia and North America in the past 20 years. Under genre approach, the teacher begins to present the situation of a certain genre of writing and then instructs learners to compose with the help of model texts, teachers and their peers.

1.2 Methods of the Study

In this study, the quantitative comparison was investigated by comparing the scores of the students' pretest and posttest in product approach group, genre approach group the level of the improvement among the three groups. The mean score differences between two groups were examined and analyzed to compare the differences. Apart from it, a pre-study questionnaire and a post-study questionnaire were performed to examine students' attitudes and perceptions toward product approach and genre approach. The qualitative comparison between peer feedback and teacher feedback was conducted by examining the feedback focus and students' views on peer feedback and teacher feedback. Besides, in order to provide cross-references for the questionnaire data, individual interviews were executed in the study.

1.3 Purposes of the Study

By objectively presenting qualitative and quantitative comparisons between peer feedback and teacher feedback, the researcher attempts to examine the effectiveness of peer and teacher feedback on students' writing and investigate the similarities and differences between the focuses of peer and teacher feedback in terms of content, organization, grammar, vocabulary and mechanics, so as to investigate if peer feedback and teacher feedback can

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complement each other properly, and therefore, reduce the heavy workload of English teachers. It also hopes to deepen English teachers' understanding of the students' perception toward peer feedback and teacher feedback. Thus, students' views on peer feedback before and after treatment were explored.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The teaching and learning of English composition often makes teachers and students in Chinese EFL writing classes feel frustrated. By making a quantitative and qualitative comparison between peer feedback and teacher feedback in English writing, the present study aims at finding searching for solution to the problems found in writing classes, from which most English writing teachers suffer, so as to shed some light on the feedback process of writing. The results of the present study could uncover some valuable features of peer feedback, which may contribute to the field of writing instruction. It is hoped that the findings of the study will enable writing instructors and researchers to acquire a better understanding of the similarities and differences between the two feedback types and help the EFL teachers beware of the possibility to get students involved in the process of feedback, so that writing instructors can incorporate peer feedback appropriately into teacher feedback; hence, to make writing instruction more efficient and effective.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Before we introduce the genre-based approach, it is necessary for us to review its theoretical background, such as the concept of genre, theory of genre analysis and the three current schools in which the theory of genre analysis is applied in teaching practice. In this section, each of them will be discussed in detail in order to provide a theoretical basis for this study.

2.1 Genre and Genre Analysis

Genre is defined as the comments, questions, and suggestions a reader gives to a writer (Flower, 1979). It is the returning information for a certain study task to improve and promote learners' learning (Ur, 1998). According to Sommers (1982) and Krashen (1984), feedback is a fundamental process of making changes throughout the writing of a draft, evolving new ideas, and clarifying meanings in order to become a better writer after receiving feedback from teachers or peers. Beyond the correctness of mechanical errors, feedback should help students to reshape their ideas and make drafts congruent with their intentions. Keh (1990) believes that feedback is "a fundamental element of a process approach to writing" (p. 294) and "learners can gain a greater sense of audience with several readers"(p. 295). By means of the appropriate feedback that teachers or peers offer, writers will learn how to improve their drafts and enhance the overall quality of their writing as they move through the stages of the writing process (Ferris, 1997). They may understand from feedback how to reorganize the writing to make it more logical and coherent, how to establish or reshape ideas, or how to choose more appropriate words or phrases. Therefore, feedback on the various drafts is what pushes writers through the writing process and on to the eventual end, a writing product (Keh, 1990).

A number of techniques may be employed to provide feedback, including teachers' commentary, peer response groups, teacher-student conferences, audio-taped commentary, reformulation, and computer-based commentary (Ferris, 1997). Another important forum for providing feedback is a writing conference, which is regarded as an effective and useful technique to allow two-way communication between the writer and the reader. It creates an opportunity for students to actively participate in negotiated discussion, helping the writer to incorporate the reader's suggestions into the revision (Nelson & Murphy, 1993). It can be oral or written, and can take forms of comments, questions, and/or suggestions (Keh, 1990).

2.2.1 Definition of Genre

In the field of ESL writing, genre is a relatively well-researched phenomenon (Falchikov, 2004). Studies of peer feedback have examined a variety of research questions, but they generally fall into two major categories: (a) studies describing the nature and effect of peer feedback; and (b) examinations of student views on peer feedback.

L2 researcher and instructor's views on peer feedback were, at least initially, almost universally enthusiastic and optimistic (Falchikov, 2004). Most of them claim that students can benefit from peer feedback. It can be explained and discussed from four aspects. In the meta-cognitive domain, peer feedback can: 1) enhance audience awareness and promote habits of revision with readers in mind (Keh, 1990; Mittan, 1989); 2) help develop students' critical reading and analysis skills (Chaudron, 1984; Keh, 1990); 3) raise learners' awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses (Tsui & Ng, 2000). In the cognitive domain, peer feedback can: 1) provide students with useful feedback related to content, organization, and vocabulary (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1992); 2) provide students knowledge of a wider variety of course topics through discussing their writing works with peers (Zhang, 1995; Jacobs, Curtis, Braine & Huang, 1998; Paulus, 1999); 3) help students become familiar with important aspects of the assignment as they use the rubric or criteria to perform the review (Brown, 1998). In the social domain, peer feedback can help students increase a range of social and communicative skills and help them receive social support from peers (Topping, 2000; Carson & Nelson, 1994) and learners can assume more responsibility for writers' revision from egocentricism or "writer-based" prose to a more "reader-based" product (Chaudron, 1984). Finally, in the affective domain, peer feedback can: 1) diminish students' affective filter since peers are more understanding and less threatening than the teacher (Chaudron, 1984); 2) increase students' motivation through an enhanced sense of ownership and personal responsibility, greater variety and interest and also improve empathy with others, such as assessors, assessees, or both (Topping, 2000).

However, as time went on, many ESL writing teachers began to express reservations about the efficacy of peer feedback for L2 writers (Falchikov, 2004). For example, some scholars considered peer feedback less trustworthy, particularly in ESL/ EFL settings because ESL/ EFL writers are regarded as incompetent in the target language to make valid comments (Leki, 1990; 1998; Nelson & Murphey, 1993; Stanley, 1992). In Chinese classroom, on one hand, Confucian cultures ascribe a particularly high status to teachers (Scollon, 1999). On the other hand, students were concerned about the "facial issue", and they tended to maintain group harmony in peer interaction, so they were reluctant to speak, and even often withheld

comments (Carson & Nelson, 1996). It is said that writing group interaction appears to be potentially problematic for Asian students (Carson & Nelson, 1994). Nonetheless, researchers such as Nelson, Carson, and Murphy have raised questions of how Chinese students deal with peer feedback.

Researches about students' views on peer feedback have generated mixed results. Some studies showed evidence that most students had positive opinions toward peer feedback. For example, Orsmond et al., (1996) found that students enjoyed carrying out the peer feedback and considered that it was beneficial to their learning. In Jacobs, Curtis, Braine, and Huang's study (1998), 93% of the participants preferred to have feedback from other students as one type of feedback on their writing. Mendonca and Johnson (1994) claimed that all L2 students they interviewed reported that they found the peer feedback activity beneficial.

Other studies purported that students doubted the objectivity and effectiveness of peer feedback. For instance, in Mangelsdorf's study (1992), five students from Asian background expressed negative views about peer feedback. They did not trust peer feedback due either to students' inability to critique peers' texts or to students' disinterest in the texts. Similarly, in Nelson and Carson's study (1998), the five Asian students also reported that peer feedback was not always helpful in making revision on their drafts. They also felt that too much time was spent on unimportant issues, such as discussing grammar level details. The Asian students in Carson and Nelson's study (1994) also regarded peer feedback activity was ineffective for them. Zhang (1995) found in his study that few students were in favor of peer feedback.

To summarize, it seems that students' cultural background may influence the degree of acceptance of peer feedback, and most studies showing doubt on peer feedback (Mangelsdorf, 1992; Carson & Nelson, 1994; Zhang, 1995; Carson & Nelson, 1996; Nelson & Carson, 1998) are concerned with student writers' cultural background aspects.

2.1.2 Genre Analysis

Researchers who have examined students' views on teacher feedback have typically investigated one or more of the following questions: (a) What is the nature and effect of teacher feedback on their (students') development as writers? (b) According to students, what types of feedback do teachers give them? (c) What are students' reactions to teacher feedback they have received and what are their preferences about the types of teacher feedback they would like to receive?

There is no doubt that feedback provided by teachers on students' writing is the most popular way for responding to students' compositions. Nonetheless, it is also the least understood part (Sommers, 1982). Over several decades, teacher feedback to students' writing

has aroused considerable disputes in L2 writing research.

On one hand, many scholars have made extremely negative pronouncements about the nature and effects of teacher feedback. Several studies suggested that much teacher's written feedback in students' writing contained poor quality, focusing on the wrong issues, and was often overlooked, misinterpreted, or misunderstood by the student writers (Sommers, 1982). For example, Cohen (1987) concluded from his data that "the activity of teacher feedback as currently constituted and realized may have more limited impact on the learners than teachers would desire" (p. 66). Zamel (1985) criticized ESL writing teachers for excessive attention to grammatical problems. Kepner (1991) concluded that "the consistent use of L2 teachers' written error-corrections combined with explicit rule reminders as a primary medium of written feedback to periodic discourse-level L2 student writing is ineffective for promoting the development of writing proficiency in the L2" (p. 310). Truscott (1996) even argued that error correction in L2 writing was useless and should be abandoned.

On the other hand, although the above studies show that feedback provided by teachers do not facilitate students' better performance in L2 writing, there are still some researchers who are in favor of teacher feedback for the promotion of students' revision, arguing that teacher feedback or comments do help students improve their writing. For instance, Fathman and Whalley (1990) claimed that teacher feedback with encouragement and suggested revisions or corrections on the content and form did help students improve their writing in rhetoric and linguistic proficiency. In responding to Truscott's (1996) arguments of teachers' abandoning error corrections, Ferris (1999) proposed that selective, prioritized, and clear error correction was the effective correction which could and did help at least some student writers. Leki (1990) noted that, "writing teachers and students alike do intuit that written responses can have a great effect on student writing and attitude toward writing" (p. 58).

From the foregoing discussion, although some studies showed that teacher feedback was ineffective to students' writing, it is necessary for writing instructors to use feedback with constructive suggestions to help students make progress in their subsequent revisions and further writings. As Hyland (1990) pointed out, "feedback must be interactive to be genuinely effective" (p. 285). In order not to become what Hairston called "composition slaves" (cited in Leki, 1990: 66), writing teachers need to adopt effective and efficient methods to respond to students' writings.

In order to make their comments more effective in facilitating students' writing, some of the writing instructors may use or try different types of feedback. Researchers have specifically examined the focus of teacher feedback over the past years. A number of studies on teacher's feedback have indicated that some types of the teacher feedback indeed have more effect on writers' drafts than other types. However, there exists great dispute on whether

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teacher feedback should concentrate on form (e.g., grammar, mechanics) or on content (e.g., organization, the amount of detail).

Some scholars confirmed that error correction on forms did not seem to have any significant effect on students' errors (Cohen & Robbin, 1976). In Cohen's survey (1987), the student respondents claimed that their teachers' commentary focused mainly on grammar, whereas they identified only "a limited repertoire of strategies for processing teacher feedback" (pp. 64–65). In Cohen and Cavalcanti's study (1990), the students reported that teacher feedback mainly consisted of comments about grammar and mechanics, but they would like to receive feedback on all areas of writing (including content and organization). Fathman and Whalley (1990) found that the students who received content-based teacher feedback improved their scores substantially more than the other students. Semke (1984) indicated that comments focusing on content significantly contributed more to students' writing in terms of fluency and progress in their general language proficiency than other groups.

2.2 Development of Genre Analysis

A number of comparative studies have been launched to examine the relative effectiveness of peer feedback and teacher feedback in the improvement of students' writing. Some comparative studies in L2 writing research yielded findings more in favor of teacher feedback. For instance, Connor and Asenavage (1994) found that peer's comments were less effective than teacher's comments, and that the teacher feedback was much more readily incorporated into the revised texts than that of their peers. Likewise, Nelson and Carson's study (1998) suggested that students preferred teacher comments to peer comments, and that they were willing to incorporate teacher comments in their evaluations more frequently than comments put forth by their fellow classmates.

However, as Paulus (1999) put it, "writing instructors can integrate peer feedback into the writing classroom with confidence and this feedback can be effective and can be used by many students in their revisions" (p. 283). Many comparative studies demonstrate that peer feedback plays a role in improving students' writing. For example, Caulk (1994) stated both teacher comments and peer comments could serve as an important and complementary function in developing and improving the students' writing abilities. He proposed that peer feedback and teacher feedback should be "complementary rather than redundant"(pp. 3-4). In Tsui and Ng's study (2000), although teacher feedback and comments were favored by all the subjects and were seen as a figure of authority of quality, peer feedback still played an important role because peer comments could "enhance a sense of audience, raise learners'

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awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses, encourage collaborative learning (p.147). Therefore, peer feedback and teacher feedback were both preferred and welcome among students. Jacobs et al. (1998) advocated the combination of peer feedback and teacher feedback through the investigation of feedback on student writing: taking the middle path. Tsui (1999) concluded that while teacher comments were welcomed much more than peer comments, the latter still assumed a role, which could not be replaced by teacher comments. Therefore, teachers should incorporate peer evaluation into English writing classes with the assistance of a specific evaluation sheet and carefully-designed teaching guidance.

The conclusion from the above researches implies that peer feedback should be considered as a great aid to the feedback process. However, the conflicting findings also display that the effectiveness of peer feedback and teacher feedback in improving students' writing needs further scrutiny.

2.3 Current Teaching Practice of Genre-based Approach

A wide range of studies about the application of peer feedback and teacher feedback in writing have been conducted abroad, whereas such studies in China are quite rare. And the empirical evidences to support the incorporation of peer feedback into writing classes are even fewer.

2.3.1 ESP

Although peer feedback is a relatively well-researched phenomenon abroad, it is relatively a new field in China. Few studies on peer feedback have been launched at home, especially in mainland, and these studies just remain at the level of introducing theories and methods abroad.

Some discuss the advantages, effectiveness and problems of peer feedback. Xu (2000) found that peer feedback could enhance learner autonomy and motivation and that most students showed favor to peer feedback. Qin (2007) expounded the potential benefits and problems of peer feedback and put forward some suggestions. Gao (2004) purported that the second draft after peer feedback could be improved by 37%. Mo (2005) pointed out that conducting peer feedback to substitute part of teacher feedback was as effective as relying completely on the teacher for feedback and that Chinese students were already capable of effective peer revision, which could also stimulate self-revision. Zhang (2008) concluded that peer feedback had an important role to play in China's college English classrooms where the size of class and teacher dominating methodology presented the main obstacles.

Some investigate students' views on peer feedback. Although Qi's study (2004) indicated that students regarded teacher feedback as more effective in improving their writing than peer feedback and attached more importance to teacher feedback, some studies showed evidence that most students had positive attitudes toward peer feedback. In Xu's study (2000), most students declared their preferences to peer feedback. Similarly, Gao's finding (2004) demonstrated that most of students (72%) held positive opinions while only 9.38% had negative attitudes towards peer feedback. Mo (2005) found that most Chinese students liked to get feedback from their peers and regarded it as useful to them. Yang's study (2006) illustrated that most students involved in peer response session showed a more positive attitude to peer feedback than those who did not. In Jing's study (2005), nearly all the subjects had positive attitudes towards peer feedback.

2.3.2 New Rhetoric

Studies of teacher feedback have been conducted from different perspectives and different conclusions have been drawn. The following are some examples. Yang (1996) believed that teacher feedback did help students improve their writing. Li and Wu (2005) assumed that teacher feedback was one of the impetuses for students to notice some kind of language features. Wang and Sun's findings (2007) revealed that teacher's commentary types posed significant influence on student's revision types. Han and Zhao (2007) concluded that teachers tended to devote much more attention to language use of students' essays. Wang (2006) found that most teachers' written feedback was corrective and that teachers' error correction mainly consisted of comments about grammar.

As to the comparative empirical study in this field, Yang (2006) was a pioneer, conducting a comparative study of peer and teacher feedback on the university students. Her findings indicated that students used both peer feedback and teacher feedback to improve their writing but teacher feedback was more likely to be adopted and it generated greater improvements in the writing and that peer feedback could facilitate students' learning autonomy and reader-writer interaction.

From the above literature review, we can argue that both peer feedback and teacher feedback entail its merits and demerits. Although teacher feedback on students' writing has come into general application, the use of peer feedback is still a controversial issue in English writing pedagogy and research despite its expected strengths. Furthermore, the research presented at home shows that peer feedback and teacher feedback have primarily been investigated separately. Few studies on teacher feedback have included the peer, and many reports on peer feedback leave out teacher feedback. In addition, little is known about the

effectiveness of peer feedback and teacher feedback empirically, especially in EFL classrooms. Therefore, more empirical studies of both peer feedback and teacher feedback are needed. To support the study, the theoretical foundations for peer feedback and teacher feedback, namely, process writing approach, Vygotsky's learning theory and collaborative learning theory need to be discussed at first.

numerous concepts in education, such as the process writing approach to the teaching of

Chapter 3 Empirical Research

Based on the overview of genre analysis in the previous chapter, a genre-based academic writing teaching model is proposed in this chapter. writing, social nature of writing from Vygotsky's theory of learning and collaborative learning in writing (Nelson & Murphy, 1992). From both cognitive and psycholinguistic perspectives, the three theoretical foundations for teacher and peer feedback, are, in fact, supplemental or, to some extent, overlap each other.

3.1 Process Writing Approach

As a response to the traditional product views of writing that focused on form and on the finished text, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the process approach to writing emerged in L1 writing teaching (e.g., Emig, 1971), which has greatly influenced L2 writing theory and the instruction of writing in ESL/EFL classes. In recent years, researchers have put special emphasis on the need for ESL writing teaching to move to a process approach and the prominent emphasis in current composition teaching field is undoubtedly on the composing process (Hairston, 1982).

Taking a perspective that writing is a communicative act, process writing approach lays emphasis on involvement in collaborative writing at different stages of the writing process. Therefore, a major characteristic of process writing approach is a stage-based view of writing, and the process is 'not linear at all' but 'recursive' (Raimes, 1985: 229). A typical model identifies four stages in producing a piece of writing: prewriting; drafting; revising; and editing (Tribble, 1996: 39). At prewriting stage, group discussion and brainstorming the topic would likely generate a variety of ideas from which each individual could benefit and learn from their peer's strengths. It also builds up students' sense of teamwork when each member makes the highest quality contribution to the successful completion of the task. Drafting is accomplished individually based on the group's selection of content and logical sequence of arguments with the help of the teacher as a facilitator or consultant. The revision stage includes whole-class feedback given by teacher on common problems in the first draft, followed by students giving comments on a peer's first draft and the final revision. Peer feedback activities allow for peer writer-reader interaction and help students refine their drafts by diagnosing their own mistakes with the assistance of a peer and a checklist on organization, content and language use prepared by teacher. Learning through self-exploration and negotiation of meaning in the revision session will likely lead to students' improvement in

writing and establish a sense of taking responsibility for their own learning.

Conclusively, in process approach, going through stages from pre-writing to final editing allows writers to focus firstly on expression and communication without fear of form, and later polish their writing. Involvement in a stage-based writing practice, presented in a flexible recursive framework of generating idea, focusing, structuring, drafting, evaluating and re-viewing, is believed by advocators of process-writing approaches to enable learners to become proficient writers through authentic engagement in writing. By breaking down the task as a whole into its constituent parts, writing can be seemed greatly as less daunting and more manageable to the EFL student. In fact, perhaps one of the most valuable contributions that the process writing approach has made to the teaching of English as a whole is to force teachers to re-examine the nature of feedback given on student writing, resulting in a development of a wealth of new techniques, including peer feedback, conferencing, minimal marking, taped commentary and self-monitoring (Keh, 1990; Hyland, 1990), and a shift in the teacher's role and in teacher-student and student-student relationships.

Furthermore, collaboration between learners and with teachers is essential in adopting process writing approach. During peer feedback sessions, peers who serve as real and immediate audience are believed to be of help in establishing students' revision strategies (Zamel, 1987). Therefore, peer feedback activity, in which students work collaboratively to provide feedback on one-another's writings as well as to develop their own paragraphs, has gradually become a common activity in composition classes.

3.2 Genre-based Academic Writing Model

Vygotsky' theories, which emphasize that learning is a result of social interaction, provide a framework that can usefully inform studies of learning in feedback groups, in the writing classroom (Dipardo & Feedman, 1998). Although his theories were developed through studies of dyadic interaction, it is possible to extend them to examine small groups (Forman & Cazden, 1985).

One of Vygotsky's central principals in learning is the emphasis that learning takes place through socially meaningful activities. According to him, good learning is accomplished through social activity in what he calls the students' "zone of proximal development" (ZDP). He defines the zone as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (1978: p. 86). That is, learning is a result of dynamically social interactions by which teachers or expert students can offer appropriate models and supports to novice students to progress through the

zone of proximal development (Lantolf & Appel, 1994). Nevertheless, according to Di Pardo and Freedman (1988), although Vygotsky specified that "more capable peers" can offer suitable supports to the learner progressing through the zone of proximal development, when students are randomly placed in groups, it is conceivable that generally weaker writers may end up offering support or advice to generally more able writers.

The ZPD recognizes learners' learning with social interactions. Thus, learners should be encouraged to participate in the activities that foster co-construction of knowledge. Apparently, peer feedback in the process writing could provide learners a community for conversation and allows them to act out different roles. As Cazden (1986) pointed out, peer interaction not only provides an abundant source of conversation, but also allows students to try out a range of roles they would otherwise be denied in the traditional student—teacher participant structures. Among themselves, peers both receive and give advice, both ask and answer questions, assuming the role of both novice and expert. More importantly, the interaction and communication during peer feedback activity, which constitute learning in peer feedback groups, are believed to assist the internalization of linguistic skills and enhance the development of students' writing ability (Bruffee, 1984). Besides, Berg (1999) supported that peer feedback could develop students' writing abilities and enhanced their learning motivation. Beyond freeing students from writing to a lonely audience of "teacher-examiner" (Britton et al., 1975), talking about the activity of writing among peer groups is thus aligned with the Vygotskian premise that writing is a deeply a social act—an act that encompasses far more than the goals and conceptions of any individual instructor. The kinds of support students can offer one another can thereby be seen as extending beyond assistance in mastering teacher-mandated goals to the rich range of communicative function that full language mastery entails (Dipardo & Feedman, 1998).

Based on Vygotsky's theory, some researchers, thus, claim that peer feedback is an effective and prominent technique in all the first, second, and foreign language writing instruction (Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992; Paulus, 1999).

Collaborative learning began to arouse college teachers' interest widely in the 1980s, when they found that many students refused the tutoring and counseling programs given by professors. Some colleges, therefore, turned to peer tutoring, in which teachers set some problems and organized students to work them out collaboratively. Bruffee (1984) defined collaborative learning as a kind of pedagogical techniques to instruct students learning, by which students work with peers in a collaborative method and acquire the academic discourses more quickly than those who work individually.

Collaborative learning has two important features. First, collaborative learning emphasizes group work. Members in a group depend on each other and contribute to the