

Pedagogical Implications and Students' Perceptions of Genre Method in an IELTS Writing Course

by

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B.A., University of South China, 2009

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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## **Abstract**

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This case study examined both the implications of using genre pedagogy on students' writing performance in IELTS-like tests as well as students' perceptions of the genre method in the context of IELTS preparation course. The data were writing samples and the interviews with the students as well as the instructor's teaching daily field notes. The implications and students' perceptions of genre method were found relating to a variety of factors, such as students' prior experience in IELTS preparation course. This study also proposed some future research directions such as the integration of IELTS preparation into the ESL courses.

*Keywords:* genre pedagogy, IELTS writing, genre learning cycle, genre analysis

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## **Introduction**

### **The Significance of the Study**

There is the dominant discourse of improving ELL (English Language Learners) writing performance in the high stakes International English Language Testing System (IELTS) by offering students frameworks and templates (such as doing fill-in-the-blanks) for writing. This practice has almost gained a hegemonic position in the English training schools in China. This study examines the implications of the genre method to teach writing in the IELTS preparation setting and the students' perceptions of the genre method.

My five years working as a teacher of ELL has led me to this study because some of my students have improved their writing score by being taught to use such templates (which downgrades writing to filling-in-the-blanks). However, when I looked at their other writing, I discovered that their ability to write other genres, except the IELTS writing test prompts, had not improved in accordance with the test score. For example, sometimes students ask me to take a look at their essays for their university application, which is an entirely different genre from the test prompts with which they are familiar. I find in those writings apparent consistency and coherence problems as well as limited vocabulary to make meaning through their writing. Therefore, this lack of competency in transferring skills from templates to other forms of writing calls into question the value of using such static formats for teaching writing. Aside from being a tool for improving students' test score, template writing is unlikely to improve students' writing performance in other scenarios.

This study draws mainly on genre theories from English for Academic Purposes (EAP) literature. Genre method is very different from the template exercises mentioned above, that treated writing instruction as cloze exercises. Providing students with templates for writing may prevent the genre knowledge from transferring to the writing of a different but similar

genre because students do not understand why they should write in this way (Lin, 2016; Partridge, 2001). In addition, life outside of the classroom provides too many specific situations for any writing course to address using static templates; instead, students need to be creative about their genre knowledge and apply it in real life situations. Thus, the pervasive uses of templates can take away students' creativity. In order to avoid these drawbacks, a better writing instructional approach may be the genre pedagogy.

This study was contextualized in an IELTS preparation course offered to students by a training institution in British Columbia. The course taught in this study implemented a genre learning cycle (genre pedagogy) in the classroom. This cycle includes four stages: (a) building knowledge of the field, (b) modelling of text, (c) joint construction of the text, and (d) independent construction of the text (Paltridge, 2001, p. 57). The first two phases are believed to be helpful for students' understanding of how and why a particular genre is formed and what communicative purposes each element of a particular genre will serve (Paltridge, 2001). With this knowledge, students will be more likely to transfer their genre knowledge to situations other than classroom writing.

Previous genre pedagogy case studies have mainly addressed at how genre pedagogy worked in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and ESL (English as a Second Language) settings. This study aims to replicate such case studies in a test preparation setting and examine the pedagogical implications and students' perceptions of the genre method in this setting. IELTS is a high stakes test that can affect students' university applications. Given the limited time for test preparation, students may turn to template writing, thinking that it is a more efficient approach, rather than gaining a broader genre awareness. In this study, which lasted for four months, I explore genre pedagogy in relation to the types of writing that students are required to do in the IELTS test.

This research was conducted as a case study. During a 4-month course that I taught, I collected 12 students' responses to the IELTS writing prompts to provide constructive feedback. Only once the course was over were students asked to participate in the study. Due to the time it required for this study to obtain ethics approval, there was three months between the end of the writing course and the interviews with the participants. In this study, students' participation involved: (a) permitting me to use their writing samples to conduct a textual analysis, and (b) participating in an individual interview regarding their perceptions of genre pedagogy. The interview and the writing samples of students were analyzed using thematic analysis. To triangulate data, I also kept field notes which I wrote after teaching each class session.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the implications of using genre pedagogy on students' writing performance in IELTS-like tests?
2. What role do students perceive that genre pedagogy plays in their preparation for IELTS?

## Literature Review

### Introduction

IELTS has been designed for and serves as a language gatekeeper for university admission in universities using English as the instructional language (Gan, 2009). Given the fast expansion of IELTS, with increasing numbers of test-takers (British Council, 2017), IELTS test preparation courses have become very popular among students seeking higher education where English is the language of instruction.

From my experience, IELTS test preparation courses are usually structured with four components, namely Listening, Reading, Speaking, and Writing, in accordance with the four skills to be measured in the actual test. These courses can be delivered in a small class, face-to-face with fewer than 30 students, or sometimes in the form of one student and one teacher. In this case study, there were 16 students in the class.

Among the four modules in these preparation courses, the writing preparation stands out for two main reasons. First, writing is considered a crucial part of higher education. Second, some universities even set a minimum acceptable score for the writing section that is higher than the threshold for the other sections. Writing instruction then has received relatively more attention compared to the other three modules. The writing part of the IELTS test has two sections. The first section usually requires candidates to write an essay reporting the figures in graphs such as bar charts, line graphs, or pie charts, which will be referred to as Section 1 in the following. The second section of the writing part is an argumentative writing task on a general topic or controversy, which will be referred to later as Section 2.

One common way of teaching writing in these preparation courses is called template writing, which reduces the writing of paragraphs to filling-in-the-blanks within paragraphs. For example, the following template is usually provided for writing the introductory

paragraph in IELTS writing:

*With the fast development of the economy, many people in today's society begin to believe that \_\_\_\_\_, because \_\_\_\_\_, but some other people think differently, they hold that \_\_\_\_\_ for the reason that \_\_\_\_\_. Thus, it is important to discuss this topic in detail.*

The blanks in the template can be filled with ideas and supporting reasons, and then the whole paragraph itself is believed to be able to serve as an introductory paragraph for a large number of prompts in the IELTS test. The common belief among teachers is that these templates will enable novice writers to get higher scores in the writing section than their actual writing ability would get them. Because, for students who were not able to construct grammatically correct sentences, they could take advantage of the template to form correct sentences by just adding a few words. If students recite some templates and then apply them in the IELTS writing, their response would appear better than their possible impromptu responses.

Lin (2016) notes that teaching writing by providing templates is “non-reflective” and “reductive,” while the genre pedagogy, as explored in this study, emphasized providing students with “genre resources” that students can later make use of, to deal with their communicative purposes (Lin, 2016, p. 159). Thus, genre pedagogy differs itself from the culture of template writing. In this study, I strived to teach IELTS writing according to the theory of genre pedagogy, instead of providing templates for students. It seemed that candidates who wrote templates in IELTS could lose marks. Though official IELTS representative like the British Council does not explicitly say so, it is reasonable to infer that using memorized text could result in a lower score on the test, because the answer sheets of IELTS writing section had a box for examiners to put their judgment on whether the

candidate was writing out of memory.

Genre pedagogy has been widely used in the writing instruction of English Language Learners (ELL) and has received a considerable amount of research focus. There are three significant streams of genre studies: English for Academic Purposes, Systemic Functional Linguistics, and New Rhetoric. As the students in this study are using English as an additional language, and they are seeking admission to Canadian universities, ESP (English for Specific Purposes) approach is appropriate. EAP (English for Academic Purposes), as a branch of ESP, was designed to help the L2 academic writing development of international students in western universities (Tardy, 2012).

This review drew insights from EAP literature that are relevant to the teaching of the IELTS writing genre. The definition of genre and register is explored first to provide the appropriate metalanguage to describe the text. Then, on the pedagogical side, issues including academic register, rhetorical moves and steps, and the genre learning cycle are discussed. Research on genre theories have been prolific; however, this literature review limits its focus to the theories and ideas that directly contribute to the design of this study. Additionally, the literature review includes a section introducing the high stakes IELTS test itself, by presenting some relevant research on the test.

### **Genre and register**

Genre and register are defined first as they make it possible to talk about the types of writing tasks in IELTS. Additionally, awareness of genre and register adds to the cognition of the students, so that they will be able to monitor their writing process (Negretti & McGrath, 2018).

Genre is defined as a message or text type (Lirola, 2015), or a group of texts that serves a specific purpose (Shi, 2015; Yang, 2016) in a context or culture (Chen & Su, 2012; Najmi,

2015; Shi, 2015) which are “predictable and recurring” (Najmi, 2015; Kongpetch, 2006; Lirola, 2015). Hyland defined genre as the “abstract, socially recognized ways of using language” (Hyland, 2007, p. 149), which was the definition that shared core components with the version presented by Swales (1990), with both emphasizing genre as socially recognized. Swales argued in his definition of discourse community that genre is owned by a community of people with shared goals (Swales, 1990). After examining the definitions provided by different scholars, I adopted Swales’ definition for the purposes of this study.

In order to contextualize the appropriateness of this definition, it is essential to recognize that the students who are aiming at getting acceptable IELTS scores for university admission come from different countries with diverse interests and skillsets. Students in this study focused on a variety of content areas that they wish to pursue. Thus, there is the communicative purpose shared by all of them: to demonstrate in the test that they have a good command of English. The standards for assessment such as the IELTS test are set by what Swales calls “expert members of the parent’ discourse community, who therefore shape the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains the choice of content and style” (Swales, 1990, p. 58). This design means that the IELTS writing tasks are genres defined by the writers of the test, and it is important to probe the official rubrics for the “preferred” genre features to be included in the curriculum of the IELTS writing preparation course in this study. The official rubrics of IELTS writing which are used to assess students’ responses could become important indicators of the genre feature. For example, the rubric includes requirements as test-takers should consider thoroughly and comprehensively the questions asked in the prompts, and extend the discussions in details. These requirements were also considered while analyzing the genre features of the IELTS writing.

The other important concept to be defined is register. As pointed out by Lin (2016) and

Emilia and Hamied (2015), genre determines the overall structure of the text, namely, stages and phrases; whereas, register determines the lexico-grammatical patterns or linguistic choices to realize the genre.

For pedagogical purposes, Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) presented a more approachable version of defining register as containing the following three variables:

- Field: The subject matter of the text
- Tenor: The relationship between the participants: speaker/listener; writer/reader
- Mode: The channel of communication: written or spoken

(p. 33)

For example, when a teacher is lecturing on photosynthesis, a biology subject matter, the field is a biology lecture or an academic lecture. The tenor is the relationship between participants like a teacher as a speaker and a student as a listener (tenor does include other properties of a relationship like closeness and rapport). The mode of communication is spoken. As cited in Lin (2016), this way of defining elements of the register has been further adapted into a framework of language variation specified for education. Field is now seen as a continuum from everyday discourses to specialized discourses; Tenor, another continuum from local/low social distance to global/high social distance; and finally, mode, the third continuum from oral text to written text (Lin, 2016). For example, an academic presentation at a conference can be interpreted as specialized discourses in field, global/high in tenor, and oral/written text in mode. The condensed ways of describing field, tenor, and mode have made the register analysis much more approachable for educational purposes in ESL/EAL contexts.

### **Types of Genre in IELTS**

Genre theories have been widely used in the instruction of writing (Deng, Chen, &

Zhang, 2014). This section addresses different aspects of genre studies and their connections to writing instruction or, more specifically, to IELTS writing. First, the IELTS writing tasks are analyzed in terms of genre and text type. Next, the discussion continues to the features of the academic register, with which IELTS writing shares similarities. At the discourse level, topics like the argumentative types and rhetorical moves and steps are reviewed in connection with IELTS writing.

**Genre and text type.** Paltridge (1996) has made a useful distinction between genre and text type to categorize text. Genre here is socioculturally constructed and accepted by a community to serve a purpose. For example, personal letters, novels or academic papers are examples of genre, as these texts serve a specific communicative purpose. As for text types, to which some refer to as “pre-genres,” Paltridge (1996) lists some examples like procedural, recount, and review.

As a genre, the designed social purpose of the IELTS writing task (Section 2) is to persuade by providing arguments on a topic or controversy. However, as indicated by Coffin’s study (2004) on the argumentative essay samples in IELTS tests, the shapes of argumentation are usually overlooked in relation to the syntactic features during the process of assessment, which means linguistic accuracy plays a more prominent role in determining the score of writing responses. Thus, the real social purpose of the IELTS writing may be more about demonstrating linguistic competence to the test graders than attaining the designed social purpose of the writing prompts, though they are mostly correlated.

Lin has listed a series of text types in academic settings (Lin, 2016, p. 66), which are contextualized in the IELTS writing tasks:

1. Information text which aims at providing information; a descriptive text of an artifact would fall in this category. Section 1 of IELTS writing shares a great resemblance

with this text type, as it requires the students to write compositions to describe graphs, like line charts and pie charts.

2. Recount text is usually a reflection of the things that happened in the past; a geology report can be an example of these texts. Though IELTS writing does not have a section to test the recount genre, there is the possibility that students may need to write some sentences about past events as evidence for their arguments in Section 2 of the IELTS writing.
3. The procedural text is for listing steps or agendas in a process, such as a lab report listing the steps of the experiment conducted. This type of genre could occasionally be tested, as the Section 1 of IELTS sometimes requires students to write the descriptive text of flow charts, in which steps and agendas are indicated.
4. Explanation text can be typically seen as explaining causal relationships. Texts like explanations of the causes for economic recession are considered explanatory. Explanation genre can be an essential part of Section 2 of IELTS when students are asked to evaluate a causal relationship in some prompts.
5. Finally, argumentation text works as a piece of writing to persuade, which is the most important and broader framework for the writing of Section 2 (Coffin, 2004; IELTS, 2017a). The previous four text types described above could be parts of the evidence or explanation section for putting up the arguments.

### **Analysis of the IELTS Academic Register**

After contextualizing IELTS writing in the genre theories, examining these writings tasks again at the register level also provide more insights into the linguistic features. For example, IELTS writing prompts usually create a scenario of formal communication. Thus colloquial language is generally not appropriate for this type of writing.

IELTS is a requirement for admission at many universities around the world, and its purpose is to assess candidates' language ability to perform in academic settings (Hyland, 2006). Thus, various scholars' analysis of academic register can work as an instrumental description of the language type preferred in the IELTS writing tasks.

Hyland (2006) lists three important linguistic features of academic register: (a) high lexical density, (b) high nominal style, and (c) impersonal constructions. English words are categorized as content words that embed meaning like nouns and verbs, and grammar words that serve mostly grammatical functions, like propositions and articles (Hyland, 2006). High lexical density means that academic writing is expected to have more content words than grammar words so that more meaning is expressed in a relatively short passage of writing. The same idea is repeated in Lin's (2016) writing on analyzing academic register. What is more, Lin further divides the content words into general academic vocabulary and technical specific vocabulary (Lin, 2016). For example, the word "analysis" can be a general academic vocabulary for it can appear in various content subjects, while "photosynthesis" is a technical specific word that appears more likely in biology. Technical specific vocabulary is said to have an even higher level of lexical density than general academic vocabulary, but, as IELTS writing is not about a specific discipline, general academic vocabulary is more likely to be used for writing. Linking transition words or phrases such as: "on the other hand" are also mentioned in Lin's (2016) book as the third type of academic vocabulary, the use of which is a requirement in the IELTS writing assessment rubrics (IELTS, 2017a).

As for high nominal style, it describes the tendency to repack a process of activities into one linguistic element (Hyland, 2006). For example, "Mary has lost her books" can be repacked into "Mary's loss of books," so that it can be an element of another bigger clause. Lin sees this as the "engine for constructing technicality and abstraction" (Lin, 2016, p. 49).

The impersonal construction means writing in a tone that is objective and detached from the topic itself as much as possible (Hyland, 2006). This trait of academic language has caused much debate; for example, some scholars argue that this style is trying to deny the subjective influence of the researcher in a study (Schram, 2003) so that not all academic texts exclude personal associations.

Besides the three features pointed out by Hyland, other features of academic register are worth noticing when considering the IELTS writing genre; the most important of which is the argumentative type in Section 2 of IELTS.

### **Types of Arguments in IELTS Writing**

As described in the introduction section of the literature review, Section 2 of IELTS requires the test-taker to write an argumentation. Thus, it is important to study the types of arguments involved in IELTS writing, and how can the types of argument affect writing scores.

There is a relatively small body of research specifically discuss types of argument in the IELTS writing task. Coffin (2004) adopted two types of arguments: analytical and hortatory. Analytical arguments focus on logic; that is, evidence to form arguments (Martin, 1989). For example, to persuade the reader that “smoking should be banned in public,” an analytical argument will likely say things like the percentage of people whose health is at risk because of uncontrolled public smoking. The hortatory argument would encourage people to say “no” to smokers around them, to call for collective action against public smoking, which involves the reader (Martin, 1989). Coffin’s study found inconclusive evidence between the IELTS score and the types of argument involved, but it is suggested that the English language teachers should help the students to find the right type of arguments to fit the specific prompts encountered in the writing section.

Furthermore, a study done by Mayor (2006) found a significantly higher proportion of hortatory arguments in the IELTS writing responses from candidates of L1 Chinese speakers. The study used indicators of English pronouns and modes like passive voice to quantify the approximate degree of a hortatory argument. Personal pronouns were used three times more frequently by test-takers from China than the frequency demonstrated by the collection of standard academic prose. Therefore, Mayor (2006) suggested teachers should pay attention to the overuse of pronouns and hortatory arguments among Chinese candidates.

### **Moves and Steps in IELTS Writing**

The EAP tradition has provided a framework to analyze academic text by breaking it down into rhetorical moves and steps towards the final communicative purpose (Deng et al., 2014; Yasuda, 2011). Moves are referred to as the rhetorical purpose to be achieved in a piece of writing. For example, a research paper needs to state its significance in the introduction part. While, steps are the necessary ways through which specific rhetorical purpose could be achieved, such as mentioning an area of research that has not been touched before. The “CARS” example (Creating A Research Space) provided by Swales (1990) has been the prototype for such analysis. According to the “CARS” model, the introduction part of the academic research paper follows three moves: (a) establishing a territory, (b) establishing a niche, and (c) occupying the niche (Swales, 1990). According to Swales, the move introduces an area of research, and then one specific topic in this area will be brought up in the second move, followed by a third move to claim part of the topic as the theme of the research. This framework of analysis has been adopted as an example of how to carry out a genre analysis in educational settings (Lin, 2016), which can provide some insights for analyzing the IELTS writing genre. For example, the introductory paragraph of the IELTS writing Section 2 usually needs to summarize the current opinions of people before stating those of the writers.

IELTS writing can be seen as a genre that serves the purpose of language assessment, which contains multiple text types like information or argumentation, with two main argument types. The language in IELTS writing generally follows in the register of academic text with high lexical density, nominal style, and an impersonal tone. Its rhetorical moves and steps are analyzed in the methodology chapter of this paper, as the “CARS” model proposed by Swales has been used to look at other types of rhetorical moves and practices in other academic genres. Regarding the classroom realization of those theoretical perspectives, recent practice of the genre pedagogy will be the focus of review in the next section.

### **Genre Pedagogy**

Hyland (2007) illustrated his genre learning cycle based on the theories of Systematic Functional Linguistics as consisting of five rotating stages: (a) building the context, (b) modelling and deconstructing the text, (c) joint construction of the text, (d) independent construction, and (e) linking related texts. Hyland’s (2007) genre learning cycle is an extension of an earlier version presented by Paltridge (2001) who described four stages of the genre learning cycle as (a) building knowledge of the field, (b) modelling of text, (c) joint construction of the text, and (d) independent construction of the text. It needs to be pointed out that the design of the genre learning cycle draws from the social constructivism theory of Vygotsky (1980). According to Vygotsky, a more knowledgeable other, such as the teacher, is the expert learner in the classroom who can scaffold the learning of the students within their proximal zone of development. This idea has been adopted in genre pedagogy. For example, in the modelling of the text stage, the teacher, who is viewed as one of the “expert learners,” shall provide both linguistic and knowledge support for the students.

**Building the knowledge.** The stage of “building the knowledge” requires an explicit explanation of the context of culture, linguistic resources, and activating students’ prior

knowledge (Hyland, 2007; Paltridge, 2001). Drawing from the theoretical frameworks of social constructivism from Vygotsky (1980), the genre knowledge to be built with students can be identified by analyzing the sample responses provided by official IELTS test agents and related publications like Cambridge IELTS series. For example, to write a descriptive text of a graph, students need to be able to read and interpret the graph and they also need to have linguistic resources to talk about the graph, such as describing 50% as “half.” In addition, at this stage, students can be introduced to knowledge about argumentation types and features of the academic language, as stated in the previous section.

**Modelling of the text.** At this stage, teacher and students work together to analyze the text, which includes register analysis of field, tenor, and mode, linguistic resources implemented, and the schematic analysis like moves and steps. (Hyland, 2007; Paltridge, 2001). It is also an important element at this stage to raise the genre awareness of the students. For example, in the case of an email inquiring about a job post, teachers should talk about what to write in this email, what words and phrases to use considering the relationship between the candidate and the potential employer, as well as the best way to present oneself. Teachers can also analyze the rhetorical moves and steps of sample text to raise students’ genre awareness in the discourse community (Swales, 1990). One example can be, in order to write an introductory paragraph of a response, the first useful move could be contextualizing the issue in everyday life to back up the significance of the writing.

**Joint construction of the text.** This stage requires interactions between teacher and students, and the focus of it is scaffolding (Paltridge, 2001). Instructional scaffolds act as a bridge between students’ prior knowledge and the instructional outcome (Seifert & Sutton, 2009). It is important for the teacher to be aware of students’ preconceptions regarding writing, and coach students through guided practice. Considering the knowledge acquired in

the previous two stages, the teacher and the students should work together to apply the genre knowledge, including register analysis, rhetorical moves and steps, and argumentation types, to the analysis and writing of a new prompt within the same or very similar genre. For example, after explaining the stages of writing description, and presenting the related vocabulary and sentence patterns, students and teacher should work together to write another descriptive text.

**Independent construction of the text.** As the last stage presented by Paltridge (2001), it serves the purpose of letting students explore the application of genre and register knowledge in other pieces of writing within the same genre.

These stages occur recursively and thus were termed as the genre learning cycle. Some studies focused on the classroom implementation of the genre learning cycle, which are discussed below.

**Recent implementation of the genre pedagogy.** Among the studies reviewed in this thesis, three of them, by Kongpech (2006), Chen and Su (2012), and Wang (2013) included the specific stage of building knowledge. Though different in their use of terminology, they share, on the one hand, some common features in that they all place emphasis on preparing students for, or aiming at socializing the students, into the genre. On the other hand, mainly due to the different types of genre taught in each study, they also have different focuses. Kongpech's "building knowledge" involved the teacher providing background information for the students so that they know what to write. Additionally, at this stage, the teacher would also help students with brainstorming ideas about the topic. In contrast, what Chen and Su (2012) have done in their "setting the context stage" is to aim at teaching students the structure of the prototypical narrative genre, which they called the "story grammar." The "story grammar" contains the setting, initiating the event, internal response, attempt,

consequence and reaction (Stein & Glenn, 1979, as cited in Chen & Su, 2012, p. 186). In their study, the instruction on rhetorical moves happens in the first stage.

Wang (2013) did not explicitly state what was done in his stage of “context exploration,” but the author did mention “both conscious-raising and linguistic developments as two intended objectives” (p. 2130), so we can speculate that at this stage, genre features are explained in connection to the related linguistic resources.

Some studies claimed to implement genre pedagogy but did not follow the genre learning cycle as identified by Paltridge (2001) or Hyland (2007). Rather, Lirola (2015) offered students typical examples of explanation and asked students to identify generic text structure and to observe the main grammatical and structural features of the text. However, Lirola (2015) attributed the students’ increased performance to the intensified teacher-student tutorials; it can, therefore, be inferred that students received more explicit feedback on grammatical mistakes when students underwent a process of editing. This editing process may influence the research findings, as it shares some elements of the process approach

To sum up, different studies have termed the stages in the learning cycle differently. They also add or remove one or two stages from the learning cycle to meet their specific teaching contexts due to differences in the genre to be taught, the program length, student level, and instructional styles. Additionally, not every study is explicit in every activity being carried out for each stage in their learning cycle. Despite the differences and modifications of the standard learning cycle of the genre approach, the empirical studies cited above can still be considered as implementing a genre approach, since they closely resemble the genre approach in the most salient ways. As for this present study, Paltridge’s four stages method were adopted, which contains recursive stages of (a) building knowledge of field, (b) modelling of text, (c) joint construction of text, and (d) independent construction of text

(Paltridge, 2001, p. 31).

### **Context of the Study: IELTS as Gatekeeper to High Education**

Standard English language tests results are typically a requirement to prove academic preparedness for university applicants from Non-English speaking countries (Pilcher & Richards, 2017). Thus, preparation courses for those high-stakes tests are very score oriented, and this context is said to have several apparent implications.

**Influence on class make up.** Gan's (2009) quantitative study found that in Hong Kong, students who are less confident with their English in terms of academic preparedness are more inclined to take the IELTS preparation courses than those who believe they are ready for university. Thus, there is a reasonable chance that students in this study are less confident of their English proficiency, and they are looking for a boost in their language ability. It is then necessary to adjust some other properties of instruction to adapt to the students' efficacy, such as the types of feedback given, as well as the level of scaffolding needed.

**Over-emphasis on test scores.** The other possible implication of Gan's study relates to students' perceptions of relevant preparation activities. Since instruction is expected to be score-driven, teaching activities that appear less relevant to improving scores are usually viewed as supplementary and marginal by the students (Gan, 2009). This is similar to Tardy's (2016) description in her book on the role of power and hierarchies in students' implementation of the genre. Students in this study considered themselves as IELTS test-takers, and any deviation from the dominant ways of test preparation (template writing) is considered risky by the students. Students in this study may appear to be very resistant to the part of instruction on genre analysis because the connection to IELTS testing is not readily transparent. It is therefore important that the relevance of the course to IELTS should be discussed and emphasized early in the course. Second, teachers who are believed by the

students to have mastered the dominant genre in IELTS writing may appear to be more authoritative and influential in front of the students.

**Previous research into IELTS writing.** There has been a paucity of research that has focused exclusively on the writing component of the IELTS test. In a 2013 study by Ameri-Golestan and Nezakat-Alhossaini, a correlation was found between classroom genre consciousness-raising activities and students' improvement in terms of various aspects in the rubric of IELTS writing. Specifically, they found that consciousness-raising activities have been very helpful in improving students' performance in the IELTS writing section. One important component of the genre method is to raise students' consciousness of the genre features, which suggests a further rationale for using genre method in IELTS writing.

Some other studies researched on the validity of the grading process in the IELTS writing (Divsar & Heydari 2017; Uysal, 2010). They concluded that although IELTS officials claimed to grade the writing with a less holistic approach and use multiple rounds of grading to ensure the quality of assessment, writings were graded locally around the world's test centres, which raised issues related to consistency and quality of grading. For example, regional differences can have an impact on the result of the grading. If candidates and graders were from the same culture, the response should seem more comprehensible to the grader because of the shared cultural background. Specifically, when candidates write stories of famous people as evidence to support the claims made in their compositions, the assessors of those stories from the same culture will understand the stories and the famous people better, so a better understanding may influence the grading of the writing. It is also argued that the genre features requested in the rubric favour western ways of argument formation, and students from other cultures that use argument differently could be at a disadvantage in this process (Uysal, 2010).

## **Conclusion**

Genre research has provided useful theoretical perspectives on which to base the teaching of IELTS writing with genre pedagogy. EAP was initially designed for international students in western universities, so the teaching of IELTS writing fits well with the context of EAP. In addition, since the high-stakes IELTS test is the gateway of language proficiency for university admission, the double purpose of the IELTS writing test, both as an assessment test and an instance of communication, have both influenced its genre features, and were taken into consideration for instruction in my study. The semi-academic register of the IELTS test may be distant from the everyday register, and could be unfamiliar to many students in this study, thus talking explicitly about its features seemed to be a plausible strategy. Since the majority of participants in this study were immigrants or visitors from China, they may overuse hortatory arguments, which could influence their writing score negatively. All the above issues and concerns were taken into consideration during the lesson planning in this study.

The genre learning cycle has been established as a useful way to scaffold students' writing in the classroom. Compared with the current practice of giving static templates to the students, the genre learning cycle is likely to help to raise students' genre awareness and provide students with genre resources to be used in other tasks. Genre and register analysis on the type of language expected in the IELTS writing will enable students to monitor their own writing processes to meet the standards set by the rubric of the IELTS exam. Genre pedagogy is not specifically designed for language tests preparation but is an evidence-based way to teach writing for academic purposes (Moore & Morton, 2005). Fortunately, there are excellent possibilities to tailor the stages, as well as the content of each stage in the learning cycle, to best accommodate the teaching of writing in preparation for IELTS. In other words,

the above literature review indicates a genre approach for IELTS writing instruction is appropriate. My study is of particular use because so few studies have examined the students' perception of the genre pedagogy in the IELTS writing setting, which is the focus of this research.

In the following methodology chapter, I outlined the rationale for the study and provided a detailed description of my research design.

## **Methodology**

This research focused on the classroom implications and students' perceptions of genre pedagogy in the IELTS test preparation setting. In this section, I reviewed first the philosophical assumptions underlying my proposed research, acknowledging Creswell (2013) and Schram's (2003) assertion that researchers always bring philosophical beliefs to their research. I explored the implicit philosophical assumptions in my research and conceptualized how those assumptions could have influenced my interpretations. Then, in the second part of this chapter, I focus on my theoretical framework of social constructivism (Bandura, 1977; Vygotsky, 1980). Following that, I explain my choice of the case study as an approach to the inquiry (Stake, 2013; Yin, 2014). Since the implementation of classroom teaching was an integral part of this research, there is also a section describing the course planning, especially the genre analysis of the IELTS writing and the course curriculum. Last, I explain how I collected various forms of data and the strategies that I used for analyzing the data.

### **Qualitative Research**

The nature of qualitative research is to work with and through the complexity of a phenomenon rather than around or in spite of it (Schram, 2003). Also, qualitative research seeks exploration and interpretation of an issue (Creswell, 2013). In my research, the complexity of classroom interaction, students' backgrounds, the diverse goals of the study, and the levels of students' motivation, for example, were factors that were very difficult to be reduced to controllable variables. Thus it is appropriate to conceptualize the process through the lens of students' perceptions and a critical reflection on my subjective understanding as a practitioner and a researcher. This type of research fits well in the qualitative paradigm as it was seeking exploration and examination of a phenomenon not easily studied in the

quantitative paradigm. According to Creswell (2013), there are four philosophical assumptions to be addressed in a qualitative study: ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology, which are discussed in greater detail below.

**Ontological assumptions.** The researcher and the participants in the study all have different perceptions about their realities, and qualitative researchers embrace these multiple realities (Creswell, 2013). I do not believe there is a universal reality, but rather multiple realities constructed by individuals in context. In this study, I had a different perspective towards the genre method than the students. I perceived the in-class activities to be a carefully planned implementation of the genre theories and pedagogy. However, the students in this study may have perceived it in a variety of pragmatic ways such as a tool to improve their writing performance to get higher grades. The shared experience between the students and the teacher is perceived very differently. As a qualitative researcher, I acknowledged that I need to embrace and report their perspectives and voices regarding the reality of the world throughout the process.

**Epistemological assumptions.** Regarding how knowledge can be known, it is pointed out that researchers need to go as close as possible to the participants being studied (Creswell, 2013). In this present study, I had gotten to know more of my students by engaging with them. For example, I took the opportunities between classes as well as lunch break to hear any personal stories they had to share. In addition to knowing them, it was also important for me to know what they know, and to understand their prior knowledge. For example, when I read students' writing, I probed into their level of English and prior learning experience; experiences that positioned them at their current level of study, instead of focusing only on corrective feedback. I also invited students, if they were comfortable, to talk about themselves in class. In short, I tried to minimize the distance between myself, as a

teacher and researcher, with the students (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 2013; & Yin, 2014).

**Axiological assumptions.** There are hidden values that researchers bring to qualitative studies (Creswell, 2013). I reflected on my own values while interpreting the students' words. One example I noticed is that I saw the importance of learning English writing because it is a main form of formal communication that students will need to conduct in the future. Therefore, when the students enrolled in my class, I could have made faulty assumptions such as assuming that learners/participants may see the same value in the course.

**Methodological assumptions.** The methodology of the qualitative research is mainly inductive (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The pedagogical implications and students' perceptions that this study aimed to find out were simultaneously influenced by many other potential or even unknown factors (i.e., students' prior study experience, personalities). Those factors (known or yet unknown) and the mechanism of how those factors work as a system, could be explored by analyzing the findings of the study from grounding up. There is no absolute fixed theory to predict the result and outcome of the study, as the literature review had shown that there was considerable variability in genre pedagogy itself. Though there are some general guidelines available for conducting a genre pedagogy, they are open to being adjusted to apply to the specific context of this study. For example, genre pedagogy was originally designed mainly for writing instruction in the everyday school context. However, as IELTS is a high-stakes test, some of the conventions in the genre pedagogy were reviewed through a situational lens and were modified or changed as necessary. In addition, I noticed that in the middle of data collection, such as during the interview I shifted my research questions, to some extent, when the need to include new ideas emerged. The methodological assumptions informed the data collection strategy.

## **Interpretive Frameworks**

The interpretive framework adopted in this study is social constructivism, as it aims at interpreting the multiple layers of meaning and understanding of the social context in which the study is being conducted (Creswell, 2013; Schram, 2003). Social constructivism values lived experience and the way the world is felt and conceptualized by “social actors” (Au, 1998). For this study, social constructivism added to the understanding of the teaching process as lived experience both for the students and the teacher, which was affected by various social factors (i.e., teacher-student relationships, peer relationships) that should be taken into consideration during the analysis.

**Position of the researcher.** I am always aware of my own position as an active participant in the whole process of this research so that I took notice of my own and the students’ social and historical backgrounds. For example, while interviewing the students, I found that they might have distorted some of their reports to validate and value my classroom teaching, which was usually expected in the Chinese culture. Due to the influence of Confucianism, which values teachers’ authority, students were more likely to reserve their different opinion to save the face of the teacher. Additionally, students’ interpretation of the genre method can be complicated by their learning habits as well as by whether they achieved their goals in the high-stake IELTS test after the course.

**Transformative framework.** As genre pedagogy is first proposed by scholars as a direct action to counteract social inequality against students who are living in an environment where their first language is not the dominant language (Lin, 2014; Paltridge, 2001). This study also examined how the genre method may have influenced students’ status of being examined and gatekept against their university application.

## **Case study**

A case study considers a case in a real life contemporary context (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014) and values in-depth data collection and multiple sources of information (Yin, 2014). To justify my choice of case study as the methodology, I considered several issues below. Yin (2014) has listed three conditions for case studies, including types of questions being asked, whether the study requires controlling of behaviour during events, and whether the study focuses on contemporary events. First, the situation of this study allowed in-depth data collection. The pedagogical implications and students' perceptions were relevant to the types of questions suitable for case study, as these two questions were exploratory in nature. Second, the weekly course I taught ran for four months, which gave me ample time to be exposed to multiple perspectives. The context of the study was also contemporary. Third, during the process of the research, students' behaviour was not controlled, and students were not even aware of the study until some of them were recruited as participants after the course. To sum up, case study is an ideal methodology for approaching my research due to the conditions and variables presented above.

## **Implementation of the Genre Approach in the IELTS Writing Course**

Since this case study is integrated with a series of classroom teaching and after class preparation, a discussion of the course preparation and its classroom implementation is necessary to give an overall picture of the research context. The classroom implementation of the genre method was based on a series of genre analysis work conducted during the process of course preparation. The findings of this genre analysis were then incorporated into the writing course following the genre learning cycle, as introduced in the literature review section.

**Genre analysis of Section 1 in IELTS writing.** There are a variety of possible writing

tasks in Section 1 of IELTS writing and the ones that are most commonly seen require test-takers to select and report information in a given graph or two. One sample-writing prompt of this section is like this (IELTSEssentials, 2017 p. 1):

*The chart below shows the number of men and women in further education in Britain in three periods and whether they were studying fulltime or part-time.*

*Summarise the information by selecting and reporting the main features and make comparisons where relevant.*

*(the link to the chart can be found in Appendix A: A sample chart of Section 1)*

Since the writing prompts require test-takers to report the main features, and make comparisons, these two moves should be included in the genre form taught to students. After reading a series of sample writing responses provided by the official testing agents around the world (IELTS, 2017a; IELTSEssentials, 2017), and modelling the tactic of Swale's "CARS," the general moves and steps of this genre had been identified. One of the writing sample co-constructed during this course is presented here as a sample of genre analysis. Table 3.1 after the sample demonstrated the moves and steps in this piece of writing.

*The bar charts illustrate the changes in the distribution of male and female students in UK universities between 1990 and 2010.*

*In almost all areas, male students predominated. Both the number and proportion of female students are increasing over the years. There is an apparent imbalance in the distribution of male and female students among different disciplines. While international students make up almost half of the student body in science-related areas, their presence in humanity subject is marginal. The engineering department is the only one having more*

*international students than domestic students. The number of people doing part-time jobs only has increased in the three decades depicted in the graph.*

*The number of international students has increased to a significant proportion of the student population in the UK.*

*(From classroom co-construction)*

Table 3.1

*A sample analysis of moves and steps in IELTS Writing Section 1.*

Moves	Steps	Examples
Move 1 General Introduction	Step 1 Restatement of the topic	The bar charts illustrate the changes in the distribution of male and female students in UK universities between 1990 and 2010.
Move 2 Report the Main Features	Step 1 An overview of the Main Features	In almost all areas, male students predominated.
	Step 2 Describe an overall Trend	Both the number and proportion of female students are increasing over the years.
Move 3 Make Comparisons	Step 1 Categorize the information	There is an apparent imbalance in the distribution of male and female students among different disciplines.
	Step 2 Make Comparisons between Categories	While international students make up almost half of the student body in science-related areas, their presence in humanity subject is marginal.
	Step 3 Describe the Extremes	The engineering department is the only one having more international students than domestic students.
Move 4 Conclusion	Step 1 Summarize the finding	The number of people doing part-time jobs only has increased in the three decades depicted in the graph.
	Step 2 A Direct Interpretation	The number of international students has increased to a significant proportion of the student population in the UK.

The above table is a summary of the preferred possible moves and steps in the IELTS writing Section 1. It was a combination of possible moves and steps implied in many sample

writings of various sources, including the official Cambridge IELTS series and other publishing on IELTS test preparation. Some of the moves and steps were direct reflections of the requirement in the rubrics. For example, the official rubric had stated that a band seven response of task 1 must contain “a clear overview of the main trends” (British Council, 2012, p. 20), and this requirement is met in Move 2, Steps 1 and 2 in the above table.

To be used as a guideline for teacher-student collaboration of genre analysis in the classroom, these steps and moves were first explained to the students in the class, and then contextualized in a series of writing samples. Students were encouraged to identify these patterns in these sample writings. In order to reduce the level of individual cognitive load, students were first allowed time for group discussion to mark the moves and steps they saw in the writing samples. Then, we went through some of the samples together as a class to compare our findings. In some samples, some of the steps were missing. For example, the Move 2 Step 2 (Describe an overall trend) was missing in the sample describing a pie chart, since pie charts emphasized more on proportions than changes. On occasions like this, students were reminded to view the moves and steps as rhetorical resources, rather than a static formula to be strictly followed.

In addition to identifying moves and steps, providing students with possible linguistic resources was also an essential part of the course preparation period. By analyzing the sample writings, several categories of vocabulary and phrases have been selected to be included in the curriculum. These linguistic resources included (a) words and phrases to name different types of graphs, like “table,” “pie chart,” and “bar chart”; (b) vocabulary to describe changes of data, like “increase,” “decrease,” and “peak”; (c) related adjectives and adverbials: “dramatically,” “mild,” and “sharp”; (d) proportions and percentage, such as “the majority of,” “almost half,” and “a small number of.” These phrases and their synonyms were

provided to students with the aim of helping students meet the requirement of “Lexical Resources” as stated in the official rubrics (British Council, 2012).

At the sentence level, some coordinates and conjunctions frequently appeared in the IELTS sample writings (IELTS, 2017a), and thus were included in the course. Those words include “and,” “yet,” and “but.” Knowing these words help students to meet the criteria of “Coherence and Cohesion” in the grading rubric (British Council, 2012).

**Genre analysis of Section 2 in IELTS writing.** As discussed in the literature review, the Section 2 of IELTS writing may contain recounting, explanative, and argumentative elements, making it a combination or an integration of these text-types. Though the writing prompts have a diverse way of asking questions, it seems that most of them can be categorized into four main types (as presented in Table 3.2):

Table 3.1

*Types of questions in IELTS writing Section 2*

Types of Questions	Explanation	Examples
Type 1 Provide Solutions	This type of questions asks students to come up with solutions to an identified problem.	The traffic problems in large cities have become more and more dangerous. What do you think we can do to solve this problem?
Type 2 Evaluate Solutions	One solution is presented in the prompts and students are asked to evaluate the solution.	With the increasing number of private vehicles on the road, traffic problems have appeared. Some people say that prohibiting cars from entering city centres could be a solution to the traffic problems in the city, what do you think?
Type 3 Present Ideas	This type of questions asks test-takers to analyze a topic and come up with ideas.	Nowadays people tend to care more about their weight and try hard to keep fit. Why do you think it is the case?
Type 4 Evaluate Ideas	One or more ideas to a question are presented in the prompts, and test-takers need to evaluate it or them.	Some people say that people now tend to care more about their weight and try to keep fit because the media tells them to do so. What do you think?
Others	Prompts that do not fit into either of the above.	Most government money should be invested in teaching science rather than any other subject in order for a country to develop and progress?

After identifying four main types of prompts, work had been done to analyze the sample writings of each type of question and summarize genre features embedded. From my previous encounters with sample answers and experience in teaching IELTS writing, I have developed a system of moves and steps for the section. Though incomplete, the system can cover a large number of topics.

To make the question types more manageable and transparent to the students, other descriptive words like discussion, opinion, advantage and disadvantage are used to mark the difference between the prompts.

For the first two types of questions, the following moves and steps have been identified by analyzing the sample writings that were both provided by the official IELTS publication (IELTS, 2017a), as well as other organizations and educational companies (IELTS Essentials, 2017). Two of the student' writing samples were quoted for demonstration. The first writing sample was a response to the Type 1 question listed in Table 3.2. The internal moves and steps were identified in Table 3.3 that followed.

*The development of the economy has allowed more people to own cars than ever before. Along with all the conveniences brought by driving, traffic problem has become a major concern of people living in big cities. Some people think it may not be possible to reduce traffic on the road. I believe there are some useful measures to be taken.*

*One possible solution to this problem is to increase the cost of driving. The government should increase the tax both on car purchase and gas. This will make people think more seriously and carefully on their decisions to buy a car. However, it may add an extra burden to people who have to drive.*

*A more feasible solution would be to limit the number of cars on the road by carefully designed regulations. It may be a good idea to allow each car to be used for five days in a week.*

*Thus, the overall numbers of cars on the road are significantly reduced. Plus, it is equal to everyone. For example, Beijing has had this rule for years. Despite the initial dissent, people began to like the idea of sharing the road equally.*

*One other thing we could do is to promote and facilitate travel by public transit. A throughout, convenient and affordable public transit system will automatically attract more people and save them from driving.*

*It is true that the complicated problem of traffic is not going to be easily solved. Increasing the cost of driving, limiting the numbers of cars on the road, as well as promoting the use of public transit are viable ways to ease the situation.*

*(From students' writing samples)*

Table 3.2

*Types of prompts in IELTS writing Section 2: Type 1-2 provide/evaluate solutions*

Moves	Steps	Examples (Provide solutions to traffic jams)
Move 1 Introduction	Step 1 Background information / Lead in	The development of the economy has allowed more people to own cars than ever before.
	Step 2 Restate the problem in the prompt	Along with all the conveniences brought by driving, traffic problem has become a major concern of people living in big cities.
	Step 3 State the opposing opinion	Some people think it may not be possible to reduce traffic on the road.
	Step 4 Thesis	I believe there are some useful measures to be taken.
Move 2 A less perfect solution	Step 1 State the solution	One possible solution to this problem is to increase the cost of driving.
	Step 2 Specific actions taken	The government should increase the tax both on car purchase and gas.
	Step 3 Effect of the solution	This will make people think more seriously and carefully on their decisions to buy a car.
	Step 4 Drawbacks of the solution	However, it may add an extra burden to people who have to drive.
Move 3 A better solution	Step 1 State the better solution	A more feasible solution would be to limit the number of cars on the road by carefully designed regulations.
	Step 2 Specific measures taken	It may be a good idea to allow each car to be used for five days in a week.
	Step 3 Effect of the solution	Thus, the overall numbers of cars on the road are significantly reduced. Plus, it is equal to everyone.
	Step 4 Examples	For example, Beijing has had this rule for years. Despite the initial dissent, people began to like the idea of sharing the road equally.
Move 4 An additional solution	Step 1 State the solution	One other thing we could do is to promote and facilitate travel by public transit.
	Step 2 Effects of the solution	A throughout, convenient and affordable public transit system will automatically attract more people and save them from driving.
Move 5 Conclusion	Step 1 Acknowledge the complexity of the problem	It is true that the complicated problem of traffic is not going to be easily solved.
	State 2 Reiterate and summarize the solutions	Increasing the cost of driving, limiting the numbers of cars on the road, as well as promoting the use of public transit are viable ways to ease the situation.

Question Type 3 and 4 followed a different pattern. Another student writing sample was

quoted, and then the internal moves and steps were explained in Table 3.4 following the writing sample.

*In today's society, fast-developing of media industry has accelerated the spreading of information. People depend a lot on medias of various type for information.*

*Among which, news report has become an essential part of story sharing at global level, thus it is significant to look at what makes a good journalist.*

*Some people maintain that educational background being the most important quality of journalists. Journalists who are very well educated will be equipped with the knowledge to write attractive news report for people read. They can use colorful language and techniques to tell amazing stories. Also, their interpretation can be provoking. However, if we set such high standards, few people could become journalists. Besides, educational background can also be burden as journalists implement much rhetoric.*

*What I believe to be more important for journalists are communication skills. With impressive communicative skills, journalists are more likely to be able to probe into mysteries, into things that are usually covered in the society. However, even with impressive communicative skills, it is hard to say some journalists would not mislead the public by distorting the information they are to publish.*

*Above all, I see morally upright as the most important quality. Most of the time, it is journalists who are able to reach the site and access to people or information unavailable to general public. So, journalists are usually the only channel for the rest of the world to know what really happened*

*To sum up, journalists are usually expected to have a good educational background, excellent communication skills, and most importantly, upright morality. These are ways to guard truthful and attractive ways of news reporting.*

*(from students' writing samples)*

Table 3.4

*Types of prompts in IELTS writing Section 2: Type 3-4 present/evaluate ideas*

Moves	Steps	Examples
Move 1 Introduction	Step 1 Lead in	In today's society, fast-developing of media industry has accelerated the spreading of information. People depend a lot on medias of various type for information.
	Step 2 Thesis	Among which, news report has become an essential part of story sharing at global level, thus it is significant to look at what makes a good journalist.
Move 2 Idea One	Step 1 Ideas One	Some people maintain that educational background being the most important quality of journalists.
	Step 2 Evidence For	Journalists who are very well educated will be equipped with the knowledge to write attractive news report for people read. They can use colorful language and techniques to tell amazing stories. Also, their interpretation can be provoking.
	Step 3 Evidence Against	However, if we set such high standards, few people could become journalists. Besides, educational background can also be burden as journalists implement much rhetoric.
Move 3 Idea Two	Step 1 Idea Two	What I believe to be more important for journalists are communication skills.
	Step 2 Evidence For	With impressive communicative skills, journalists are more likely to be able to probe into mysteries, into things that are usually covered in the society.
	Step 3 Evidence Against	However, even with impressive communicative skills, it is hard to say some journalists would not mislead the public by distorting the information they are to publish.
Move 4 Discussion	Step 1 Weigh between ideas	Above all, I see morally upright as the most important quality. Most of the time, it is journalists who are able to reach the site and access to people or information unavailable to general public. So, journalists are usually the only channel for the rest of the world to know what really happened
	Step 2 Conclusion	To sum up, journalists are usually expected to have a good educational background, excellent communication skills, and most importantly, upright morality. These are ways to guard truthful and attractive ways of news reporting.

Table 3.3 and 3.4 were a summary of the possible moves and steps identified for Section 2 of the IELTS writing. Table 3.3 applies to the first two types of questions while Table 3.4 applied to the last two types. The rubrics for Section 2 were also taken into consideration

during the genre analysis. For example, the rubric requires a band seven paper to have “a clear progression throughout” thus Move 1, 2, and 3 demonstrate the progress of thinking, in providing solutions.

The strategy of working out this table was aiming for inclusiveness, so not every move and step was taken in every piece of writing sample analyzed. In addition, the students were told in class that this table was more descriptive and restrictive. Students were then encouraged to use this table as a bank of potential moves and steps that they could implement rather than a standard formula that they should follow. In order to facilitate a better understanding of the table, classroom genre analysis was also carried out, in which students were told to identify the moves and steps in the writing samples given to them.

As with the instructions in Section 1, the necessary vocabulary in Section 2 had also been a focus of instruction, which included three main categories of vocabulary: (a) content vocabulary of specific prompts. For example, in writing to provide solutions for traffic problems, students were taught phrases like “public transportation,” “subways,” “limit the number of cars,” and “prohibit;” (b) general academic vocabulary was also taught in the instruction of Section 2. Examples were “analyze,” and “detrimental;” (c) coordination and subordination words were the third group of vocabulary for instruction. Words like “but,” “nevertheless,” and “thus” were explained to the students with examples.

The genre analysis work was done during the class preparation period before the actual classroom implementation so, it served as knowledge base and made classroom co-construction more efficient.

**Classroom implementation of genre learning cycle.** Based on the genre knowledge obtained in the previous analysis stage, the four-staged genre learning cycle was implemented in classroom instruction.

The stage of building the knowledge began with an introduction to the genre view of writing. Following Tardy's (2009) study, a sample genre analysis of Move 1, Step 1-4 of an IELTS Section 2 response served as an example to contextualize the genre theory to the student. The logic behind the writing convention was also explained to the students. For example, Move 1, Step 1, is usually a sentence introducing the context of the problem in the prompts, in order to establish a focus for the discussion in later paragraphs. At this stage resources on which students could draw for ideas were also provided. For example, students may not have even considered ways to solve traffic jams (Table 3.3). Thus news articles were provided for students to come up with ideas and save those ideas for their future writing. The above-mentioned linguistic preparation had been the third group of knowledge built at this stage.

The second stage in the cycle, modelling of the text, mainly focused on sample writing responses provided by IELTS test organizations. For Section 1, three samples of high achieving writing had been explained throughout the writing course. These samples covered writing descriptions of a line graph, a table chart, as well as a flowchart. For Section 2, eight writing samples were analyzed in class together with the students. As mentioned previously, the study categorized the writing of Section 2 into four different question types; two writing samples were chosen for the explanation of each question type. For both IELTS Section 1 and 2, the analysis included the register of the language used, the moves, and steps. For Section 2, the types of arguments were also identified in class, and students are encouraged to write more analytical arguments than hortatory arguments in keeping with the findings of the literature review. These changes were likely to influence students' score in IELTS writing positively.

The co-construction stage in the genre learning cycle was carried out as authentically as

can be done in the classroom. The researcher did not pre-select prompts for the co-construction of an IELTS essay with the students but randomly drew on the bank of prompts in the previous IELTS test papers published by Cambridge IELTS series. This was purposefully done to avoid the possibility of pre-selecting prompts that better fit the moves and steps identified. If the prompts used for classroom co-construction were intentionally selected to fit the moves and steps better, students would feel disheartened during their independent construction after class when the prompts did not fit perfectly. This strategy also created pedagogical opportunities to demonstrate ways to incorporate the genre method of writing when a given prompt did not fit perfectly with the identified moves and steps. During the co-construction process, sometimes, students would propose sentences to be included in the product, and those sentences were displayed on each student's computer screen for feedback and discussion. At other times, the teacher/researcher would write a sentence or two after some discussion with the students. This "zigzag" process involved constant checking and compromising between different ideas, proposing alternative ways of expression, and rewriting some parts after discussion. The assessment was intentionally minimized in this process to encourage better participation. When some students made grammatical, lexical, or idiomatic mistakes, they would mostly be identified and corrected by peers, rather than by the researcher.

Different from the independent construction stage described in the literature review, where teachers are present and actively ready to help students, the course in this study did not allow much time in-class to do independent construction. Students' independent construction was done mainly by themselves in the form of homework, and then uploaded to the course online learning management platform. In order to make at least part of the theory-designed teachers' scaffolding available for students during independent construction, printed copies of

the classroom genre analysis and the product of classroom co-construction were provided.

The four stages of the genre learning cycle were repeated each time recursively during the whole course when a new type of question or prompt was introduced in class. Two of the four-hour weekly sessions were dedicated to writing instruction, excluding instructional time spent on model testing as well as time lost due to public holidays. In the end, I had completed seven rounds of the cycle as shown below (two hours of classroom instruction time for Section 1, and a little more for Section 2).

Table 3.5

*Schedules of genre cycle implemented*

Cycle	Question Type/Content
1	Section 1 Line chart
2	Section 2 Provide a solution
3	Section 2 Evaluate a solution
4	Section 1 Pie chart
5	Section 2 Present ideas
6	Section 1 Flowchart
7	Section 2 Evaluate ideas

The classroom implementation of the genre method was an essential part of this study because the data for later analysis was generated in this process. Several sources of data were collected in this process. The next section explains the types of data collected and the process of collection for this case study.

**Data Sources**

Case study encompasses six main sources of data including documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation, and physical artifacts (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014). For this study, I collected data from three of these sources: (a)

documentation, which mainly includes students' writing samples collected; (b) direct observations, comprised of my teaching field notes; and (c) semi-structured interviews. My personal communications and interactions with the participants during breaks and spare time was also used to describe the participants.

**Research context.** The writing course where this research study was conducted occurred in a language training school in western Canada. The school had been doing business in Canada for about 14 years. The majority of students were from mainland China and Hong Kong. Most of these students were in high school in Canada at the time of data collection and were around the age of 17. In addition to the after-school IELTS training programs carried out in this study, the school offered many other tutoring courses like English 12, math, and AP (Advance Placement). The school also offered services such as finding homestay parents for students and helping students renewing their study permit. Overall, the students maintained strong connections with the school. The students were mostly from more affluent families in China.

I applied for human ethics approval from the University of Victoria. The study was approved the study under the condition that the recruitment shall happen when the course had finished, and therefore any potential "power over" the students as their teacher would cease to exist. After the course was finished, the school manager approached the students for participation. Three of the eleven students in the course agreed to participate and signed the consent form. The three students have been assigned pseudonyms (self-chosen) including, Lee, Xianxu, and Haoran as a way to protect their identities. The material generated by students other than the three participants was not collected as data for this study.

**Documentation.** Students' writing samples during the period of the writing course were collected, labelled, and documented. Since it was a weekly class, students handed in their

writing assignments to the teacher/researcher for formative feedback. I focused mainly on formative feedback with their homework as I was told that most of the students in this class lacked confidence in writing. Thus, providing summative feedback might not have been useful in building their sense of confidence. The writing samples were submitted via the online learning management platform of the school. They were then sorted and labelled by students' names, date of submission, topic, and the respective prompts of each submission. At least two writing samples were collected from each of the participants.

**Direct observations.** Observational data can be instrumental in elucidating information about the research topic (Yin, 2014). As the teacher of the writing course, I was presenting and facilitating during every session of the class. There were plenty of opportunities for me to make significant observations of classroom interactions with students, scaffolding students' writing, and interpreting students' responses in relation to the content delivered in the classroom. I kept a research journal and wrote in it right after every session of the class for further reflection and analysis which was then juxtaposed with other data (Altrichter & Holly, 2011). At the end of the course, there were 14 pages of field notes, which documented the instructional patterns, the annotated classroom co-construction writing samples, and my reflections on the instruction.

**Interviews.** After ethics approval, I asked the school manager to approach the students on my behalf to seek their consent. Since it is an after-school training center, the school manager did not have power over the students. The school manager was able to deliver recruitment letters to six students, and three of them decided to participate.

As the students are sometimes not comfortable with their English, I offered the option of doing at least part of the interview in Chinese. The Chinese segment was translated into English during the transcription stage of this study. The interview data gathered are as

follows:

Table 3.6

*Information about the interview data*

Name of participants	Length of the interview	Pages of data transcribed
Lee	19:36	14
Xianxu	20:23	9 (English Only)
Haoran	22:26	17

The planned questions asked during the interviews are as follows:

1. Do you notice any difference between the writing class of this course and the previous writing class you have taken?
2. Can you describe the structures and organization of IELTS writing?
3. Do you think knowing more about the structures and organization helped or hindered your IELTS writing?
4. Is there anything in the writing class that particularly attracted your attention?
5. Besides IELTS writing, do you think the writing class has an effect on your writing in other situations?
6. What else can you think of regarding this writing course?

The first two questions and the fourth question aimed to find out whether students could recall most of the information several months after instruction. The questions were written to exclude the technicalities in genre theory to facilitate better understanding by the student. The third question aimed at encouraging students to report their perception of genre pedagogy in relation to the preparation of the IELTS test. The last question was asked to give students a chance to report any other things that were of interest or concern to them. During the

interview process, I asked additional questions, for mainly two reasons. Sometimes students presented unanticipated ideas and thoughts that I found relevant to the research question and would like to know more about them. For example, one student (Haoran) reported his feelings about the IELTS test itself. At other times, I asked additional questions requesting students to clarify or elaborate their points.

### **Data Analysis**

The overall analytic framework to be used for this study is thematic analysis (TA). The theme, in this case, is defined as important emerging trends from the data that relate to the research questions (Braun & Clark, 2006; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2011), and thematic analysis is the process of locating these patterns from the data. According to Braun and Clark (2006), there are six steps to conduct a thematic analysis: (a) familiarize yourself with your data, (b) generate initial codes, (c) search for themes, (d) review themes, (e) define and name themes, and (f) produce the report (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 87).

As the first step of the thematic analysis, it requires the data to be transcribed and also translated as necessary (Braun & Clark, 2006). In this study, the interview was designed to be conducted in English; however, as some of the interviewees felt the need to use their native language to express themselves, I switched into Mandarin Chinese, which is also my first language. In this stage, it was also required to read the data, like the transcripts of the interview and the students' work, multiple times to get an overall impression. To ensure that I was familiar with the data before going on to the subsequent steps, I read the interview transcripts three times.

After consultation with my supervisor (R. Tobin, Personal Communications, May 30, 2018), I decided to use the computer software Dedoose as the tool for data analysis. All the data were imported into the software as text. There are also four general strategies of

analyzing the data in case studies: relying on theoretical propositions, working data from the “ground up,” developing a case description, and examining plausible rival explanations (Yin, 2014). In the scenario of this case study, I implemented the second and supplemented the analysis with the fourth one. Though computer programs can be of assistance to data analysis, researchers were expected to act as an analyst to discover meaningful patterns in data (Yin, 2014).

**Working on data from the “ground up.”** The rationale to implement this strategy of working on data from the “ground up” was to follow an inductive approach towards data analysis, so as not to confine what could be identified in the data. For example, initially while reading the interview transcripts, I found that all the students interviewed reported that they did not see much difference between the genre approach and the previous writing courses that they have taken. It was useful not to assume the reason behind this perception until more evidence is found in the data to back up any interpretation on this. This process also involved “playing with the data” (Yin, 2014, p. 186), to discover potential meaningful concepts and ideas that could possibly become the route for coding.

The data went through two independent rounds of analysis in order to answer the two research questions. 356 code applications were applied to 250 excerpts from the students’ writing samples and transcripts of the interviews. 28 themes emerged through the analysis process. To answer the first research question, which mainly regarded the pedagogical implications of the genre method in the IELTS exam preparation setting, the teaching notes were read first and coded for the first round into aspects of genre knowledge taught. One of such codes is “teaching of transitions between paragraphs.” Then, as the second step, the students’ writing samples were read and coded for the identifiable genre and linguistic features. When the coding process was completed, the search for themes then began. As an

example, the theme “students’ approximation of the genre features” were identified.

To answer the second research question on student’s perception of the genre method, the interview data took the lead in the analysis process. The path of analysis began with the coding of the interview data, which followed similar paths of generating initial codes, and then involved a search for themes. For example, one consistent pattern found in all three participants is that they did not perceive the genre method of writing instruction to have any confining effects on their creativity, as they treated the IELTS test only as a gatekeeper of university education, rather than real writing activities they need to be able to engage in the future.

After coding in relation to the two research questions, the third round of data analysis aimed at making connections between themes so as to form an overall picture of the case study. One sample identified connection is: when students perceived the IELTS test to be a gatekeeper, or even an enemy that they had to fight against, the genre features taught in class were downgraded in their minds and then discarded upon completion of the course.

**Examine plausible rival explanations.** Yin (2014) points out that this strategy is usually combined with others to validate the findings of data analysis further because it filters out other plausible variables. For example, had I discovered any improvement in students’ writing on coherence, I must look carefully and actively for other explanations of the improvement. It could be that the students had read a book about coherence in their own study, which was independent of the writing course. In the best scenario, I needed to find ways to actively seek for evidence (for example in the interview with the students) that was against my explanation, and if I could not find substantial evidence supporting other explanation, then my explanation was more validated.

## **Conclusion**

This study was conducted as a qualitative case study with the philosophical assumptions of acknowledging multiple realities, relating to participants for knowledge creation, reflecting on hidden values and adopting ground up methodology. Using mainly the interpretive framework of social constructivism, added by transformative framework, I positioned myself in the study. Three sources of data namely, documentation, direct observation and semi-structured interviews were collected and analyzed by thematic analysis.

## **Findings**

The data analysis generated ample findings related to the pedagogical implications and students' perceptions of the genre method in the IELTS preparation context. These findings were based on three data sources: the teaching field notes, students' writing samples, and the interviews with students. In this chapter, I describe the specific findings for each data source and triangulated data to present the overall findings.

### **Descriptions of the participants**

In order to contextualize the students, each participant is described in relation to their general characteristics, learning characteristics, and experience with IELTS. The most significant information about each participant is listed in Table 4.1. This table gives personal information, followed by key points on the general characteristics and learning characteristics of each participant. The last column shows the participants' experience with the IELTS test or IELTS test preparation course. Following Table 4.1, more elaborated descriptions of each participant are provided. In this table, descriptions of students' learning characteristics were identified from my interactions with the students both in-class and during break time.

Table 4.1

*Information about each participant in this study.*

Details of participants	Learning characteristics	Experience with IELTS and Other information
Lee/Male/17	Active classroom participant, less ready for more serious tasks, reluctance in homework submission	No experience with IELTS and no plan to take it, in Canada for only three months
Haoran/Male/17	Test-driven, paid close attention in class before the test, some procrastination in submitting homework	Taken IELTS at least five times, rich experience in test preparation course
Xianxu/Male/18	Serious, motivated and maintained high standards for himself, Advanced learner	No experience with IELTS, no experience in test preparation course

**Description of Lee.** Lee was a seventeen-year-old male living on his own in Canada. By the time he enrolled in my IELTS course he had only been here for three months. At the same time, he was attending Grade 12 at a local high school. In addition to the regular courses (i.e., science, social studies, and math), he was also taking an ESL course in his school. Lee had opted to take Communication English 12, which is a practical alternative to the more academic English 12. Lee was a very active participant in class and loved to share his opinion. However, as the subject matter became more challenging and serious, his participation dropped off possibly due to his inability to produce more complex writing, as evidenced by his writing samples. His limited interest resulted in reluctance in submitting homework assignments. Lee got along well with other students in part because of his sense of humour. He did not enjoy speaking English that much and often avoided speaking in English. It seemed as if his high level of participation in learning English was not sustainable throughout the course. I responded to his reluctance and lack of assignment submissions by talking to him individually after class. With this extra prompting and support, he would do

minimal work. I also responded to his needs and interests by listening to his stories at lunchtime in Mandarin.

**Description of Haoran.** Haoran is a seventeen-year-old male who had been studying in Canada for over a year at the time he enrolled in my class. He attended a private international high school in Shenzhen (one of the four tier-one cities in China) before he came to Canada. Haoran has been very interested in electronics, fashions, and news as he always engaged in such conversations with classmates. He maintained excellent relationships with other students in class and engaged in classroom activities very actively. Because of his rich experience in taking IELTS tests, he had a series of ideas about the tests that he liked to share with the class. He would also occasionally challenge me in class when he felt the ideas and skills I shared were perhaps not beneficial for getting a good score in IELTS.

He paid close attention in class; however, after class, he procrastinated in finishing the assignments. I had to remind him about his homework because they were sometimes late. He did his work to an acceptable level, and to his credit, he would always voluntarily write some reflections on his own homework at the end of each submission, which provided interesting insights into his thoughts about writing. He was absent for the last class because by then, he had already taken his IELTS test.

**Description of Xianxu.** Compared to the other two participants described above, Xianxu was a much quieter individual. He was eighteen years old and had been in Canada since grade nine. He adapted well to the high school education here as the other classmates referred to him as the “expert in study everything.” Though he was not as talkative as the other two students in the class were, he was the one who would speak up at important moments for instance, he was sometimes the person to settle arguments between two other students.

Xiaoxu was very determined to study psychology at the undergraduate level. He shared with me that he developed an interest in the way people think in childhood. Along the way, he had read various works in psychology in Chinese. As for homework, he had no trouble meeting all the deadlines and would always submit a quality version compared to the typical students in the class. He was also very keen on grammar in English writing, as he would remind me to help him locate his grammatical mistakes in writing.

Now that students' profiles have been identified, the analysis of their writing samples is presented, followed by the summary of findings.

### **Findings in the Students' Writing Samples**

In order to make my system of analysis of students' writing samples transparent, I have included in this section definitions of the abbreviations and short-codes used throughout the analysis. I drew on Swales' model (1990) of "Creating A Research Space" (CARS) to conduct the analysis. In the CARS model, Swales demonstrated a genre analysis system, which included functional moves (i.e., providing background information) and a series of steps to achieve that function (i.e., current debates over the issues). An example of a rhetorical function in IELTS is to introduce the topic at the very beginning or to contextualize prompts in the writing response.

**Guide to the terminologies, abbreviations, and short-codes.** Students' writing samples were labelled in this format "Name-Section Number–Document A/B." For example, "Lee-Section 1 A" means the first writing sample from Lee about Section 1 (Expository) of IELTS writing. In addition to the writing samples collected during the study, there were also writing samples collected from students for pre-assessment purposes before the course. I gave those writing samples back to the students, but I took field notes while grading these preliminary

writing samples. These now constitute part of the field notes data set. The writing samples collected before the course are referred to as initial samples (IS). For example, “IS-Lee” means the initial writing sample of Lee collected prior to the start-up of the course.

Short-codes were used to label the rhetorical moves and steps in the students’ writing. (The detailed meanings of each rhetorical move and step were listed in Chapter 3 on page 28.) Those steps and moves in this document were labelled as “Section Number–Moves Number-Steps Number.” For example, “S1M1S1” means the first move and the first step in Section 1, which is “Introduction to the graphs.” In order to facilitate reading, the title of the specific step is written in the parenthesis after each label, for example, S1M1S1 (Introduction to the graphs), and S2M1S1 (Lead-in). Links to sample questions from the IELTS test are provided in Appendix B.

**The analysis of the students’ writing samples.** After obtaining students’ consent for using their writing samples as data, I retrieved the samples from Google Classroom and then uploaded them into Dedoose (a qualitative software program) for analysis. The 12 writing samples consisted of four samples from each one of the three participants in the study. The writing samples also contained annotations that document my editing suggestions. The following Table 4.2 lists some general information of each writing sample.

Table 4.2

*Information from the students' writing samples*

Name of participants	Title	Number of words	Date of submission
Lee	Lee-Section 1 A	107	October 16, 2017
	Lee-Section 1 B	216	December 14, 2017
	Lee-Section 2 A	239	November 11, 2017
	Lee-Section 2 B	239	December 14, 2017
Haoran Liu	Haoran-Section 1 A	213	October 16, 2017
	Haoran-Section 1 B	202	December 13, 2017
	Haoran-Section 2 A	252	November 11, 2017
	Haoran-Section 2 B	294	December 17, 2017
Xianxu	Xianxu-Section 1 A	169	November 11, 2017
	Xianxu-Section 1 B	231	December 14, 2017
	Xianxu-Section 2 A	206	November 11, 2017
	Xianxu-Section 2 B	271	December 14, 2017

Students' pre-assessment writings (such as IS-Lee, IS-Haoran and IS-Xianxu) were not listed in the table but were examined by comparing and contrasting with the samples listed in the above table. All the students' writing samples (excluding pre-assessment writings) can be found in Appendix A.

The IELTS requires candidates to write at least 150 words for Section 1 (expository on graphs) and 250 words for Section 2 (argumentation). From the table, we saw that Lee is the only student who had trouble meeting the word length requirement at the end of the course. Though the number of words in Lee's Section 1 increased significantly during this course, he still failed to meet the word requirement for Section 2 near the end of the course. The other finding from Table 4.2 was the general increase in the number of words perhaps because they could figure out more to write as they progressed. More detailed findings, such as students' growing implementation of genre knowledge, are presented in the following sections.

**Findings in Lee's writing samples.** Lee's initial writing samples (*IS-Lee*) in both Section 1 and Section 2 did not meet the requirement of the word limit for IELTS. One of the most obvious problems in his Section 1 was a lack of comparisons, trends, and descriptions

of the main features of the graphs. Rather, Lee's samples contained merely a conversion of all the numbers in the graphs to a text form. Judging from the perspective of the IELTS grading rubric, his initial writing of Section 1 (IS-Lee) failed to address the task. Lee's two other samples of Section 1 (*Lee-Section 1 A* and *Lee-Section 1 B*) were analyzed to examine the moves and steps. The following Table 4.3 presented an example of analyzing students' writing samples by extracting the moves and steps in it. The first column lists the moves and steps discovered in the writing sample, and the second column presents the original excerpt from the sample that matched the moves and steps identified. I identified the moves and steps by connecting the analysis with the writing prompts. For example, when the prompt asked candidates to provide solutions to a problem, then writing about one solution was identified as a move. Steps were then identified as the necessary ways to discuss and analyze the solution comprehensively. To contextualize and aid coherence, Table 4.3 is preceded by the original sample from the student.

*As shown. The North American vegetation is the best in three different regions, and desertification accounts for only 5% of the land area. Europe has the worst land desertification, with 23%. It is also the most common cause of desertification in three regions, with Oceania being the worst, up to 11.3 percent and Europe up 5.5 percent. Secondly, the consequences of the effects are as high as 30%. Among the three regions, the most serious cause of the desertification of Europe is the lack of water. North American has the least impact. Over-cultivation is the most serious in three regions, but Oceania has no problem at all.*

*Lee-Section 1 A*

Table 4.3

*Genre analysis of Lee-Section 1 A*

Moves and Steps	Excerpts
S1M3S3 Extremes	As shown. The North American vegetation is the best in three different regions, and desertification accounts for only 5% of the land area
S1M3S3 Extremes	Europe has the worst land desertification, with 23%.
S1M3S3 Extremes	It is also the most common cause of desertification in three regions, with Oceania being the worst, up to 11.3 percent and Europe up 5.5 percent.
Deviations	Secondly, the consequences of the effects are as high as 30%.
S1M3S3 Extremes	Among the three regions, the most serious cause of the desertification of Europe is the lack of water
S1M3S3 Extremes	North American has the least impact. Over-cultivation is the most serious in three regions, but Oceania has no problem at all.

*Note. "Extreme" here means the biggest or the smallest number appeared in each category of information in writing prompts. They are expected to be included in the response, as indicated by the rubrics.*

As shown in Table 4.3, in Lee's first writing sample, he adopted only one of the moves and steps explained during co-construction in class, plus one deviation from the moves and steps.

In terms of defining deviation and innovation, the difference is whether a rhetorical function had been achieved by moving away from norms. If students' moving away from the norm attained a rhetorical purpose relevant to the prompt, it was termed as innovation; otherwise, it was termed as a deviation. The cause of deviation varied. Some of the deviations might be attributed to the students' failures of approximation, while others could be students' attempts or instances of failed genre innovation. Examples of one deviation and one innovation can be found in the following Table 4.4:

Table 4.4

*Examples of deviation and innovation*

Moves and Steps	Deviation	Innovation
S2M1S1 Lead-in	Of course, teaching primary school students to use a computer is important.	My little brother always comes home and complains about how “childish” his computer course in primary school is.

*Note. For a prompt to discuss the idea of starting computer lessons at primary school, students wrote the above words. In the deviation column, the student claimed it is important to teach students to use a computer without providing any evidence at the beginning of the whole composition, which did not serve the rhetorical purpose of providing a lead-in to the discussion. While, in the innovation column, the sentence did not follow the usual way to discuss the situation in society, but provided the author’s experience as a lead-in.*

In Lee’s writing sample *Lee-Section 1 A*, I found that, after two rounds of genre learning cycles for Section 1 (one on “line chart” and the other on “pie chart”), Lee adopted at least one of the class-room taught steps in his independent writing. The reason why he only adopted S1M3S3 (Extreme) could be that this step aligned more with his prior writing experience compared with other moves and steps described in the course. S1M3S3 (Extremes) involved only describing the number in a sentence whereas other steps such as S1M2S1 (Describing a general trend) would require identifying a trend from the changes depicted in the graph as well as differentiating the main trend from relevant details.

The deviational sentence in this piece was only a direct description of a number in the graph, which was a remnant of Lee’s prior writing habit. Lee’s writing continued to assimilate more moves and steps as his learning advanced. Table 4.5 listed the moves and steps identified in the writing sample *Lee-Section 1 B*, along with the matching excerpts from his writing sample.

*As shown in the graph. International students in the information technology course have a score of about 90 percent, and 30 percent higher than the UK students. And*

*International students seem to have a stronger advantage in information technology. But in international law, international students scored significantly lower than UK students, with international student scores generally at 50 percent, 20 percent lower than UK students. Informational technology and international law has is the most obvious gap between international and UK students. But in Nursing and accountancy, the there is not much difference gap between international students and UK students is almost the same. The only difference is that the Nursing score is high, about 75%, and Accountancy's score is low, about 60%. This may be related to the difficulty of the course, and the gap between international students and UK students is not reflected. In the comparison of subjects, we probably learned that international students are more likely to be in science, with higher scores than UK students, such as Electrical engineering and information technology. However, apart from these two extracurricular activities, international students have not had a great advantage in other subjects of the chart, and even we can find that the average score of UK students is slightly higher than that of international students.*

*(Lee-Section 1 B)*

Table 4.5

*Genre analysis of Lee-Section 1 B*

Moves and Steps	Excerpts
S1M1S1 General introduction	As shown in the graph. International students in the information technology course have a score of about 90 percent, and 30 percent higher than the UK students.
Deviation	... International students seem to have a stronger advantage in information technology.
S1M3S2 Comparisons	But in international law, international students scored significantly lower than UK students...
S1M3S3 Extremes	Informational technology and international law has is the most obvious gap...
S1M3S3 Extremes	...there is not much difference gap between international students and UK students is almost the same.
Deviation	This may be related to the difficulty of the course...
S1M2S1 An overview of the main features	International students are more likely to be in science subjects
S1M4S1 Summarize the finding	international students have not had a great advantage in other subjects of the chart...

As can be seen in Table 4.5, after several additional rounds of learning in the class using the genre learning cycle, Lee's use of moves and steps had increased considerably from using only one of the steps to five different steps. Lee showed progress in examining the graphs for trends and patterns before he started writing. However, the analysis also revealed that the internal structure of the whole piece of writing did not reflect the order taught in class. Lee seemed to use S1M2S1 (An overview of the main features) as part of a summary. In addition, his report began with an S1M3S2 (Making comparisons), not as he was taught to do, which was S1M3S1 (Categorization of information). These two deviations demonstrated he was not yet competent in organizing a whole piece of Section 1.

Based on my previous teaching experience, the two deviations discovered in his writing were common mistakes made by many students. Students are often tempted to interpret the

data according to their own experience or perhaps stereotypes. For example, students claimed that international students favoured science subjects based solely on a comparatively more significant number of international students in those departments. However, claims like these overlooked other possible causes behind the trends in the prompt. Thus, the IELTS official guide had advised candidates not to interpret the meaning of the figures. For example, when the graph shows an unbalanced distribution of resources among different countries, test-takers should report the pattern in their writing, without anticipating any reasons behind such a distribution.

The writing of Section 2 was a very different style compared to Section 1. Lee's first Section 2 writing *Lee-Section 2 A* was aiming at finding solutions to inappropriate behaviours at tourism attractions. The other sample *Lee-Section 2 B* was to discuss the idea of building more sports facilities instead of shopping centers to create a better community. The two writing samples were analyzed for their genre features as follows (the moves and steps of each writing sample were listed for comparison):

Table 4.6

*Comparison of genre analyses of Lee's Section 2 writing samples*

<i>Lee-Section 2 A (Question Type 1)</i>	Moves and Steps
	<i>Lee-Section 2 B (Question Type 3)</i>
S2M1S1 Lead-in	S2M1S4 Thesis
S2M1S2 Restate the problem	S1M1M1 Lead in
S2M1S3 An opposing opinion	Deviation
S2M1S4 Thesis	Deviation
S2M2S1 An imperfect solution	S2M2S2 Evidence for
S2M2S3 Drawbacks	Deviation
S2M3S1 A better solution	
S2M3S2 Specific measures	
S2M3S3 Examples	
S2M4S1 An additional solution	
S2M4S2 Effect of the solution	
S2M5S1 Acknowledgement	
S2M5S2 Summarization	

As can be seen in Table 4.6 more rhetorical moves and steps were implemented in the first writing sample submitted in the early stage of the course. Only two steps were missing from the first writing sample, while the second writing sample followed only three steps. It was perplexing at first to note that Lee's second writing sample did not seem to reflect the increasing amount of genre knowledge and genre awareness that he was developing in the class (as reflected in the field notes). After examining the field notes attached to the two assignments, one possible reason was identified. The level of resemblance, between the prompt assigned for independent construction stage and the one used in co-construction stage, mattered. Lee's topic for independent construction, "solutions to solve inappropriate behaviours at tourism attractions," was very close to the topic, "solutions to solve traffic jams in major cities," which was used for co-construction during class time. This phenomenon was interesting because of the resemblance between these two topics likely facilitated a similar process of idea generation and implementation of genre knowledge for the student. However,

in the context where the two topics were dissimilar, Lee had trouble using genre knowledge. More specially, my teaching field notes revealed that the topic discussed in class was “whether parents or the teachers should be responsible for cultivating good manners in children.” In contrast, the topic assigned for homework afterward was “to comment on building sports facilities instead of shopping centers as means to creating a better sense of community,” which was incongruent with their in-class work. This incongruence in the assigned homework required more manipulation and modification to apply the knowledge generated from the co-construction during class time. Lee’s writing samples indicated that the similarity between prompts had an impact on his ability to apply the genre knowledge.

Additionally, one of the deviations in Lee’s second writing demonstrated a possibility that he had mixed up the moves and steps for different question types (the four questions types of IELTS writing Section 2 were explained in Chapter 3 on page 27). For example, he wrote a sentence: “to improve the community, people should build more shopping malls to better the economy,” and this sentence sounded more like finding solutions (provide solutions to a problem), rather than searching for evidence to support his thesis such as his suggestion to build more sports facility (present ideas in response to a question). The second deviation was a hortatory argument calling for the importance of doing physical exercise, which was only tangentially relevant to his argument.

**Findings in Haoran’s writing samples.** From my field note, I found that Haoran’s initial two pieces of writing (*IS-Haoran*) had met the number of words requirement of the IELTS test. In addition, some aspects of his writing indicated his previous experience in taking IELTS preparation courses, as he generally used accurate vocabulary in IELTS writing Section 1, such as words and expressions to describe changes of trend and extremes. For example, Haoran wrote, “Although over-cultivation in North America was only had 3.3%, it

was the main cause led to land infertility.” In this sentence, he used “although” to contrast the small percentage of over-cultivation with the impact that the small percentage had caused.

Table 4.7 below showed the comparison of genre analysis in Haoran’s two Section 1 samples. As can be seen in the table, the second writing sample used two more steps S1M2S1 (Overview of the main features), and S1M3S1 (Categorization of information) that did not show up in the first writing sample. Similar to Lee’s writing, comparisons and extremes seemed to be more manageable for Haoran, and he attempted to include the other steps that required more synthesis of the information in the graphs, rather than merely reporting numbers. In the field notes, I reflected that students seemed to be confused at differentiating the general trend (the changes demonstrated in the graphs) and the main features (the kind of information provided in the graphs). I used more examples to illustrate to the students how to identify the main trend or pattern in those graphs, but Haoran continued to reject this step, as he believed the definition of main trend or pattern was open to interpretation. However, he did agree that it seemed to be a necessary step in the IELTS writing.

Table 4.7

*Comparison of genre analyses of Haoran’s Section 1 writing samples*

Moves and Steps	
<i>Haoran- Section 1 A</i>	<i>Haoran-Section 1 B</i>
S1M1S1 General introduction	S1M1S1 General introduction
Deviations	S1M2S1 Overview of the main features
S1M3S2 Comparisons	S1M3S2 Comparisons
S1M3S3 Extremes	S1M3S2 Comparisons
Deviations	S1M3S1 Categorization of information
S1M2S2 Comparisons	S1M3S3 Extremes
S1M3S2 Comparisons	S1M3S3 Extremes

The two deviations found in Haoran’s Section 1 sample echoed Lee’s mistakes, which were making groundless connections or interpretations of the causes or reasons behind the

trend displayed in the graphs. The students tended to speak beyond the data that were presented to them in the prompt. In one of the samples, Haoran wrote: “UK students are more interested in getting degrees in arts rather than science because they think it is easier for them to pass.” The graph displayed a higher portion of UK students in arts-related subjects but claiming that the students think arts subjects are easier was a groundless speculation. In his later sample, such deviations disappeared.

One other noticeable finding in Haoran’s writing sample was his own reflections on his writing, which he would voluntarily enclose at the end of each writing sample. In almost every piece of homework he handed in, he would write one or two sentences of self-reflection on his own writing, in Chinese. In *Haoran-Section 1 A* he wrote, “I felt that my writing is chaos, I do not have a clue on how to begin, and how to make my writing more logical” (English translation). Haoran’s feeling might have come from the layout or sequence of all the moves and steps he displayed in his writing sample. As described in class, there was not a fixed order for the steps to be demonstrated in a piece of writing, because the sequence depended on several factors. For example, the participants could choose a specific sequence for paragraph development due to the requirement in the prompts. However, Haoran’s writing did not reflect an internal logic of implementation to organize the features and trends he discovered in his writing. There seemed to be a gap between just modelling all of those genre features (moves and steps) and manipulating or integrating them into a coherent piece of writing.

When the analysis continued to Section 2 of Haoran’s writing, interesting findings emerged again. The following Table 4.8 shows the moves and steps in Haoran’s two writing pieces of Section 2. Haoran’s first writing sample in Section 2 followed the majority of the moves and steps co-constructed in class with only one deviation and three omissions.

Table 4.8

*Comparison of genre analyses of Haoran's Section 2 writing samples*

Moves and Steps	
<i>Haoran-Section 2 A (Question Type 1)</i>	<i>Haoran-Section 2 B (Question Type 4)</i>
S2M1S1 Background/Lead-in	S2M1S1 Lead-in
S2M1S2 State the opposing opinion	S2M1S2 Thesis
Deviation	S2M2S1 Idea one
S2M1S4 Thesis	S2M2S2 Evidence for
S2M2S1 State an imperfect solution	S2M2S3 Evidence against
S2M2S4 Drawbacks of the solution	S2M3S1 Idea two
S2M3S1 A better solution	S2M3S2 Evidence for
S2M3S2 Specific measures taken	Deviation
S2M3S3 Effect of the solution	Deviation
S2M3S4 Example	S2M4S2 Conclusion
S2M4S1 Additional solution	
S2M4S2 Effect of the solution	
S2M5S1 Acknowledge the complexity	

This repeated pattern (reproducing most of the moves and steps in writing question Type 1) could be connected again to the level of similarity in the two topics, but the possible reasons behind the missing moves and steps are explored in this section. S2M2S2 (Specific measures taken), S2M2S3 (Effects of the solution) were missing, which is probably because Haoran saw Move 2 (imperfect solution) as similar to a writing technique he had learned in other writing classes when he was in China. During one of the classroom co-constructions, some of the students echoed him saying that S2M2 (An imperfect solution) was a technique called “making an intentional compromise,” which was used to strengthen the argument. He shared an example of this technique in class: in order to strengthen the argument for the importance of protecting the environment, they had to take a move backwards first by saying: “although being environmental friendly could mean an increase in the cost of living.” He thought the argument was more credible if he had already considered how people could attack it. Thus, he insisted on leaving out S2M2S2 (Specific measures taken) and S2M2S3

(Effects of the solution) because he believed these two steps could make the intentional compromise too strong to support his main argument.

Haoran had misunderstood the intention of the S2M2 (An imperfect solution), which was to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of an imperfect solution, because a better solution (S2M3) had not yet been provided at this stage. Throughout the course, he continued to have a strong preference for using his “intentional compromise,” as he repeated this technique occasionally during the classroom co-constructions. The deviation in the first writing sample was written as an alternative way to address his impulse of using a specific word such as “epitomize” to impress the reader. This connection was evidenced by his own reflections in Chinese at the end of his writing. He asked me whether this word sounded good enough to help him get extra points in IELTS.

Haoran’s second writing piece in Section 2 was to comment on “whether the formal pen-paper exam is a good assessment of one’s intelligence.” S2M1S1 (Lead-in) to S2M3S2 (Evidence for) were successfully applied as he followed the genre features very carefully up until the point where he was about to write some evidence against his second idea. He proposed in his second idea: “human has multiple aspects of intelligence and should be assessed separately.” Instead of looking for evidence against this idea, he continued with two deviations, which were two examples of people with multiple intelligences. It could be that he believed in his second idea and was reluctant or unable to find any evidence against it, so he decided to bend the genre to some extent to fit his writing. Given the effect of the two examples he wrote, I see these as successful innovations because they served the rhetorical functions of strengthening his main argument.

**Findings in Xianxu’s writing sample.** Among all the students in the course, Xianxu’s initial assessment writing sample stood out from the rest because of his high level of mechanisms in writing. He met both the word number requirement and his ideas were usually well developed. Xianxu’s writing samples were also analyzed for genre features, and the results of his Section 1 pieces are displayed in Table 4.9. Xianxu’s first writing sample was generally successful as he reported almost all the main features that could be found in his writing prompts.

Table 4.9

*Comparison of genre analyses of Xianxu’s Section 1 writing samples*

Moves and steps	
<i>Xianxu-Section 1 A</i>	<i>Xianxu-Section 1 B</i>
S1M1S1 Restatement of the topic	S1M1S1 Restatement of the topic
S1M2S1 An overview of the main features	S1M2S1 An overview of the main features
S1M3S1 Categorization of the information	S1M2S2 Describe an overall trend
S1M3S3 Describe the extremes	S1M3S1 Categorization of the information
S1M3S3 Describe the extremes	S1M3S2 Make comparisons
S1M4S1 Summarize the finding	S1M3S3 Describe the extremes
	S1M3S1 Categorization of information
	S1M4S1 Summarizing the finding

Compared with the first writing sample, Xianxu used two new steps in his second writing sample (S1M2S2, Describing an overall trend and S1M3S2, Categorizing of the information). As discussed before, these steps usually require further scrutiny. Given the word and time restrictions and the fact that Xianxu had written too much detail in his repeated analysis, his score may have been comprised. For example, Xianxu’s second writing *Xianxu-Section 1 B* was supposed to report features in a graph, depicting changes in the amount of goods transported in the UK by four different modes of transportation from 1974 to 2002. Xianxu categorized the information twice. In his first attempt, he categorized the information by an increase/decrease binary, as he described those modes that increased from 1974 to 2002, and

other modes, which declined in the same period. In his second attempt, he tried to re-categorize the information by making a distinction between different modes of transportation such as by land or by water. Given the amount of time and space allowed in IELTS Section 1, this could have a negative impact on his score if he were not able to finish his writing on time.

One of the most innovative pieces of writing among all the writing samples was Xianxu’s Section 2 writings. The following Table 4.10 displays the moves and steps found in Xianxu’s writings:

Table 4.10

*Comparison of genre analyses of Xianxu’s Section 2 writing samples*

Moves and Steps	
<i>Xianxu-Section 2 A (Question Type 1)</i>	<i>Xianxu-Section 2 B (Question Type 3)</i>
S2M1S1 Background information/Lead-in	S2M1S3 State the opposing opinion
S2M1S2 Restate the problem	S2M1S4 Thesis
S2M1S3 State the opposing opinion	S2M2S2 Evidence for
S2M1S4 Thesis	S2M2S2 Evidence for
S2M2S1 State the solution	S2M2S2 Evidence for
S2M2S3 Effect of the solution	S2M2S3 Evidence against
S2M2S4 Drawbacks of the solution	S2M2S3 Evidence against
S2M3S1 State the better solution	S2M2S3 Evidence against
S2M3S3 Effect of the solution	Deviation
S2M4S1 State an additional solution	S2M4S1 Weigh between ideas
S2M4S2 Effects of the solution	S2M4S2 Conclusions
S2M5S1 Acknowledgement	
S2M5S2 Reiterate and Summarization	

Xianxu’s first writing sample replicated almost all the moves and steps in the co-construction stage. This replication is evidence that the prompts asking for solutions bear more similarities for students so that they can easily follow the patterns they observed and practiced in class. The missing steps included S2M2S2 (Specific measures taken) and S2M3S4 (Examples). These two steps were also the ones that constantly were mixed up by

students in the co-construction stage. In the co-construction of looking for “solutions to the traffic jams problems in major cities,” one of the solutions that came to our classroom discussion was to limit the number of cars on the road. After some discussion, both the teacher and students agreed to write this as S2M3S1 (A better solution), but when it came to S2M3S2 (Specific measures taken), many students brought up the traffic policies implemented in Beijing. I tend to make a distinction between S2M3S3 (Specific measures taken) and S2M3S4 (Example). Many different measures of limiting the number of cars on the road had been carried out. One example was to establish a system that allows cars to alternate days on the road based on whether they had even numbers on their license plates or uneven numbers. Another example was setting up tollgates at each road entrance leading to the city center. I saw those ideas as specific measures taken to solve the problem. These two measures have been taken in various places around the world. Beijing and Singapore are two examples of such implementation. However, students did not seem to agree, as they did not appear to see the need to make such distinctions. Xianxu’s omission of S2M2S2 (specific measures taken) and M3S4 (Examples) could have been connected to this disagreement in class. As for the purposes of IELTS preparation, it is hard to say whether the distinction between specific measures taken and examples was truly meaningful since the rubric did not cover such nuances.

When Xianxu’s second writing sample was analyzed, I experienced tensions in my own judgement of labelling the moves and steps, mainly because the whole piece of writing could be considered a deviation or an innovation based on what we had discussed in class. The topic was to evaluate the idea of education for the purpose of developing the society. In M1S4 (Thesis), Xianxu stated his thesis as: “no one can limit personal freedom even though education can be beneficial for the society.” Different from the classroom co-construction

when multiple ideas to a question were explored, Xianxu chose to evaluate this one idea. After stating the single idea, his following three pieces of evidence were trying to prove how personal freedom was essential to the society. Then, his additional three pieces of contrary evidence were written to explore how society needed contributions from the individual. He then concluded in S2M4S1 (Weigh between ideas) and S2M4S2 (Conclusions) that it was important for education to help people to make contributions to the society but crucial steps must be taken to ensure the freedom of the individual. I believe the overall effect of Xianxu's innovation was mixed. On the one hand, such innovation allowed him to provide a more detailed and a wider range of examples to support his main point. For example, he had a very interesting discussion on how personal freedom ensured the diversity of choices and further contributed to the creativity of the society. On the other hand, going in-depth to discuss freedom may have been tangential.

**Findings on the linguistic aspects of students' writing samples.** The most obvious trend in terms of language use in the students' writing samples was the emergence of hedging, which means students tend to make less direct claims but limit their claims through moderate commentary. For example, in *Lee-Section 2 A*, S2M2S1 (An imperfect solution), Lee wrote, "Bad behaviours of the tourists can be solved easily by using very heavy penalties." Later in his second writing, he turned to use language that is more moderate. In S2M2S2 (Evidence for) he wrote, "Building shopping centers and malls may also help to develop the local economy." The use of "may" to soften the language had been one of many occasions discussed during the co-construction as the need to hedge an argument. Many similar changes were identified in the students' writing samples in the study.

One other finding is the effect of linguistic preparation during the stage of building knowledge. Many of the words and expressions were introduced in class to help students to

describe the trends and features in the graphs in Section 1. After some practice, students began to use those words and expressions more freely in their writing, and the result was that the varieties in their language to express similar ideas had increased. For example, *Xianxu-Section 1 B* demonstrated three ways to describe a decreasing trend. In the two examples underlined here, Xianxu discussed the decline of the railway transportation when he wrote, “The quantities of transported goods by rail had an abrupt recession between 1978 and 1994, followed by a steadier decrease thereafter.”

In terms of register, a variety of evidence have indicated that students had displayed some important aspects of the academic register in their writing samples. For example, in *Haoran-Section 2 B*, he wrote:

*“For example, the IELTS test is not only includes sections on reading and writing, and also attaches importance to some necessary social skills like listening and speaking. Thus, formal exams seem to be a relative accurate measurement of intelligence.”*

*Haoran-Section 2 B*

Despite the grammatical errors, words and phrases such as “seem to be” or “relative” suggested a possibility, rather than a certainty, and were some clear examples of general academic vocabulary. Connectives like “thus” was another example. However, the students in this study did not display the same level of representation of the academic register. The following comparison of the same move S2M3S1 (A better solution) written by two students could illustrate this difference.

*So we have to make a better solution, we could change the method of punishment.*

*Lee-Section 2 A*

*Briefings hosted by the tourism companies with the aim of educating tourists are a better method.*

*Xianxu-Section 2 A*

Both of the excerpts above fulfilled the rhetorical function of stating a better solution, but they seem to belong to two different registers. Lee's writing, with the use of personal pronouns, simple sentences and grammatical structure (sentences containing one independent clause), and the hortative property of the argument, seem to belong to the non-academic register. However, in Xianxu-Section 2 A, the use of participles and prepositional phrases, and fewer conjunctions and auxiliary verbs, increased the lexical density of the writing, representing the more formal academic register.

To summarize, the main findings in the students' writing samples are:

1. Students adopted some of the moves and steps taught and co-constructed in class.
2. The extent to which students could implement the moves and steps in independent construction was connected to the level of similarities between the topics co-constructed in class.
3. Moves and steps that required more holistic observations were more difficult for students to use.
4. Students would not just adopt the genre features as static; Rather, they sometimes maneuver and manipulate their genre knowledge for newer prompts, but the attempts of their genre innovation did not always appear to be successful.
5. The genre method did have an influence on the students' choice of register as demonstrated by the writing samples.

These findings will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5 discussion.

### **Analysis of Field Notes**

Yin (2014) pointed out that the field note, as a type of direct observation on a case, bears the advantage of capturing the immediacy and the contextualized nature of information. The field notes of this study consisted of 14 pages of information related to classroom procedures, the instructional content of each session, as well as noteworthy student-student and student-teacher interaction. The field notes were written within 24 hours after each teaching session. A large part of the commentary in my field notes was related to the co-construction stage. I compared and contrasted the patterns in the students' writing samples with my field notes to better understand the meaning and context related to those patterns. I often could see the connection between what students wrote and what they were studying in class at that time. The field notes also informed my teaching practice, and they served as a reflective exercise about the ongoing study. For example, my written field note indicated that during the co-construction stage, some students were reluctant in adopting certain moves and steps, like the S2M2S2 (Specific actions taken). The students expressed in class that they felt it was difficult to make distinctions between S2M2S2 (Specific actions taken) and S2M2S1 (State the solution). This piece of information regarding students' thinking was an important piece of evidence to explain why S2M2S2 (Specific actions taken) is missing in some students' writing samples. The field notes in this study served also as a record of classroom dynamics to be compared with the other two data sources to make meaning.

### **Interviews**

The interviews happened three months after the course because of the time it took to gain ethics approval. Based on my intensive experience teaching this group of students and based on my extensive background in teaching English to Chinese students, I judged that the three

participants, Lee, Haoran, and Xianxu were representatives of the class overall in terms of their English proficiency: They mainly represented 5 or 5.5 band in IELTS. The interview took a semi-structured format with five questions semi-structured and one open-ended question. The participants received the questions one day prior to the interview so that they had a chance to think about those questions. I did not limit the choice of language used for the interview as I anticipated some of the participants might favour conducting some part of the interview in Chinese. In the end, Xianxu chose to speak English for the whole session, Haoran spoke English half of the time, and Lee's interview was predominately done in Chinese. After the interviews were transcribed to text, I conducted member checking by sending copies of the transcribed interviews to each of the participants to let them read and make clarifications when necessary, and to avoid mistakes in transcription. I heard back from Haoran and made necessary changes to the transcripts according to his email. He suggested replacing the Chinese term he used to describe himself to a more accurate one. The strategy for transcription was to achieve the most accurate and authentic rendition, so language mistakes, repetition and self-correction were directly transcribed, as those nuances are often meaningful in a study such as this one.

**Interview with Haoran.** As mentioned in the description above, Haoran had been in Canada for about one year at the time of the interview and had been in high school previously in Shenzhen, a major city in China. In addition, Haoran had taken the IELTS tests at least five times (he was not entirely sure of the exact number), which could have had an effect on his perception of the course and his attitude towards IELTS. When I asked him to describe his feelings towards his recent IELTS test, he said the following.

**Qinghua:** So, before I ask you the question on the list, I would like to know that you have taken the test already. Then, what is your feeling about the test? Can you describe it?

**Haoran:** I, um, very common. Because it is not the first time I take the test, maybe, last time is the 6, 5 or 6 times that I have the IELTS test, so I can not feel and anxious and nervous before the test, even the reading test.

Haoran's situation was not an exception, as he was just one of the many students that I encountered in my career as an English teacher in China, who took these language tests multiple times in order to get a higher score. Despite the time, money, and effort invested, some of my previous students in the past experienced a high level of anxiety. However, Haoran seemed to be strong in the sense that he no longer felt anxious about taking the IELTS. Haoran continued to bring up the topic of regional differences in IELTS.

**Qinghua:** And also, why do you take it so many times?

**Haoran:** Because, two times, I let me see, two times, if I remember right, have the test in China, mainland China, even Hong Kong. So, I think it is pretty hard; I only get a 5.0. Em, When I came back to Canada, last October, if I remember right, I got 6.

**Qinghua:** Oh, ok.

**Haoran:** So, it is totally different, in China, it is pretty hard, maybe, even for the speaking test, while, how to say that, that environment, let you feel pretty nervous, but in [A place in western Canada], 考官怎么说呀? [Asking the English word for “examiner” in Chinese].

**Qinghua:** The examiner.

**Haoran:** The examiner, is will smile with you. So that I will not feel pretty nervous and anxious about the test.

Haoran felt that the IELTS tests he took in Canada were easier compared with those he took in China and Hong Kong. In my extensive experience as a teacher in China working with hundreds of students, Haoran's choice, both in terms of taking the tests many times, and taking it in different countries suggested a very different attitude towards the tests. Based on what I knew about Haoran from our extensive time together in class, I was led to believe that he treated the test much like an "enemy" to be defeated as opposed to a challenge to be met through study and preparation. He did not seem to fully realize that the coursework would prepare him to be successful. He and some other students in this class even called tests like IELTS as "sources of all evil." That is to say; he believed these tests to be obstacles in his life that he needed to conquer by whatever means possible, so for this reason, taking part in an IELTS preparation course made sense to him. This attitude of looking only for instant success in IELTS may have resulted in a lack of commitment and effort to retain the core ideas of the course. This attitude was suggested in the interview section below:

**Qinghua:** Well, I can discuss about this later but, so let's see, thanks very the information and that is very interesting information I think. So, can you describe the structures and organization of IELTS writing.

**Haoran:** I don't, I don't remember.[Burst out to laugh]

**Qinghua:** You don't, you don't have to repeat what I said in class, what do you now remember about IELTS writing and how would you do that.

**Haoran:** So, it's a topic, a question, like you asking a point or an opinion, agree or disagree. The first paragraph is to describe the questions, or you can use other ways to repeat the question again. And, the second paragraph, is let me see, if you agree about 我不是，如果我说错了不要怪我啊[I am not sure, please don't blame me if I am

wrong]。The second paragraph is about your opinion, like if I agree I should list two reasons about why I agree with this...同意什么? 同意这个观点。观点又是什么[to agree , agree with, how to say opinion in English]?

In the above excerpts, Haoran shared that he could not remember things about IELTS writing anymore, and when I asked again what he could say about IELTS writing now, the answer he gave did confirm that by the time of the interview, there were already not much left in his mind about IELTS writing. He said, “I can’t remember” five times in the interview. However, in the writing sample analyzed in the previous section, he demonstrated a certain level of knowledge in the genre features of IELTS writing. Haoran felt somewhat embarrassed during the interview because he thought he had made me look bad by not remembering anything from the class thus he then tried his best to recall the classroom discussion. The following excerpt was what he could recall at that point.

**Haoran:** Idea, and but it is not totally right. So I should list one 我不同意的观点, 就是转折, 过渡。我列出两个它好的优点, 我认为它是正确的, 但是它肯定有不足, 我再列一点点可能有点可以反驳它的这个东西, 但不要太绝对。列一个。

[opinion that I disagree with, like a contrast, a transition. I list two things that I like about it, like why it is the right thing to do, and as it must be insufficient, so that I should list a little bit of this side as well, but not to go extreme for that.]

**Qinghua:**ah, I see.

**Haoran:** 是吗, 我有点点忘了, 是这样吗? [Is that correct? I think I forgot about it a little bit.]

**Qinghua:** Don’t worry, you don’t have to repeat what I said, you can just...

**Haoran:** 不对，我记错了，我记错了，我记错了， [so excited ]那个，是如果说你要讨论，他的，反正 discuss 还是什么，比如说上次我写的那个，混论， 举行大型赛事是一件好事还是坏事，那我现在先说两个好事，比如说，可以增进经济收入啊，促进当地经济啊，然后，有什么文化呀，什么文化价值什么的，然后再列一个会浪费土地资源啊，会浪费奥运村什么的，就不能再继续用了嘛。但是也不是绝对的，是吧，然后，再总结。这是一个框架。 [Oh, I got it wrong, I got it wrong. That is, for example, if you would like to discuss something, like the one I have written last time, to discuss whether it is a good thing to organize a big sport event. So, I should talk positively about it first, something like it can boost the economy, stimulate local business, help spreading the culture and cultural values, things like that, and then I talk about its drawbacks like, a waste of land and resources, such as the deserted Olympic Villages. Nothing is to the extreme, right? So, at last I make a conclusion. That's an IELTS structure.]

Haoran's recalling effort had helped him to dig up an important aspect we discussed in the course. When we were analyzing the sample writing about "whether hosting major sports events is beneficial to a country," we emphasized looking for evidence in support of the idea and evidence that does not support the idea as opposed to focusing on one side. However, Haoran was not able to recall the reasons and communicative purposes of this rhetorical move. So, when we went on to discuss the effects of the genre knowledge, Haoran had following comments.

**Qinghua:**就是，你不是知道这个雅思作文的时候，雅思作文有个结构嘛，你刚刚也说了，先写什么再写什么，你觉得知道这些结构对你写这个作文来说是好还是

坏呢? [That is, when you start to write to an IELTS prompts, there is an organization, like you have just said, you know what to write first, and what to write next. Do you think knowing organizational knowledge like this is good or bad for your IELTS writing?]

**Haoran:** 好啊! [ good!]

**Qinghua:** OK, 那为什么呢? [And why is that?]

**Haoran:** 就套进去就是了啊。呵呵。 [just apply the structure to your writing.

LAUGH]

**Qinghua:** 套进去就可以了比较省事? [Just apply it to your writing, and that saves a lot of energy?]

**Haoran:** 啊, 对[Burst out laughing], 然后只要把你自己的内容再填进去就可以了。 [You then only need to fill in all the blanks]

From Haoran's words, he treated the genre knowledge entirely as writing templates, despite the classroom discussions on genre innovation and genre's descriptive properties. He also mentioned genre knowledge helped him to save energy, which I interpreted as saving the energy to plan, contemplate, and organize a piece of writing. He also viewed the genre knowledge as a strategy for him to come up with ideas and directions for his thinking, as he compared the genre knowledge to the formulaic tasks in math and science. As we discussed the learning of linguistic resources, he mentioned he remembered something about connectives we discussed in class.

**Haoran:** 哈哈，学完雅思之后就，停了很久不过还是会有记忆的啦，比如说什么像是，好像现在最有记忆的就是那种衔接词。因为以前只会用 first, beside, 或者 second, 现在最起码还会说用一些 hence, 或者 therefore, 这种词连接一下，就不是至于那么生硬，对吧，所以说这还是有点用的。就像现在你要是学英语 12，虽然我文章还是很生硬啦，因为国际学生我觉得，可能这么说有点不要脸吧但是，大家跟我都半斤八两吧。所以说，大部分的人，都跟我半斤八两吧，所以说，学一点还是有用的。 [(Laugh out loud), after learning the IELTS writing course, it has been quite a while, so I don't think I can remember much. Something I can still remember is the connectives at least. In the past I know only to use "first," and "second," but now I am able to use words like "hence" and "therefore" which make my writing less rigid. So, I think it is useful. Just like I use them in my English 12 course, although, my English writing is still very rigid; I think my English is almost at the same level with other international students in my class. So I believe the learning has been useful.]

Haoran did recall two examples of connectives we discussed in class. He also mentioned that he used that linguistic knowledge to write in one of his other course. Although he could have said those things to make me feel better as a teacher, his easiness and effortlessness in coming up with those specific words make it more likely that his words should confirm the transfer of linguistic knowledge. At the end of the interview, Haoran disclosed his attitude towards the test preparation courses, and he said the following:

**Qinghua:** oh ok right, 然后，那你对，这种上考前培训班这种东西你是怎么看的呢？有没有什么意见？ [Then, what do you think of those test preparation courses? ]

**Haoran:** 我很需要他们，我很需要我不能离开他们。 [I really need them. I can not do without them.]

**Qinghua:** 为什么呢? [Why is that?]

**Haoran:** 因为我不是那种，不是那种自觉的人嘛。我不是那种会自己发现线路的人啊，我喜欢走别人已经走过的路。 [Because, I am not very self-aware, and also, I am not that kind of person who enjoys finding new paths, I really enjoy going on the road others have taken before. ]

Haoran clearly viewed the IELTS training course more as tricks for him to learn in order to pass the high-stakes IELTS test. Haoran also viewed the IELTS as distinctive to the other writings he had to do in other occasions. He realized after taking the IELTS course with me, that the test preparation course for English 12, the provincial English test of British Columbia (where he was enrolled in high school) required a different genre of writing.

The interview with Haoran had elucidated several important points. After taking the IELTS tests for many times, the students could form their own sense of judging whether a course is legitimate for the tests they were about to take. Based on their judgment, they will then decide whether to go to a preparation class and what to take away from those classes. They were more interested in knowing the “tricks” than knowing more about the foundational structures of writing.

**Interview with Lee.** By the time Lee joined my class, he had been in Canada for only three months, and his student record showed that his English proficiency was average in his class in China. Lee had never taken the IELTS test before, and by the time of the interview, he did not have a plan to take it any time soon, as he was planning on moving back to China.

The initial finding on Lee's interview was that like Haoran, Lee could not remember much about the course content, though in a different way as presented in the following excerpts from the interview.

**Qinghua:** 哦，也就是，也就是说，那你觉得，那雅思的这个作文跟你刚才说的类似周末干了什么这样的作文，最大的区别在哪里呢？ [Oh, I see, then what do you think are the most obvious differences between the IELTS writing and the kind of writing task you have mentioned before, like asking you to write about your weekend? ]

**Lee:** [Using facial expression to indicate he can not answer this question]

At the beginning of this conversation, Lee said that he had learned many writing skills in the course. When I went on asking for examples, he said he could only recall writing skills when a specific topic was given to him. Before I could come up with a topic for him, he diverted the conversation by saying that he felt IELTS writing is very different from the writings he had done before, such as writing diaries. When I continued to ask for the specific differences, he used his facial expression to tell me that he could not answer the question. Lee had been a very active student in my class, and he often approached me to talk about his personal issues, which suggested that he related to me as much as a friend than as a teacher. During the interview, he lowered his voice and asked twice if I could stop recording and tell him what to say before resuming the interview. In this case, some of his words maybe intended to impress me as a teacher.

Regarding the genre learning cycle, he said he could remember the following:

**Qinghua:** 然后我这个问题问的是，雅思作文的结构，构思这方面你还记得多少？

[Actually, I asking about the structure and the organization of the IELTS writing, and I wonder how much you remember about this information.]

**Lee:**就是，嗯，雅思结构和构思的话，要把它写的比较全面一点，然后就是，就像你当时说那个，就是不能完全，比如说这个问题，他问你，就是不能，肯定或者否定它，或者是赞同它，你要写出就是自己那种，比较中立的保持中立思想什么的。 [That is, about the structure and organization of IELTS, I think we need to write more comprehensively about a topic, which means, we should not stand on just one side, to say we agree or disagree with the topic. We should try to stand in the middle, and think both ways.]

As with Haoran, Lee had assimilated the genre features also as a cognitive strategy to come up with ideas when he mentioned that he needed to consider both the positive and the negative side of a problem, and weigh between the two. This awareness also partly contributed to the reduction of hortative arguments in Lee's writing as he adopted a more analytical strategy. In the interview, Lee continued to elaborate on the ways genre knowledge had helped him to think "more deeply." I encouraged him to implement his critical thinking on the IELTS writing genre itself and to think if genre knowledge could have had a negative effect on him, and he then expressed the following.

**Qinghua:** 你觉得知道这个结构和套路可能有什么不好么？ [Do you think there is any negative consequences of knowing the structure and the organization?]

**Lee:**就是有些，就是比较懒的话，就感觉哦，这好像很难，就会，嗯。

[Sometimes, if people get lazy, they will feel it is very difficult to write according to a structure, which will ...]

**Qinghua:**很难的话，你是会觉得，反而就不想写了？ [If it seems difficult to write according to a structure then you may feel unwilling to write?]

**Lee:**对，反而就不想写，就是，在写作的时候，就会加深自己的恐惧感什么的。

[Yes, when people do not feel willing to write, and when they start to write, they may feel afraid of writing.]

**Qinghua:**哦，就是可能觉得这个任务非常的困难，非常的麻烦。觉得，又不能按照自己的思路写，就很担心自己写不好，就干脆就不写了。 [Oh, I see, it means that this writing task can be made to be felt very difficult, and complicated. People will feel that, since they cannot write according to their own strategy, and at the same time they were worrying about the product, they could simply stop writing.]

**Lee:** 对。 [Yes, exactly]

When reading this part of the transcript during my initial round of coding, several classroom scenes occurred to me. In the second class, when I was introducing that IELTS writing test as a piece of academic writing, students began to respond and said that academic English was complicated to learn. Then, later during the genre analysis process, I presented the students with some general features of academic language (as introduced in the literature review), such as nominalization, higher lexical density, coordination, and subordination. Some students began to show signs of withdrawal, as they perceived that these theories were not relevant to the IELTS writing, and were too complicated for them to process. The over-

emphasis on IELTS writing as academic writing may have led the students to think that IELTS writing is beyond their ability, and further led students to withdraw.

When Lee mentioned knowing the genre features could deter “lazy” students from writing, I thought at least part of the reason behind this fear to write was that I presented IELTS writing in a way that was too detached from students’ everyday English to let them feel connected to it. Lee even considered IELTS writing as the optimum of the highest level of writing:

**Lee:** 我觉得话，雅思这个东西本来就比较难，你要是学会了这个写作，你还何必去烦恼另外那些写作呢？ [I feel like, the IELTS writing seems to be very difficult, and if someone mastered how to do IELTS writing, why should him or her bother about writing in other situations.]

**Qinghua:** 哦，你的意思是说雅思的写作比较难，把雅思的写作学会了之后呢，其他的写作，也就相对来说就不用担心了，就觉得很简单了，就这个意思么？ [Oh, I see, what you mean is that since IELTS writing is very difficult, and if someone can do IELTS writing, then writing in other situation may seem to be easier. Right?]

**Lee:** 对。 [Sure.]

After hearing Lee’s comments saying that IELTS writing is more difficult than the other types of writing he had to do in school, I asked him to come up with an example to compare the other types of writing with IELTS. He then cited a type of writing he had to do during his Communication 12 course (A provincial standard course in British Columbia, Canada). Also, he cross-compared the writing of Communication 12, IELTS writing, and the writing in the ESL course he took at his high school:

**Qinghua:** 那我就很感兴趣的是，那么你现在在学校上学的时候，会有一些什么样的写作的东西要进行呢？有些什么样的写作的任务？ [In that case, I am interested in knowing when you are at your school, what kind of writing activities have you encounter? What type of writing task do you have to do?]

**Lee:** 我的话，就我现在也在上那个 Communication 12 嘛，还有那个英语 11，和 ESL 这类似的。嗯，Communication 12 的话就是每天都要写一点，写点小文章。然后还有那个 ESL 的话，也是，不过 ESL 的话就层次比较浅，就是你只要写一些相当于日记呀那样的东西就可以了，但是 Communication 的话就是每天都要写，比如说他们会给你那种，例子材料什么的，然后让你去写，有时候会讲到比如说什么美洲狮那种保护啊什么的。 [For me, I am taking courses such as Communication 12, English 11, and ESL courses. Communication 12 requires us to write every day like a small piece of composition. As for the ESL course, it also requires writing, but I feel it is much shallower than Communication 11, I just need to write something like a diary. However, communication 11 will require a writing in response to a piece of material being given; for example, I have been required to write about the protection of leopards.]

**Qinghua:** 然后你的意思是说，觉得那样的写作都会比这个雅思写作要简单？ [Then are you saying that writing tasks like that seem to be easier to you than the IELTS writing tasks?]

**Lee:** 对，主要的话就是这技巧，你的雅思写作技巧都知道了，比如说你的中立性啦，比如说它，然后他们在说那个保护，美洲狮到底该不该保护的这个问题，那你就是可以写比较中立的那一面，就是让自己看起来比较独特，不像其他同学写的我就是认为要保护，就是要保护它。 [Yes, what I mean is the techniques of writing

learned in the IELTS writing class. To use the example of whether to protect leopards or not, I could choose to write the middle way, which will seem to be unique compared to other student's writing which argues their eagerness to protect them.]

In this excerpt, Lee had talked about an example of applying the cognitive skill he learned from the IELTS writing course to the piece of writing he had to do in Communication 12. He also thought IELTS writing was of a higher level than that of an ESL course, which he considered to be everyday easy writing. The fact that Lee chose to take Communication 12, instead of English 12, was perhaps an indication that he was not very confident about his English, which was also a theme that appeared several times during the coding process of the interview.

In regard to Lee, about three months after the course, he could also remember some of the big ideas about the course content, such as the cognitive strategy to think of both sides of the problem. However, their elaborations lacked the details of genre knowledge presented in class. Lee himself attributed the situation to his own "laziness" as he failed to do any practice after the course, but it seemed that his withdrawal is partly the result of the way IELTS writing is presented to him: as a technical, academic, and high-level writing.

**Interview with Xianxu.** Very different from the other two participants, Xianxu seemed to be a confident student. I booked a room at the university library to conduct the interviews, and Xianxu was the only participant who found his way by asking the library staff. Comparatively, Lee and Haoran were a little taken aback by the serious environment of a university library as they seemed unsure of themselves and were uncomfortable with the environment. I had to lead them from the library entrance to the interview meeting area.

At the beginning of the interview, Xianxu voluntarily shared his current study progress at school, as well as his future career goals. He said he agreed to participate partly because he would like to know the way to conduct interviews, since his future major, psychology would require him to do it. Xianxu had never taken the IELTS test or IELTS preparation courses before my course, which made him unique in the class. During my question requesting him to recall the moves and steps we discussed in class he said:

**Qinghua:** Ok, thank you, and can you describe the structures and organizations of the IELTS writing?

**Xianxu:** so the first paragraph is to retell the questions. And then, to list my own, my own opinions, like pros or drawbacks of my opinions. And then, for the main part of the passage, is to list and state and give examples of my opinions. And the second half of the part is to give the drawbacks of my opinions, like to tell what is right and what wrong, and how we can improve it. And then the last part is to conclude the whole idea I wrote.

The above excerpt showed that Xianxu could almost instantly retell the detailed moves and steps to do IELTS writing, although it was to some extent different from the classroom discussion. Xianxu's description of his genre feature clearly reflected what he had been implementing in his writing sample-*Xianxu-Section 2B*. Instead of exploring multiple ideas, he insisted on exploring just one idea more deeply and thoroughly. I would see this as innovation now because it seemed to be an expansion of his genre knowledge bank. Compared with his description of Section 2, his ideas on Section 1 were more consistent with the content of the course:

**Qinghua:** Yeah, can you describe a little bit of the first section?

**Xianxu:** so the first section, because the first section is mainly about charts and diagrams and things so that we need to state each step. For the diagram we need to state each step and for the charts we need to indicate the data of it and also to describe the trends for the charts.

When Xianxu mentioned, “to state each step” I think he was reflecting on a specific type of writing we discussed – the flow charts - which took on a different approach than the other types. Because flow charts were rarely tested in IELTS, it was not a focus of the course. He mentioned describing the trend, which many students tend to neglect. When our discussion continued on the effect of genre knowledge in writing, he presented the following theory.

**Qinghua:** Ok, right. Thank you, and next, do you think that knowing about the structures and organizations of the IELTS writing actually helped or hindered your IELTS writing process?

**Xianxu:** I think it will help. Because, for me like I am not really sure how to write it, so if I have a structure, then I can use my languages to describe it, and put inner thought into the structure. But if I already achieved that level or beyond that level. I think it might limit my writing style.

**Qinghua:** Ok, so you will feel that knowing the structure may, may limit your writing style.

**Xianxu:** Yeah.

Xianxu meant that genre knowledge was more beneficial to beginner writers since they did not yet know how to write. In the context of this study, genre innovation could be very risky, because IELTS is the gatekeeper of university application, and if the innovation failed,

students could suffer a negative influence on their college application. Any attempts at deviation to the conventional way can be highly sensitive, and consequential so that many students would choose to avoid such risky innovations. For Xianxu, my own success in IELTS was not enough to convince him to follow the way I suggested in class, making him a very confident learner. He reaffirmed his confidence when our conversation touched on the grammatical mistakes he made in the writing samples.

**Qinghua:** Oh, Ok, so you think it depends on which areas that you are writing about, Ok, that is a very interesting answer, thank you. And, are there anything in the writing class that you have taken, er that particularly attracted your attention, that you think and that you remembered of.

**Xianxu:** Of the teacher.[burst into laugh]

**Qinghua:** Of the teacher. Ok, say a little bit more about it.

**Xianxu:** He is handsome. [joking]

**Qinghua:** Oh, please.

**Xianxu:** And also like, he get to explain the details very clearly and to give us the further examples, and tell us like which part should we improve.

**Qinghua:** Ok, so you mentioned about examples, can you say a bit more about that?

**Xianxu:** like, if I have some grammar mistakes, and then he will correct me, and also, like if I have, for the part he gives me examples, he will give me the like, how should I write it and then I can based on that, I can write my own part...I think it is necessary to pick up the grammar mistakes, because like, for students, you don't really sure about the correct grammar, so at least for me I don't know which grammar or like if my grammar

is right or not. So, for me I think to tell me about grammar is the right way to teach me.

But like, to tell grammar for some students, maybe you mean like to limit their creativity of writing?

**Qinghua:** it will make them so nervous about writing, so they will feel afraid of writing, because they are afraid of being picked on by the teacher, because of their mistakes.

What do you think?

**Xianxu:** Then, I am not sure, because I am not one of that one. I want to be picked up my mistakes.

After flattering me on my appearance humorously, he expressed he enjoyed that I corrected his grammar mistakes in writing and presented him with examples of correct grammar. When I was grading the students' writing samples, I did not identify all the grammatical problems that I found, because I thought students' confidence could be affected had I marked all the mistakes. This discussion reminded me of the question regarding students' perception of linguistic preparation, and Xianxu said he did not see a connection between learning the genre and the improvement of linguistic resources.

**Qinghua:** So, I remember in the class we have talked about a lot about the structure and organizations, and just now you mentioned about grammar and vocabulary, do you see, if there any connections, between knowing the structure and organization and improving the ability to write grammatically and idiomatically correct?

**Xianxu:** eh, I am not sure if there is. I mean structures are structures but grammar are for the sentences right?

**Qinghua:** so you see there is no connections in it?

**Xianxu:** Yeah.

When I read this part of the transcript, I went back to look for the memos I made while examining Xianxu's writing samples, especially the ones I made before the beginning of the writing course. I discovered that Xianxu's perception of linguistic improvement might be because he had already mastered a great amount of the linguistic preparation I offered to students in the class. In the first piece of Section 1 writing, he demonstrated "successful use of important vocabulary to describe the numbers and changes of numbers in the graphs." I began to wonder where Xianxu could have picked up on the way to describe graphs and figures since my own familiarity with the Chinese high school English curriculum told me it would not have been there since it was not a focus. It could be that Xianxu had studied IELTS by himself during spare time or may have learned in his high school in Canada, as Xianxu denied taken any IELTS preparation course before.

In the latter part of the interview, Xianxu shared with me his recent experience taking the IELTS test (two weeks after the course), for which he scored 6.5 in the writing section (The minimum requirement of writing for most Canadian universities is 6). It was not very common for students to receive this score at their first attempt, and Xianxu mentioned he would not retake the test or continue to learn anything about IELTS writing. As for the application of IELTS genre in other writing scenarios, he mentioned how he was trying to implement the concept of genre in his scientific writing:

**Qinghua:** Oh, ok, so and besides IELTS writing, do you think the writing course, especially the method, I mean the way of teaching writing in that course could have any effect on your writing in other situations?

**Xianxu:** ah, like I said, since I may apply that method to the scientific side of writing.

**Qinghua:** so, like a little bit more about it, what kind of scientific writing.

**Xianxu:** to write the thesis, or report, so I can write exams for my high school, thesis or report yah.

Xianxu did not go into details about his comments, but it was noticeable that the scientific writing like lab reports usually followed a static process (Tardy, 2009). This similarity might have triggered Xianxu to break down a more significant piece of writing into smaller moves and steps in other situations, which could be a sign of learning at a metacognitive level.

Overall, Xianxu held a very positive attitude towards genre writing, as he defended it when I brought up the idea of genre writing's potential to limit students' creativity. In addition, he was able to recall a considerable amount of genre knowledge co-constructed in class and even recalled his genre innovations based on the knowledge learned in the class. His confidence had driven him to work hard on the mechanics of his writing and had supported him to view IELTS test as less like a burden or an enemy, but a step forward in his academic progress.

## **Conclusion**

There were significant findings derived from the data analysis process. The students' writing samples reflected an increase in the complexity of writing when more moves and steps were integrated into the students' writing after instruction. This trend applied to all three of the participants. However, not every move and step was equally perceived and adopted by the students. Some of the moves and steps appeared to be more difficult. The level of similarity between prompts also mattered, in terms of transfer of genre knowledge. More similar prompts were more transferable. Students' writing samples also displayed

transfer of specific vocabulary and phrases taught in class as linguistic resources to attain the rhetorical moves and steps. The writing samples also showed signs that the students were transitioning and adopting the more academic register compared with the initial assessment writing samples. As for the deviations and innovations, multiple reasons were suggested including the level of resemblance in the topics, students' perceived ideas about IELTS writing, and students' confidence in their own learning. In addition, students with a higher level of English proficiency were more likely to innovate.

From the interview, students' perceptions of the genre learning were influenced by their relationship with the IELTS test, given how they position themselves in relation to the test. Students who held a negative attitude towards the IELTS test appeared to discard most of the learning shortly after the course, while students who viewed the course as opportunities to improve writing skills recalled much of the learning. Students also generally reported that the genre knowledge they have learned in this class could be applied to other types of writing that they encountered.

In the upcoming Chapter 5, a discussion of the findings are presented in relation to the research literature and the current instructional practices in the IELTS test preparation setting.

## Discussion

The previous chapter introduced the findings of my study, drawing on the students' writing samples, field notes, and the interviews. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the significance and insights arising from the findings, as well as the connections between the findings and the extant literature. This chapter will be organized into four main sections; the first two correspond to the two research questions: (a) Implications of genre pedagogy on students' writing performance, and (b) Students' perceptions of the genre method in the IELTS writing context. The other two sections in this chapter focus on connections to the literature and recommendations for future research.

In this first section, the findings in the students' writing samples are discussed together with the findings derived from the teaching field notes and the interviews in order to examine the implications of genre method on students' writing. Several pedagogical implications are summarized into three findings which are discussed in detail. These are:

- Finding one: Genre pedagogy influenced the development of cognitive skills
- Finding two: Simplicity and comprehensiveness of the genre pedagogy were competing tensions in the IELTS context
- Finding three: Implications on students' implementation of genre innovations

After a discussion of the pedagogical implications, the second section highlights students' perceptions of the genre method. The three factors are discussed separately first, and then the relationships between these factors are also examined. The three factors include: (a) students' prior experience with the test, (b) instructors' framing of genre knowledge, and (c) students' attitudes towards IELTS.

Following the two sections of discussions related directly to the research questions, this chapter continues with a third section which examines the findings in light of the research

literature. The findings are connected to three main bodies of theories or instructional practices including (a) the binary of “template” writing versus genre writing, (b) Swales’ CARS model (the moves and steps), and (c) the genre learning cycle.

The fourth section of this chapter reports on the limitations of this study, followed by a discussion of future research directions.

### **Implications of the Genre Pedagogy on Students’ Writing Performance**

The two sections in the IELTS writing are distinct, as they aim at testing two very different text-types/sub-genres. Section 1, which focuses on reporting graphs, has a narrower focus (mainly describing graphs and figures) and is less diverse regarding linguistic preparation and the possible numbers of rhetorical moves and steps. Section 2, which focuses on building arguments, involves a higher diversity in types of topics, and subsequently leads to a more complicated system of moves and steps. Thus, more organizational work had to be done by the students to synthesize the moves and steps into a coherent composition. In addition, Section 2 also requires a heavier cognitive load as students need to generate ideas by themselves, rather than reporting the ideas that are already given in the prompts (like in the case of Section 1).

Based on the analysis of the students’ writing samples reported in Chapter 4, as well as comparing and contrasting with the field notes and interviews with the students, three main findings were identified regarding the pedagogical implications of the genre method, which are discussed in detail below.

**Finding one: Genre pedagogy influenced the development of cognitive skills.** The first major theme that identified is genre knowledge as a cognitive tool for students to speculate on patterns in the graphs and figures (for Section 1), as well as generate examples and evidence in building an argument (for Section 2). Before the course, students focused

exclusively on reporting the numbers, even though the prompt instructed students to examine general trends and make comparisons. After several rounds of genre learning during my IELTS preparation course, students developed some cognitive strategies to reflect on their writing, so that they can continue to look for patterns in the graphs. It is this further step that helped students to fit some of the rhetorical moves and steps required of the genre, like to write about an overall trend in a graph. Thus, genre knowledge appears to have influenced students' cognition and served as a tool for students to generate ideas to write.

Conversely, students' level of cognitive skills also affected students' ability to implement the genre knowledge they learned in class. This impact is evidenced by the fact that some moves and steps were more difficult for students to implement, mainly because they required holistic thinking. In this case, the cognitive ability to differentiate the holistic trend from discrete pieces of information is a forerunner to the successful implementation of specific moves and steps. For example, S1M2S2 (Describe an overall trend) and S1M3S1 (Categorization of information) are specific steps that required such thinking. In this study, after implementing multiple rounds of genre learning cycles, Xianxu was the only student who seemed capable of implementing those steps. This situation suggested to me that these steps may need more pedagogical attention and more scaffolding, at the same time, successful implementation of these steps may also relate to students' proficiency and motivations in learning.

Interestingly, regarding this metacognitive process, some of the students' prior knowledge and beliefs about IELTS had become barriers for them to accept certain genre moves or steps. For example, some of the students might have already been used to writing only about specific pieces of information, and they became very resistant to the requirement of reporting holistic trends. Examples of the reluctance can be found in Lee's overuse of

S1M3S3 (Extremes), Haoran's S1M3S2 (Comparisons) and their persistence in making groundless interpretations of the graphs in the prompts. The influence of students' prior experience appeared in Section 2 as well, when Haoran expressed that he did not see the step S2M2S2 (Specific measures taken) as useful.

**Finding two: Tensions between simplicity and comprehensibility in the IELTS context.** At the discourse level, though students appeared to be more capable of implementing the rhetorical moves and steps after implementations of genre learning cycles, they were still challenged by the amount of organizational and structural work they had to do to weave the moves and steps together. Thus, the tension is apparent between making the moves and steps simple and straightforward while simultaneously making them comprehensive and inclusive. On the one hand, there is a need to emphasize that the sequence of the moves and steps need to be sometimes altered in consideration of prompt variation. On the other hand, making various changes in the steps and moves resulted in a somewhat chaotic writing organization as demonstrated in the students' writing samples. In the middle of the course, I was tempted to follow more of Swales (1990) "CARS" model to list some of the steps in parallel; or for example, Step 1A, and Step 1B, to indicate these steps can be re-sequenced or interchanged. Given that IELTS preparation courses are typically short, instructions on moves and steps in this course focused more on simplicity, rather than on comprehensiveness.

**Finding three: Implications on genre innovations.** Participants in this study have unanimously declared that genre knowledge did not limit their imagination and creativity. Their main argument is that they treat genre knowledge as only a transparent framework. They are still responsible for using their creativity to generate ideas to fill in the framework. Therefore, their creativity is not limited or confined by the genre approach. However, after

analyzing students' writing samples, I gave these students' argument a second thought.

From the teacher's perspective, while providing feedback to students on their writing, I have indicated whether they followed the moves and steps taught in class. This feedback strategy may have unduly influenced students to follow in a literal uncritical way the sequence of the moves and steps presented in class. Alternatively, I could have written feedback to encourage students to reflect on their use of moves and steps, and implement some necessary innovations.

Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that Xianxu engaged in reflection and innovation in his writing sample. From his writing sample, I found that Xianxu decided to adopt only some of the moves and steps in class, and chose to innovate. Later in the interview, Xianxu revealed that he is a very confident student, which likely explained his intentional action to follow only some of the moves and steps. His confidence and own linguistic competence seemingly supported him to stand against the teachers' action of persuading students to follow the teacher's suggested moves and steps. In this case, the students' written language level and self-efficacy did seem to have an effect on whether students would choose to reflect on genre knowledge they learned in class.

The above analysis examined the pedagogical implications derived mainly from students' writing samples and my own field notes. However, students' subjective perceptions of the genre method are also an important aspect of this study, to bring a broader understanding of the specific cases.

### **Students' Perceptions of the Genre Method in the IELTS Writing Context**

After comparing the findings in the students' writing samples, with claims made by students in the interview, as well as the contextual factors of this study, the students' perceptions of the genre method were found to be related to several factors. These factors

include (a) students' prior experience with the test, (b) instructor's framing of genre knowledge was presented, and (c) students' attitude towards the IELTS test. These three factors are found to be intertwined in this study. This section first explains these factors separately and then attempts to probe into the connections among those factors.

**Factor one: Students' prior experience with the test.** The three participants in this study are Chinese nationals, and none of them had been in Canada for more than three years. Most of them had taken the IELTS before in China. One of them have even taken it for multiple times. From my years of working experience in the field, I believe that the IELTS preparation industry gives the main responsibility to the teachers, for both the course content and the outcomes of their course (i.e., students' performance on IELTS). Because of this business model, which centred on teachers' authority, students are usually led to believe in the words of the teachers who are held in high regard as both the apparent experts on IELTS preparation and as a highly successful IELTS performer. Students tend to believe that these teachers' success was due to the fact that they know some very effective tricks in writing. Thus, for students who have ample prior experience with IELTS, they tend to be less receptive to genre analysis because they would like to get more of a simple and executable "formula." For example, Haoran insisted on a "false compromise" (assuming the polarized opinions are always wrong) in every piece of Section 2 writing. In this case, he did not have to know why or how a "false compromise" should be implemented; he was just lead to believe that including a "false compromise" would simply help him gain a few more marks in the IELTS writing. I sensed students' strong preference for simplicity and formulaic approach to writing from those who were most reluctant in altering or modifying some of the moves and steps to adapt to prompt demands. In contrast, students with little or no prior experience with IELTS preparation seemed to be more open to genre analysis pedagogy. This is a

different finding compared with Gan (2009), who claimed students are generally disinterested in material less relevant to IELTS in the test preparation setting. In this study, students' perception was found to be related to their prior experience.

**Factor two: Instructors' framing of genre knowledge.** The way the knowledge was presented to students affected students' perceptions. Although this study followed the steps and procedures described in the literature review and the methodology, some unexpected implications occurred.

First, the fact IELTS writing was presented as a form of academic writing in this study has, to some extent, caused some of the students to withdraw or to become less motivated. For example, in the interview with Lee, he indicated that the IELTS writing genre, with its academic properties, could make some students, including himself, to think that it is beyond their capacity to master the genre. As indicated in Cummins (2008), cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) takes longer to acquire, compared to basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) so likely, my students found the academic language to be much more difficult to learn. Then, the choice of presenting IELTS writing as academic becomes questionable. According to Moore and Morton's study (2005), IELTS writing genres are relatively non-academic, compared with the writing genres required at the university level. In this case, the choice to present IELTS writing as academic writing may not be wise. Instead, it may be a better choice to present IELTS writing as a non-academic genre, while keeping only the academic components that are relevant to IELTS, such as the requirement to recognize register.

I reflected further on my unconscious choice of presenting IELTS writing and preparation training as detached and different from students' English learning at school. This tendency could be a result of my years of working experience in the test preparation industry

in China. I formed the habit of presenting my class content always as “different and more valuable.” This subliminal choice may also be a cause for students to form certain attitude towards the IELTS test, which is the focus of the discussion in the next paragraph.

**Factor three: Students’ attitude towards IELTS.** In this study, students’ attitude towards IELTS generally fell into two categories: Those who treated the test as “the enemy” to be defeated and those who saw it merely as a set of procedures to be understood. Haoran is a representative of the former group who would go to any length to pass the tests without the prerequisite hard work of truly understanding the process. He mentioned in the interview that he travelled to different countries to take advantage of the perceived regional differences in IELTS grading, hoping that he could achieve a better score in places where IELTS writing is more benevolently graded. His confrontational attitude towards IELTS suggested that he was somewhat cynical about the course content. He was continually judging the validity of the course content based on his own beliefs about how to get a good score on IELTS. He then would only attend to elements that he saw as legitimate and dismiss all instruction that he perceived were irrelevant. For example, Haoran did take the advice to describe the general trend of the graphs in Section 1, as evidenced by his writing sample. However, he was resistant to perform genre analysis as a means to fully understand the thinking behind the moves and steps. Haoran was dismissive of the process of genre analysis.

By contrast, another student, Xianxu, who represented the latter group, showed more interests in understanding IELTS writing. His writing samples and my teaching notes revealed that he even took a further step to critically reflect on those moves and steps we discussed in class. He thought there were better ways to meet the requirement of the prompts (communicative purpose) in some cases.

The relationships among the three factors identified above are cumbersome and intricate.

The next section analyzes these relationships.

**The relationships between factors that influence students' perceptions.** Three factors, prior experience with IELTS, instructor's framing of genre knowledge, and students' attitude towards IELTS, interact with one another. The following diagram depicts how they work together to influence students' perception of genre in the IELTS preparation setting:

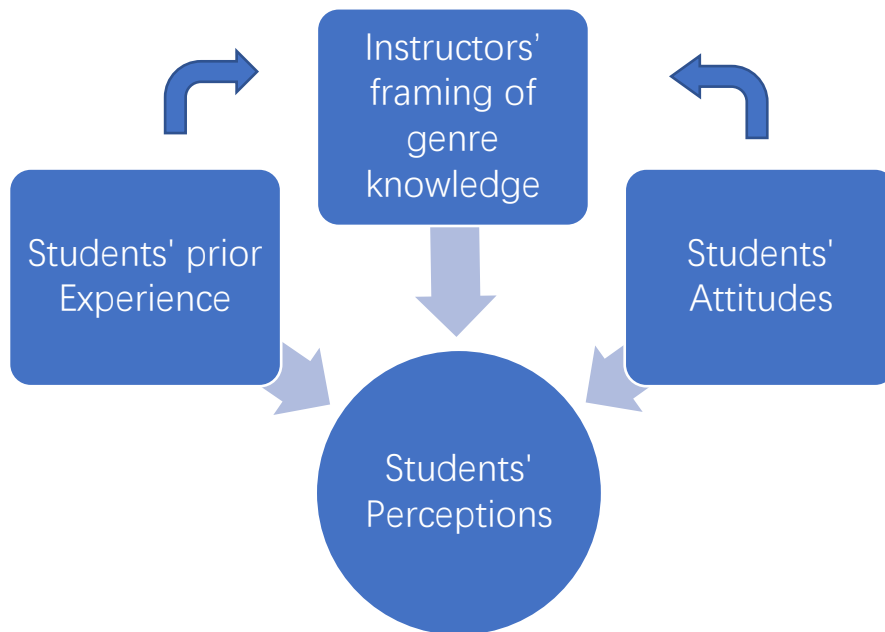


Figure 5.1 Relationship among factors influencing students' perceptions

As shown in the diagram, students come into the class with their prior experience, which both affects their own perceptions of the genre method, and instructor's framing of genre knowledge. For example, when Haoran challenged me in class with his ideas supported by his own experience with IELTS, I moved away a little from the more theoretical side of the genre and focused more on the applicability in IELTS writing. In addition, I continue to reflect on the idea of presenting IELTS writing as academic, due to some students' fear of academic English.

In addition, students' attitudes influenced the perception of genre method, students who saw IELTS as an obstacle to their academic success and thus developed a confrontational

attitude towards IELTS, were more likely to forget the genre knowledge soon after the course, because the knowledge about IELTS genres could no longer be of any use for them. Students' attitude also played a role in affecting the ways that I presented genre. In this study, students' confrontational attitudes towards the test forced me to make the IELTS genre as straightforward as possible, despite its real complexity.

After synthesis of the pedagogical implication and an exploration of relationships between the factors affecting students' perception of genre method, it is essential to connect the discussion with the literature review to compare and identify further research directions.

### **Connections with current research**

This study has echoed many prior research findings such as the effectiveness of genre method in developing students' writing, and the applicability of using genre method as a way to prepare IELTS writing. The following section discusses the connections between this study and prior research.

**Templates writing or genre method?** Lin (2016) presented the distinction between writing templates and genre method by describing the former as "reductive" and the latter providing critical "genre resources." Furthermore, Lin distinguished between "non-reflective" and "innovative" use of genre knowledge. However, the distinction between templates writing and the reflective genre method was complicated in my course. To implement the genre method, I devoted time and energy to do reflective and innovative practices. For example, I prepared writing samples for students to try genre analysis by themselves and asked them to reflect on the genre features they identified. However, these reflective and innovative attempts were questioned continuously by the students, because they saw these innovative and reflective practices as less relevant to IELTS preparation.

Some degrees of reflective use of genre knowledge did appear in Xianxu's writing, but

that was the only obvious one in the 12 writing samples collected for this study. The difficulty in carrying out genre method while avoiding templates writing should be connected to the students' prior training experience with the IELTS test. In students' prior experience, IELTS writing course was taught mostly like template writing. Thus students recognized template writing as the most legitimate way to learn IELTS writing. When I attempted to do something different in class, such as genre analysis, students started to reject it.

To sum up, the business model of the IELTS preparation courses limited the amount of innovative and reflective work that can be done with students.

**Swale's "CARS" example.** Swales' (1990) example in analyzing the introduction section of academic papers has been an inspirational tool for the genre analysis of IELTS writing. In the preparation stage of the course, the sample writings in the Cambridge IELTS series (official test preparation guide) have been analyzed for embedded rhetorical moves and steps. It was found that the "CARS" model had been applicable in the IELTS exam setting. For example, the introductory paragraph for IELTS writing Section 2 was easily marked and found to have four steps:

- Step 1 Background information / Lead in
- Step 2 Restate the problem in the prompt
- Step 3 State the opposing opinion
- Step 4 Thesis

Swales' (1990) model at the tertiary level deals with the academic research paper, which is a very different genre comparing with the IELTS writing. Swales presented some of the steps as parallels: Step 1A (outlining a purpose) and step 1B (announcing present research). However, in this study, given the considerations on English proficiency of the students, and their confidence in writing, I decided to present the steps mainly as sequential, making them

easier to follow. This compromise to make the move and steps system more accessible for students to follow had not been very successful. The students were having difficulties organizing the steps into a coherent paragraph. The reason for such difficulties was that the dissimilarities between the writing prompts discussed in co-construction stage in class and the ones students worked on for independent construction. If more instruction time were allowed for the IELTS preparation course, it might be useful to present the students with a more developed system of moves and steps that covers a broader range of different types of prompts.

**Genre learning cycle.** During my course, students participated in the complete genre learning cycle seven times. The field notes, students' interviews, and my own reflection on teaching the course suggested that students had an overall positive attitude towards this type of writing class implementing genre learning cycle. This is a similar finding compared with other studies that examined students' perceptions of genre method, such Kongpetch (2006) and Najmi (2015). The IELTS context did not affect students' positive overall rating of genre learning cycle, especially of the co-construction stage. This study also reiterated that, among the four stages of genre learning cycle, the students enjoyed co-construction the most. My field notes revealed that students were excited about classroom discussion on a topic and then compose together as a class. Some of their questions and difficulties such as choice of words were discussed in situ. Theoretically, students should encounter more success in the independent construction stage more after being through the co-construction process in class. However, I was not able to confirm this idea in the data, since two of the three participants did not remember much about the content of the class after three months when the interviews took place.

## **Limitations of this study**

There were several limitations that could have influenced the findings and significantly limited the transferability of the findings to other settings.

**Duration of the writing course.** This writing course is an after-school program that happens once a week over a four-month period. There was but only one genre learning cycle implemented for each type of question, so students may not have had enough exposure to the genre knowledge. Had more time and space been allowed for this course, more work could have been done to cover more question types. In this case, maybe the genre learning cycle requires an extended period of instruction to receive a better pedagogical outcome. Some researchers formed the same argument (Chen & Su, 2012; Kongpetch, 2006).

**Reliability.** Despite the benefit of being an insider in the case, and therefore understanding the students and context very well, an independent knowledgeable “other” would have permitted more reliability. Some of the reflections and interpretations I have done were based on my experience, knowledge, and critical reflection of my teaching practice. It could have been different if there were a second researcher to observe the course and do an independent round of coding and a discussion of the subsequent findings.

In addition, my extended experience working in the IELTS preparation industry in China could have an impact on this study. I did strive to reflect on my teaching practice and locate any possible implications due to my working experience, or teaching habits resulted from working in the IELTS preparation industry. However, for all of us, it is challenging to have a full awareness of the influence of prior knowledge on current pedagogical practice.

**The delay in conducting interviews.** Due to the time it required for this study to gain ethics approval, the interviews were conducted three months after the course, which could have had significant impact on the findings. Had the interviews been conducted right after the

course, the participants in this study may have recalled more about the writing course and reported more or different feelings towards the genre pedagogy.

### **Future research possibilities**

IELTS, with its result widely accepted among universities globally, has attracted three million test-takers in 2017 (British Council, 2017). It is a test that merits and requires far more research attention. Among the four components (reading, speaking, listening and writing), test-takers of Chinese origin scored the lowest in the writing section (IELTS, 2017b). Thus, research into IELTS genre could be of great significance. The result of this study pointed to several future research possibilities.

**Additional scaffolds for certain aspects of the IELTS writing genre.** This study has identified that some of the moves and steps were more difficult for students. Future research is also needed to look at possible scaffolds for the holistic thinking required in those moves and steps. For example, asking students to engage in reflection about their writing through talking and writing could be an important direction for this kind of research. By engaging in such reflective practices, instructors would be able to observe students' metacognitive process and use this information to inform teaching.

**Connections between co-construction of sample texts and test texts.** This study has found that if the prompts students encountered for independent construction were similar to the ones they experienced during co-construction in class, then they were more likely to write longer, better organized and higher-quality texts. However, the specific nature of the similarities concerning which specific factors influence students' perception on whether two topics are similar, is poorly understood. Factors that determine the transferability of genre knowledge can be an important direction for future research.

Also, the long term transferability of genre knowledge in other related school writings

should be evaluated by future case studies with the participants.

### **Reflections on the design of the study**

With post-study reflection on the design of this study several important issues have been found.

**Leading questions in the interview.** During the interviews, I inadvertently asked the participants some leading questions. For example, during the interview with Lee, when he mentioned “some people get lazy, they will feel it is very difficult to write according to a structure, which will...” Before Lee finished his sentence, I jumped in and interpreted his sentence as “If it seems difficult to write according to a structure then you may feel unwilling to write?” These types of leading questions can be problematic because they stop the interviewee from finding the right words to express their own feelings, rather than follow the answer suggested by the researcher.

**Four types of questions in IELTS writing Section 2.** Another design issue relates to planning and implementation of the course content. After conducting genre analysis of the IELTS writing Section 2, I decided to introduce four types of questions: provide/evaluate solutions and, present/evaluate ideas. The original purpose of this design was to help students differentiate question types which influences their selection moves and steps. Upon further reflection, it became clear that differentiating question types became a major burden for the students, because sometimes the prompts could fit in more than one of the question types. It may have been somewhat confusing for students to make such judgements. To avoid such confusion, the types of questions should be re-designed for simplicity.

### **Conclusion**

In essence, this study generated some interesting findings regarding the pedagogical implications of using a genre method in relation to students’ writing performance and in

relation to students' perceptions of the genre method. Study participants generally displayed more moves and steps in their writings after engaging in several rounds of the genre learning cycle suggesting a certain level of effectiveness in approaching IELTS test preparation in this way. The genre knowledge, mainly the rhetorical moves and steps, had very likely influenced the students' metacognitive development in this study, which was reflected in students' writing samples when they were generating ideas for writing. Some of the moves and steps that required less holistic thinking (such as reporting the general trends of a graph) were found to be more easily implemented in students' independent construction process. As a teacher, tensions were experienced while making instructional decisions on how to frame and situate the IELTS genre. One decision taken was to situate IELTS writing as an academic genre, which may have contributed to negative perceptions of the genre approach. Also of note, students in this study generally displayed very limited innovation in their writing samples, which suggested that the genre method coupled with the high-stake testing environment might have had a negative impact on students' motivation to innovate. As for students' perceptions, the students mostly reported positively on the genre pedagogy, though the IELTS test preparation context influenced to some extent, student perceptions. For example, students with less experience in the IELTS training industry responded better to the genre method, although genre method, to a certain degree, seemed to benefit all the students in the class. To varying degrees, students of this study accepted the genre method as a legitimate way of preparing to write the IELTS test.

This chapter has echoed numerous previous research studies about and instructional practices in writing, most specifically in the applicability of the genre learning cycle in the IELTS writing session. Recommendations for future research possibilities were offered. For example, one direction could be to examine possible ways to scaffold students' ability to

implement more difficult moves and steps that require higher-level holistic thinking. In addition, a study of the factors that influenced students' perception of similarities between different prompts would be a worthwhile research direction.

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## **Appendix A Participants' writing samples**

### ***Lee-Section 1 A***

*As shown. The North American vegetation is the best in three different regions, and desertification accounts for only 5% of the land area Europe has the worst land desertification, with 23%. It is also the most common cause of desertification in three regions, with Oceania being the worst, up to 11.3 percent and Europe up 5.5 percent. Secondly, the consequences of the effects are as high as 30%. Among the three regions, the most serious cause of the desertification of Europe is the lack of water. North American has the least impact. Over-cultivation is the most serious in three regions, but Oceania has no problem at all.*

### ***Lee-Section 1 B***

*As shown in the graph. International students in the information technology course have a score of about 90 percent, and 30 percent higher than the UK students. And International students seem to have a stronger advantage in information technology. But in international law, international students scored significantly lower than UK students, with international student scores generally at 50 percent, 20 percent lower than UK students. Informational technology and international law has is the most obvious gap between international and UK students. But in Nursing and accountancy, the there is not much difference gap between international students and UK students is almost the same. The only difference is that the Nursing score is high, about 75%, and Accountancy's score is low, about 60%. This may be related to the difficulty of the course, and the gap between international students and UK students is not reflected. In the comparison of subjects, we probably learned that international students are more likely to be in science, with higher scores than UK students,*

*such as Electrical engineering and information technology. However, apart from these two extracurricular activities, international students have not had a great advantage in other subjects of the chart, and even we can find that the average score of UK students is slightly higher than that of international students.*

### ***Lee-Section 2 A***

*With the economic development and social progress. The tourism industry has developed very well. But because of the uncivilized behavior of tourists, the tourist attentions have been destroyed. Such as drawing names on the wall or litter around. Some people consider this as insignificant, because they believe it will improve over time. Even so, we still have some good ways to minimize solve the tourist's impolite behaviors.*

*The tourism industry could be setting up signs to remind tourists normative behavior. However most tourist usually ignore or neglect the poster.*

*So we have to make a better solution, we could change the method of punishment. Such as constraint the uncivilized person to labor to save their error. Let them know their mistakes had bring trouble to other, so they have to save that. Bad behaviors of the tourists can be solved easily by using very heavy penalties. For example, people littering in the tourist attraction should be punished with compulsory work picking up the trash. By doing labor work, they can better realizer their misconduct.*

*One additional solution is to promote universal standards for a variety of tourism, to overcome international cultural difference. Many inappropriate behavior are caused by cultural difference which can be solved by a standard.*

*The uncivilized behavior of travel is difficult to solve in the short time. There are many different ways to change situation setting up sign giving positive punishment or requiring universal standard.*

### ***Lee-Section 2 B***

*I don't agree with this view. It's good to build parks and sports facilities for people to spend their free time, but it's a great idea to not ignore the construction of shopping center, which many people are not satisfied with. As material levels rise, people have more and more money in their hands, and they like to spend it on things they want to do, like shopping. To improve the community, people should build more shopping malls to better the economy. To this end, merchants will also make some discounts to sell their products, which means building shopping centers and malls may also help to develop the local economy. And people spend time on things they like to do, and the happiness level of the residents will be improved. The purpose of shopping is not only that, but for those people, the use can be more, and the proper purchase of the opposite sex can definitely improve their liking...*

*Of course, building parks and sports facilities is also a good thing, giving people more time to spend and choosing, and giving people a good workout to be healthier. The better the social infrastructure is, the more the residents will be happy and the more stable the society will be. My proposal, of course, is to get people involved in the construction of urban planning and to vote on the infrastructure. This will bring people and society closer together.*

### ***Haoran-Section 1 A***

*The given bar chart compares the percentage of the second class degrees or better which were acquired by international and local students at a major UK university in 2009.*

*As shown in the chart, the science classes were more easier for the international students to obtain the degree, even the percentage of second plus grades for international students in the Information technology was the only one specialty over 80%, which was nearly 20% higher than that of the native students. The percentage of international students gaining second degrees or better in Electrical engineering was slightly lower than the percentage of international students acquiring in Information technology.*

*By contrast, UK students are more interested in getting degrees in arts rather than science because they think it is easier for them to pass, which were obviously in Sociology and Art history. There were the vast majority of native students gaining degrees. The International law was taken by fewer native students than the those both majors, which had approximately three quarters of UK students.*

*Nursing and Accountancy had some amount of students to obtain the degrees. There into the proportion of students getting Nursing degrees had around 75%. Thus this was the one of the hottest major for students gaining second degrees in this UK University.*

### ***Haoran-Section 1 B***

*The given pie chart illustrates the percentage of why the land of agriculture became more infertile, and the table shows the information of how these caused three different areas in the world during 1990s.*

*The main reasons caused the land degradation in the pie chart could be divided into 3 parts. Over-grazing comprised about 35% of the whole. Following closely by deforestation, which was 5% lower than over-grazing. The proportion of the over-cultivation was just under a third which ranked the third place. There were the least percentage goes to the of other reasons which was only only had 7%.*

*In the table, Europe no matter in what aspects had constituted high proportions, and also the total land degradation percentage in Europe was the only one over continent which over 20%. The problems were mainly concentrated in deforestation and over-cultivation. Compare with other two regions, which there had lower percentages in this 2 aspects, the even Oceania did not even have any over-cultivation issue in their continent. Although over-cultivation in North America was only had 3.3%, it was the main cause led to land infertility. In the over-grazing, Oceania made up 11.3% which was approximately 8 times as much as North America.*

### ***Haoran-Section 2 A***

*Nowadays, many tourists practise inappropriate behaviours in public areas, such as drawing name on the wall or litter around. Some people said as the number of the tourists increase dramatically, the inappropriate behaviours are unavoidable, so they and considered this as insignificant because it would will improve over time. However, these behaviours epitomise the populace's cultivation. So in my opinion, we still have some good ways to solve the tourists in police behaviours.*

*One situation could be setting up the remainders and posters which can remind tourists directly. However, most people usually ignore or neglect them. The better solution can be using some positive punishment to deter tourists' impoliteness, we can ask them to do compulsory labor work to replace take forfeit. In this way, violators will be more likely to recognise their mistakes and correct them. For example, people littering in the tourists attraction should be punished with compulsory work picking up the trash by doing labor work. They can better realize their misconduct.*

*One additional solution is setting up a volunteer program. Welcome all the civil to join in the programs to propagandize the civilization. Governments could also promote universal standards for a variety of tourists to overcome international culture differences. Many inappropriate behaviours are caused by cultural difference which can be solved by a standard.*

*Although the behaviours of impolite travel can't be solved in a short time, there are many different ways to change the situation by setting up signs, giving positive punishment or requiring universal standards.*

### ***Haoran-Section 2B***

*Nowadays, there are loads of different types of formal exams aiming at could assessing people intelligence, even those examinations sometimes relates to have related with the whether people will be awarded university degrese, and be offered job positions. However, how to measure intelligence is a tough question.*

*To assess intelligence, some people believe that the formal exams based on pen and paper are at dominant position today. We can imagine a person who do well in the formal exams often do well in other types of exams. In addition, current exams are including a variety of methods to measure different abilities. For example, the IELTS test is not only includes sections on reading and writing, and also attaches importance to some necessary social skills like listening and speaking. Thus, formal exams seem to be a relative accurate measurement of intelligence. However, sometimes those examinations are predictable, which that means some students could prepare by rote learning. Besides, some people sometime do bad due to anxiety, rather than lack of intelligence. So, the formal exams still have some circumscribed issues to beshould be solved in the future.*

*The other research claims that human has multiple aspects of intelligence and should be assessed separatel. For instance, though some students get bad performance in the formal exams, they may have excellent oral abilities when they show their presentations in class. What's more, some successful businessmen and technicians may not have good educational background, but they can also get remarkable success by the virtue of their intelligence in their areas.*

*Though, pen and paper exams could be very useful in measuring certain skill of intelligence, but these grades cannot absolutely represent people intelligence totally and accurately. We should reference all aspects of people before we come to a conclusion.*

### ***Xianxu-Section 1A***

*The bar graph explains UK and International students gaining second class degrees or better*

in 2009.

*In half of all eight majors, UK students presented a better performance of grades. In the quarters of the majors which are Nursing and Accountancy, two groups of students gained the same percentages of grades. In the rest of majors the International students presented higher grades than the local students did. In Information technology, International students' grade surpassed the local students greatly. It is the largest gap inof the grades between local students and international students. Moreover, in this major, international students have the highest percentage of grades in all grades of international students. In other hand, UK students have the lowest grades of the information presented. However, the second largest gap of grades appears in International law where UK students showed a higher percentage of marks at \*\*\* percentage.*

*Overall, UK students had better performances in half majors presented in the bar graph. And International students were good at science related majors.*

### ***Xianxu-Section 1B***

*The graph shows the amount of goods transported in UK from 1974 to 2002 by four different types of transportation.*

*This four modes of transportations are by road, water, rail, and pipeline. Overall the four modes of transportation were increased from 1974 to 2002. In this 28 years the most significant increase was road, from the scale, the the increase were about 20 million tonnes of goods transported in UK between 1974 and 2002. The quantities of transported goods by rail*

*had a recession between 1978 and 1994, followed by a steadily increase after 1994. The growing trends of pipeline was very moderately over this 28 years, it increased about two third million tonnes each year approximately on average. For water transportation, it gained a dramatically increase twice in this period. First increase was between 1978 and 1982, in contrast of the decline of road and rail, the water transportation nearly increased about 20 million tons. The second increase was between 1998 and 2002. The four modes of transportation can be divided into ground transport, and water transport. In four modes, water transportation had the most dramatically increase, but the increase is just at the middle level if compared with other land transport.*

*The four modes of transportation shows in the graph all presents a positive development of transportation of goods in UK, every one of them increased over the time.*

### ***Xianxu-Section 2A***

*Nowadays, many tourists practise inappropriate behaviours in public areas, such as drawing names on the wall or yelling at the restaurants.*

*However, tourists' behaviours are generally affected by their own cultural traditions. Some people consider this as insignificant, because it will be improved overtime, even so, we still have some good ways to solve tourists impolite behaviours.*

*One solution could be using posters to prompt the right behaviours. Carefully designed posters can remind tourists the standard behaviours when they attempt to violate some rules. But those posters might also be misunderstood by international tourists who are not*

*used to look for posters.*

*Briefings hosted by the tourism companies with the aim of educating tourists are a better method. Tourists can understand the proper behaviours, and avoid the risks caused by inappropriate behaviours. For example, stand-up-paddleboarding companies' guides will instruct customers to keep a certain distance from the shoreline.*

*One additional solution is to promote universal standards for a variety of tourism, to overcome international cultural differences. Many inappropriate behaviours are caused by cultural difference which can be solved by a standard.*

*Overall, the inappropriate behaviours may be more difficult to solve than we'd expected. By setting posters, briefings, and establish standards, inappropriate behaviours will be disappeared eventually.*

### ***Xianxu-Section 2B***

*The purpose of education is controversial, some believes that education should prepare people to be useful members for society, others believes that personal ambition overweight to be useful members for society. However, no one can limit personal freedom even though education can be beneficial for the society.*

*Everyone have the right of freedom, people can chose to contribute the society rather than their own interests. Same as the biological diversity is crucial to the environment; diversity of people's future choices contributes to the creativity of the society. It creates the competitiveness*

*among people which propel the development of the society. For example, in the history, many king totally controlled the power in their regime, which led to the dictatorship and ignorance of ordinary citizens. But nowadays, many political parties are trying to gain political power through the votes of citizens, because of this situation, common people get chance to seek their needs.*

*However, the society need contribution of people to keep developing. When the education system lesser produce elites for the society, the development of society will slower down. But the elites that follow their dreams also can contribute to the society. For example, in China, employees created the sharable bikes available for people to transport to other places faster. The CEO of that company was not devoted into society development but rather to earn more money. Still their company greatly provided a cheap and convenient method of transportation for normal people.*

*In sum, educate people to contribute to help the development of society is important, but the crucial step is let people follow their dreams and help them do that.*

## **Appendix B: Links to IELTS Sample Questions**

A sample chart of Section 1

<https://www.ieltsessentials.com/global/>

[/media/IELTS/Global/Files/PDFs/academicwritingsampletask1.ashx?la=en](https://www.ieltsessentials.com/global/-/media/IELTS/Global/Files/PDFs/academicwritingsampletask1.ashx?la=en)

A sample on Section 1

[https://www.ielts.org/-/media/pdfs/120430\\_academic\\_writing\\_task\\_1a.ashx?la=en](https://www.ielts.org/-/media/pdfs/120430_academic_writing_task_1a.ashx?la=en)

A sample of Section 2

[https://www.ielts.org/-/media/pdfs/120430\\_academic\\_writing\\_task\\_2a.ashx?la=en](https://www.ielts.org/-/media/pdfs/120430_academic_writing_task_2a.ashx?la=en)