

pISSN: 1906 - 6406 The Scholar: Human Sciences
 eISSN: 2586 - 9388 The Scholar: Human Sciences
<https://assumptionjournal.au.edu/index.php/Scholar>

A Qualitative Study in Using the Curriculum Cycle Model and Genre Theory to Improve Students' Business Negotiation Writing Performance in Chinese University Contexts

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Received: June 15, 2024. Revised: August 18, 2024. Accepted: February 18, 2025.

Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates the effectiveness of integrating a curriculum cycle model and genre theory to enhance Chinese university students' proficiency in business English negotiation writing. **Research Design, Data, and Methodology:** The research employs a qualitative approach to explore the impact of the curriculum cycle model on students' writing abilities, perceptions, and preferences. After the experiment teaching for 8 weeks, twenty-eight undergraduate students majoring in English at Wuchang University of Technology, Wuhan, China participated in in-person interviews to gather qualitative data. **Results:** Findings from the interviews revealed that students held positive views regarding the curriculum cycle model, emphasizing its role in enhancing their negotiation writing skills. The study concludes that implementing such pedagogical approaches can significantly benefit students by equipping them with essential negotiation skills and fostering effective communication in business contexts. **Conclusions:** This research contributes to the field by demonstrating how innovative teaching methodologies can empower students to navigate and succeed in the complexities of professional communication.

Keywords : Business English, Negotiation Writing, Curriculum Cycle Model, Language Teaching, Academic Writing

JEL Classification Code: E44, F31, F37, G15

1. Introduction

In today's globalized economy, effective communication in business negotiation writing is crucial for fostering successful international transactions. This study explores innovative approaches to enhancing business negotiation writing skills among Chinese university students, focusing on the integration of the curriculum cycle model and genre theory. The curriculum cycle model emphasizes iterative stages of context exploration, text exploration, joint construction, and independent construction, tailored to enhance students' understanding and application of genre-specific writing skills. Genre theory, on the other hand, provides a framework for analyzing how different genres of writing serve distinct communicative purposes within specific social contexts.

In Chinese university contexts, where English is often

taught as a foreign language, developing proficiency in business negotiation writing requires not only linguistic competence but also genre-specific awareness and strategic communication skills. By employing qualitative research methods, this study delves into the experiences and perceptions of undergraduate students majoring in English at Wuchang University of Technology, Wuhan, China. Through in-depth interviews, the study aims to uncover how students perceive the effectiveness of the curriculum cycle model and genre theory in improving their business negotiation writing abilities.

The findings of this research are expected to contribute valuable insights into pedagogical practices aimed at enhancing students' writing skills in professional and academic settings. By understanding how these theoretical frameworks can be applied practically, educators and curriculum developers can better equip students to navigate

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complex business negotiations and communicate effectively on an international stage. This study seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice in language education, offering actionable recommendations for curriculum design and instructional methodologies tailored to the needs of Chinese university students studying business English.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Genre Theory

Genre theory, originating from the French word "genre" and rooted in the Latin "genus" for classification, has evolved significantly from its origins in ancient Greece and Rome to its contemporary applications in linguistics. Initially confined to literary and rhetorical studies, genre theory expanded into linguistics with Bakhtin's introduction in 1929, coinciding with a shift in language learning research towards social perspectives. This theoretical framework has been instrumental across various domains of language education, including discourse analysis (Hasan & Williams, 1996), composition studies (Bazerman, 1994), and ESL/EFL instruction (Bhatia, 1993). Notably, genre theory has spawned three influential schools of genre analysis in language education: English for Specific Purposes (ESP) with Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993), with Miller (1984) and Bazerman (1994), and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) with Martin (1984). Each school provides unique insights into genre as "communicative events" shaped by specific social purposes and structural conventions. Despite varying definitions and scopes, all schools agree that genres serve distinct communicative functions and maintain consistent structural frameworks across discourse types like business negotiation correspondence, scientific papers, and legal documents. Today, genre theory informs ESL/EFL writing instruction, emphasizing the relationship between genre-specific structures, language features, and social contexts to enhance students' communicative competence. Figure 1 depicts the relationship of genre, register and language, in which tenor, field, and mode are differentiated within the register level. These distinctions are manifested intrinsically in the interpersonal, ideational, and textual functions of language. However, they are interconnected at the genre level.

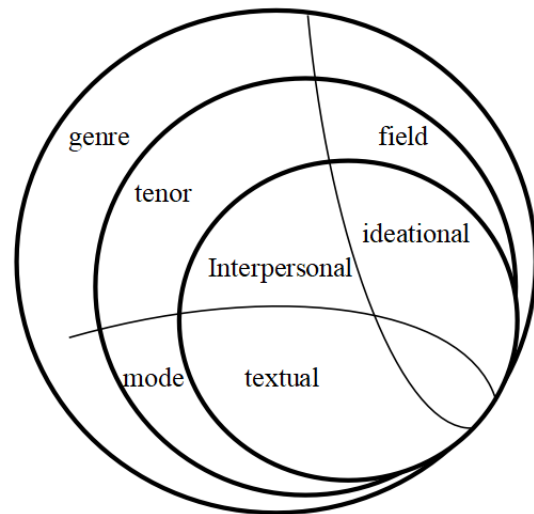


Figure 1: The Relationship of Genre, Register and Language (Adapted from Rose, 2014)

2.2 Business Negotiation Writing Genre (BNWG)

Negotiation involves the social interaction where parties attempt to reach mutually beneficial agreements on conflicting interests (Huțiu, 2017). This process spans various contexts from personal disputes to intricate business transactions and international diplomatic engagements. This study focuses on business negotiations concerning international trade transactions, which typically involve discussions on commodity specifics, pricing terms, shipping logistics, trade conditions, and packaging details between buyers and sellers. Such negotiations traditionally occur face-to-face or in written forms like business correspondence, increasingly via digital platforms due to global connectivity. Here, the business negotiation writing genre specifically refers to business English correspondence used in negotiation processes. This genre's definition, scope, and distinctive features—both generic and lexico-grammatical—will be systematically explored. To ground our exploration of the Business Negotiation Writing Genre (BNWG), we utilize an adapted ESP classification by Dudley-Evans and John (1998), initially proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), illustrated in Figure 2. This framework underpins our investigation into the BNWG, aiming to clarify its characteristics and instructional implications:

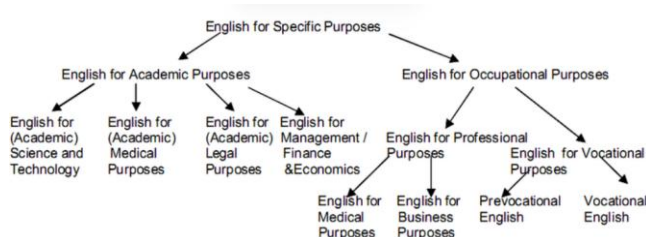


Figure 2: Classification of ESP

2.3 Writing Approaches

Writing, particularly in a second language context like English, poses significant challenges for learners worldwide. Over the years, educators and linguists have explored various methodologies aimed at enhancing students' writing skills. Among these, three prominent approaches—process, product, and genre—have shaped ESL/EFL writing instruction profoundly. Each approach offers distinct perspectives and methodologies tailored to different aspects of language learning.

2.3.1 Product Approach

The product approach, rooted in behaviorism theory, views writing as the mastery of predefined habits through stimulus and response mechanisms (Nunan, 2001). This traditional text-model approach begins with teachers providing sample essays, followed by detailed analysis of vocabulary, sentence structure, and content. Students then replicate these models in their own compositions, culminating in evaluation and feedback from the teacher. Emphasis lies on correctness and adherence to linguistic models, reflecting an instructional focus on grammar and structural drills (Krashen, 1984). However, critics argue that this method often results in formulaic writing devoid of genuine communicative intent, termed as "mindless copies" (Eschholz, 1980; Silva, 1993). Despite its structured approach, the product-centered pedagogy has increasingly faced criticism for its teacher-centric nature, where assignments are predominantly designed for evaluation rather than fostering authentic communication (Badger & White, 2000).

In summary, while the product approach emphasizes language structure and correctness, it falls short in cultivating writing as a means of genuine communication. This critique has prompted a shift towards more learner-centered approaches like the process and genre methodologies, which will be explored in subsequent sections.

2.3.2 Process Approach

Since the 1980s, a paradigm shift in writing instruction has evolved from focusing solely on the final written product

to emphasizing the dynamic process of writing itself. This transformation was driven by a communicative theory that views writing as a collaborative activity rather than an individual endeavor. Graves (1983) argues for a comprehensive approach where teachers guide students through all stages of writing: from gathering material and planning, to drafting, peer-conferencing, and peer-editing. This process-oriented approach allows students ample time to refine their ideas and skills through multiple drafts and revisions, fostering critical thinking and ownership of their writing.

Compared to the traditional product approach, the process approach offers several advantages. Firstly, it nurtures a deep understanding of the writing process, enhancing students' ability to engage in pre-writing, drafting, revising, and rewriting. Secondly, the emphasis on student-centered activities promotes active learning, where students collaborate with peers and teachers to improve their writing style and clarity. However, despite these strengths, the process approach has its limitations. Horowitz (1986) notes its relative effectiveness in composing assessment essays, while Badger and White (2000) criticize its tendency to overlook genre-specific linguistic knowledge, hindering students' proficiency in varied writing contexts.

Moreover, challenges persist regarding the clarity of instructional practices in both the product and process approaches. Questions arise about the timing of writing assignments, the structure of editing and revision processes, and the criteria for evaluating student work. These uncertainties underscore the need for clearer guidelines in writing instruction and assessment that align with students' developmental needs and learning objectives.

In conclusion, while the process approach represents a significant advancement in writing pedagogy by foregrounding the writing process over the final product, ongoing refinement is necessary to address its limitations and enhance its effectiveness in diverse educational settings.

2.3.3 Genre-based Approach

Since the mid-1980s, the genre approach has gained prominence in language education, offering a distinct alternative to the traditional flaws found in both the product and process approaches (Swales, 1990). Rooted in genre theory and discourse analysis, this approach provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how different types of texts are structured and function linguistically to achieve specific communicative goals. According to Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993), genre analysis integrates linguistic, sociological, and psychological perspectives, focusing on the communicative purposes that underpin each genre of writing.

Central to the genre-based approach is the recognition that writing is inherently social and contextual. Each genre exhibits recognizable patterns and conventions tailored to its

intended purpose and audience. For example, a business report follows a distinct structure aimed at conveying information concisely and persuasively, contrasting sharply with the narrative style of a short story. By familiarizing students with these genre-specific conventions through practical examples and guided analysis, educators empower them to effectively navigate and produce texts across various professional, academic, and personal contexts.

In English for Specific Purposes (ESP), where the goal is to equip learners with the language skills necessary for specific communicative tasks in their fields, the genre-based approach is particularly valuable. ESP courses can tailor instruction to address the precise genres—such as business emails, research reports, or legal documents—that students will encounter in their professional lives. This relevance ensures that students not only develop language proficiency but also acquire the practical skills needed for successful communication in their chosen fields.

Moreover, the genre-based approach aligns harmoniously with constructivist and functionalist theories of language learning. By engaging students actively with authentic texts and contexts, it promotes deeper understanding and skill acquisition. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), within the functionalist framework, further enriches this approach by exploring how linguistic choices shape meaning within specific genres, thereby enhancing students' ability to effectively deploy language to achieve communicative goals.

In summary, the genre-based approach represents a significant advancement in writing instruction by emphasizing the social, contextual, and functional dimensions of writing. By equipping students with the tools to analyze and produce genre-specific texts, educators prepare them to navigate diverse communicative challenges with confidence and proficiency.

2.4 Teaching and Learning Cycle

The teaching and learning cycle, or the curriculum cycle, serves as a cornerstone in genre-based pedagogy, offering a structured approach to implementing genre theory in educational settings. Numerous scholars have investigated diverse methodologies to contextualize target situations, present models as exemplars, support learners through iterative learning processes with teacher guidance and interaction and foster reflective writing practices. In recent years, Derewianka and Jones (2016) developed another five-stage model (See Figure 3), which comprises 'Building knowledge of the field,' 'Supported reading,' 'Modelling/deconstruction,' 'Joint construction,' and 'Independent use of the genre.' This new five-stage model adds a new phase called 'Supported reading,' in which a range of supported activities and teaching practices centered on

reading will be used to facilitate students' understanding of the field and the focused genre. In addition, 'Assessment' is located in the model's center. The teacher monitors the students' progress at all stages and assesses students' understanding of both the content and language demands of the certain genre, focusing on areas of need or moving rapidly through areas with which students are already familiar.

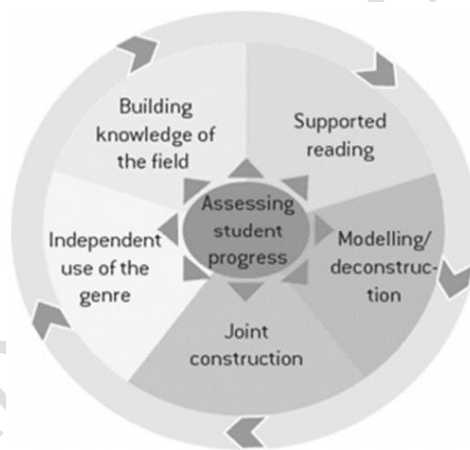


Figure 3: Teaching and Learning Cycle by Derewianka and Jones (2016)

3. Research Methods and Materials

3.1 Research Methodology

The research comprised qualitative exploration of students' perceptions through semi-structured interviews. Qualitative data from interviews provided insights into students' experiences, preferences for learning methods, and perceptions of the curriculum cycle model's effectiveness in enhancing their negotiation writing skills.

3.2 Population and Sample Size

This study employed a qualitative approach to investigate the impact of the curriculum cycle model on students' business English negotiation writing skills after 8 weeks of experiment teaching. A sample of 28 Chinese university students enrolled in a business English correspondence course participated in the study.

4. Results and Discussion

Five questions aim to delve into students' experiences, preferences, and perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the curriculum cycle model in improving their business negotiation writing skills. They encourage reflective responses that provide deeper insights into the impact of the instructional approach on their learning outcome.

4.1 Interview Questions and Response

Table 1: Interview Questions and Answers

Questions	Example of Student's Answer
1. How did traditional writing classes compare with the curriculum cycle model in terms of preparing you for business negotiation writing?	"In traditional classes, we focused a lot on grammar and vocabulary, but didn't practice much with real negotiation scenarios. The curriculum cycle model was different because we could apply what we learned directly to writing negotiation letters."
2. What aspects of the curriculum cycle model did you find most beneficial for improving your negotiation writing skills?	"I really liked the group work in the curriculum cycle model. It was helpful to discuss ideas with classmates and see different approaches to writing negotiation letters. Also, getting feedback from peers was valuable."
3. How did the curriculum cycle model impact your confidence in writing negotiation letters?	"Before, I wasn't sure how to structure a negotiation letter or use formal business language correctly. The model gave me clear steps to follow and after practicing, I felt much more confident in my writing."
4. Can you describe a specific instance where the curriculum cycle model helped you address challenges in writing negotiation letters effectively?	"There was a case where we had to negotiate terms with a client. Using the model, we could plan our approach, draft the letter together, and revise it until we were sure it covered all aspects professionally."
5. How do you think the curriculum cycle model could be improved to better support students' learning of negotiation writing skills?	"While the model was great, more examples of real negotiation scenarios would have been helpful. Maybe incorporating more case studies or simulations could enhance our understanding."

4.2 Summary Report of Qualitative Insights from Student Interviews

The qualitative data gathered through interviews with students provided valuable insights into their experiences, preferences for learning methods, and perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the curriculum cycle model in enhancing their negotiation writing skills. Here is a summary of the key findings:

Experiences with Learning Methods:

Many students expressed that traditional teaching methods in previous writing classes often focused on grammar and vocabulary acquisition without sufficient emphasis on practical application in business negotiation writing.

The curriculum cycle model introduced in this study was perceived favorably due to its structured approach, which allowed for iterative stages of context exploration, text exploration, joint construction, and independent group work. Students appreciated the hands-on experience and the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge to practical writing tasks.

Preferences for Learning Methods:

Students generally preferred active learning methods that engaged them directly in the writing process. The curriculum cycle model, with its collaborative and iterative nature, resonated well with their preferences for interactive and group-based learning.

The model's emphasis on scaffolding and peer feedback was highlighted as particularly beneficial, as it allowed students to learn from each other's strengths and collectively improve their negotiation writing skills.

Perceptions of the Curriculum Cycle Model's Effectiveness:

Students reported a perceived improvement in their negotiation writing skills after participating in the curriculum cycle model. They noted enhancements in their ability to structure negotiation letters effectively, use appropriate business terminology, and address diverse audience needs.

The model's systematic approach was credited for helping students gain confidence in navigating complex negotiation scenarios and adapting their writing style to professional standards.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Conclusion and Discussion

This study explores the integration of a curriculum cycle model and genre theory to improve Chinese university students' proficiency in business English negotiation writing. The research employs a qualitative approach to investigate the impact of these pedagogical frameworks on students' writing abilities, perceptions, and preferences.

After an experimental teaching period of 8 weeks, twenty-eight undergraduate students from Wuchang University of Technology, Wuhan, China participated in in-depth, in-person interviews. The qualitative data gathered provided valuable insights into students' experiences with the curriculum cycle model and its effects on their negotiation writing skills.

The findings from the interviews underscored students' positive perceptions of the curriculum cycle model. Students appreciated the structured approach of the model, which guided them through stages of context exploration, text analysis, collaborative construction, and independent refinement. This systematic progression allowed students to develop their negotiation writing skills iteratively, gaining confidence in crafting effective and professional communication pieces.

Structured Learning Process: Students valued the clear stages of the curriculum cycle, which provided them with a roadmap for developing their writing skills.

Active Engagement: The model encouraged active learning through collaborative activities and peer feedback, fostering deeper understanding and skill development.

Practical Relevance: Students recognized the practical relevance of the model to real-world business contexts, equipping them with skills directly applicable to professional settings.

This research contributes to the field by demonstrating the effectiveness of integrating genre-based pedagogies like the curriculum cycle model in enhancing students' business negotiation writing skills. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, these innovative methodologies prepare students to communicate effectively in diverse and demanding business environments.

Moving forward, educators can build on these findings to refine and expand genre-based approaches in ESL/EFL writing instruction. Longitudinal studies could further explore the sustained impact of such methodologies on students' writing proficiency and their ability to navigate complex communication challenges. Ultimately, integrating effective pedagogical strategies not only enhances students' linguistic abilities but also cultivates essential skills for successful professional communication in a globalized world.

5.2 Recommendation

Educators play a pivotal role in implementing effective pedagogical strategies and supporting student learning. Therefore, investing in professional development opportunities for educators is crucial. Training workshops on genre-based instruction and effective feedback strategies can empower educators to enhance their teaching practices in business communication courses.

Additionally, educators should be equipped with the skills to provide constructive feedback and support students' iterative writing processes. By fostering a culture of continuous improvement among educators, educational institutions can ensure that students receive high-quality instruction that aligns with best practices in negotiation writing education.

Support services, such as writing centers and peer review programs, are instrumental in assisting students in refining their negotiation writing skills. Writing centers equipped with resources and trained tutors can provide personalized support to students at various stages of the writing process. Peer review programs encourage students to engage critically with their peers' work, fostering a collaborative learning environment where students can learn from each other's strengths and challenges.

These support services not only enhance students' writing proficiency but also promote self-reflection and continuous improvement. By empowering students to seek and receive feedback, educational institutions can cultivate a culture of academic excellence and professional development among their student body.

To advance the field of negotiation writing education, future research should focus on longitudinal studies and cross-cultural comparisons. Longitudinal studies can assess the long-term impact of genre-based instruction on students' negotiation writing proficiency and career readiness. By tracking students' progress over time, researchers can evaluate the sustained benefits of the curriculum cycle model and identify areas for improvement.

Cross-cultural studies are essential for understanding how cultural factors influence negotiation writing strategies. By examining cultural nuances in negotiation communication, educators can develop strategies to address diversity and inclusivity in teaching practices. Moreover, research should explore the role of technology in enhancing negotiation writing education, investigating innovative approaches to integrate digital tools into the curriculum effectively.

In conclusion, enhancing students' business negotiation writing skills requires a multifaceted approach that combines curriculum development, pedagogical innovation, professional development for educators, student support services, and rigorous research. By implementing the recommendations outlined in this essay, educational institutions can empower students to excel in negotiation writing and prepare them for successful careers in diverse professional environments. Through collaboration and continuous improvement, educators can ensure that business communication courses remain relevant and impactful, equipping students with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive in the global marketplace.

5.3 Limitation and Further Study

One significant limitation for future research lies in the need to explore the scalability and generalizability of genre-based pedagogies across different educational contexts and student populations. While this study focused on Chinese university students majoring in English, future research

should investigate how these pedagogical approaches can be adapted and implemented in diverse linguistic and cultural settings. Moreover, longitudinal studies are necessary to assess the sustained impact of genre-based instruction on students' writing skills beyond immediate classroom settings. Addressing these limitations will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the applicability and effectiveness of genre-based approaches in enhancing students' communication competencies across various educational and professional domains.

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