

Genre awareness of English language education students: An Indonesian context

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Abstract: Genre refers to the type of literary work characterized by a particular style, form, or content. Language students are expected to have good genre awareness, or the understanding and recognition of text types, to be able to understand texts. This study aims to measure the genre awareness of the students in an English Language Education study program at a state university in Indonesia and identify the genres as well as the aspects they perceived as difficult. This research employed a descriptive design. The data were gathered by using a reading test measuring knowledge of 13 genres and a questionnaire. There were 96 students involved in the research. Data analysis was done descriptively. From the results of data analysis, the following conclusions were obtained: first, the genre awareness of the students was categorized into average for five text types (narrative, recount, spoof, explanatory, and procedure) and was categorized as poor and failed for the other text types; second, students perceived the genres which were the most difficult to identify are hortatory exposition and analytical exposition, and the aspects of the text are significant lexico-grammatical features and the generic structure. Lecturers are thus recommended to teach genres and address the factors perceived to hinder the students' understanding of texts.

Keywords: English language education, Genre awareness, Genre, Indonesian students, Reading comprehension.

1. Introduction

The word genre is etymologically derived from the French language, which means form or type. It is defined as a term for texts that are grouped together, and these groups of texts represent how the authors of the texts use language to respond to recurring situations [1-3]. Each genre has distinctive and recognizable patterns and norms of organization and structure, as well as particular and distinctive communicative functions [4]. In other words, when we talk about genre, we talk about recognizing similarities in the texts we use frequently, and we are able to use the experiences with such texts to read, understand, and write them.

Understanding the concept of genres is essential for genre awareness [5]. Genre awareness is defined as “a critical consciousness of both rhetorical purposes and ideological effects of generic forms” [6] and the rhetorical adaptability required to fit students' socio-cognitive genre knowledge into constantly changing situations [7]. This consciousness of specific features will lead to acquisition [8] and is used to identify and use a genre that is appropriate for a given situation, group of individuals, and communication goal [9, 10]. Students who develop genre awareness have an understanding and recognition of genres and thus are able to read and write in specific genres. They are able to understand how a specific genre advances a rhetorical objective, how the writer, the intended reader, and the text itself are all guided by purpose, and how they are trained and behave in their discourse communities.

Genre awareness is reported to have a high correlation with reading comprehension [5, 11]. In fact, studying the characteristics of various genres enables readers to identify what they are reading and

modify their reading approach [12, 13]. To comprehend a text, a student must be aware that there are various types of texts, each with its unique characteristics, functions, and standards. They need to understand that narrative texts are meant to narrate a story, persuasive texts are intended to persuade readers, and informational texts are intended to provide readers with data or information. As they develop their reading abilities, they can leverage the characteristics of various genres to expedite the acquisition of information, such as utilizing headings to comprehend informational text. Without genre awareness, students will not be able to comprehend how the text accomplishes its goals, and they can find it difficult to interact with a text in another subject when they come across a new genre. By learning to identify and utilize different text genres, students develop the foundation for comprehending new and unfamiliar readings. Hence, genre awareness needs to be taught as [6] proposed.

Explicit teaching on genres is realized through text-based or genre-based learning methods or, more popular, with a genre-based approach. The teaching and learning methods of this approach focus on understanding and producing texts from a chosen genre [13, 14]. A study proved that the SFL-based genre approach was effective in promoting EFL writers' genre awareness and writing competence [15]. There are six main genres taught in this approach according to their primary social purposes: (1) narratives, i.e., genre used to tell a story, usually to entertain; (2) recount, i.e., a genre used to tell what happened; (3) information reports, i.e., genre used to provide factual information; (4) instruction, i.e., genre used to tell the listeners or readers what to do; (5) explanation, i.e., genre used to explain why or how something happens; and (6) expository, i.e., genre used to present or argue a viewpoint [16]. In the Indonesian context, these six main genres have subtypes and are more well-known as 13 genres. The genres are narrative, recount, procedure, report, analytical exposition, hortatory exposition, explanation, descriptive, discussion, news item, review, anecdote, and spoof text. They have all been taught in English subjects from elementary school to senior high school following the 2006 school-level curriculum [17].

The importance of genre awareness has come to the attention of several scholars. One of the studies scrutinized the relationship between genre awareness and reading comprehension and revealed that there is a significant connection between the two variables. The students' awareness of literary genres and their reading comprehension skills are both inadequate [11]. The next study investigated the effectiveness of the genre awareness approach, a novel writing instruction approach, on the development of the writing skills of EFL undergraduate students. Writing tests, genre awareness questionnaires, and interviews were administered to students at the beginning and end of the course. The results showed that the genre awareness approach substantially benefits students by enabling them to be aware of how texts are shaped for different communicative purposes [18].

Understanding a new genre will prepare students for lifelong reading. Accordingly, reading various types of texts or genres is a skill that must be possessed by foreign language learners, including students of the English Language Education Study Program (henceforth ELE) in a state university in Indonesia. As with other universities, there are some reading courses offered in this study program. Reading skills are regarded to be so important that each reading course is a prerequisite for the other. Students are expected to have good text comprehension skills after completing a series of Reading courses. Unfortunately, little research has been done on genre awareness among students in Indonesia, especially English Language Education students. In fact, to this day, no research has been conducted to examine the genre awareness of all genres taught in Indonesia. At the same time, knowledge of genres can benefit students in every language class, including English. Students who take English Education majors or study programs who, in fact, are prospective English teachers have a big responsibility because they learn about text types not only for themselves but also for their prospective students. For this reason, it is important to examine genre awareness to provide an overview of student competencies and provide input regarding the curriculum and learning English. Therefore, this study aimed to find out the genre awareness of students of English Language Education and identify the genre as well as the aspects that are perceived to be difficult for the students.

2. Methods

In accordance with the research objectives, the appropriate research design is descriptive research. This study attempts to assess the genre awareness of the students and also describe their difficulties in identifying the genre from their own perspectives. The researcher collected data through a reading test to answer the first aim of the research and a short questionnaire to answer the second one.

This research was conducted at an English Language Education Study Program in a state university in Bali in the 2023/2024 academic year. The subjects of this study were the fourth-semester students, as they had taken two consecutive mandatory reading classes in the first and second semesters, namely Interpretive Reading and Critical Reading. Regarding the English subject taken in senior high school and also the two reading classes in the ELE study program, the students are assumed to have developed genre awareness. Based on academic data owned by the faculty of language and arts, the total number of students in the English Language Education study program in the academic year is 932 students. The research samples were taken using the Slovin technique, where a sample range between 10-20 of the research population can be taken. In this study, at least 10 of the population were expected to participate. The test was distributed to five classes, around 155 students, and 96 students returned the test. The number of students fulfilled the target of participants. Thus, data analysis was carried out.

The instruments used in the data collection were a reading test and a questionnaire. The reading test given aims to measure students' genre awareness and was designed based on genre theory. The test was in the form of multiple-choice questions. There was a total of 13 genres, which are all taught in Indonesian schools to form the test questions: narrative, recount, procedure, procedure, report, analytical exposition, hortatory exposition, explanation, descriptive, discussion, news item, review, anecdote, and spoof text. There were two texts given for each genre, with five questions asking about their genre awareness in each text. The questions were intended to ask the following questions: the type of the text, the lexico-grammatical features of the text, the communicative purpose of the text, and the organization of the text or the generic structure of the text. Thus, a total of 130 questions were administered to the students. These questions were distributed through Google Forms, where students could do it online.

Before being distributed, the test was validated by two experts using the Gregory Formula. The content validity coefficient of the tested instrument was 0.5; thus, it was valid as it is ≥ 0.30 [19]. The table below shows the grid of the assessment.

Table 1.
The grid of the assessment.

No	Genre awareness aspect	Test item number	Total number
1.	The type of the text	1, 6, 12, 17, 22, 23, 29, 33, 37, 41, 46, 47, 51, 56, 63, 68, 71, 76, 81, 86, 91, 96, 104, 109, 115, 120	26
2.	The communicative purpose or social function of the text	3, 8, 11, 16, 21, 30, 31, 36, 43, 48, 52, 57, 61, 66, 72, 77, 82, 87, 93, 99, 101, 106, 113, 118, 121, 127	26
3.	The lexico-grammatical features of the text	2, 5, 9, 10, 13, 15, 18, 20, 26, 35, 39, 40, 50, 54, 55, 59, 60, 65, 70, 74, 79, 85, 90, 94, 97, 105, 110, 114, 119, 124, 129	31
4.	The generic structure of the text	4, 7, 14, 19, 24, 25, 27, 28, 32, 34, 38, 42, 44, 45, 49, 53, 58, 62, 64, 67, 69, 73, 75, 78, 80, 83, 84, 88, 89, 92, 95, 98, 100, 102, 103, 107, 108, 111, 112, 116, 117, 122, 123, 125, 126, 128, 130	47

The answers were analyzed quantitatively. First, the responses from the students were examined and given a score of 0–1. The correct answer was given a score of 1, and the wrong answer was 0. The percentage of total correct answers was then calculated to indicate the student's genre awareness. The number of students who were able to answer each question was also calculated to indicate the difficulty level of each genre.

Afterwards, the next instrument applied was a questionnaire. It was distributed to find out the genres that were difficult for students to understand as well as the aspects of the texts that they

considered difficult to identify. The results of the questionnaire were acquired by calculating the percentage of students' answers to each question in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was also used as data triangulation, which means a data collection technique was used to get data from the same source for data validity.

3. Results and Discussion

The results of the data analysis are presented in tables and graphs. It is presented based on the main classification of genres: narrative, descriptive, and argumentative. It was revealed that of all 130 questions in the reading assessment to evaluate the genre awareness of students, the percentage of the correct answers for genre awareness was only 52.6%.

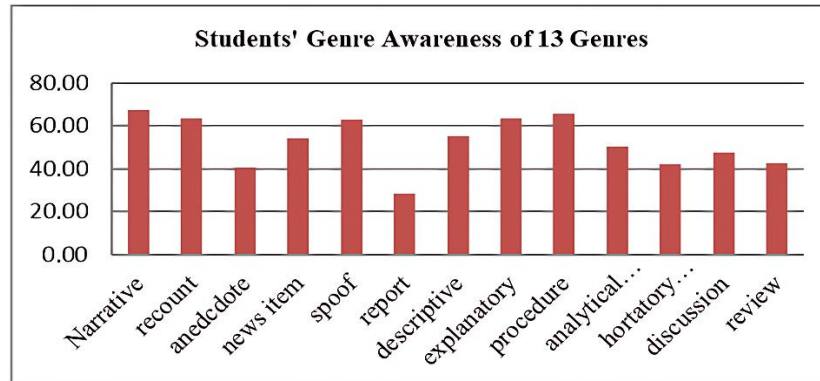


Figure 1.
Students' genre awareness of all text types.

Figure 1 above presents the students' genre awareness of all 13 text types. As seen from the figure, the genre awareness of text types with 60 – 74% correct answers, categorized as average, were narrative, recount, spoof, explanatory, and procedure. Meanwhile, the genre awareness of text types was categorized as poor, with 50 – 59% correct answers, including news items, descriptive, and analytical exposition. Lastly, the remaining categories of genre awareness failed; they are hortatory exposition, discussion, review, anecdote, and report. Thus, none was categorized as good or very good. Each of these text types is explained further in their main types: narrative, descriptive, and argumentative.

3.1. Description of Genre Awareness of ELE Students on Narrative Texts

The following table is the result of data analysis on genre awareness of ELE students on narrative texts. Narrative texts are divided into narrative, recount, anecdote, news item, spoof, and report.

Table 2.
Genre awareness of ELE students on narrative text.

No	Genre	% of correct answers	Category
1.	Narrative	67.1	Average
2.	Recount	63.5	Average
3.	Anecdote	40.6	Failed
4.	News item	54.0	Poor
5.	Spoof	62.9	Average
6.	Report	28.5	Failed

From Table 2 above, it can be seen that the students' genre awareness towards narrative texts is average, poor, and failed. Of the total number of questions, the percentage of correct answers of the genre awareness with category average was narrative at 67.1%, followed by recount text at 63.5% and

spoof text at 62.9%. The genre awareness with category poor was news items text with 54%. Last, the genre awareness categorized as failed was anecdote text with 40.6%, and report text with 28.5%.

3.2. Description of Genre Awareness of ELE Students on Descriptive Texts

The following are the results of the analysis of the genre awareness of ELE students regarding descriptive text. Descriptive texts are divided into descriptive, explanatory, and procedure.

Table 3.
Students' genre awareness of descriptive text.

No	Genre	% of correct answers	Category
7.	Descriptive	55.2	Poor
8.	Explanatory	63.5	Average
9.	Procedure	65.6	Average

From the table above, it can be said that ELE students' genre awareness for descriptive texts was categorized as average and poor. The genre awareness for explanatory and procedure was average, with 65.6% correct answers for procedure text, followed by explanatory text with 63.5%. Students' genre awareness for descriptive text was poor, with 55.2% of correct answers.

3.3. Description of genre awareness of ELE students on Argumentative Texts

The following are the results of the data analysis of the genre awareness of ELE students on argumentative texts. Argumentative text is divided into analytical exposition, hortatory exposition, discussion, and review.

Table 4.
Students' genre awareness of argumentative text.

No	Genre	% of correct answers	Category
10	Analytical exposition	50.4	Poor
11	Hortatory exposition	42.3	Failed
12	Discussion	47.7	Failed
13	Review	42.7	Failed

The table above shows that the genre awareness of ELE students on the argumentative text was categorized into poor and failed. The students' genre awareness for analytical exposition text was poor, with only 50.4% of correct answers. Subsequently, the other text types are categorized as failed: discussion text with 47.7%, review text with 42.7%, and the last place is hortatory exposition text with 42.3%. Clearly, these numbers show students' lack of understanding and recognition of all the argumentative texts.

The unsatisfying result of the genre awareness of the ELE students is caused by the students' low understanding of each aspect of it. This is shown in the following graph, presenting the percentage of the correct answers for each aspect of genre awareness. The social function gained 30%, followed by identification of the text (28%), generic structure (24%), and lexico-grammatical features (18%).

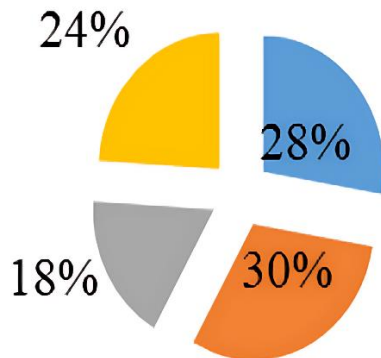


Figure 2.
Students' genre awareness on each aspect.

3.4. Students' Perceptions of Difficult Genres

The data from the questionnaire confirmed the test's result. The students perceived that the genres that they thought were the most difficult to identify were hortatory exposition text (72.9%) and analytical exposition text (68.8%). These two text types were the ones with genre awareness from the test, which were categorized as poor and failed.

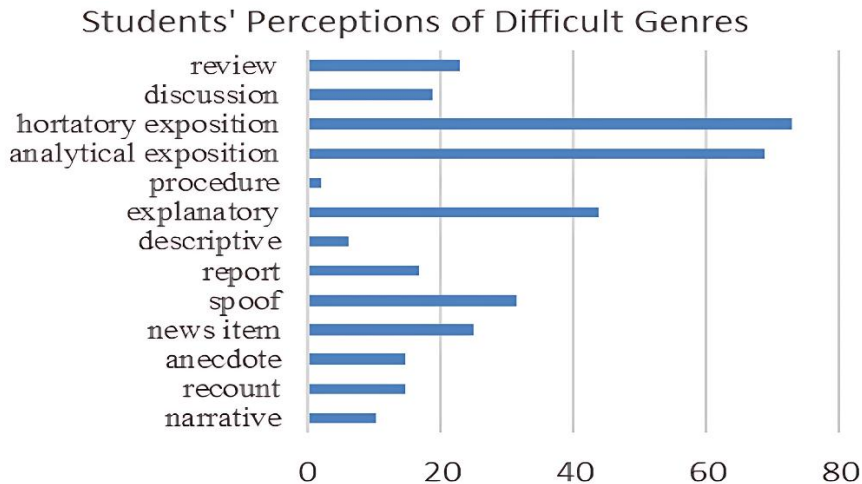


Figure 3.
Student perceptions of difficult genres.

Regarding text aspects that are considered difficult to identify, according to students, they are the significant lexico-grammatical features (87.5), then the generic structure (41.7). The other two aspects, identification (21.5%) and social function (12.5), gained less percentage.

Students' Perceptions of Difficult Genre Aspects

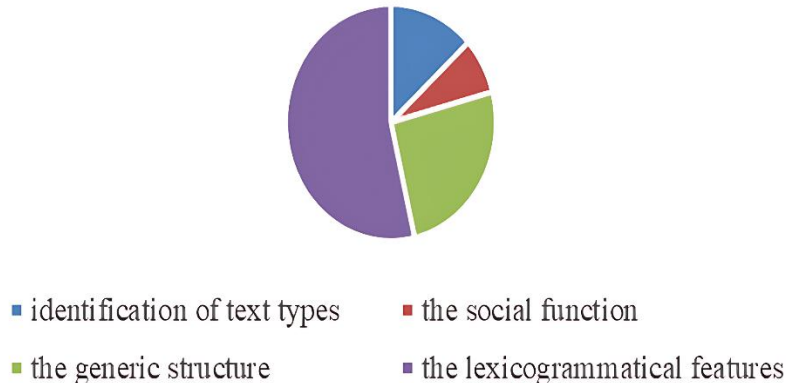


Figure 4.
Students' perceptions of difficult genre aspects.

The findings of the ELE students' genre awareness in an Indonesian university were not satisfying. Out of all the genre awareness of the 13 genres or text types, none was categorized as good or very good. The students' genre awareness was average for five texts and poor and failed for the rest of the text types. This study supports another related research on genre awareness of ELE students in different universities in Indonesia. The students had a very poor understanding of genres, as they were only able to answer 23% of the questions correctly [11]. Even though there were five genres tested in the study: explanation, exposition, discussion, review, and narrative, the results were almost the same. They only have a partial understanding of the basic structure and the most common language elements used in the texts of these five genres. One thing to point out from the study in West Sumatera is that the students had a slightly better understanding of exposition compared to other text types, such as explanatory, discussion, review, and narrative. However, this current study showed that students' genre awareness of narrative and explanatory text exceeded exposition. These two genres are categorized into average, while exposition (analytical exposition and hortatory exposition), discussion, and review were categorized as poor and failed.

There were not many significant differences found in the results of all 13 genres. For the category of narrative texts, from Table 2, it appears that the students had slightly better genre awareness for the narrative and recount texts than the other four genres: anecdote, news item, spoof, and report. The majority of students know the identification and the general construction of these two genres well. This is in line with the result of a study where most students understand narrative and recount since they are frequently explained in junior and senior high school [20]. Questions about genre identification and generic structure were often heard in high school, thus making it relatively easier for students to answer questions related to those.

Meanwhile, the most difficult genre for the students in narrative texts was report text. Indeed, the report text had the lowest percentage of correct answers of all 13 genres. Students tend to identify the report text incorrectly. When viewed from the generic structure, the report text is slightly similar to descriptive text, which is divided into general classification and description (in the report) and identification (in descriptive). What distinguishes them are lexico-grammatical features that focus on generic participants (report) and specific participants (descriptive) [21]. However, due to the weakness of the students themselves in their lexico-grammatical features (see Figure 3), the two texts were perceived the same by the students.

The students' genre awareness was also low for descriptive texts. For the three texts here, there were almost no differences in students' work in distinguishing texts and recognizing social functions,

generic structures, and lexico-grammatical features. For the argumentative text, it exhibits similarities to both the discussion text and the exposition text. Nonetheless, students' understanding of this text is less than that of an expository text. The most answerable question for students was about identifying text types and the purpose of discussion texts. They are unfamiliar with the typical format and language characteristics of these texts.

Some scholars identified the causes of students' problems with low genre awareness. For problems related to recount text, a teacher identified the cause as a lack of authentic text that can be found. "It is difficult to find recount texts. I only had two, and they were not authentic enough. I took them from textbooks" [22]. Another possibility was that the limitations of the text owned by the teacher caused the teacher to be unable to provide exposure to varied models (texts), so students assumed that the generic structure of a text was patent and did not change. This can be seen when students do the exercises to deconstruct narrative texts. In an activity, many students label the section according to the example given by the teacher, namely orientation — complication — evaluation — resolution. Meanwhile, in certain cases, there are several stories that have several conflicts (complications). It is possible to develop a genre by repeating some parts of certain stages. For example, there is one text (narrative) that has a conflict (complication) repeated several times. Furthermore, there is even text that starts the story with a conflict (flashback plot) [22]. These possible generic structures could not be explained as the model texts were limited.

Genre exposure and analysis can develop a better understanding of different text types. Students can become aware of the structure and patterns of the texts they are reading as they use reading strategies that are appropriate for each genre [12]. Thus, teachers are suggested to raise the students' awareness by explicitly teaching three elements that create genre specificity. The three elements are situational considerations of the genre texts, organizational structure, and linguistic features. These elements are to be taught in the instructional process stages as follows: a) the pre-reading/ listening stage, when students are prepared for the actual work with the text using activities meant to interest them in the topic and, at the same time, to familiarize them with the genre in question, and b) a combined while- and post-reading/ listening stage, when students use the acquired generic knowledge for a full comprehension of the written or oral text [23].

Teachers are also suggested to apply two approaches in teaching reading, particularly to increase genre awareness of novice students, namely learning communities and 'macro genres' [7]. Another idea is to guide students in applying their knowledge of genre structures to improve their reading skills. Teachers should lead students through three main activities, namely genre and context awareness activities, awareness activities genres and discourses, as well as genre and language awareness activities [10]. Through text comparison activities, teachers can encourage students to analyze the similarities and differences between texts, paying attention to genre-specific features. In addition, teachers also need to provide students a clear description of metacognitive reading skills, demonstrate how to use them and provide scaffolding so they may practice them while discussing a text.

4. Conclusion

The genre awareness of ELE students at a state university in Indonesia is generally low for narrative, descriptive, and argumentative texts. From the questionnaire distributed to students, the genres that they think are the most difficult to identify are hortatory exposition, analytical exposition, and explanatory. According to the students, the three texts that are easy or the least difficult to identify are procedure, descriptive, and narrative. Additionally, text aspects/factors considered difficult to identify are the significant lexico-grammatical features, generic structure, and social function.

Regarding the results of this study, lecturers of the English Language Education Study Program who are in charge of Reading courses need to provide further structured and guided exercises for text genres that students consider difficult. Moreover, students of the English Language Education Study Program need to enrich their knowledge of text genres by being more exposed to various text genres.

For further research, it is suggested that the subject can be expanded using different methods, investigating the cause of students' low genre awareness and providing more diverse texts.

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The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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