

# The Effect of Genre Approach to Improve University Students' Critical Thinking Skills

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## ABSTRACT

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The changing times have had an impact on educational orientation, which not only requires university graduates to master knowledge but also other skills, one of which is critical thinking skills. This study aims to determine the impact of using a genre-based approach on students' critical thinking skills through learning to write essays. This study uses a quasi-experimental design involving 54 students (experimental and control classes) taking writing course one at Muhammadiyah University of Palembang, South Sumatera, Indonesia. Data were collected using a written essay test which was then assessed using the critical thinking skills assessment rubric. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS 20.00 by performing paired sample t-test, independent sample t-test, and MANOVA. The group of students who used the genre approach was proven to improve critical thinking skills compared to the group that used the conventional method. In conclusion, teachers can consider using this alternative learning method to improve students' critical thinking skills.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The changing times that are happening at this time also impact all aspects of life, one of which is education. These changes have also changed the current educational paradigm, which focuses not only on basic literacy knowledge and skills. One of the 21st-century skills that today's students must master is critical thinking skills. These skills have attracted the attention of actors, stakeholders, and education observers (Stupple et al., 2017). Students with this ability can use reasoning and logic that focuses on everything that must be believed or done based on specific mechanisms (Pithers & Soden, 2001). There are two mechanisms referred to in this context: conducting conceptual analysis and providing arguments to solve problems or make decisions.

Although it has become the focus of modern education worldwide, the definition and concept of critical thinking are still a matter of debate today (Ku, 2009; Rudd, 2006). Experts define critical thinking in different ways and from various points of view. On the one hand, critical thinking is defined as

independent thinking that exemplifies the perfection of thinking following a particular domain (Ashfar et al., 2017). On the other hand, some experts consider critical thinking a mental process, strategy, and representation of a person in solving problems, making decisions, and learning new concepts (Willingham, 2007).

There are several benefits of critical thinking skills on students' personalities. With this skill, students will be assisted in paying attention to the context in which the actions and ideas they generate (Brunning et al., 2004). In addition, critical thinking also makes students sceptical of quick-fix solutions and single answers to universal truth problems. On the other hand, students will also be open to looking for other ways of looking at and behaving towards something (Ebadi & Rahimi, 2018; Halpern, 2001).

The existence of educational institutions as a place to teach critical thinking skills is still a lot of criticism until now (Radulovic & Stancic, 2017). Schools are considered not to teach critical thinking, so when they start entering the campus world, many still find that critical thinking skills are not their strongest side. This is also reinforced by the characteristics of current students as Generation Z, who have weaknesses in processing the information they get (Hampton & Keys, 2016). On the one hand, generation Z can access information quickly, but on the other hand, this generation is mostly unable to analyze and check the truth of the news it receives and is sometimes trapped in hoax news (Swanzen, 2018; Turner, 2015).

Critical thinking skills are skills that cannot stand alone. This skill follows other skills, one of which is language skills (Paul & Elder, 2008). One way to teach critical thinking skills is to teach writing lessons. Writing activities contribute to developing an understanding of critical thinking because writing manifests the thinking process (Alidmat & Ayassrah, 2017). This is based on the fact that writing is a medium to express and communicate the writer's thoughts. Another study claims that several writing activities can improve critical thinking skills: writing analytical essays, evaluating evidence or facts, writing reflective journals, writing comparative reports, and summarizing (Tuzlukova et al., 2018).

One form of writing that is taught to college students is an essay. The author's essays are writings compiled to convey an exciting theme by presenting data, facts, and arguments that support it (Oshima & Hogue, 2006). On the other hand, Meyers (2005) states that an essay can be said as an organized discussion about a specific topic in a collection of several paragraphs. Essays are included in the type of short writing consisting of an opening paragraph, several paragraphs in the essay's body, and a closing paragraph (Bailey, 2011; Kane, 2000; Smalley & Ruetten, 1986).

Essay writing can be a very complex and highly complex writing activity. In other words, writing this essay is related to the process of involving various aspects in it. The elements referred to in the essay writing activity are activities of collecting material, arranging the material into a logical and systematic order, using expressions that are in accordance with the choice of vocabulary and sentence construction, and selecting and using appropriate mechanical aspects such as punctuation, use of letters, capitalization, spelling and grammar (Fakeye & Ohia, 2016). For this reason, essay writing activities require skills that are not simple and must always be trained continuously.

The use of learning approaches or methods also affects student performance in writing. Experts recommend one approach to learning to write that is genre-based. This approach emerged because he considered that the two previous approaches had not yet had a favourable impact on student performance (Helaluddin et al., 2021). Both approaches are considered to tend to only focus on individual cognitive processes and writing skills. In other words, the two approaches override the importance of social constructs in learning to write (Khatibi, 2014).

A genre approach is an approach with the main focus on the social and cultural dimensions of language and text (Amogne, 2013). In this approach, genres are equated with social products and institutional contexts (Beck & Jeffery: 2009). This approach is expected to help students increase their awareness of the most challenging parts in conveying their autonomy focused on the reader/audience they want to address. In this context, the writer must choose specific features such as vocabulary, function, discourse, and writing style and also consider who the potential readers of the writing are

(Arteaga-lara, 2018). These features are a form of interaction between the author and the reader to determine the article's purpose to be easily understood. Furthermore, there are several stages of learning in the genre approach, namely (1) building the text, (2) modeling of the text, (3) joint construction of the text, and (4) independent construction of the text (Almacioglu & Okan, 2018; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Yan, 2005).

A genre-based approach is important to use in learning to write because of the various problems that occur in the classroom. Many teachers use a simple method of displaying a sample text and then asking students to duplicate it (Ghina, 2016). The same thing was also stated by other researchers who revealed that the approach to learning to write only refers to the process of duplicating sample texts and focuses on grammatical aspects only (Adnyana et al., 2017; Heffernan, 2006). This condition is considered not to provide opportunities for students to develop because they ignore aspects of autonomy and social constructs (Dewle, 2017). Thus, a genre-based approach should be implemented to improve students' writing and critical thinking skills.

There are several previous studies linking the genre approach with learning to write. For the high school level, Haryanti & Sari (2019) stated that this approach has proven to affect the ability of high school students to write narrative texts. On the other hand, two other studies also raised the same theme, and the results showed that the genre approach had a positive impact on students' writing skills (Irwansyah, 2016; Listriyawati, 2021). For contexts outside Indonesia, several studies also showed the same result that the genre approach was proven to increase their metacognitive awareness, understanding of "interpersonal meaning", and their positive attitude toward improving their writing skills (Almacioglu & Okan, 2018; Lap & Truc, 2014; Nagao, 2019).

From some of these studies, aspects of critical thinking skills seem to have escaped the attention of researchers. The majority of these studies only focus on efforts to achieve writing skills without involving other aspects that are no less important. In other words, further research is needed to investigate the impact of a genre-based approach on improving students' critical thinking skills through learning to write. Critical thinking skills must be part of today's educational and learning goals because the demands of 21st-century work have included them in the four primary skills. The research question is how the influence of the genre approach on students' critical thinking skills compared to conventional methods.

## 2. METHODS

### Design & Participants

This research is a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design with a pretest-posttest control group. The choice of this design is adjusted to the research objective, which is to prove the effectiveness of a genre-based approach in improving students' critical thinking skills. This research was conducted from February to April 2022 at the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Study Program, Muhammadiyah University of Palembang, Indonesia.

The participants of this study were all 2nd-semester students who were taking advanced writing courses consisting of 4 study groups. The researcher applied a purposive sampling technique because, in the quasi-experimental design, there was no selective selection of participants (Campbell & Stanley, 2015; Fraenkel et al., 2011). The participants were selected based on several considerations in line with the research objectives. The researcher randomly determined the experimental or control groups from the four groups to choose the experimental or control groups. The total participants of this study were 54 students consisting of the experimental group of 28 people and the control group of 26 people.

### Instruments

#### 1) Essay Writing

The data collection of this research was carried out by carrying out a pretest and posttest and writing an argumentative essay. Participants from both groups were asked to write an argumentative essay with the theme of social issues that are currently being discussed. In this study, the pretest and

posttest applied were writing essays with the same theme and were not allowed to choose a different theme. The recommended essay writing system is an essay structure consisting of: (1) an opening paragraph, (2) an essay body, and (3) a closing paragraph (Oshima & Hogue, 2006).

## 2) Critical Thinking Skill Rubric

The second instrument used in this research is the critical thinking assessment rubric through essay writing activities. That is, critical thinking skills are measured based on several aspects contained in their writing. The critical thinking rubric used in this study was adapted from the Illinois Critical Thinking Essay Test (ICTET) developed by Finken & Ennis (1993). This rubric uses a scale of 6 by measuring several features of students' critical thinking based on student writing, namely: (a) focus, (b) supporting reasons, (c) reasoning, (d) organization, (e) conventions, and (f) integration (Amrous dan Nejmaoui, 2017; Nejmaoui, 2019). For this study, the researcher adopted the rubric by simplifying it into four scales, as shown in table 1.

Table 1. Critical Thinking Skills Assessment Rubric in Essay Writing

Variabel	Sub-variabel	Indicator	Score
Focus	The extent to which the main ideas, themes, and points of view are conveyed and defended	No idea or theme & insufficient length of writing	1
		There is an idea or theme, but it is not clear that the article's length is sufficient.	2
		The idea or theme is clear, located at the beginning of the text but is still general.	3
		The idea or theme is clear, is located at the beginning of the text, & is explicitly presented.	4
Supporting reason	The extent to which the reasons and supporting evidence are clear & reliable and come from credible sources	No arguments & no credible referral sources	1
		There are arguments presented, but they all come from inaccurate sources	2
		There is one argument/evidence that is still vague, while the others are clear	3
		All sources/evidence/reasons presented are credible and trustworthy	4
Reasoning	The extent to which conclusions are made and supported by reasons or evidence, precise arguments, & well-presented alternatives	No conclusions, no arguments elaborated, & no alternatives are offered	1
		There are only 1 of the three aspects presented (conclusion, argument, & alternative)	2
		There are two aspects presented in the text	3
		The three aspects are stated clearly and completely	4
Organizational	The extent to which the flow of ideas is logically organized, and the structure of the text is clear & connected.	There is no visible structure in writing, there is no cohesion & coherence, & the parts are not related	1
		The structure of the writing is visible, the cohesion & coherence are not visible, and the parts are still not unified	2
		The structure of the text is clear, and cohesion & coherence are related, but there is still one part that deviates	3
		The writing structure, cohesion/coherence, and part structure are visible and unified	4

Conventions	Writing convention usage: - Major errors: sentence structure, non-standard words, diction, effective sentences. - Minor errors: typo, punctuation, capitalization, etc.	Text is difficult to understand/read, sentence construction is problematic, & there are three or more major & minor errors	1
		There is a maximum of two major errors and two minor errors	2
		There is a maximum of 1 major error and one minor error	3
		There are no major or minor errors	4
Integration	The extent to which the writing is clear and under the standards of the assigned task	The article does not meet the criteria because it does not discuss the specified topic & the length of the article is not adequate (too short of expressing an idea that it carries)	1
		The article has tried to discuss the topic/feature, but it is only a surface overview.	2
		The article's length is sufficient, but there are still often confusing points.	3
		The arguments are well presented, but one feature is underdeveloped.	4

### Data Analysis

The data from the pretest and posttest of writing essays assessed using the critical thinking assessment rubric were then analyzed quantitatively using the SPSS 20 application. At this stage, the researcher conducted several data analyses to determine the average value, standard deviation, t-test, and one-way Multivariate Analysis of Variate (MANOVA). The researcher ran a paired sample t-test to determine whether there was a significant improvement in students' critical thinking skills in writing essays. The researchers compared the advancement of these skills between the experimental group using the genre approach and the control class using the conventional method. Another stage of analysis carried out by the researcher was to run a one-way MANOVA test to control the effect of covariates on the posttest of the two study groups.

### Procedure

As previously discussed, the design of this study used two groups, namely the experimental and control groups. For the control class, the researcher applied treatment with a conventional approach which consisted of several stages of writing, namely: (1) showing an example essay, (2) analyzing the structure of the essay, (3) compiling a draft, and (4) writing an essay independently. On the other hand, for the experimental group, the researcher applied a genre-based approach as proposed by Cope & Kalantzis (2000) and Yan (2005), which consisted of several stages, namely:

#### 1) Building the text

The lecturer lays out the definition of an essay and explains several types of essays. In addition, the lecturer also described several arguments about the importance of being proficient in essay writing.

#### 2) Modeling of the text

In this phase, the lecturer presents an example of an argumentative essay by explaining several parts of an essay. Such as the opening paragraph, the body of the essay, and the closing paragraph. In addition, the lecturer also mentions several essential aspects of an essay, such as a thesis statement, sentences that interest the reader, and others.

#### 3) Joint construction of the text

In the third phase, the lecturer divided the experimental group into several groups with the task of compiling a writing framework. In addition, students are also directed to look for various references that support the theme of their writing.

4) Independent construction of the text

The final phase in the genre-based approach is writing the essay independently. The recommended essay themes are social issues that are currently being discussed.

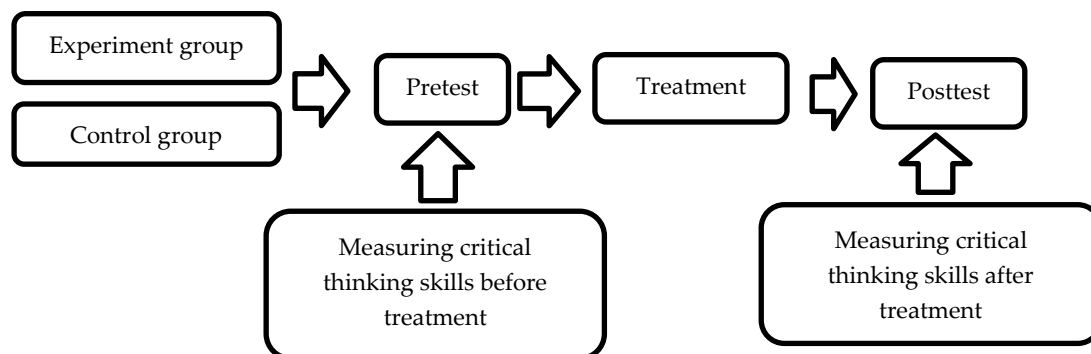


Figure 1. Research flow

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Both control and experimental classes were analyzed from the pretest and posttest data by running a paired sample test to determine the mean score, standard deviation, and standard error mean. The analysis results showed that the average score in the posttest session was higher than in the pretest session. These results apply to both groups, both experimental and control groups. In total, the results of the analysis are presented in table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Foc-Pre-Ex	1.96	28	.576	.109
Foc-Post-Ex	3.21	28	.568	.107
Foc-Pre-Cont	2.12	26	.516	.101
Foc-Post-Cont	2.27	26	.533	.105
Supp-Pre-Ex	1.79	28	.315	.060
Supp-Post-Ex	3.14	28	.576	.109
Supp-Pre-Cont	1.88	26	.431	.085
Supp-Post-Cont	2.19	26	.491	.096
Rea-Pre-Ex	1.79	28	.568	.107
Rea-Post-Ex	2.93	28	.539	.102
Rea-Pre-Cont	1.81	26	.491	.096
Rea-Post-Cont	2.08	26	.560	.110
Org-Pre-Ex	2.36	28	.678	.128
Org-Post-Ex	3.07	28	.466	.088
Org-Pre-Cont	2.08	26	.688	.135
Org-Post-Cont	2.54	26	.508	.100
Conv-Pre-Ex	2.18	28	.476	.090
Conv-Post-Ex	3.43	28	.504	.095
Conv-Pre-Cont	2.31	26	.471	.092
Conv-Post-Cont	2.54	26	.710	.139
Int-Pre-Ex	2.36	28	.678	.128
Int-Post-Ex	3.57	28	.504	.095
Int-Pre-Cont	2.46	26	.582	.114
Int-Post-Cont	2.81	26	.634	.124

Furthermore, table 3 presents the results of research data analysis to know whether there is an effect of using a genre-based approach on improving students' critical thinking skills. From the table, information is obtained that the two approaches affect increasing students' critical thinking skills. The increase occurred in six aspects of critical thinking skills, namely: (1) focus, (2) supporting reason, (3) reasoning, (4) organization, (5) convention, and (6) integration. That is, from tables 2 and 3, it can be concluded that genre-based and conventional approaches are proven to be able to develop students' critical thinking skills.

Table 3. Paired Sample t-test

	Paired differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. Error mean	Lower	Upper			
Focus (Ex)	-1.250	.701	.132	-1.522	-.978	-9.442	27	.000
Supp (Ex)	-1.143	.591	.112	-1.372	-.914	-10.234	27	.000
Rea (Ex)	-1.143	.705	.133	-1.416	-.869	-8.575	27	.000
Org (Ex)	-.714	.763	.144	-1.010	-.418	-4.954	27	.000
Conv (Ex)	-1.250	.585	.111	-1.477	-1.023	-11.301	27	.000
Int (Ex)	-1.214	.917	.173	-1.570	-.859	-7.005	27	.000
Focus (Con)	-.154	.675	.132	-.426	.119	-1.162	25	.256
Supp (Con)	-.308	.618	.121	-.557	-.058	-2.540	25	.018
Rea (Con)	-.269	.669	.131	-.539	.000	-2.059	25	.050
Org (Con)	-.462	.706	.138	-.747	-.176	-3.333	25	.003
Conv (Con)	-.462	.811	.159	-.789	-.134	-2.900	25	.008
Int (Con)	-.346	.892	.175	-.706	-.014	-1.979	25	.059

Table 4. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	Pretest	.188 <sup>a</sup>	1	.188	.050	.824
	Posttest	284.791 <sup>b</sup>	1	284.791	75.122	.000
Intercept	Pretest	8554.188	1	8554.188	2.283E3	.000
	Posttest	15496.569	1	15496.569	4.088E3	.000
Skill	Pretest	.188	1	.188	.050	.824
	Posttest	284.791	1	284.791	75.122	.000
Error	Pretest	194.849	52	3.747		
	Posttest	197.135	52	3.791		
Total	Pretest	8758.000	54			
	Posttest	16156.000	54			
Corrected Total	Pretest	195.037	53			
	Posttest	481.926	53			

a. R Squared = .001 (Adjusted R Squared = -.018)

b. R Squared = .591 (Adjusted R Squared = .583)

Finally, the results of data analysis from the one-way MANOVA test are presented in table 4. The one-way MANOVA was carried out to determine the different scores of students' posttest scores through essay writing activities on six (6) aspects of critical thinking skills. This test was applied to both groups, both experimental and control groups. Table 4 shows a relationship between a genre-based approach and critical thinking skills with a score of .050 and a significance of .824. In conclusion, the genre-based approach affects students' critical thinking skills in all aspects (6 aspects) univariately.

Based on the descriptions in the previous sections, this study aims to prove the effectiveness of a genre-based approach on students' critical thinking skills through learning to write essays. This skill is one of the skills that college graduates must master and is part of the Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). This means that these skills are not only taught at the high school level but are also an essential part of courses at universities (Forbes, 2018). Various elements of society engaged in education, such as educators, policymakers, and entrepreneurs, have agreed to support the learning process of critical thinking skills as essential life skills and assets for the workforce in the future (Huber & Kuncel, 2016). In addition, critical thinking aspects also play a crucial role in academic activities to develop and improve students' critical thinking skills (Franco, 2016; Grant & Smith, 2018).

Until now, experts are not unanimous in defining this skill, and it even tends to cause controversy. On the one hand, some experts consider that critical thinking skills are still in the form of abstract concepts and lack a shared understanding (Behrooznia et al., 2014). Assadi et al. (2013) emphasized that the definition agreed upon by experts and practitioners about critical thinking is very "scary" because the concept is still vague and unclear. This skill is the "art of thinking" about the mind when we think to make our thinking better, clearer, accurate, and defensible (Mehta & Al-Mahrooqi, 2015). In line with this statement, Bouanani (2015) explained that critical thinking is a means to generate new ideas and process them with existing knowledge summarized in analysis, understanding, and synthesis activities used as strategies for processing the information they receive.

Critical thinking skills are considered essential for students because they can help them verify and prove the truth of their information based on evidence, logic, and awareness of bias (Larsson, 2017). Furthermore, skills also play a role in determining what a person should do (Karakoç, 2016; Radulović & Stančić, 2017). Students need to be trained to develop these skills to become individuals who have a focus, find solutions to the problems they face, and conduct comprehensive analyzes to conclude (Ulger, 2018).

The results showed that the genre process approach could improve students' critical thinking skills in learning to write essays. In this case, two focuses need to be discussed, namely the relationship between writing activities and the use of a genre-based approach that can improve critical thinking skills. The results of this study are contrary to the analysis proposed by Rahmat et al. (2020), which states that the writing process has nothing to do with critical thinking skills. However, several previous studies are in line with the findings of this study. Students as writers can develop critical thinking skills even though, in practice, they face various challenges (Zhang, 2018). Unlike these findings, Bouanani (2015) also states that critical thinking can be improved through dialogue and reflective writing. The effect of writing activities on critical thinking skills can also be developed by choosing topics that are familiar to students when they do writing activities (Indah, 2017).

Various language teaching materials have also developed the relationship between writing activities and thinking skills, especially writing skills. This is based on the fact that writing is considered a vehicle that students can use to express their critical thinking (Nadri & Azhar, 2016). The same thing was stated by Alidmat & Ayassrah (2017), which noted that these skills could be improved through writing assignments. This relates to the definition of writing as a medium of expression and communication. With writing activities, students can enhance their way of thinking through the efforts of each individual to make his ideas explicit in written form.

Another focus of this research is using a genre-based approach in learning to write essays. This approach aims to provide an equal portion of the genre aspect with other aspects (Helaluddin et al., 2020). The results of this study prove that a genre-based approach has the potential to improve student's

critical thinking skills. The genre-based approach arises because it considers the process and product approach only focused on individual cognitive processes and writing skills and tends to override the importance of existing social constructions. The genre has become one of the most important and influential concepts in language learning (Khatibi, 2014). For this reason, this genre-based approach is recommended by experts and researchers to be applied in learning to write.

The genre-based approach is a concept of a writing learning approach that emphasizes the social and cultural dimensions of language and text (Amogne, 2013). The term genre is also synonymous with a product of social and institutional context (Beck & Jeffery, 2009). This approach focuses on the reader or audience the writing is intended to address. In this context, the writer must choose specific features such as vocabulary, function, discourse, and writing style and also consider who the potential readers of the writing are (Arteaga-lara, 2018). In other words, the writer must interact with the reader to determine the paper's purpose so that it is easy to understand. It is hoped that it can help students increase their awareness of the most challenging parts of conveying their autonomy.

Thus, it can be concluded that the genre approach is an appropriate approach to be used as an alternative for teachers to improve writing skills and critical thinking skills. This approach is considered ideal because it also covers the social aspect (readers) as part of writing activities. A writer must also pay attention to the aspect of the reader who must be involved in writing activities. Thus, readers who have been considered people outside the circle must be applied to enjoy the resulting writing.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that the genre-based approach has a positive impact on the development and improvement of critical thinking skills in learning to write essays. The genre approach is one of the writing learning methods considered better than the other two approaches, namely the product and process-based approaches. The genre-based approach is considered more comprehensive because it focuses on the linguistic aspect and provides an equal portion of the audience aspect as one of the social constructs. This reader aspect distinguishes it from the other two approaches that students must consider as writers. With these results, it is hoped that teachers will view this genre-based approach as an alternative option in teaching academic writing, especially essay writing. Furthermore, it is expected that researchers will continue this research by focusing on other text genres, such as non-scientific writing, such as writing short stories, writing poetry, and others.

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