

Sydney School strategies for developing generic competence of Pakistani undergraduates: The teachers' perspective

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ABSTRACT: Though, like other parts of the world, academic genre analysis has been a widely researched area in Pakistan, the application of this research for developing generic competence of learners of English has largely been an unattended area. With an understanding of this vacuum in Pakistan, the purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perspective on strategies based on Sydney School genre studies for meta-awareness and acquisition of disciplinary discourses. The study, based on the PhD research, was grounded in social epistemology, systemic-functional linguistics, and learning through social mediation. The Sydney School approach, being closely modelled on these theories, was employed to define learning procedures and resources for generic competence. To achieve the research objectives, questionnaire survey was used to collect quantitative data from 60 teachers of compulsory English selected purposively from single and mixed discipline classes of two public and two private universities located in Lahore. The descriptive and inferential analyses of data indicate that Pakistani teachers largely employ Sydney School strategies with genre based materials for BS compulsory English. The study has implications for developing meta-communicative competence, text based learning resources, and optimally utilizing English Literature for multidisciplinary academic English.

Keywords: Generic competence, Sydney School strategies, Discipline based English, BS level compulsory English

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One major function of a modern university is to provide skilled workforce to a country for survival in the knowledge based economy. This is, however, possible if the human product of the universities, among other skills, possesses competence in the use of English. (Seargeant, & Erling, 2013). For the purpose of this competence, English has been taught as a compulsory subject up to the undergraduate level in Pakistan. But this study of English spanned over years is badly exposed at the workplaces. Shamim (2011) ascribes this situation to the neglect of English for academic and professional purposes at the tertiary level. To counter this deficiency, universities should teach English to orientate students to the discourse conventions accepted in a specific community of practice for knowledge creation and communication (Kuteeva, & Negretti, 2016).

For this purpose, the Higher Education Commission (HEC onwards), Pakistan, introduced compulsory English in all subject disciplines at undergraduate level (Ashraf, Hakim, & Zulfiqar, 2014). These courses were needed because general English alone has not been adequate to socialize the incoming undergraduates into the academic culture and disciplinary genres to study at an English medium university (Hyland, 2006).

Bhatia (2004) believes that the generic competence enables the undergraduates “to select the appropriate set of genres (or system of genres) to suit a rhetorical purpose in a specific professional, disciplinary or workplace context...” (p.145). But he clarifies that generic competence is only one part of academic discourse competence. It must be complemented with the practical part that is “genre performance”. It shows that discourse competence requires to enable undergraduates to relate knowledge and skills (disciplines) with actions (academic/professional performance) (Poole,2009).

Applied linguists since Swales’ (1981) and Bhatia’s (1993) pioneer works in the area of applied genre analysis have offered genre based strategies to connect genre knowledge and performance. Flowerdew (2002) has, very comprehensively, classified all these approaches and strategies into linguistic (developed in Linguistics) and ethnographic/ New Rhetorical categories. He says that all these approaches draw upon textual knowledge and contextual factors and functions. The analysts following linguistic approaches including English for Specific Purposes (ESP onwards) (Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 2004), Corpus Linguists (e.g.,

Biber, 2006), and the Sydney School (e.g., Rothery, 1996, and her colleagues) interpret context with textual analysis whereas New Rhetoricians with a sociological orientation (e.g., Devitt, Rieff, & Bawarshi, 2004) tend to interpret text with contextual analysis. In these sociological approaches, texts and contexts are inalienably linked with each other and combine to perform different functions in communication within the same or different discourse communities. Genres function as instrument at individual level, meta-communicative at discourse community level, and socio-political at the broader level (as in critical discourse analysis) (Kain, 2005).

Sometimes the genre approaches are classified with respect to whether the learner is native or non-native, but integration always remains an overriding option (Freedman, 2005). This blending is desirable as the explicit linguistics based approaches stimulate genre acquisition while the implicit ethnographic approaches develop genre awareness and both contribute to genre competence (Johns, 2008). To a large extent, Sydney School strategies can be considered a model of integration of both type of approaches (Johns, 2002).

The Sydney School perspective on genre, originated and developed mainly in Australia in 1980s and 1990s, approximates the ideals of social epistemology that sees disciplinary knowledge as social construction by expert members of a discourse community. The genre theory and pedagogy that bring social constructionism in English language classes are rooted in the Systemic-Functional Linguistics and Vygotsky's theory of cultural mediation (see Halliday, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978). The Sydney School perspective is preferred in this study because it is "perhaps the most clearly articulated approach to genre both theoretically and pedagogically" (Hyland, 2007, p. 153). The stages of classroom procedure based on the Sydney School are conditioned with the degree of scaffolding required for genre learning (please see Appendix A).

The Sydney School approach is unique as it provides systematic procedures to determine WHAT (content) and HOW (academic tasks and learning resources) for Academic English (EAP onwards). Feez and Joyce (1998) define language learning as learning texts (linguistic forms) and their functions in discourse. It means that the course content will consist of text-types/genres used in the target discourse community which will be delivered through individual and joint scaffolding by the teacher during academic activities.

A closer look at Feez and Joyce's framework shows that general purpose course books and materials cannot not work with genre based EAP (compulsory English for undergraduates in this study). Some researchers (e.g., Hyland, 2006) prefer teacher selected real life resources to commercial materials and some, such as Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), support that learners' self-produced materials are also a worthwhile resource. These days, technology based teaching has, admittedly, impacted the development and exploitation of learning resources for language teaching (Read, 2015). The classroom applications of corpora (O'Keeffe, McCarthy & Carter, 2007) and the Internet resources have made possible authenticity of course materials and connectivity across diverse local and international discourse communities (Arno- Macia, 2012). The studies conducted in Hong Kong (Dreyfus, Humphrey, Mahboob, & Martin, 2016), Singapore (Bhatia, 1993), and multilingual Europe on English and non-English versions of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) (Lorenzo, 2016) are some of the mentionable applications of the Sydney School approach to EAP.

It never means that Pakistani researchers did not make any worthwhile contribution in academic discourse analysis. The huge body of research available on academic genres can be presented as a glaring proof (Umm-e-Habiba, 2018; Shahzad, & Sohail, 2012; Azher, & Mahmood, 2016 to cite a few). Masroor (2016) has even come up with a step by step classroom procedure in line with the New Rhetorical approach. But the main hurdles in bringing this research in EAP classes in Pakistani universities are lack of recognition of an EAP specific pedagogy, professional competence and availability of quality text/genre based course materials (Mansoor, 2003). More serious problems than these, using words of Hyland (2009), are "the assumption that there is a single, overarching literacy which students have failed to master before they get to the university... and this deficit can be corrected by a few top-up English classes" (pp. 8-9).

Prior to any solution, it is necessary to understand the potential roots of these issues. The beginning should be made by exploring Pakistani teachers' perspective on strategies and resources used for teaching compulsory English at undergraduate level. This investigation is particularly important because, ultimately, developing generic competence through compulsory English heavily depends on what

teachers think and do to attain this purpose. (The perceptions of the undergraduates and how far praxis conforms to the perceptions have been investigated somewhere else by the researchers). This study is confined only to these objectives: (1) to explore teachers' perceptions of the strategies used for teaching compulsory English to BS classes; (2) to ascertain teachers' perceptions about the choice of learning resources for teaching compulsory English to BS classes; and (3) to find variations in teachers' perceptions in terms of demographic variables. To achieve these objectives, following research questions were addressed: (1) What do teachers of compulsory English perceive about strategies for teaching compulsory English to the BS classes? (2) How do teachers of compulsory English view their choice of resources for teaching compulsory English to BS classes? (3) To what extent do teachers vary in their perceptions with respect to demographic variables? (Parts of data collection and analysis given in tables (1-4) have been taken from the PhD thesis of the first writer).

Participants and data collection

Keeping in view the objectives of this study, questionnaire survey was used. Out of 21 general universities in Lahore (<http://hec.gov.pk>), two public and two private universities were selected using the main criterion that they had established departments of English, Economics, Education, Mass Communication, and Sociology. Besides, these universities offered compulsory English to the undergraduates in single or mixed discipline classes at these departments.

From these four universities, 60 teachers of BS compulsory English were selected using purposeful sampling but data provided by 55 teachers was usable in the analysis. Out of 55 teachers, 29 (52.73%) taught at the public and 26 (47.27%) at the private universities; 19 (34.54%) taught compulsory English in BS classes held separately at the respective departments (single discipline) and 36 (65.45%) in mixed discipline classes; and 31 (56.4%) were male whereas 24 (43.6%) were female.

For the survey, eight 6-point Likert type items on strategies and five on the choice of learning resources for BS compulsory English were included in the teachers' questionnaire (minimum 4 items on both factors as suggested by Dornyei, 2003). The response categories in strategies section were from "Never" to "Always" and those in the learning resources section ranged from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree".

Information was also collected on three demographic variables: status/sector of the teacher's university; type of class s/he taught (single/mixed discipline); and gender. This background data was used to find out variation in teachers' perceptions. The item consistency rates (Cronbach values) of the two sections were .894 and .656 respectively in the final questionnaire (minimum .60 is also acceptable in applied linguistics. See Dornyei, 2007, p.207). After getting informed consent from the participants, questionnaires were self-administered according to a mutually decided schedule to ensure maximum response rate of teachers' questionnaire (97%).

Data analysis

The quantitative data obtained through the questionnaires was analyzed statistically using SPSS (v 22). Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) was employed to provide a summary of the questionnaire data. To see whether overall item means were significantly distanced from the cut-off value, one-sample *t*-test was applied. For comparison of mean differences on the basis of demographic variables, *t*-test for independent samples was run with the effect size. The choice of these measures was made in pursuance of the objectives set for this study.

Results

The analyses of mean scores for the teaching strategies and choice of learning resources and significance of mean differences at the cut-off point ($M=3.5$) are shown in Table 1. The results in Table1 regarding teaching strategies show that all mean scores of the teachers' responses are greater than 3.5. It suggests that the teachers frequently taught BS compulsory English using strategies (items 1-8) comparable with the Sydney School approach. This result is also supported by one-sample *t*-test which shows that all mean differences are significant ($p<.05$). But, at item level, highest variation from 3.5 ($M= 4.40$, $SD= 1.40$) has been reported on "I engage students in tasks focused on comparisons of text-types across subject areas" (item 6).

The results about the choice of learning resources show that all mean scores of teachers' responses are greater than 3.5 (cut-off mean). It indicates that teachers had agreement on their selection of learning resources (items1-5) appropriate for teaching BS compulsory English following the Sydney School approach. This agreement is also supported

by results of the one-sample *t*-test that show all mean differences as significant ($p < .05$). However, at item level, the result of item 3 “I adapt resources for teaching general academic English for discipline based teaching” is notable with closest agreement ($M = 4.93$, $SD = .959$).

Table 1. Summary of Teachers' perceptions of Strategies and Learning Resources for Teaching BS Compulsory English ($N = 55$)

		<i>df</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean differences*</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Teaching Strategies</i>							
1	I start teaching with texts used in familiar social situations (e.g. email, invitations, etc.).	54	4.18	1.321	4.182	23.483	.000
2	I lecture on the text types frequently used in the subject area of my students (e.g. in Sociology, Economics, etc.)	54	3.91	1.365	3.909	21.246	.000
3	I highlight form and features of a text type with oral and spoken models.	54	4.62	1.194	4.618	28.685	.000
4	I involve students in tasks based on comparison and contrast of text types (e.g., job interview vs. informal interview).	54	4.78	1.287	4.782	27.564	.000
5	I engage students in tasks based on blending of text types (e.g., reference to religion, history etc. in an essay).	54	4.35	1.377	4.345	23.398	.000
6	I engage students in tasks focused on comparison of text types across subject areas (e.g., narratives in literature and in ads).	54	4.40	1.396	4.400	23.379	.000
7	I give group tasks on comparison and contrast of grammar and vocabulary features of text types (e.g., clauses in “how-to-do” essays and in arguments).	54	4.44	1.259	4.436	26.143	.000
8	I follow the techniques of teaching suggested in standard course outline of HEC, Pakistan.	54	4.49	1.373	4.491	24.264	.000
<i>Learning Resources</i>							
1	I use commercially available EAP (English for academic	54	4.35	1.364	4.345	23.630	.000

	purposes) textbooks.						
2	I seek guidelines of the subject teachers in selecting or developing my own teaching materials/resources.	54	4.44	1.302	4.436	25.271	.000
3	I adapt resources for teaching general academic English for discipline based teaching.	54	4.93	.959	4.927	38.086	.000
4	I use only the resources / books recommended in the HEC Pakistan's course outlines.	54	4.00	1.599	4.000	18.557	.000
5	I use electronic text collections as resources when and where relevant and technically viable.	54	4.64	1.379	4.636	24.929	.000

$p < .05$

*Mean difference cut-point=3.5

Table 2. Comparison of Mean Scores Based on Status of University (N=55).

Components	Public (n=29)		Private (n=26)		Independent Samples <i>t</i> -test				
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mean diff.	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig</i>	<i>t</i> (53)	<i>p</i>
Strategies for Teaching BS Compulsory English	4.47	0.79	4.36	0.91	0.12	0.353	.555	.523	.603
Choice of learning resources for teaching of BS compulsory English	4.48	0.74	4.74	0.71	-0.26	0.105	.748	1.330	.189

$p < .05$

Table 2 shows results of independent samples *t*-test run to explore difference in perceptions of teachers of public and private universities. There was no significant difference in the means for public and private university teachers on strategies of teaching and choice of learning resources for BS compulsory English ($p > .05$ for both the components).

Table 3. Comparison of Mean Scores for Class Composition (N=55)

Components	Single discipline classes (n=19)		Mixed discipline classes (n=36)		Independent Samples <i>t</i> -test				
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean diff.</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig</i>	<i>t</i> (53)	<i>p</i>
Strategies for Teaching BS Compulsory English	4.49	0.90	4.38	0.82	.11151	.298	.587	.450	.656
Choice of learning resources for teaching of BS compulsory English	4.53	0.88	4.64	0.65	-.11009	4.898	.031	-.477	.637

p < .05

Table 3 presents results of independent samples t-test run to explore difference in the teachers' views with reference to class composition. There was no significant difference in mean scores for teachers who taught BS compulsory English in single discipline classes (university A) and for those who taught mixed discipline classes (universities B, C, & D) on teaching strategies and choice of learning resources ($p > .05$ for both the components).

Table 4. Comparison of Mean Scores for Gender (n=55)

Components	Male (n=31)		Female (n=24)		Independent Samples t-test					
	M	SD	M	SD	Mean diff.	F	Sig	t(53)	p	Eta-squared
Strategies for teaching BS Compulsory English	4.63	0.75	4.15	0.89	0.48	2.51	.119	2.180	.034	.082
Choice of learning resources for teaching of BS compulsory English	4.71	0.75	4.46	0.70	0.25	0.34	.564	1.256	.215	-

Note. Interpretation of Eta-squared: .01 (small), .06 (moderate), .14 (large) (Pallant, 2016).
 $p < .05$

Table 4 shows results of independent samples t-test run to find difference in teachers' views with reference to gender. The test indicated significant difference only in the means for male and female teachers on the teaching strategies: $t(53) = 2.180$, $p = .034$. But the actual difference in mean scores (eta-squared = .082) was moderate. The test indicated no significant difference in the mean scores for male and female teachers on the choice of learning resources for BS compulsory English ($p > .05$).

Discussion

The results of this study reveal that teachers of BS compulsory English at the four selected universities usually used teaching strategies convergent with the Sydney School approach for developing generic competence. It means an appropriate approach was being followed to deliver genre based EAP course to the undergraduates. But these results are starkly different from the results of other studies (e.g., Sultan, Afsar, & Abbas, 2019) which reported lecturing as the dominant strategy for teaching undergraduate level English. The results of this study also draw attention

to the teachers' tendency to ignore cross-disciplinary genre comparisons. This practice, over the time, may result in blocking meta-awareness inevitable for learning disciplinary and new genres (Kain, 2005). The findings of this study amply suggest that teachers do not expose the undergraduates to the independent text production strategy.

Results of the study also suggest that teachers in the sample made choice of learning resources fit for implementing the Sydney School genre approach for teaching BS compulsory English. Besides, the teachers seem to understand that genre based teaching of English could not be effective without using authentic course materials (as suggested by Bhatia, 1993). But a very close degree of agreement was noted in the sample on using adapted general purpose academic English. This result gets support from a study conducted on learning resources at a large state sector Pakistani university (Raza, & Akhter, 2015).

Teachers also perceived (though less consistently) that they used corpora based resources, if needed and available. However, this finding is contradicted by other studies (e.g., Asgher, Mahmood, & Asgher, 2018). A possible explanation of these conflicting results in Pakistan's context is lack of availability of genre based learning resources/course books as was found in studies by Dar (2010) and Irshad and Anwar (2018). For the use of corpora resources, even accessibility and technical support are useless until teachers of English are tech savvy (HEC Annual Report, 2015) and know how to extract and interpret data from a corpus.

When teachers' perspectives were compared on the basis of the sector of their university, it was found that the choice of strategies and learning resources for BS compulsory English were the same in public and private universities. A possible explanation, with everything else being constant, may be the same course content and recommended resources used in all universities of Pakistan under the guidelines of the Federal HEC. Further, teachers in Asian countries like Pakistan tend to think that the compulsory English for BS classes is similar to a foundation/study skills course for university studies (Basturkman, 2006) or they think that compulsory English means the study of English Literature. In this background the possibility of same teaching strategies and course materials is quite understandable.

The variable of class composition of BS compulsory English provides a valuable insight into the teachers' perspective. In the three out of the four

sampled universities, compulsory English was taught in mixed discipline classes but no difference was found in the choice of strategies and learning resources. A possible explanation is that teachers and the universities tend to think that BS compulsory English is just a core study skills course. This approach definitely works well with a foundation course for the freshmen (Hyland,2006) but not with the advanced stages which should be discipline based (Kuteeva, & Airey,2013). This explanation is consistent with the purpose of undergraduate compulsory English in Pakistani universities (Ashraf, Hakim, & Zulfiqar, 2014).

Implications

One important implication of the study is choice of different genre teaching strategies in classes with mixed gender. This is remarkable when seen in the backdrop of the same course content and learning resources available to both female and male teachers. An explanation of this difference can be found in the review of case studies by Duff (2010). These studies conclude that the consideration of socio-cultural expectations of students and teachers of different gender determine choice of strategies and learning resources. Pakistani teachers, too, cannot sidestep these cultural norms in co-ed classes while socializing the undergraduates into the academic community or discipline.

The results of this study has implications for the future trends in academic compulsory English at tertiary level in Pakistan. The genre learning strategies and materials require congruity with the communicative functions of the academic discourses at the individual and discourse communities level. These discourse communities may be local, national or international. The Sydney School strategies can serve this purpose effectively being based on social constructionist framework of disciplinary knowledge and its acquisition.

The results also imply that teachers' perspective supports use of multiple genre learning resources. As there is dearth of authentic materials in Pakistan (see Introduction), teachers will have to bring discipline based corpora into their classes of English to fill this vacuum. It is heartening to note that Pakistani academics have long careers in corpus based genre analysis and they can be engaged with materials development for BS compulsory English.

In mixed discipline classes (in three out of four) universities, common core study skills are focused at the cost of competence in disciplinary genres and their comparisons. It is not enough to teach the undergraduate how to deliver good presentations, write impressive assignments and exam essays. They, more essentially, have to acquire disciplinary literacies for studies and research. Majority of university teachers with qualifications in English Literature are often unfamiliar with subject specific language (British Council, 2015). This demands a close cooperation between subject and language teachers. Only then will the teachers' knowledge of English Literature and literary criticism be optimally utilized. They can teach text analysis and critique skills common to all disciplines if they understand interdisciplinary potential of English Literature.

The study concludes that teachers of BS compulsory English perceive that they develop generic competence of the undergraduates following Sydney School strategies very closely with genre based multiple resources. But such conclusion will be premature as it is based only on perceptions reported by teachers in a questionnaire survey. Further, this study included teachers from five disciplines of only four Pakistani universities in Lahore excluding all-female universities.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the study provides valuable ideas for the future researchers in largely unexplored areas of disciplinary English. Pakistani corpus researchers should conduct meta-analysis studies in EAP and come forward with a pedagogical model suitable for academic context and variable proficiency levels of the undergraduates. To increase the validity of the findings, mixed design studies can be planned to triangulate the results of the present research. For the purpose of better external validity, studies are needed with larger samples involving teachers, undergraduates, universities of different categories and more disciplines. Another suggestion is to conduct experimental studies to see the impact of Sydney School strategies on Pakistani undergraduates' genre competence using the results of this study as hypotheses.

The study also contributes significantly at the theoretical level. There are many researches on applications of SFL based Sydney School strategies and social interactionist language learning in multilingual Asian and European countries. But very limited research is available on the possibilities and problems implied in use of these strategies for tertiary level English in Pakistan. The contribution to the EAP practices includes

drawing attention of the teachers to the relationship between language resources, culture, and communicative functions. Further, the study contributes to the understanding of difference in study skills courses and discipline based academic English.

Another major contribution is developing awareness in teachers about the contextualized and integrated teaching of vocabulary and syntax at the clause level. The study is also important for its recommendations for the teachers to develop professional competence in explicit and implicit genre techniques along with the traditional lecturing. Further, it recommends that teachers should gradually move from bilingual to monolingual EAP in view of linguistic diversity of Pakistan. The HEC and universities should consistently update the English courses and learning materials in light of the assessment of academic and professional needs of the undergraduates.

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Appendix A The Sydney School Strategies

Strategy	Focus of the Strategy	Scaffolding Activities
Context building	Social location Social purpose Topic/focus Participants Mode of communication	Participation or observation in workplace or subject class/guest speakers/discussions and surveys/comparison of cross-cultural features in genre use/comparison of the same genre-text in spoken and written modes/contrasts in texts/ use of socio-literacy/teacher questioning etc.
Modelling and Deconstruction	Clause and lexical level features Discourse structures of genres	Comparing texts with the model texts/ using text enhancement strategies (capitalizing, underlining, italicizing/ using stress and intonation)/ giving practice exercises on grammar and vocabulary/ using concordances/ questioning etc. Using rhetorical consciousness-raising tasks/identifying discourse structures of genres with model texts/identifying phases in discourse structures etc.
Joint Construction	Text production through collaboration	Teacher questioning etc. Teacher questioning/editing tasks/skeleton texts/information gap activities/checklists etc.
Independent Construction	Unsupported text production /performances formative assessment	Discussion/clustering/outlining/first drafts/teacher and peer comments/Listening tasks e.g., ticking/underlining/sequencing/speaking tasks e.g., role plays/simulations/class or workplace performances/presentations/reading comprehension and writing tasks.
Text linking	Intertextuality/hybridity	Tasks on cross-disciplinary communication/Tasks on related texts in the same course or discipline/Role playing for practicing the same text in different modes and with different participants/comparison of linguistic features in related text-types etc.

Note. Adopted from “Approaches and methods in language teaching” by J.C., Richards and T.S., Rodgers, 2014, pp.208-209