Exploring Genre Awareness: L2 Learners' Voices in Tertiary-Level Writing Contexts[1]

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Abstract

This study explored tertiary-level L2 learners' familiarization with genre-specific conventions in English writing skills. Employing a qualitative research paradigm, data were gathered via semi-structured interviews with 26 L2 learners. An inductive content analysis was conducted to elicit recurring codes and themes. The learners expressed strengths encompassing the recognition of genre-specific features, awareness of linguistic and organizational conventions in genre writing, and formality level. They highlighted the challenges in their orientation to genre identification, text organization, and genre-specific language choices. The learners established connections between these challenges and limited prior writing experience in L1 and L2 and their subsequent reliance on L2 formal knowledge. Further sources of challenges were linked to affective factors, language proficiency, genre convention mastery, and topic familiarity. They reported feeling anxious due to unfamiliarity with genre features, lack of interest in a given topic, inadequate pre-writing, and planning stage, the demanding nature of the process-genre writing instruction, and instructors' expectations. They proposed suggestions regarding the mastery of lexical and grammatical knowledge, the provision of effective feedback from instructors to improve textual organization, and genre-specific language conventions. Accordingly, instructional implications for the cultivation of genre knowledge and awareness of tertiary-level writing skills are presented.

Keywords: Genre awareness, genre knowledge, L2 writing, tertiary level

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Introduction

Tertiary-level writing processes are rather specific and complex for EFL learners. Writing in a second language is conceptualized as a complicated and contextual social practice (Benzie & Harper, 2020; Hyland, 2007; Paltridge, 2013; Tardy et al., 2020). As part of this writing process, the concept of genre pedagogy in L2 settings has been a central topic in EFL learners' orientation toward the requirements of genres. As part of this concept, the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) framework, which was primarily informed by Swales (1990), has been widely adopted and used at the tertiary and professional levels (Huang & Jun Zhang, 2020). According to this school of thought, the genre is conceptualized as "structured communicative events engaged in by specific discourse communities whose members share broad communicative purposes" (Swales, 1990, p. 45). Genres are social practices that achieve a specific purpose in a distinct context (Hyland, 2004). Each genre displays varying formality levels, text structures, and reader-author relationships (Johns, 2008).

The ESP genre-based approach, adopted as a conceptual framework in this study, is prevalent in L2 academic contexts and is used by many teachers of L2 writing (Cheng, 2021). The recognition of the relationship between the audience, the purpose of the text, and linguistic choices lies at the center of this pedagogy (Yasuda, 2011). This pedagogy proposes the integration of the audience, social context, and communicative purposes (Huang & Jun Zhang, 2020, p. 340) by offering a way of viewing the interrelation of genres in real life and an authentic context to develop skills in genre types (Hyland, 2004, p. 47). Previous research has documented the effectiveness of a process-genre approach to L2 writing instruction (Huang & Jun Zhang, 2020; Tardy et al., 2020).

Problem Statement and Justification

Genre-based pedagogy has gained prominence, specifically in language education, as a means of enhancing the writing performance of L2 learners (Zhai & Razali, 2023). It embodies several pedagogical benefits (Hyland, 2004) and is utilized to instruct ESL/EFL or native English students about the structure and linguistic patterns found in important genres, such as letters, recounts, research articles, narratives, reports, and expositions (Zhai & Razali, 2023). This pedagogy is best achieved when combined with process methods to ensure that learners gain control and develop an understanding of the properties, purposes, and contexts of writing processes (Hyland, 2004). Because of the multidimensional and multifaceted properties of genre approaches, it is difficult to conceptualize the problem, critically analyze the challenges, and suggest effective remedial solutions if learners' identities, purposes, and disciplines are ignored when trying to learn skills (Hyland, 2013). It is widely acknowledged that novice foreign language writers face difficulties in simultaneously considering the relationships among these elements (Yasuda, 2011). This complex nature poses a stumbling block to L2 learners' orientation toward genre features (Schellekens, 2007).

Surprisingly, previous research has shown constraints in addressing L2 learners' orientation toward genre-based L2 writing instruction. Much of the existing literature explored the issues related to and the factors that affect L2 learners' writing learning processes and contribute to the difficulties in adjusting to the linguistic and academic demands of L2 writing. Among these factors, vocabulary, register, and organization are the primary challenging elements (Evans & Morrison, 2018; Hinkel, 2011). A lack of previous writing experience could pose challenges (Belcher, 2012), which in turn affects learners' consideration of readership,

mastery of text structure, organization, and language choice (Wang & Xie, 2022). Discrepancies in previous writing practices in high schools and universities are considered to have a profound impact on their challenges (Carlino, 2010). Specifically, learners experience obstacles in the pre-writing stage, including a lack of interesting ideas, finding relevant essay topics, developing ideas, and supporting details or examples (Rao, 2007; Salem 2007). Huang (2010) classifies these obstacles into two levels: surface level such as vocabulary, tense use, and sentence construction, and global level such as organization, idea development, and knowing the audience. Drawing on the close relationship between L1 and L2 writing as well as the transfer of writing strategies between L1 and L2 (Keck, 2006; Schoonen et al., 2011), previous empirical research has confirmed the major impact of L1 habits on the schemata of L2 writing (Sheldon, 2011; Wei et al., 2020; Zhang, 2013) and enrich our understanding of the L1 effect in L2 writers' production hampered by the decision-making processes while writing (Odlin, 2003). Accordingly, education and success in L1 are powerful predictors of success in L2 education (Leki et al., 2008). Restrictions related to contact with proficient users of the target language and authentic texts and the lack of opportunity to write stemming from real-world contextual limitations are other major compelling issues that make teaching and learning L2 writing difficult (Belcher, 2012).

Purpose and Significance of the Study

Building on previous research, this study aimed to decipher L2 learners' experiences and reflections regarding their orientation toward tertiary-level L2 writing processes in different local educational settings in Turkiye. This study specifically focused on pre-service English language teachers, as they are expected to be well-informed about effective writing pedagogies and be prepared for their future roles as language teachers. Considering the social, discoursal, and demographic changes in language education, teacher trainers need to draw attention to a genre-based approach which "offers principled ways of assisting both pre- and in-service writing teachers to provide their students with targeted, relevant, and supportive instruction" (Hyland, 2007, p. 148). Further, genre awareness is significant for the conscious understanding of genre-relevant aspects that address students' "rhetorical flexibility necessary for adapting their socio-cognitive genre knowledge to ever-changing contexts" (Johns, 2008, p. 238). Thus, uncovering learners' perspectives regarding their development of genre awareness is primarily needed to document experienced challenges, the multilayered nature of the reasons behind challenges, and potential solutions. The rationale behind the examination of this issue among the learners, who are pre-service English teachers, is that the cultivation of a cognizance awareness of genre-based instruction among teachers could influence their students' learning quality (Nazari & Oghyanous, 2023). To address these needs, this study provides a composite picture of L2 learners' genre awareness in writing, in line with the multifaceted nature of the dimensions of genre knowledge in light of the following research questions:

1. What are the stances of learners on their orientation toward genre-specific conventions in L2 writing at the tertiary level?

   a. How do learners conceptualize their experiences with genre-specific conventions in tertiary-level L2 writing?

b. From the learners' point of view, what factors contribute to (re)shaping their experiences with genre-specific challenges in tertiary-level L2 writing?

c. What strategies do they suggest to promote the development of genre knowledge and awareness in tertiary-level L2 writing?

Method

Research Design

In the present study, we employed a qualitative research paradigm to explore the reflections and experiences of L2 learners in their orientation to genre-specific conventions in the L2 writing process. The qualitative research framework of the study was centered on the principles proposed by the interpretivist paradigm suggested by Silverman (2018). This research design enabled us to examine L2 learners' conceptualizations of their experiences with genre convention and document challenges and related strategies to promote genre knowledge and awareness. To this end, we used research question-oriented qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2019). Through an inductive inquiry into the qualitative data, we conducted research question-oriented coding by eliciting responses. This coding approach enabled the presentation of an in-depth description and interpretation of learners' experiences and further insights. Then, we interpreted and discussed emerging picture learners' stances.

Participants and Setting

This study was conducted in an EFL context, where the primary medium of instruction was English. Participants were 26 second language (L2) learners who were first-year pre-service English language teachers enrolled in three different state universities. To get enrolled in their first year, they were required to have a B1 proficiency level. An English proficiency exam was administered as part of the enrollment process. Those who did not meet the requirements and pass the proficiency exam were enrolled in a preparatory class to master their basic language skills. As a participant sampling technique, we used a combination of purposeful and convenient sampling. We used convenient sampling since the participants were accessible due to their enrollment in the genre-based instruction. We also used a purposeful sampling technique considering specific criteria. This choice was motivated by their exposure to genre-based L2 writing instruction for the first time.

In this study, the participants, aged between 18 and 21, comprised 18 females and 8 males. This study was carried out after the spring semester on completing the course content and exams. The timing aimed to minimize the potential influences of learners' course-related concerns and eliminate any ethical considerations regarding the instructors' potential impact(s) on their responses. The learners voluntarily participated in the study, contributing to the elicitation of multiple voices on the research topic. They were concurrently enrolled in compulsory and elective skill-based English language courses. In the writing courses given in the first year of education, students are introduced to the ESP genre-based approach. This pedagogy foregrounded genre structures (i.e., organizational features) as well as stylistic and grammatical features in the L2 writing process. Learners master the linguistic and functional features of texts in their professions and disciplines in ESP genre-based pedagogy (Hyon

1996, p. 698). Throughout the first-year writing courses, participants were expected to incorporate the context of a text, readership, particular text-type conventions, and knowledge development into their writing with the help of their teachers' guidance. Further, mastery of various text types, such as cause-effect, opinion, argumentative, and comparison-contrast, were required components of the program curriculum.

Data Collection Tools

Qualitative data were gathered through one-on-one semi-structured interviews with the learners. The researchers constructed interview questions through an in-depth analysis of the literature. A pool of items was initially compiled. Relevant items were selected for inclusion in the interview procedure. Three experienced researchers in teaching writing skills at the tertiary level reviewed the compiled items. They provided feedback about the clarity of the items, overlapping questions, instructions, wording, and elimination of any biased items. This thorough examination adopted the principle of not posing research questions to participants (Silverman, 2018, p. 570). Upon reflecting on this principle and eliciting the feedback, the interview questions were revised and finalized. These questions were mainly centered on the learners' prior writing experiences, familiarity with English text types, perceived challenges and strengths in producing different genre types, strategies to overcome the challenges, and their orientation towards learning to create various genres.

Data Collection Process

Data collection was conducted by informing the participants about the purpose and scope of the study and by obtaining written consent from them. The interview sessions were conducted in their L1 to enable the participants to express themselves clearly and comfortably and to eliminate language proficiency-related challenges. We included learners at the end of their first year of higher education and carried out interviews upon the completion of the lessons, assignments, and exams. Face-to-face interview sessions, lasting around fifteen minutes, were audio-recorded and later transcribed by researchers. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned to the participants.

Data Analysis

Considering the data analysis procedure, the researchers initially organized the interview transcripts. Data coding was simultaneously conducted by three researchers. To gain familiarity with the data, the researchers engaged in reading the whole data several times by adding comments and summaries. Each researcher independently coded the data eliciting codes and themes. Then, they compared emerging codes and themes, identified discrepancies, and resolved divergences. In the data analysis, the qualitative content analysis was followed as suggested by Mayring (2019). As part of this analysis, inductive category formation was utilized following an iterative cycle in the content analysis to enhance the robustness of the analysis. We followed the inter-coding technique proposed by Silverman (2018) to enable credibility and internal validity checks for the credibility of interpretations emerging from the data. We set grounds for including certain instances emerging in the data

set. Initially, we organized discussion sessions to discuss elicited findings, resolve overlapping and diverging categories in the qualitative data, and reach a consensus among researchers. The reliability of this study was enhanced through transcribing, organizing, reviewing, and analyzing the transcripts by fellow researchers. The credibility of the data analysis was set by administering individual analysis of the data set followed by cross-checking the elicited themes, revealing diverging and overlapping findings, reaching a consensus, and reporting representative results. We used the refutability principle (Silverman, 2018) to challenge our initial assumptions during the data analysis. The extracts obtained from the learner responses were presented using pseudonyms to analyze the data set, illustrate the findings, and enable the anonymity of responses.

Ethical Issues

We obtained ethical approval for this research from the Sinop University Human Research Ethics Committee with the decision number 2023/178.

Findings

The analysis of the elicited data revealed L2 learners' stances on tertiary-level L2 writing practices: (a) L2 learners' conceptualizations of genre awareness and knowledge (b) perceived genre-specific challenges, and perspectives about the sources of these challenges, (c) suggestions including sources and tools to foster genre knowledge in L2 writing. These themes are elaborated below through elicited codes and a variety of extracts from L2 learners' responses. The excerpts of participants' responses were illustrated without making any changes in linguistic accuracy and clarification.

Table 1

Themes and Related Codes Elicited from L2 Learners' Stances on Tertiary-level Writing Experiences

Themes	Codes
Theme 1: L2 learners' conceptualizations of genre awareness and knowledge	a) perceived genre knowledge • knowledge of genre-specific features • awareness of writing processes • knowledge of genre-specific language use • strengths regarding idiosyncratic features b) strengths in genre-specific distinctive features • recognition of genre-specific features • formality level, textual organization, topic vocabulary, structure, unity, coherence
Theme 2: Perceived genre-specific challenges and perspectives about the sources of challenges in L2 writing	a) challenges • using genre-specific language • organizing texts • identifying genres and genre-specific features • arranging and coordinating essay-writing processes

Table 1

(Continue)

Themes	Codes
Theme 2: Perceived genre-specific challenges and perspectives about the sources of challenges in L2 writing	b) sources of challenges • affective factors • nature of tertiary-level writing instruction • prior writing experiences • a lack of genre practice • language proficiency • mastery of genre conventions • a lack of awareness of the significance of the writing-planning stage • topic (un)familiarity
Theme 3: Suggestions to improve genre knowledge in L2 writing	a) suggestions on genre-based tertiary-level L2 writing instruction b) skill areas and strategies to be improved c) sources and tools to be used in genre writing instruction

L2 Learners' Conceptualization of Their Orientation toward Genre-Specific Conventions in Tertiary-Level L2 Writing

As a result of the data analysis as part of the first research question, the first theme was the conceptualization of their orientation to genre-specific conventions in L2 writing, which yielded two main points: orientation to genre knowledge in L2 writing and their strengths in genre-specific distinctive features.

To start with, we revealed the conceptualization of their orientation to tertiary-level genre-based instruction on their perceived genre knowledge. This orientation was centered on their genre knowledge which included their reportings on four main areas of strengths in the first theme: genre-specific features, writing processes, language use specific to genre writing, and idiosyncratic features. The learners established connections between the genre-specific features and areas that feel competent in writing. Addressing these areas, the participants shared varying responses, such as opinion, descriptive, comparison-contrast, and argumentative genres. They specifically emphasized their skills in identifying the features of genres, such as the organization of essay parts and formulaic language patterns, and in transferring the rules they learned across different genres. In addition, they centered their strengths on their effective dictionary use, searching about a topic, expressing their opinions in writing, and providing evidence to support their ideas. Considering language use, most L2 learners emphasized their strengths in having rich vocabulary knowledge and using appropriate cohesive devices to form coherent and unified writing. The following excerpt illustrates this point:

> *I think I can actually create sentences very easily because I trust my vocabulary. And I think I can use connective devices to connect the subject, such as how to move from development to conclusion. (Leyla)*

As part of idiosyncratic features, the majority of the participants stressed that they could think about the details of writing, be creative, and adopt various perspectives on the genre they wrote.

Second, we revealed that learner responses were centered on their recognition of distinctive genre-specific features. These conceptualizations surfaced mainly on language, style, and organizational elements in the formation of a genre. Awareness of formality, word choice, passive structures, sentence structures, the use of conjunctions, choice of formulaic expressions, using adjectives effectively, and providing numerical data and evidence were particularly prominent in learner responses. Forming effective thesis statements, topic sentences, the body of the essay, providing support, and deciding on the number of paragraphs were reported as familiar organizational elements in forming a genre. The following example is from a participant's excerpt which illustrates a distinction between descriptive and argumentative essays by explaining genre-specific features.

> *Well, to illustrate… descriptive. Adjectives visualize in our minds, or… to give an example from the argumentative genre, numeric information is given and it is more scientific. Or, in the cause-effect type, that kind of connective word is used and emphasized. (Engin)*

As shown above, most of the similar responses revealed their awareness and information about the differences and variations among different text types in terms of textual organization, language use, and topical information.

Factors Contributing to (Re)Shaping Learners' Experiences in Tertiary-Level L2 Writing

As a second emerging theme as part of the second research question, factors with a particular emphasis on (re)shaping their experiences in tertiary-level L2 writing were revealed. These factors were centered on L2 learners' grounds and connections to their challenges and sources of these challenges in accommodating genre-specific conventions of L2 writing at the tertiary level.

Regarding the learners' challenges in reshaping their experiences, they drew attention to four related elements: (1) language-related challenges, (2) organizing texts, (3) identifying genre types and genre-specific features, and (4) arranging and coordinating essay-writing processes. As a first major challenge, the majority of L2 learners noted having little or no prior writing experience in their L1 and L2 before higher education as illustrated in the following excerpt.

> *Writing an essay for the first time or ... I mean, it's a small paragraph, but even with that, I mean, I encountered it for the first time and I had a lot of difficulty. (Ferda)*

Nevertheless, some of them highlighted their familiarity with cause-effect essays, tales, and argumentative genres through model texts, while the majority of learners further elaborated that they had their first writing experience in the proficiency exam.

As a second major challenge, the learners viewed language-related issues as significant obstacles to producing different genres in L2 writing. These reported challenges were clear verbalization of ideas, identification of differences between two sentences, construction of sentences, use of topic vocabulary, appropriate use of grammar rules, and subject-verb agreement in long paragraphs.

...we have difficulties in writing due to our language skills, that is, words do not come to our mind, and this is because we are not proficient enough in the language (Esma).

I need to improve myself, especially my vocabulary and my ability to form sentences (Mehmet).

In line with these challenges, further challenges on text organization, unity, and coherence, lack of harmony among the text parts, and forming an essay outline were explicitly mentioned as other major difficulties experienced during the writing process. In this respect, learners expressed various textual organizational challenges in the essay-writing processes during the interviews. These challenges were mainly centered on forming an essay outline, a thesis statement, a conclusion, the body of the text, topic sentences, brainstorming, idea generation, narrowing down the topic, and starting to write any piece of text. The following excerpts from different participants illustrate this point:

The outline was very difficult. Anyway, if I can get through that brainstorming thing, it is alright. For example, if I think about brainstorming for two hours, I write the essay in one hour. (Dilan)

Maybe it could be to prepare an outline. We need to think about everything before we take it out. (Feyza)

I find it very difficult to make an outline, to collect those ideas and put them together. After I do that, the writing is already done. (Ahmet)

The most difficult thing that I experienced during writing courses was to write topic sentences. I could not write. (Nehir)

Building on the overall challenges mentioned above, learners reflected on the genre-specific challenges in L2 writing. Providing evidence to support claims, expressing ideas, forming arguments, refuting claims, confusion about genre features, forgetting about previously learned genre features, and transferring genre conventions were reported to pose a stumbling block to learners' mastery of genre conventions. Further, outlining, narrowing down the topic, using grammar rules appropriately, following stages of writing, forming thesis statements, topic sentences, conclusion and restatement of the thesis, paraphrasing, organizing the text, and referring to different sources were reported genre-specific challenges by L2 learners.

Overall, all of these challenges voiced by the learners on language-related challenges, organization of texts, identification of genres and genre-specific features, and arrangement of essay writing processes seem to indicate that learners were aware of the genre as a genre-based pedagogical approach was adopted in their L2 writing courses in these contexts, which may have enabled learners to have awareness of and develop the knowledge of genre-specific features.

Building on these challenges, the factors contributing to (re)shaping their experiences in tertiary-level L2 writing were centered on the sources of their challenges. The analyses revealed that L2 learners referred to affective factors, the nature of writing instruction, prior writing experiences, lack of practice, language proficiency, mastery of genre conventions, and topic (un)familiarity as sources of the challenges they experienced during the writing process. The following extract illustrates their experienced challenges due to lack of practice and prior training.

I think the lack of practice, as I said, we have never done anything like this before, and we have never done writing or anything like that, we have not been trained in this … I think it is the reason for having difficulty with writing. (Ömer)

> *The reason for this difficulty is that I have never had any experience before, I have never practiced. (Helen)*

In the following extract, another participant attributed the challenge she experienced to the inefficient use of vocabulary and the lack of word knowledge.

> *I cannot use words and phrases effectively and correctly in my writing… I don't know how to use conjunctions or which word should be used in a particular context. I had a lot of difficulty in this sense. (Narin)*

Considering affective factors, learners specified their feelings of anxiety and stress due to several reasons such as time constraints and lack of interest in forming written products as illustrated in the excerpt below.

> *Of course there were difficulties in the writing process. To give an example, I could say 'stress'. Throughout the procedure, I never saw stress as an inhibiting factor. I know everyone is stressed. I have not seen anybody who said I don't have it. But I did vice versa. I didn't let stress prevent me from doing something which maybe I would do so great. So I pretended it didn't exist.(Mercan)*

As it is obvious in the response of the learner above, stress was the factor that may have affected the writing process making it difficult but she successfully dealt with it. Considering this finding, psychological well-being and feelings of nervousness and anxiety in the L2 writing process may play a major role in writing performance.

Apart from the sources of challenges presented so far, the learners reflected on a lack of awareness of the significance of the writing planning stage. Regarding the nature of classroom instruction, the learners referred to teachers' expectations about the length, word count, content of essays, assessment and evaluation, and time pressure in the exams, distance education, and online classes. The learners related such challenges to having little or no prior writing experience in a specific genre, lacking lexical knowledge, using a limited variety of words, and being non-native speakers of English.

Importantly, they also reported that such challenges stemmed from their unfamiliarity with genre-specific features and conventions, topic unfamiliarity, no prior background knowledge about the assigned topic, challenging essay prompts, and lack of interest in the topic as highlighted in the quotations drawn from interviews below.

> *Because, as I said, my problem is putting it together. Of course, it is difficult to find a lot of causes, think about their effects and write them again (Ümit).*

> *Because opinion essays give you the opportunity to think about many issues and we have the opportunity to write them down, but at the same time, it is difficult to think about them in a way. (Mehmet)*

Suggested Strategies to Promote the Development of Genre Knowledge and Awareness

As part of the third research question of the study, the learners were found to reflect on a variety of suggestions for improving genre knowledge in L2 writing. They reported three main strategies and suggestions: (a) course-specific features, (b) skills and strategies, and (c) supportive sources and tools that could contribute to improvement in L2 writing.

The first element among these suggestions was their emphasis on course-specific features of L2 writing. L2 learners foregrounded the significance of meeting the expectations of course instructors and requirements of course attendance. Regarding skills and strategies, the participants underlined the entailment of having concentration, good research skills, asking relevant questions, and being creative during the writing process. Moreover, they underscored their suggestions on the need to revisit basic genres and topic-related considerations in L2 writing instruction. To illustrate, they specifically elaborated on the necessity of using appropriate grammatical items, having lexical variety, familiarity with and interest in the topic, and background knowledge of the given topics.

The second element elicited was their suggested ways of skill areas and strategies in L2 writing processes. Several participating learners noted the significance of boosting lexical knowledge, especially genre-specific lexical expressions, and grammar knowledge. The provision of constructive feedback is another suggestion. Accordingly, providing L2 learners with sufficient and effective feedback on the textual organization of their texts and genre-specific language patterns is suggested. The preparation stage in the pre-writing process was stressed by the learners, during which sufficient time was given to think about and search for the topic and to generate ideas. Other than these, more practice with writing-based tasks and activities, planning, reading model essays, and thereby internalizing genre conventions are other ways suggested by L2 learners to overcome the challenges. A learner refers to ways to overcome a problem with time constraints in the following excerpt:

I try to improve myself in writing with my own efforts. (Interviewee: like what?) At home, I try to write something about a topic within a certain period of time, just like we do at school. (Kemal)

The last element was the suggested sources and tools to be used in L2 genre writing instruction in higher education. They highlighted the need for further practice, preparation, time management, and the effort made during the writing process as other crucial prerequisites for the improvement in L2 writing.

I know that the more we practice, the more we improve (Ferda).

As I said, we need to improve ourselves primarily in terms of language, apart from that, we need to learn how to write an essay or another type of writing and know its format (Ümit).

We had assignments. I tried to deliver them within allocated time. I gradually realized that I could write. All in all, I dealt with the problems through practice (Işıl).

The learners also underscored the need for effective use of Internet sources, online applications, translation tools, and additional sources that provide language input. More engagement with L2 genre writing was also suggested by the participants as a useful tool to gain awareness about genre knowledge and cope with challenges. In addition, motivation and concentration have been reported to be influential affective factors in coping with L2 writing difficulties. These areas are foregrounded as a way and tool to facilitate L2 learners' effective engagement with genre-based tertiary-level writing instruction as exemplified below:

I created an account by registering a website called Udemy which provided different activities related to translation and writing. It helped me a lot So I think I can practice writing a bit more and improve my writing skills in this way (Kiraz).

Conclusion, Discussion, and Implications

This study aimed to decipher L2 learners' stance on tertiary-level L2 writing and their reflection on the challenges, possible solutions to overcome challenges, and suggestions to enrich genre knowledge and expand their awareness in L2 writing development.

First, the findings indicated that the experiences of learners from three different settings of the research reflected their awareness of genre knowledge to a certain extent and uncovered L2 genre-specific challenges. This study relates L2 writing knowledge to Tardy's (2009) framework, which encompasses the properties of formal, process, rhetorical, and subject-matter knowledge of genres. Reflections on perceived genre awareness and knowledge showed that L2 learners reported a tendency to rely on the formal features and subject matter of the target genre, which conforms with a predominant emphasis on their process knowledge, representing the activities and practices involved in genre enactment (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010). Nevertheless, the findings show learners' lack of explicit reference to rhetorical knowledge in their writing. To address this dimension of genre knowledge, incorporating the writing process and explicit genre instruction into the process-genre framework can greatly benefit the development of writing skills and genre knowledge in L2 writing (Huang & Jun Zhang, 2020).

Second, the learners were found to have no prior writing experience in either L1 or L2, which was frequently mentioned as the predominant reason for their orientation challenges while writing in L2. Previous research in L2 writing contexts noted that learners in L2 settings mostly have limited writing experiences which mainly focus on grammar practice and translation (Yasuda, 2011). In our study, the learners reported considering organization, language, and essay writing procedures as the most influential elements in their experienced challenges. They reported the crucial impact of L2 formal knowledge and academic skills in L1 in text production. This research provides conforming evidence regarding the significance of previous L1 and L2 knowledge to internalizing procedural and conceptual properties of L2 writing (Gentil, 2011).

Third, the learners connected the sources of these challenges to unfamiliarity with genre conventions and features, and process writing in and out of the classroom. Previous research provided confirming evidence that a lack of previous writing experience could pose challenges to genre mastery in L2 writing (Belcher, 2012). The sources of such challenges were attributed to distinctive features in certain genres. Provision of evidence to support claims, expressions of ideas, formation of arguments, and refutation of claims were prominent dimensions of these features. Existing literature has documented that L2 students had language and cultural-related rhetorical challenges (Kibler, 2017) along with rhetorical ability and audience awareness(Johns, 2017) due to their individual differences (Zhang & Zhang, 2021). In our study, the results showed that the students also reported getting confused about genre features and transferring previously learned conventions. Previous research provided confirming evidence regarding these challenges and related sources. For example, L2 learners tended to transfer the discourse structure of L1, use discourse moves inconsistently, and underestimate the readers' background knowledge, and their need for clarity of the text (Hinkel, 2011). Further, the formation of thesis statements, topic sentences, conclusion, and restatement of the thesis, as well as outlining, topic narrowing, appropriate use of grammar rules, following stages of writing, paraphrasing, organizing the text, and referring to various sources, were other genre-specific challenges that L2 learners reported. Previous research

demonstrated similar findings in that vocabulary, register, and organization are the primary challenging elements (Evans & Morrison, 2018; Hinkel, 2011) followed by a weak introduction or a weak conclusion, and too long or too short paragraphs (Hinkel, 2011). In our study, their perceived awareness of genre features was mostly about language, style, and genre-based organizational patterns. Previous research documented L2 learners' overemphasis on grammar accuracy over content (Ye, 2017), which provides partial confirming evidence regarding the perceived genre features.

In the present study, the learners elucidated the sources of these challenges about affective factors, language proficiency, classroom instruction, genre-specific conventions, and topic familiarity. Relatedly, Piniel and Csizér (2015) argued that anxiety-related factors can hinder L2 writing performance and development. It is worth noting that the influence of pre-task planning can vary according to the educational context, background, previous familiarity with the target genre along overall L2 proficiency (Johnson et al., 2012). Thus, adopting genre as a frame for course organization is suggested, because it could enable novice and experienced language educators to organize practical tasks that address enhancing genre knowledge and production (Tardy et al., 2022). Relatedly, Cheng (2018) emphasizes the significance of building genre awareness and discipline-specific knowledge within such an instructional approach. Thus, L2 genre knowledge gradually merges into an integrated system of genre understanding, forming a unified system of genre knowledge (Kim & Belcher, 2018). Finally, suggestions to foster genre knowledge in tertiary-level L2 writing were explicated regarding the importance of formality awareness, word choice, sentence structure, and feedback provision. They referred to the necessity of concentration, strong research abilities, asking pertinent questions, and creativity during the writing process.

In conclusion, this study foregrounds the need to integrate genre-specific features and genre-based pedagogy in tertiary-level writing processes in pre-service teacher education contexts. The lack of prior writing experiences in L1 and L2 necessitates the adoption of a genre-based approach to enhance learners' understanding of the rhetorical organization, linguistic or lexico-grammatical resources, and the rhetorical context specific to genres. L2 writing instruction could be tailored in such a way that texts written in learners' L1 could be used to facilitate the learning of the complex nature of genres in L2. Having background knowledge about genres in their languages could facilitate learning of the aims, linguistic and stylistic elements, and features of genres in L2 (Johns, 2011, p. 60). Having such practices in terms of all these points could assist L2 learners in gaining genre knowledge and awareness of L2.

To address the needs of learners, teaching genre conventions explicitly could enhance learners' comprehension and production of texts and convey their intended meanings (Bawarshi, 2016). Increasing learners' awareness of purpose and audience across genres through genre analysis tasks may enhance L2 learners' awareness of genre features. An imaginary situation or an image could be given to learners to think about the surrounding context and setting, including people and entities included in the situation or image. This will help them activate their schema before they start writing, as EFL learners tend to have problems brainstorming and generating ideas about what to write (Maghsoudi & Haririan, 2013), and activated schema is important for generating ideas. Furthermore, they could be asked to determine the type of genre based on the situation or the image and create a specific type of text by considering the following genre-specific features: textual organization, content,

rhetorical conventions, language use, sentence-level considerations, length of the text, and type of sources that could be used.

Additionally, learners' attention could also be drawn to the following genre-specific questions such as "Who could be the specific audience of this text? What could be the role and the ideology of the writer?, and What could be the goal of this text?" Previous research has suggested the facilitative impacts of genre analysis activities on the understanding of where, when, why, by whom, and how the genre is used, as well as the rhetorical and linguistic patterns used in the genre (Devitt et al., 2004). Accordingly, raising their awareness of effectively presenting rhetorical structures and considering the audience's needs could potentially enhance the success of L2 learners in their writing endeavors (Lam, 2015; Sengupta, 1999). Relatedly, course instructors could select the optimal strategy for teaching writing skills by providing feedback and coaching if they were aware of the difficulties students could face when learning how to write. In a relevant line with this point, peer feedback should be promoted with EFL learners because it can conjure up a sense of the target audience and genre, which may prompt further revisions to the substance and organization of texts (Berggren, 2015). In addition, the more students write, the more they are involved in it (Light, 2004), which improves their writing skills (Bozkır, 2009).

Guiding learners in monitoring and evaluating their genre knowledge could positively contribute to L2 writing success. Instead of doing things in the same way they have always been done, self-reflection encourages learners to hone their skills and assess their efficacy. It involves constructively challenging what they do and why they do it, and then determining if there is a better or more effective way to do it. More specifically, learners can describe how they evolved as writers, researchers, or thinkers, or how they experienced a particular process or event. Self-reflection frequently involves making an argument regarding the significance of a specific event, procedure, or body of information by drawing on personal experiences. To overcome challenges, teacher training programs could provide contributions to the development of professional authorial identity via genre-based instruction (Nazari & Oghyanous, 2023).

To gain further insight into the influential elements in L2 genre awareness, the impact of L1 on L2 literacy competence could be examined. To address the multifaceted nature of genre knowledge, a corpus-based examination of the use of cross-genre conventions could also prove useful in examining this phenomenon. From a methodological perspective, introspective think-aloud protocol data to elicit the transfer of genre-specific conventions should be useful to obtain more detailed data about the lived experiences of L2 learners while writing in English. Reflective writing practices and journal entries centered on writing processes and learners' perceived progress can be elucidated. L2 learners' abilities to recontextualize genre awareness in tertiary-level L2 writing might be examined with a focus on learners' genre-specific writing samples and elicitation of further insights via open-ended questions and interviews. Although learners' voices are significant in finding out their challenges concerning genre orientations, the perspectives of lecturers/instructors may be investigated to go deeper in the search for the research problem.

Statement of Conflict of Interest

We have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Appendix A. Sample Data Coding

Interviewer: Ok. Did you have difficulty in writing courses? Interviewee: Actually I had **a lot of difficulty in prep class.** I mean because **it was my first time** and it **is not my native language** and I **just started learning** it. I was a student in language class but it was **a completely new language learning process** and I had a hard time but I **think I improved myself in the prep class. It was easier for me in the first grade** thanks to prep class education. Interviewer: What was the most difficult thing for you? Interviewee: In fact, we **went step by step**. We started by writing only one paragraph first and then two paragraphs, three paragraphs. It went on like that. At first, I had **difficulty while learning the genres**. We needed to be careful with **grammar,** and **we combined everything we learned.** Therefore, we **needed much more time** then. Actually, I **wasted a lot of time** and it made me sad because I could **not think of something easily and quickly, I had to check a lot**, and I **had to put things that came to my mind in order**. That's why I **tried so hard** and I still **wasted a lot of time** while doing something like this. Maybe it is not right to say 'waste' but it **requires a lot of time.**	**writing-specific challenge** **sources of challenges** **strengths** **prior-writing experience** **prerequisites**

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