



# The comparative effect of process-oriented approach vs. product-oriented approach in teaching ESP writing within the specific domain of banking English in-service training

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## ABSTRACT

The central aim of this study was to investigate the comparative effect of process-oriented approach vs. product-oriented approach in teaching ESP writing within the specific domain of banking English in-service training. The forty participants of the present study were selected from among 50bank staff taking part in upper intermediate level of banking English courses held in the educational department of Export Development Bank of Iran. Following the treatment, which lasted 8 weeks, two 90-minute sessions per week, altogether 24 hours of instruction, a post test of ESP writing, which was the same the pretest, was administered to the learners of both experimental groups. The outcome of the posttest data analysis clarified that both product and process-oriented approaches significantly affect the improvement in the ESP writing ability of the in-service trainees taking part in an ESP course of banking English writing. Meanwhile, it was revealed that the process-based group outperformed the product-based group on the posttest of ESP writing indicating that there was a significant difference between the two groups' mean scores on the posttest of ESP writing. It was thus concluded that there was a significant difference between process-oriented and product-oriented approaches in teaching ESP writing to the banking English in-service training students.

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## Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) can be considered one of the dominant approaches to second and foreign language teaching, rivaling task-based and communicative language teaching approaches. Since its beginning in the 1960s, the ESP approach has often been compared to English for General Purposes (EGP) approaches, and its proven effectiveness has been attributed to its focus on the needs of learners in a specific discourse community and its attention to grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse, and genre training (Anthony, 2009). ESP writing, as an integral part of ESP movement, has been the home of choice for ELT research worldwide (Anthony, 2011; Dudley-Evans & John, 1998; Fukui, Noguchi & Watanabe, 2009; Hyland, 2002).

In a rapidly changing and evolving world, the traditional *product-oriented* knowledge taught to target learners in an ESP course is likely to quickly change or even become obsolete in only a few years (Hyland, 2008). On the other hand, *process-oriented skills*, such as the ability to acquire new knowledge through observing, recording, and analyzing texts, are likely to be more stable and highly valued over the long term, as these are the exact same skills that ESP practitioners themselves apply when attempting to understand the target language (Hyland, 2008).

Investigating the effects of product-oriented vs. process-oriented approaches in teaching writing, though discussed in both ESL and EFL situations, has recorded poor in the Iranian ELT and ESP research and it is worth doing such a research and making use of its results in the local environment which is in immediate contact with the real needs, wants, and requirements

of the Iranian learners of English in general and ESP students in particular.

Second language writing development in general and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) writing enhancement in particular have been the home of choice for ELT researchers since 1960s. As Kaplan (1966) has implied mastery over writing in the second language is extensively affected by the cultural mentality the learner has and the writing familiarity or ability he has already developed in his or her first language. Direct, explicit, and to-the-point addressing and referencing in the English language compared to indirect or implied presentations in Asian languages could be considered as one of the significant points literature has recorded in this respect (Alderson & Tankó, 2010; Arndt, 1987; Kaplan, 1966).

As Widdowson (1990) implies all four skills of language play their vital role in the second language communication, meanwhile getting mastery over speaking and writing requires high motivation, training, and practice. Richards (2006) also presents that various real language writing tasks should be developed in any second language course book. These could include very small, easy-to-practice tasks such as construction or production of a sentence or very complicated discussions or graphs through which the learners express their ideas technically.

ESP writing also has been a matter of concern since the emergence of ESP courses and modules which back to 1940's, pursuing the demands of the Second World War offshoots (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). Since 1960's the realm of ESP or English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has undergone variety of changes such as *register analysis*, *discourse analysis*, *target situation analysis*, *analysis of skills and strategies*, and *learning*

–centered approach (Basturkmen, 2006). Developing materials, methods, and strategies for ESP/ EAP writing also has been a challenging issue thereof.

On the other hand, training learners in the *processes of observation*, recording, and analyzing texts will result in a set of skills that are much more regular and stable, and more importantly, highly valued in the modern workplace. “These are exactly the same skills that ESP practitioners themselves use when developing effective traditional ESP courses” (Anthony, 2011, p.4). It follows that ESP practitioners are the most qualified people to teach learners these skills in an ESP classroom setting and process- based approach could be in line with what the learners need to know as they would face the same issues in the real world of business, commerce, technology, medicine and the like.

#### **Purpose of the study**

The present study aimed at discovering the effect of product-oriented approach in ESP writing with process- oriented approach in the same issue in a comparative mode. To make the study more practical, the researcher focused on “Banking English” in a real situation where ESP writing was employed for banking transactions, money transfer, LC supporting issues, and the like **Research questions**

Considering the purpose of the study and based on the problem specified above, the following research questions were raised:

1. Is there any significant improvement in the ESP writing ability of the in-service trainees taking part in an ESP course of **product-based approach** to banking English writing?
2. Is there any significant improvement in the ESP writing ability of the in-service trainees taking part in an ESP course of **process-based approach** to banking English writing?
3. Is there any significant difference between process-oriented and product-oriented approaches in teaching ESP writing to the banking English in-service training students?

#### **Method**

The forty participants of the present study were selected from among 50 bank staff taking part in upper intermediate level of banking English courses held in the educational department of Export Development Bank of Iran. These EFL/ESP students were of different age groups, mostly between 22 to 50 and both males and females. The participants were of different educational backgrounds and had a minimum experience of one year in their job positions. These participants received a standard test of language proficiency (Nelson, 2005) for the purpose of homogeneity. On the basis of the obtained data, the learners with extreme scores were excluded from the study although they were benefiting from the specified instruction and assessment procedures. Forty learners whose scores were located within one standard deviation (1SD) below and above the mean served as the actual participants whose performances were under investigation. Finally, the participants were divided into two equal experimental groups and the treatment was started. It is worth mentioning that there was no control group in the present study.

A piloted version of Nelson English Language Test was administered to ensure the homogeneity of the learners in experimental and control groups. Test 200 A, from the second book of Nelson English Language Tests developed for intermediate language learners was selected and used as a language proficiency test. This test enabled the researcher to construct somewhat equal groups in terms of language proficiency level and to eliminate the learners with extreme

scores from the study and to neutralize the subject selection effect.

The second instrument used in the pre-treatment level was a pretest of ESP writing which was given to the participants who were selected after the pre-test of language proficiency. This test included 5 topics of ESP writing which were frequently used in the banking system, namely *letter of swift, letters to a foreign embassy, e-mailing, balance sheet, and L.C documents*. The aim was to minimize the effect of previous writing knowledge on the performance of the learners following the treatment.

The writings of the learners were corrected employing the inter-rater method. The raters, the researcher himself and one of his colleagues, employed the British Council writing scoring rubric for scoring the learners’ writings.

Following the treatment, which lasted 8 weeks, two 90-minute sessions per week, altogether 24 hours of instruction, a post test of ESP writing, which was the same the pretest, was administered to the learners of both experimental groups. The same inter-rater method was employed to correct the students’ papers. It means that the raters employed the same writing scoring rubrics.

#### **Procedure**

##### **Pretest Phase**

Following the Nelson test, in which 50 bank staff were taking part, forty participants whose scores fell 1SD above and below the mean were selected for the main study. These EFL/ESP students were of different age groups, mostly between 22 to 50 and both males and females. The participants were of different educational backgrounds and had a minimum experience of year in their job positions. On the basis of the obtained data, the learners with extreme scores were excluded from the study although they were benefiting from the specified instruction and assessment procedures. The rest of the learners, located within one standard deviation (1SD) below and above the mean served as the actual participants whose performances were under investigation. Finally, the participants were divided into two equal experimental groups and the treatment was started. However, there was no control group in the present study.

##### **Treatment phase**

Both groups used the course book entitled as “English for banking in higher education studies” by McLisky (2008). Meanwhile each experimental group had its own specific activities which were based on the schedule given by British Council developed by Steele (2004).

Product-oriented group was directly focusing on these texts imitating the model texts to develop the same. For this group organization of ideas was more important than ideas themselves. The process-oriented group, however, used the texts as text as a resource for comparison and as models of activities to be followed. Here ideas developed were more important.

##### **Post test Phase**

After 8 weeks of treatment a post test of ESP writing, which was the same the pretest, was administered to the learners of both experimental groups. The inter-rater method was employed to correct the students’ papers.

#### **Materials**

The main instruments employed in the treatment process were as follows:

##### **Course book**

Both groups used the course book entitled as “English for banking in higher education studies” by McLisky (2008). Meanwhile each experimental group had its own specific

activities which were based on the schedule given by British Council developed by Steele (2004) (see appendix D).

**1. Sample texts:** Some sample letters and documents from the real situations were used in the classes.

**2. Pamphlet:** An abridged and simplified writing pamphlet were provided based on McLisky (2008) and Steele (2004) and were given to the learners as a source they could refer to in case of need.

**3. Participants' writings:** The participants' writings on various topics practiced in the classroom were gathered each and every session for the purpose of scoring and providing additional feedback.

### Data Analysis

#### Testing Assumptions

Four assumptions should be met before one decides to run parametric tests; 1) the data should be measured on an interval scale; 2) the subjects should be independent, that is to say, their performances on the test is not affected by the performance of other students; 3) the data should enjoy normal distribution, and 4) the groups should have homogeneous variances (Field, 2009).

The present data were analyzed through the parametric tests of independent and paired-samples t-test which are based on four main assumptions of interval data, independence of subjects, normality and homogeneity of variances. The first two assumptions do not have a statistical test. The researcher confirms that the data are measured on an interval scale and the subjects performed on the tests independently. The normality assumption was met.

#### Pretest of ESP Writing

An independent t-test was run to compare the Product-based and process-based groups' mean scores on the pretest of ESP writing in order to prove that both groups enjoyed the same level of ESP writing ability prior to the administration of the treatment. As displayed in Table 4.3 the product-based ( $M = 47.97$ ,  $SD = 2.25$ ) and process-based ( $M = 46.67$ ,  $SD = 4.97$ ) groups showed almost the same means on the pretest of ESP writing.

**Table 4.3: Descriptive Statistics Pretest of ESP Writing by Groups**

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Mean
Product-Based	20	47.97	2.2506	.5032	
Process-Based	20	46.67	4.9717	1.1117	

The results of the independent t-test ( $t(26) = 1.06$ ,  $P > .05$ ,  $R = .20$ , representing a weak effect size) (Table 4.4) indicated that there was not any significant difference between the two groups' mean scores on the pretest of ESP writing. Thus it was concluded that they enjoyed the same level of ESP writing ability prior to the administration of the treatment.

#### Research Question 1

A paired-samples t-test was run to compare the product-based group's mean scores on the pretest and posttest of ESP writing in order to probe the first research question. As displayed in Table 4.5 the product-based group showed a higher mean on the posttest of ESP writing ( $M = 61.75$ ,  $SD = 3.04$ ) than pretest of ESP writing ( $M = 47.97$ ,  $SD = 2.25$ )

**Table 4.5: Descriptive Statistics Posttests of ESP writing and ESP writing (Product-Based Group)**

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Mean
Posttest	61.75	20	3.0414	.6801	
Pretest	47.97	20	2.2506	.5032	

The results of the paired-samples t-test ( $t(19) = 35.33$ ,  $P < .05$ ,  $R = .99$  representing a large effect size) (Table 4.6) indicated that there was a significant difference between the product-based group's mean scores on the pretest and posttest of

ESP writing. Thus it was concluded that **the first null-hypothesis** as "There is not any significant improvement in the ESP writing ability of the in-service trainees taking part in an ESP course of product-based approach to banking English writing" **was rejected**.

**Table 4.6: Paired-Samples t-test Pretest and Posttest of ESP writing (Product-Based Group)**

Paired Differences					t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Interval Difference	Confidence of the			
			Lower	Upper			
13.775	0.7432	.3898	12.9591	14.5909	35.33	19	.000

#### Research Question 2

A paired-samples t-test was run to compare the Process-based group's mean scores on the pretest and posttest of ESP writing in order to probe the second research question. As displayed in Table 4.7 the process-based group showed a higher mean on the posttest of ESP writing ( $M = 84.75$ ,  $SD = 4.38$ ) than pretest of ESP writing ( $M = 46.67$ ,  $SD = 4.97$ )

**Table 4.7: Descriptive Statistics Posttests of ESP writing and ESP writing (Process-Based Group)**

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Mean
Posttest	84.75	20	4.3875	.9811	
Pretest	46.67	20	4.9717	1.1117	

The results of the paired-samples t-test ( $t(19) = 26.95$ ,  $P < .05$ ,  $R = .98$ , representing a large effect size) (Table 4.8) indicated that there was a significant difference between the process-based group's mean scores on the pretest and posttest of ESP writing. **Thus the second null-hypothesis** as "There is not any significant improvement in the ESP writing ability of the in-service trainees taking part in an ESP course of process-based approach to banking English writing" **was rejected**.

**Table 4.8: Paired-Samples t-test Pretest and Posttest of ESP writing (Process-Based Group)**

Paired Differences					t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Interval Difference	Confidence of the			
			Lower	Upper			
38.075	0.3168	1.4125	35.1186	41.0314	26.95	19	.000

An independent t-test was run to compare the product-based and process-based groups' mean scores on the posttest of ESP writing in order to probe the third research question. As displayed in Table 4.9 the process-based group ( $M = 84.75$ ,  $SD = 4.38$ ) outperformed the product-based group ( $M = 61.75$ ,  $SD = 3.04$ ) on the posttest of ESP writing.

**Table 4.9: Descriptive Statistics Posttest of ESP Writing by Groups**

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Mean
Product-Based	20	61.75	3.0414	.6801	
Process-Based	20	84.75	4.3875	.9811	

The results of the independent t-test ( $t(38) = 19.26$ ,  $P < .05$ ,  $R = .95$ , representing a large effect size) (Table 4.10) indicated that there was a significant difference between the two groups' mean scores on the posttest of ESP writing. Thus it was concluded that **the third null-hypothesis** as "There is not any significant difference between process-oriented and product-oriented approaches in teaching ESP writing to the banking English in-service training students" **was rejected**.

It should be noted that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met (Levene's  $F = 1.21$ ,  $P > .05$ ). That is why the first row of Table 4.6, i.e. "Equal variances assumed" was reported.

**Table 4.10: Independent t-test Posttest of ESP Writing by Groups**

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means								
F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
							Lower	Upper		
Equal variances assumed	1.219	.276	19.267	.738	.000	23.0000	1.1937	20.5834	25.4166	
Equal variances not assumed			19.267	.733	.834	.000	23.0000	1.1937	20.5736	25.4264

**Reliability of the Writing Tasks**

The students' writings on the pre and posttests were scored by two raters, following the inter-rater method. A Pearson correlation was run to probe the inter-rater reliability and the results indicated that there were significant agreement between the raters on rating; pretest of ESP writing ( $r(38) = .83, P < .05$ ) and posttest of ESP writing ( $r(38) = .98, P < .05$ ). Table 4.13 below represents the inter-rater reliability of the writing pre and posttests.

**Table 4.13 Inter-Rater Reliability of the Writing Pre & posttests**

		PreR2	PostR2
PreR1	Pearson Correlation	.833**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	40	
PostR1	Pearson Correlation	.982**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	40	

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Discussion**

The findings of the present study revealed a significant improvement in the ESP writing ability of the in-service trainees taking part in the ESP courses of product-based and product-based approaches to banking English writing. Meanwhile, the process-based group outperformed the product-based group on the posttest of ESP writing indicating that there was a significant difference between the two groups' mean scores on the posttest of ESP writing. Thus it was concluded that there was a significant difference between process-oriented and product-oriented approaches in teaching ESP writing to the banking English in-service training students. Therefore, the process-based approach in teaching ESP writing could prove effective in the development of second language writing ability of the learners taking part in the study.

The first finding of the study which confirms the success of the product-based approach to banking English writing is in line with the findings of other researchers recorded in the literature: Kroll (1997) argues that the reader's main interest is not in the quality of ideas or expressions, but in the correct use of formal linguistic features. What Kroll focuses on is one of the main tenets of product-based approach to teaching writing (Hyland, 2003). Pincas (1982) also believes that a product-based approach to writing provides students with "no freedom to make mistakes" (p. 91). Following Hyland's perspective, Steele (2004) argues the importance of product-based approach in shaping the organization of ideas among second language learners of English.

Hable (2010) who focused on implementing computer corpora as a source in English language teaching (ELT) found that the models of writing employed in the product-oriented

approach are useful tools for the learners developing second language writing. Al-Jarrah and Al-Ahmad (2013), in their research entitled 'writing instruction in Jordan: past, present, and future trends' found that majority of teachers are still implementing the final product-oriented approach in their teaching.

The second finding of the present research highlights the significance of process-based approach in teaching second language writing. This is in line with the findings of the previous research as follows: Masny and Foxall (1992) found that low apprehension in writing could be enriched through employing a process-based approach to SL writing. Their study concluded that process-oriented classroom writing may reduce apprehension since it deals with exploring ideas and content.

The third finding of the present study confirmed that the process-based group outperformed the product-based group on the posttest of ESP writing indicating that there was a significant difference between the two groups' mean scores on the posttest of ESP writing. This revealed the significance of the process-based approach in teaching writing in Iranian EFL situation. This finding is in line with the research results reported in the literature: Akpinar (2007) who investigated the comparative effect of process and product-oriented writing instructions on 48-Turkish university students' writing came to know that the learners experiencing the process-based approach could come up with better results.

**Conclusion**

The outcome of the posttest data analysis clarified that both product and process-oriented approaches significantly affect the improvement in the ESP writing ability of the in-service trainees taking part in an ESP course of banking English writing. Meanwhile, it was revealed that the process-based group outperformed the product-based group on the posttest of ESP writing indicating that there was a significant difference between the two groups' mean scores on the posttest of ESP writing. It was thus concluded that there was a significant difference between process-oriented and product-oriented approaches in teaching ESP writing to the banking English in-service training students.

Here it could be concluded that in case the learners are exposed to process-based approach of teaching second language writing, they can develop the writing skill better and, therefore, could promote their second language learning development. The findings of the study also proved that both product and process oriented approaches to teaching second language writing are effective.

Hyland (2008), within the framework of SLA pays attention to the role training and interactional feedback play in L2 writing development. This way he emphasizes the importance of presence of training and modeling in prompting learners to notice L2 forms and produce well formed writings.

English teachers and learners could employ product-based approach, process-based approach, or the alternative mixed approach, as well as awareness of a mismatch between input they receive and their current learning. This way the classroom interactions could be enriched and would help subsequent L2 development of the learners. Materials developers in the ELT domain also could employ the findings of the present study and those of the similar ones to present tasks in which learners' awareness toward learning is enhanced. Such tasks may help the learners move towards self-correction, autonomy, and meaningful learning.

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