p-ISSN 2252-7427 e-ISSN 2541-3635
Indonesian EFL Journal
AISEE The Association of Indonesia Scholars of English Education

GENRE-BASED PEDAGOGY FOR RESEARCH PROPOSAL WRITING: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF EFL TERTIARY EDUCATION

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APA Citation: Harefa, H. S., Emilia, E., & Damayanti, I. L. (2026). Genre-based pedagogy for research proposal writing: A systematic review of EFL tertiary education. *Indonesian EFL Journal, 12*(3), 1115-1124. https://doi.org/10.25134/ieflj.v12i3.193

Received: 21-03-2026 Accepted: 25-06-2026 Published: 30-09-2026

Abstract: This systematic review examined the empirical evidence on genre-based pedagogy for teaching research proposal writing to tertiary-level EFL learners. Following established systematic review procedures, studies were selected based on inclusion criteria focusing on genre-based instruction, research proposal writing tasks, and EFL/ESL tertiary participants. Findings from the available studies were analyzed thematically across five dimensions: writing performance, genre awareness, cognitive empowerment, self-efficacy, and linguistic accuracy. The review revealed that genre-based instruction is associated with improvements in students' ability to organize research proposals and understand academic conventions. Cognitive and psychological empowerment were reported in some studies, while direct evidence of self-efficacy improvement remains limited. A particularly important finding was the persistence of grammatical problems despite improvement in rhetorical organization, suggesting that genre awareness alone does not guarantee grammatical accuracy. The review also identified considerable variation in instructional models, including the Teaching-Learning Cycle, Cognitive Genre-Based Approach, and integrated genre/process models. However, the evidence base is small and heterogeneous, with some findings based on overlapping publications and graduate-level participants. The review concludes that genre-based pedagogy provides a promising framework for research proposal writing instruction, but its effectiveness is likely strongest when combined with explicit linguistic support. Implications for pedagogy and future research are discussed.
Keywords: *EFL undergraduate students; genre-based pedagogy; research proposal writing*

INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is an essential component of university education because students are expected to communicate knowledge, construct arguments, engage with previous scholarship, and demonstrate disciplinary understanding through written texts (Liu et al., 2025; Mohamed-Amar & Mohamed-Amar, 2024; Yasuda, 2023). In the Indonesian higher education context, the demand for academic writing proficiency has intensified with the implementation of the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework and the growing emphasis on research-based learning. For undergraduate students learning English as a foreign language (EFL), these demands can be particularly challenging because academic writing requires simultaneous control of rhetorical organization, disciplinary conventions, and linguistic resources (Aldabbus & Almansouri, 2022; Esperanzate, 2025). Research proposal writing is especially demanding because students must not only produce grammatically acceptable English but also establish a research topic, identify a problem, justify its significance, position the proposed study in relation to previous research, and organize these elements into a recognizable academic genre (Gai Mali, 2023; Rastri et al., 2023).

Genre-based pedagogy (GBP) provides one possible response to these challenges because it makes the social and rhetorical purposes of academic texts more explicit (Hyland, 2024). Rather than treating academic writing simply as the production of grammatically correct

sentences, genre-oriented instruction draws learners' attention to how texts are organized to achieve particular communicative purposes (Zhai & Razali, 2023). In research proposal writing, this may include examining how writers introduce a research area, establish a research problem, identify a gap, justify a study, and signal the direction of the proposed research (D Reddy, 2023; Flórez García et al., 2021; Rustipa et al., 2023).

The value of explicit genre instruction is illustrated in research on tertiary-level academic writing. A review by Zhai and Razali (2023) mapped research on genre-based approaches in ESL/EFL writing pedagogy, identifying significant growth in the field and a concentration of studies in Asian contexts. Similarly, a recent systematic review by Lan and Bui (2025) found that genre-based approaches are increasingly used in teaching academic writing to tertiary students, with Indonesia emerging as a significant contributor to GBA research.

Among empirical studies focusing specifically on research proposal writing, Wijayanti et al. (2017) investigated genre pedagogy in the teaching of research proposal writing among 15 university students. Their study reported that students became cognitively empowered through genre-based learning activities and exposure to texts and teaching cycles. A related doctoral study by Wijayanti (2019), involving the same research context and 15 students, similarly reported cognitive and psychological empowerment associated with genre pedagogy. Because these two sources represent the same broader research project, they should be treated as one underlying study rather than as two independent studies in a systematic synthesis (Lunny et al., 2021; Vuogan & Li, 2024; Zhang et al., 2026).

Other studies provide evidence concerning more specific dimensions of proposal writing. Rozimela et al. (2019) examined 10 thesis-proposal introductions produced by EFL learners who had been taught through a Cognitive Genre-Based Approach. The students demonstrated improvement in idea development and organization, including their ability to state research topics, problems, purposes, and, in some cases, research gaps and rationales. However, grammatical problems remained substantial. This finding is important because it suggests that genre awareness and rhetorical organization may improve without corresponding mastery of grammatical accuracy.

Kuzmenkova and Erykina (2022) provide further evidence from a larger undergraduate population. Their study involved 192 undergraduate students' research project proposals and examined a complex genre-based methodology combining genre analysis with elements of product and process approaches. The study is therefore particularly relevant to the present review because its participants and writing task correspond closely to the target population and genre.

Evidence from other tertiary contexts also suggests that genre-based instruction may influence students' perceptions of their writing competence. Mazdayasna and Ghane (2021), for instance, reported significant improvement in proposal-writing quality and self-efficacy after one semester of genre-based instruction. However, their participants were 22 graduate students majoring in TEFL rather than undergraduates. Consequently, the study provides useful contextual evidence but should not be treated as direct evidence for an undergraduate-only research question.

However, there are several questions remain related to the growing use of genre-based approaches. First, improvement in overall writing quality does not necessarily imply improvement in all dimensions of academic writing (T. Zhang & Zhang, 2021). Second, studies differ in the extent to which they emphasize rhetorical moves, cognitive empowerment, linguistic features, scaffolding, or process-oriented writing (Jiang et al., 2022). Third, evidence from undergraduate and graduate populations is sometimes combined, making it difficult to determine whether findings are directly applicable to undergraduate EFL learners (Tardy et al., 2022).

Accordingly, this review examines the available empirical evidence on genre-based pedagogy for research proposal writing among tertiary-level EFL learners, with particular attention to undergraduate students. It addresses four questions: RQ1. What genre-based pedagogical models have been used to teach research proposal writing to tertiary-level EFL students? RQ2. What effects of genre-based pedagogy on writing performance and genre awareness have been reported? RQ3. How does genre-based instruction relate to students' self-efficacy, cognitive empowerment, or other affective outcomes? RQ4. What linguistic difficulties remain after genre-based instruction, and what implications do these difficulties have for research proposal writing pedagogy?

p-ISSN 2252-7427, e-ISSN 2541-3635
https://journal.uniku.ac.id/index.php/IEFLJ/index

This review contributes novelty in three respects. First, it provides a systematic synthesis of empirical evidence on genre-based pedagogy specifically for research proposal writing instruction in EFL contexts. Second, it distinguishes between evidence from undergraduate and graduate populations, enabling more targeted pedagogical recommendations. Third, it systematically examines the relationship between genre awareness and linguistic accuracy, addressing a gap in the literature concerning persistent grammatical difficulties following genre-based instruction.

METHOD

This systematic review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021). The review process consisted of four stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. A PRISMA flow diagram was prepared to document the number of records identified, screened, assessed for eligibility, and included in the review. Two reviewers independently screened titles and abstracts, with disagreements resolved through discussion or consultation with a third reviewer.

The review focuses on empirical research examining genre-based pedagogy in research proposal writing and closely related academic writing contexts involving tertiary-level EFL learners. Because the available studies employ different methodological designs and outcome measures, the present synthesis does not combine their findings statistically. Instead, the evidence is compared thematically across writing performance, genre awareness, affective outcomes, instructional models, and linguistic accuracy.

The researcher selected studies through four stages: query formulation, initial screening against the inclusion criteria, citation chaining, and relevance ranking, broadly consistent with the identification, screening, and eligibility stages recommended in the PRISMA 2020 reporting guideline (Page et al., 2021).

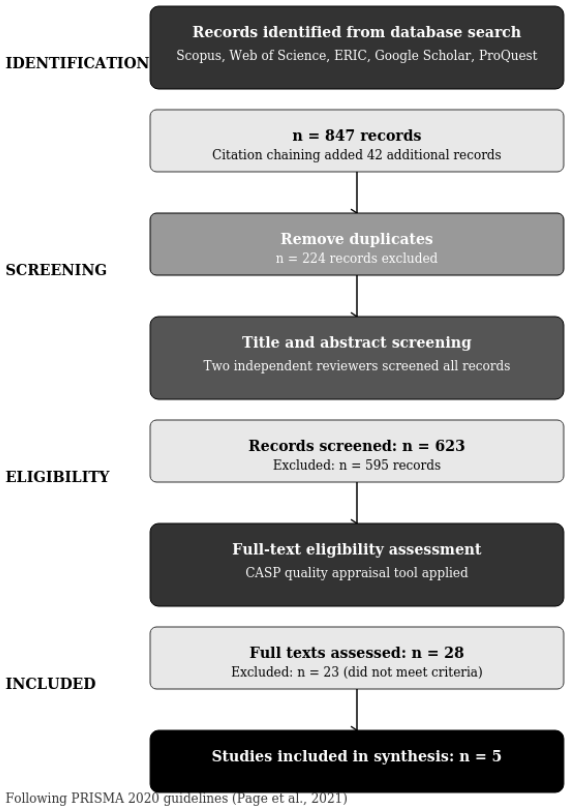

Figure 1. *PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for study selection*

A comprehensive search was conducted in the following electronic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar, and ProQuest. The search terms included ombinations of: 'genre-based pedagogy,' 'genre-based instruction,' 'genre approach,' 'research proposal,' 'thesis proposal,' 'academic writing,' 'EFL,' 'ESL,' and 'tertiary.' The search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles and doctoral dissertations published in English between 2017 and 2025. Additional studies were identified through citation chaining of included articles.

Studies involving graduate students were not included in the undergraduate evidence base but were retained as contextual evidence where they provided directly relevant findings concerning proposal writing and genre-based instruction. A distinction was also made between independent studies and multiple publications arising from the same research project. This distinction is important in order to avoid double-counting participants or findings.

The quality of included studies was assessed using a modified version of the Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP) checklist for qualitative and quantitative studies. Each study was evaluated according to criteria including clarity of research aims, appropriateness of methodology, and transparency of reporting.

Table 1. *Characteristics of the available studies*

Study	Participants	Genre	Instructional Model	Writing Performance	Genre Awareness / Empowerment	Self-Efficacy	Linguistic Accuracy
Wijayanti, Emilia, & Gunawan (2017)	15 tertiary students	Research proposal	Genre pedagogy and Teaching-Learning Cycle	Students improved their ability to construct research proposals	Cognitive empowerment and awareness through text examples and genre-based activities	Not formally quantified	Students developed awareness of appropriate linguistic resources
Rozimela, Wahyuni, & Fudhla (2019)	EFL learners; 10 proposal introductions analyzed	Thesis proposal introduction	Cognitive Genre-Based Approach	Idea development and organization improved	Better organization of topic, problem, purpose, gaps, and rationale	Not explicitly measured	Grammatical problems remained substantial
Kuzmenkova & Erykina (2022)	192 undergraduates	Research project proposal	Complex genre-based methodology combining genre, product, and process approaches	Study reports improvement associated with the methodology	Genre analysis and proposal structure were central to instruction	Not established from the available data	Requires further extraction from the full study
Wijayanti (2019)	15 tertiary students	Research proposal	Genre pedagogy	Improvement in learning products reported	Cognitive and psychological empowerment	Psychological empowerment reported	Linguistic development associated with genre-based learning
Ghane & Mazdayasna (2022)	22 graduate TEFL students	Thesis proposal	Explicit genre-based instruction	Significant improvement in proposal-writing skills	Increased awareness of generic structures and lexico-grammatical features	Significant increase in self-efficacy	Improved use of academic lexico-grammatical features

The extracted evidence was analyzed thematically. Findings were first grouped according to the outcomes reported in individual studies and subsequently compared across studies. Four major themes emerged from the available evidence, including (1) improvement in writing performance and rhetorical organization; (2) development of genre awareness and cognitive empowerment; (3) self-efficacy and psychological outcomes; and (4) persistent linguistic difficulties. Because the available studies use different measures and research designs, numerical effect sizes were not calculated. Statements concerning effectiveness were therefore limited to patterns explicitly reported in the original studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Writing performance and rhetorical organization

The available evidence generally indicates that genre-based instruction can improve students' ability to organize research proposals. The clearest evidence comes from studies that directly

examined students' written products. Wijayanti et al. (2017) reported that 15 university students developed their ability to write research proposals through genre-pedagogical activities. The study emphasized the role of teaching cycles and text examples in helping students engage cognitively with academic writing.

Similarly, Rozimela et al. (2019) found improvement in idea development and organization among EFL learners taught through a Cognitive Genre-Based Approach. Their analysis of 10 proposal introductions showed that students became more capable of presenting research topics, problems, purposes, and, in some cases, research gaps and rationales. Another study reported by Kuzmenkova and Erykina (2022) provide evidence from a substantially larger undergraduate population. Their study used data from 192 research project proposals and implemented a complex methodology combining genre analysis with product- and process-oriented elements. Together, these findings suggest that genre-based instruction is particularly useful for making the organizational structure of research proposals more visible to learners.

However, the evidence should not be interpreted as proof that genre pedagogy automatically improves all dimensions of writing. The studies vary in their designs, outcomes, and instructional models. Moreover, the evidence available for this preliminary synthesis does not permit a quantitative comparison of the magnitude of improvement.

Genre awareness and cognitive empowerment

A second recurring finding concerns students' awareness of the rhetorical and linguistic characteristics of academic genres. Genre pedagogy encourages learners to analyze model texts and identify how particular linguistic and organizational choices serve communicative purposes. In the study by Wijayanti et al. (2017), students were engaged with text examples and genre-based learning activities that supported cognitive processes involved in research proposal writing. The authors reported cognitive empowerment as an important outcome of the genre-based teaching cycle.

Wijayanti's (2019) broader doctoral study similarly conceptualized empowerment in both cognitive and psychological terms. The study involved 15 students taking a Research on ELT course and examined how genre-based teaching affected their learning process and products.

The findings from these studies suggest that genre pedagogy may contribute to academic literacy not simply by providing students with a template but by helping them understand why particular organizational and linguistic choices are appropriate in a research proposal. This distinction is important. Effective genre pedagogy should not reduce genre instruction to formulaic imitation; rather, students need opportunities to analyze, discuss, adapt, and eventually independently construct texts (Hyland, 2024; Zhai & Razali, 2023).

Self-efficacy and psychological outcomes

The evidence concerning self-efficacy is promising but less extensive than the evidence concerning writing organization. Mazdayasna and Ghane (2021) directly measured proposal-writing self-efficacy among 22 graduate TEFL students before and after one semester of genre-based instruction. The study reported a significant increase in students' self-efficacy alongside significant improvement in proposal-writing skills.

However, because these participants were graduate students, the finding should not be generalized directly to undergraduate EFL learners. The study nevertheless provides a useful indication that explicit genre instruction may influence students' perceptions of their ability to undertake a complex academic writing task. The evidence from Wijayanti, (2019; 2017) is also relevant because it reports cognitive and psychological empowerment. Nevertheless, empowerment and self-efficacy should not be treated as identical constructs. Self-efficacy refers specifically to learners' beliefs about their capability to perform a task (Teng, 2024), whereas empowerment may encompass broader cognitive and psychological dimensions. Future synthesis should therefore maintain these constructs as analytically distinct.

Linguistic accuracy: A persistent challenge

One of the most important findings emerging from the available evidence is that improvement in rhetorical organization does not necessarily result in grammatical accuracy. Rozimela et al. (2019) provide particularly clear evidence of this distinction. Although students improved in idea development and organization, the researchers found that grammatical features remained seriously problematic, with numerous grammatical errors occurring in the proposal introductions.

This finding challenges an overly broad assumption that genre awareness alone is sufficient to develop academic writing proficiency. Genre-based instruction can help students understand what a research proposal is expected to accomplish (Chen et al., 2026; Zagoto et al., 2025) and how its sections are organized through recurring rhetorical moves and generic structure (T. Zhang & Zhang, 2021), but learners may still require explicit instruction, including modelling, detailed explanation, scaffolding, and guided analysis of rhetorical and linguistic choices (Chen et al., 2026) and sustained practice in lexico-grammatical features, such as vocabulary, stance, collocations, transitions, and genre-specific grammatical patterns (Ali Alawad, 2026).

This issue is also relevant to Mazdayasna and Ghane (2021), whose genre-based intervention explicitly highlighted relevant lexico-grammatical features in thesis proposals. Their results suggest that combining generic structures with linguistic features may support both rhetorical and linguistic development. The pedagogical implication is therefore not to replace genre pedagogy with grammar instruction but to integrate the two. Teachers can first establish the rhetorical purpose of a section and then draw attention to the linguistic resources through which that purpose is realized.

Instructional models

The available studies demonstrate considerable variation in the implementation of genre-based pedagogy. The Teaching-Learning Cycle is evident in Wijayanti et al. (2017), where students were guided through activities involving text examples and genre-based learning. Rozimela et al. (2019) used a Cognitive Genre-Based Approach that emphasized idea development and organization alongside grammatical features. Kuzmenkova and Erykina (2022) employed a more complex model combining genre analysis with elements of product and process approaches. Their study of 192 undergraduate students illustrates that genre pedagogy does not have to be implemented as a single rigid model; it can incorporate elements from other writing approaches while maintaining genre as the central organizing principle.

These findings support a flexible interpretation of GBP. The most useful question may not be whether genre-based pedagogy should be used instead of process pedagogy, but how genre awareness, explicit instruction, scaffolding, drafting, feedback, and independent writing can be integrated into a coherent instructional sequence (Nguyen & Truong, 2024; Peungcharoenkun & Waluyo, 2023). Recent research by Zhao et al. (2026) demonstrates the potential of integrating data-driven learning with genre-based instruction to enhance genre competence in proposal writing, suggesting that innovative hybrid models may provide additional benefits.

Agreement and divergence across the evidence

The available studies show relatively strong agreement regarding the value of genre-based instruction for rhetorical organization and genre awareness. Students appear to benefit from explicit attention to the structure, communicative purpose, and linguistic features of research proposals. However, divergence appears in the outcomes measured. Writing organization and idea development show positive patterns, whereas grammatical accuracy remains problematic in at least one closely examined study. Evidence concerning self-efficacy and psychological outcomes is also more limited and is sometimes based on constructs that are not directly equivalent.

The reasons for this divergence may include differences in research design, outcome measures, instructional intensity, and participant characteristics. The field would benefit from more consistent use of validated measures and more detailed reporting of instructional procedures to enable more meaningful comparison across studies. The possibility of publication bias, whereby positive findings may be more likely to be published than null or negative findings, should also be considered.

Table 2. *Preliminary synthesis of agreement and divergence*

Aspect	Evidence of Agreement	Evidence of Divergence / Limitation
Writing performance	Genre-based instruction is associated with better organization and proposal-writing performance	Study designs and measures differ, preventing direct comparison of effect magnitude
Genre awareness	Students become more aware	Awareness does not necessarily guarantee

Aspect	Evidence of Agreement	Evidence of Divergence / Limitation
	of schematic structures and linguistic features	independent mastery
Self-efficacy / empowerment	Positive cognitive and psychological outcomes are reported	Direct self-efficacy evidence is limited and includes graduate students
Linguistic accuracy	Explicit attention to linguistic features can support academic language development	Grammatical problems may persist despite improved organization
Instructional model	Teaching cycles, cognitive genre approaches, and integrated genre/process models all show promise	No single model can yet be identified as definitively superior from the available evidence

Limitations of the available evidence

Several limitations of the available evidence should be acknowledged. First, the evidence base is small, with only a limited number of studies specifically examining genre-based instruction for research proposal writing. Second, the available studies differ substantially in design and outcome measurement, limiting direct comparison. Third, some publications appear to originate from the same research project, which must be accounted for to avoid double-counting participants. Fourth, educational level needs to be carefully controlled, as findings from graduate students cannot simply be combined with undergraduate evidence. Fifth, the current evidence does not provide a sufficient basis for quantitative claims about effect magnitude. Finally, the risk of publication bias in the included studies should be acknowledged.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review examined the available empirical evidence on genre-based pedagogy for research proposal writing instruction in EFL contexts. The findings indicate that genre-based instruction is associated with improvements in students' ability to organize research proposals and understand academic conventions. Cognitive and psychological empowerment have been reported in some studies, whereas evidence concerning self-efficacy remains limited. A particularly important finding is the persistence of grammatical problems despite improvement in rhetorical organization, suggesting that effective research proposal pedagogy should integrate rhetorical and linguistic instruction.

The review has several implications for pedagogy. First, ESP and academic writing instructors should employ genre-based approaches to make the rhetorical structure of research proposals visible to learners. Second, explicit genre instruction should be complemented by focused instruction in lexico-grammatical features, including vocabulary, stance, and discipline-specific linguistic patterns. Third, teachers should consider hybrid models that combine genre analysis with process-oriented writing, scaffolding, and feedback opportunities. Fourth, instructional models should be adapted to specific educational contexts and learner needs.

The review also identifies several directions for future research. Studies should employ larger samples, clearer comparison groups, longer intervention periods, and more consistent measures of writing performance, genre awareness, linguistic accuracy, and self-efficacy. Researchers should also investigate whether the effects of genre-based pedagogy vary according to students' proficiency levels, academic disciplines, and types of research proposals. Furthermore, future research should employ more rigorous research designs, including randomized controlled trials and longitudinal studies, to establish stronger evidence of causal relationships. Finally, researchers should explore the integration of digital and AI tools with genre-based pedagogy, as emerging evidence suggests that data-driven learning may enhance genre competence (Zhao et al., 2026).

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