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Genre variation and its impact on EFL students' reading comprehension

Recent years have seen increased attention being given to the notion of genre in ELT. This has been especially true in the case of ESP, where researchers have been interested in genre as a tool for analysing and teaching the spoken and written language required of non-native speakers in academic and professional settings (Bruce 2008; Hyland 2007; Mysko & Gordon 2009; Swales 1990, 2011). In studies of ESL reading development, a number of studies (e.g. Cervetti *et al.* 2009; Francis & Hallam 2000; Toledo 2005) reported positive effects of genre instruction on students' understanding of text structure.

In spite of the fact that the studies conducted on the impact of genre instruction on written production of texts is well researched, little research has been conducted to investigate whether a change in text genre can affect learners' reading comprehension. This is especially important given that reading is the most needed skill in ESP contexts worldwide.

This study is the report of a research project which attempted to answer the following research question: What is the effect of genre variation on the reading comprehension of medical students? To that end a reading comprehension test was developed which consisted of two types of texts (with the same text difficulty) each in a different genre, a medical English textbook and a general English textbook. 93 students majoring in medicine took the test. A matched-pairs t-test was used to compare their performance on the two different text genres. The findings indicated that the participants were more proficient in comprehending EGP texts compared to ESP texts. This shows the relative superiority of topic familiarity over text structure familiarity in text processing. The inability of readability formulas to exactly mirror the text difficulty might be the second reason for the better performance of learners on EGP texts.

