STYLE-SHIFTING IN EFL STUDENTS' WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS: BEYOND THE TEXTUAL REPRESENTATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Investigating English as a foreign language (EFL) students' writing performance is a continuing concern within the field of research on writing. The present contribution scrutinizes style-shifting in EFL students' assignments through an examination of the nature of their image-schemas of different types of academic genres, the most prominent factors that may affect the structure of these image-schemas, and the effect of the insufficient structure of these image-schemas, if any, on students' written assignments. A number of semi-structured interviews were conducted and sample texts were analyzed, following a content analysis approach integrated with a grounded theory approach. The study shows that EFL students' image-schemas seem to be interactive, interpretive, and dynamic in nature. It also shows that the structure of these image-schemas can be influenced by several cognitive, affective, social, and contextual factors. Significantly, the insufficient structure of these image-schemas may lead EFL students to shift their style locally and globally.

Contribution/ Originality: This study presents critical practical insights into the interactional, organizational, and rhetorical features of EFL students' constructed genre knowledge which has a great impact on their writing performance. It seeks primarily to unravel the underpinnings of EFL students' image-schemas of different academic genres in relation to their teachers' perspectives.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past 25 years or so, a major paradigm shift has been taking place in exploring the effectiveness of different pedagogical strategies in relation to genre research that may influence students' writing performance. Since the 1970s and the 1980s, variable contextual frameworks for teaching and learning writing in EFL contexts for a wide range of genres across the curriculum have been developed. Even if there were complete agreement that it was not the central concern of writing classes across the curriculum movement at that time, genre knowledge "was the focus of substantial theoretical and practical work" (Herrington & Moran, 2005). Consequently, something of a consensus seems to have emerged over the last two decades regarding the approaches to the development of genre knowledge and its importance across the curriculum.

Genre knowledge necessitates a fairly high level of familiarity with different types of knowledge which may encompass the knowledge of the formal, rhetorical, process, and content dimensions of a given genre (Tardy, 2009). As Llach (2011) maintains, learning how to write involves numerous cognitive processes that may interact and overlap with each other. Researchers and writing teachers, in this view, believe that "writing is social, strategic, and purposive, that it can be used to both generate and clarify ideas" (Casanave, 2004).

It was implicit in what was said above that genre has been defined and utilized differently throughout its history across different approaches to language use in general. However, there is a very broad consensus among researchers that genre can be described as "a classificatory tool, a way of sorting and organizing kinds of texts and other cultural objects" (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010). Despite the multifaceted body of literature, the majority of the existing studies on academic genre knowledge focus more although not exclusively on pedagogical instructions that may prepare students to participate and communicate effectively across academic genres and on the knowledge base and approaches across the curriculum (e.g., (Askehave & Swales, 2001; Bazerman, 1994; Bazerman, 2004; Hyland, 2000; Hyland, 2003; Hyland, 2007; Kress, 1999; Swales, 1990; Swales, 1993; Swales, 2004)). Yet, there has been a remarkable lack of attention to the effect of students' construction of genre knowledge on the quality of their written assignments. There is little literature on genre research that addresses the effect of EFL students' cognitive constructions of different types of academic genres on their production.

As Bruce (2008) notes, the construct of genre has been described by linguists working in the context of the systemic functional linguistic (SFL) approach in terms of its schematic structure and linguistic features, particularly in Australia (e.g., (Hasan, 1977; Martin, 1985)). On the other side, the English for specific purposes (ESP) approach to genre "is primarily a social genre construct although it acknowledges the existence of more general cognitive elements that are integral to the creation of discourse" (Bruce, 2008). Some scholars (e.g., (Evensen, 2002)) emphasize the importance of combining the social and cognitive dimensions of writing that account for the genres and their sociocultural and textual aspects. In a more restricted sense, teaching and learning writing involve constructing knowledge of the linguistic representations of linguistic features, their social and communicative purposes, and, crucially, the cognitive knowledge that is involved in the production of discourse (see Bruce (2008)). Notably, when one of these aspects of knowledge is lacking, students may shift from one style of a particular written academic genre to another. Such kind of shifting may occur locally or globally.

1.1. Problem Statement: The Emergence of Style-Shifting in Academic Writing

It has become something of a truism in conversations among scholars working in the contexts of both SFL and ESP that language knowledge is at the heart of students' understanding of different written genres. As Hancock (2009) states, it does not follow that "language is simply a behaviour or an instinct" (p. 204). The questions at this stage should be of "knowledge about language, not simply a question of what behaviours will be encouraged, discouraged, or permitted" (Hancock, 2009). Thus, EFL writing students should attain a fairly high level of proficiency in standard English and conventions of written discourse. They need to construct schematic structures of various determinable patterns of assigned genres.

Several scholars (e.g., (Balta, 2018; Han & Hiver, 2018; Horwitz, 2010; Kormos, 2012; Pajares, 2003; Teng & Zhang, 2016)) argue that the level of effort EFL writing students invest in composition processes may be influenced by several social, affective, and cognitive factors such as the level of anxiety, self-efficiency, and self-regulatory capacity, to name just a few. However, far too little attention has been paid to the influence of EFL writing students' inadequate social and cognitive genre knowledge, if any, on their performance. It has been observed that this sense of inadequacy may lead them to shift between different styles of written academic genres. EFL writing students' adherence to particular categorizing structures of discourse can be seen as a result of structuring image-schemas that are typically associated with the discourse of particular types (Bruce, 2008). This can best account for the occurrence of what could be called 'style-shifting' in many EFL students' written assignments.

By examining EFL students' acquisition of various writing conventions, it seems safe to argue that they tend to construct a number of image-schemas (both consciously and unconsciously) that help them understand and utilize different types of genres appropriately within a particular academic discipline. Image-schemas consist of several primitive metaphors. These primitive metaphors have been structured because of the regular occurrence of two or

more basic embodied experiences in people's daily life (Lakoff, 2014). This is supported by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) theory of image-schemas.

To summarize the general points here, one might say that EFL writing students tend to construct image-schemas of different types of genres that may be affected by different factors, as discussed below. The construction of such schemas may affect the production of different types of texts, as far as the organizational patterns of the assigned genres are concerned. These aspects of cognitive development in academic, linguistic, and social spaces need to be examined. The most intriguing questions, in this respect, are:

- What are the most salient features of Saudi EFL students' image-schemas of academic written genres?
- What are the most prominent factors that affect the structure of Saudi EFL students' image-schemas of academic written genres?
- To what extent does the insufficient structure of these schemas, if any, affect Saudi EFL students' writing performance?

The present study seeks to shine new light on genre-based pedagogy through an examination of different aspects concerning this issue. More importantly, it contributes to enhancing EFL students' and teachers' understanding of different underlying interactional, organizational, and rhetorical features of students' image-schemas that may account for the utilization of various textual representations. It presents the features, underpinnings, and structures of EFL students' image-schemas of different academic genres in relation to their teachers' perspectives.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1. Construction of Students' Image-Schemas of Academic Genres

As Hancock (2009) points out, the development of writing can be seen as a development of social practices "in which there are many active parts" (p. 122). As for bilingual students, many scholars argue that the development of effective writing necessitates a kind of active acquisition of various values, patterns, and norms that may require a combination of multiple languages and identities students need to construct more creative texts (e.g., (Lave & Wegner, 1991; Li, 2007)). Due to the multidimensional nature of writing, the development of EFL writing students' performance involves an awareness of dominant conventions in the community of practice one wishes to address (Alamargot & Fayol, 2009; Canagarajah & Jerskey, 2009).

In addressing the multidimensional and multi-genre nature of writing, Boscolo (2009) states that writing is "progressively restricted to essays and compositions in which students are basically required to expose, in a correct and possibly personal form" (p. 302). Students need access to "the standard variety of the dominant language, to dominant genres and to the social and rhetorical sophistication needed to write for a range of audiences and purposes." (Janks, 2009). Therefore, students' texts are "constructed word by word, image by image" (Janks, 2009) in a way that shapes the goals they seek to achieve (Lakoff, 2004). In this view, writing can be seen as a form of social action that can be realized through a set of underlying patterns that organize students' ideas cohesively.

Image-schemas are, then, various cognitive representations of people's social practices. The term 'image-schema' has been invented by Mark Johnson and George Lakoff in the 1980s. It is used to refer to the central notion "in cognitive semantics and other fields that focus on the construction of meaning" (Mandler & Cánovas, 2014). Image-schemas generally have been described by Gallese and Lakoff (2005) as "interactional, arising from (1) the nature of our bodies, (2) the nature of our brains, and (3) the nature of our social and physical interactions in the world" (p. 467). The understanding of different concepts and patterns in social life encompasses a wide range of concepts that cannot be considered perceptual; however, people rely on particular experiences through the affordances in which these particular concepts might be realized (Hedblom, Kutz, Peñaloza, & Guizzardi, 2019).

Quite rightly, EFL writing teachers "may need to help learners acquire the appropriate cognitive schema . . . or knowledge of topics and vocabulary they will need to create an effective text" (Hyland, 2003). Schema knowledge is

said to include "considerable knowledge of contexts, interpersonal relations, the roles of readers and writers, and how all these influence texts" (Hyland, 2003). Thus, for the purpose of this study, it might be claimed that when one of the elements of image-schemas (i.e., an element of the micro-genre) within the family (i.e., the macro-genre) of academic essays is lacking, students may shift their style of writing from on type of academic genre to another or within a particular genre from one stage to another.

2.2. Genre

Many scholars view genre as a determinable way of the production and the interpenetration of system and process across discourse communities (e.g., (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995)). In her words, Miller (1984) defines genre as "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations" (p. 159). Furthermore, Harmer (2001) notes that genre "represents the norms of different kinds of writing" (p. 327). It refers to "the use of language to interact with participants of a particular social community in a conventional structure" (Yeh, 2015). In a more restricted manner, the written genre has been described as "(a) primarily literary, (b) entirely defined by textual regularities in form and content, (c) fixed and immutable, and (d) classifiable into neat and mutually exclusive categories and subcategories" (Freedman & Medway, 1994).

Genre is, then, a term for collecting texts together, representing appropriate use of language within a particular discourse community. More precisely, each genre is associated with a cognitive representation (i.e., an image-schema) that encompasses different types of skills, vocabulary, ideas, and experiences that can be communicated effectively in a culturally organized way.

2.3. Applications of Genre Research to Academic Discourse: Students' Written Assignments

In addressing the overall goal of improving students' writing skills, several attempts have been made to examine and emphasize the importance of genre knowledge in the production of appropriate academic texts within a particular academic community (e.g., (Chen & Su, 2012; Cheng, 2008; Kongpetch, 2006; Russell, 2014; Yasuda, 2011; Yayli, 2011)). As Russell (2014) points out, "an important aspect of becoming proficient in academic English is learning to write appropriate academic language and becoming familiar with the genres of academic and professional life" (p. 8). Crucially, students may be asked to write about different topics that fall into more general types of genres such as "definition, argumentation, description, classification, cause and effect, comparison and contrast" (Nadjette, 2016).

By analyzing students' argumentative assays, Ferretti, Andrews-Weckerly, and Lewis (2007) conclude that providing students with model texts may help students analyze and understand genre specifications and improve their argumentative skills. Examining the basis of academic writing, Peters (2008) claims that "some forms and their associated 'styles' (both written and performative) are 'individual' and some are group styles and truly collective" (p. 820).

In their efforts to investigate ESL students' writing skills, Fareed, Ashraf, and Bilal (2016) conclude that ESL students' written texts encompass several issues pertaining to "grammar, syntax, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, word form and word order, spoken expressions, contracted forms, cohesion, repetition of ideas and L1 influence" (p. 85). They further assert that "society, culture, the teaching-learning context and the learners themselves" are said to have a significant impact on "the development of writing skills in one way or the other" (Fareed et al., 2016). Indeed, students' writing performance may be affected by various factors which might be internal or external.

2.4. Factors Affecting EFL Students' Performance across Written Academic Genres

Perhaps one of the most undisputed assumptions about the improvement of writing skills in EFL and English as a second language (ESL) contexts is the aspects of cultural differences in written texts. On this account, Hyland (2003) stated that "what is seen as logical, engaging, relevant, or well-organized in writing, what counts as proof,

conciseness, and evidence, all differ across cultures" (p. 45). Furthermore, Burgos (2017) maintained that "the poor development of academic literacies in students' mother tongue is claimed to be transferred to the second/foreign language (L2) learning process; consequently, writing becomes a more complex in process in foreign language contexts" (p. 142). According to Kaplan (1966) groundbreaking work on contrastive rhetoric, the patterns of paragraphs in students' native languages "need to be discovered or uncovered and compared with the patterns of English in order to arrive at a practical means for the teaching of such structures to non-native users of the language" (p. 21).

Understandably, other social, cognitive, and institutional factors may affect students' writing performance positively or negatively. More recent attention has focused on affective and cognitive factors, including self-efficacy, language anxiety, attitude, and motivation, to name but a handful (e.g., (Deb, 2018; Han & Hiver, 2018; Henter, 2014; Lee, 2005; Nadjette, 2016; Nitta, 2006; Zabihi, 2018)). In her effort to scrutinize the main psychological factors that may affect EFL students' academic writing, for instance, Nadjette (2016) concludes that students' high level of anxiety and lack of motivation may affect their writing negatively; however, their attitudes towards English does not affect the way they write. Likewise, Henter (2014) demonstrates that "motivation and anxiety are strongly linked to English performance" (p. 377). By investigating the role of cognitive and affective factors in measures of the second language (L2) writing, Zabihi (2018) concludes that "when L2 learners perceived themselves capable of writing in English they were more prone to write more complex, accurate and fluent narratives" (p. 47).

Interestingly, Dhanya and Alamelu (2019) investigate the effect of motivation, digital technologies, positive environment, assessment, feedback, and teacher-student relationship on the acquisition of L2 writing skills. Additionally, through an examination of barriers and solutions to academic writing, Itua, Coffey, Merryweather, Norton, and Foxcroft (2014) conclude that the barriers to academic writing that may include "lack of time and confidence; lack of extended writing at FE level; lack of reading and understanding of academic texts or journals; referencing; and academic jargon" (p. 305).

Collectively, these studies provide important insights into the construction of EFL students' genre knowledge through structuring a number of cognitive representations i.e., image-schemas of different types of micro-genres that seem to be associated with certain types of macro-genres. Crucially, the construction of such knowledge may be affected positively or negatively by social, cognitive, and instructional factors, which ultimately affect the writing performance of EFL students.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Study Design

A Qualitative approach seems to be useful to explore "the richness and significance of people's context-dependent experiences; in the generation of new theories; and in the early stages of problem analysis and project design" (Itua et al., 2014). Given the fact that genre analysis involves textually oriented and socio-cultural methods, researchers should employ a variety of methods when conducting a genre analysis (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010). For this study, the data were collected from analyzing EFL teachers' perspectives concerning the phenomenon under consideration following a grounded theory approach as it allows researchers "to conduct in-depth interviews with the participants" (Alhojailan, 2015).

3.2. Textual Analysis

Throughout the period of investigation, Saudi EFL students are assigned to write numerous types of essays addressing certain themes or topics in relation to the content, style, or rhetorical patterns of the assigned genres. The students were familiar with various types of academic genres and generic conventions from previous instructions, experiences, and disciplinary affiliations. Hence, samples from different texts were analyzed to illustrate

and explore the occurrence style-shift, if any, as the students enacted the functions of genre knowledge they construct from these instructions and affiliation in creating texts.

3.2.1. Research Sample

For the purpose of this study, thirty assignments were collected randomly from Saudi EFL students' assignments from different academic levels during the 2019-2020 academic year. The students are majoring in English Language and Translation at a large Saudi university in the middle east. The data were collected from analyzing both male and female students' assignments that have been written to accomplish various goals in different classes. Students' assignments in this study have been written in three distinct genres: explanation, exposition, and discussion.

3.2.2. Data Analysis

Saudi EFL graduate students' assignments were analyzed following a number of guidelines inspired by a new framework for university writing instruction that has been proposed by Beaufort (2007). Beaufort (2007) argues that "understanding the social action the genre represents within the discourse community is … crucial" (p. 111). These guidelines can be summarized as follows (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; Beaufort, 2007):

- Collecting samples of the genre.
- Identifying the larger scene and describing the situation in which the genre is used, including the setting, subject, participants, and purposes of using a particular type of genre within a particular discourse community.
- Identifying and describing patterns in the genre's features and stages.
- Analyzing what these patterns reveal about the identified situation and scene.

3.3. Interviews

The present research is conducted in a highly accredited university in Saudi Arabia. Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with both male and female EFL instructors in an attempt to gain an insightful understating of the occurrence of style-shifting among EFL undergraduate students. The participants have been teaching at the university level for more than ten years. Semi-structured interviews allow "the interviewer to introduce the topic to the interviewees and guide the discussion to make them provide detailed information to answer the research questions" (Alhojailan, 2015).

3.3.1. The Interview Questions

The interview questions have been designed in a way that reveals important facts about the occurrence of style-shifting in light of the research questions (see Appendix A). The validity of the interview questions was assured through consulting a linguistic expert who discussed the formulation of some questions and provided his feedback about how some questions should be rewritten in a more effective and appropriate way.

3.3.2. Data Collection Procedure

As for interviews, informed consent was obtained before the interviews and a possibility of withdrawing was given to all interviewees at any phase of the data collection. The interviewees were kindly requested to provide some of their students' texts to be analyzed. Anonymity and confidentiality were kept at all phases and a system for record-keeping was implemented throughout the period of investigation. The formal process of analyzing the collected data began by transcribing, coding, and organizing the interviewees' responses in accordance with a number of themes in light of the research questions.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

In an attempt to explore the nature of EFL students' writing performance in relation to the schematic representations of various written academic genres, the collected data were analyzed to draw out key themes that are grouped in relation to each of the research questions, as outlined below.

4.1. The Most Salient Features of EFL Students' Image Schemas of Academic Written Genres

To explore the most salient features of EFL students' image-schemas of academic writing, it seems important to consider the teachers' philosophies about teaching and learning writing and their perceptions of different teaching strategies they utilized to help their students acquire academic genre knowledge that may enable them to construct their texts appropriately.

4.1.1. EFL Teachers' Philosophies

Perhaps one of the most useful tools for constructing students' academic genre knowledge is practice. EFL students may arguably structure an image-schema of a particular genre stage by stage as they write independently. The role of the teacher here is to guide the students and provide them with certain principles that tell them where their focus should be, as Excerpts 1 and 2 suggest.

(Excerpt 1)

Hamad: "Practice, practice, and practice at every single stage. We take writing as a process that involves a number of recursive stages. So, at every single stage, you [as a teacher] need to give the students plenty of practice."

(Excerpt 2)

Sami: "Knowing the genre types is Ok but this is not enough. Writing is a practice . . . You have to practice them you have to use them."

Notably, some EFL teachers prefer to provide their students with some effective, analytical tools that help them discuss the rhetorical patterns of academic genres and, hence, acquire them. To achieve this goal, some teachers provide their students with both explicit and implicit instructions to facilitate the construction of an interpretive framework of various academic genres that paves the way for structuring the schematic representations of these genres, as illustrated below.

(Excerpt 3)

Khalid: "Personally speaking, I think I will use both! I will explain them [the stages of the assigned genre] and then provide the students with examples. I want them [the students] to practice what they learned."

(Excerpt 4)

Hana: "It is a complete process. You [as a teacher] have to work on all of these parallelly. You have to give them [explicit] instructions at the beginning . . . They [students] have to know the basic knowledge or the organization of the text. So, I give them the instructions and they have to use critical analysis to understand the assignments . . . go ahead and practice! And of course, feedback. It is a complete process. I can not underestimate any section of this process."

Therefore, it seems fair to argue that students structure their knowledge as they write and discuss the features of each genre with their teachers and peers. The repetitive use of these kinds of learning and teaching practices can ultimately help students structure their image-schemas accurately. The concept of image-schemas is grounded in the ideas of Lakoff, who conclude that the cognitive representations (i.e., image-schemas) can be structures because of the frequent correlation of several elements. Accordingly, one of the most important features of EFL students' image-schemas is that they are structured in time with practice, as discussed above. In this sense, Hassan, in Excerpt 5, commented that his students' performance improves eminently in time.

(Excerpt 5)

> Hassan: "At the beginning of the semester, the writing is a disaster. It is lacking in every single aspect you can think of. As they move on throughout the semester, as they get supports from other professors and from other classes . . . reading classes and grammar classes, in particular, the writing tends to improve."

4.1.2. Teaching Strategies

To enhance this kind of underlying knowledge that provides the orienting framework of the features of students' image-schemas, most of the EFL teachers aim to facilitate the developmental learning processes of different academic genres, following several teaching strategies.

As Excerpt 6 shows, some EFL teachers believe that the grammatical rules and writing conventions should be taught inductively. In some instances, inactive, shy students are jointly engaged within the process to discuss some exercises with their peers.

(Excerpt 6)

> Khalid: "Some of my students are a bit shy, so they never ask questions. Therefore, I tend to divide them into groups of three students and ask them to do the exercise and discuss it with each other."

Khalid further commented that he usually encourages his students to understand and explain some grammatical rules by saying "take ten minutes, for example, or fifteen minutes and read it [the rule] carefully."

Most interestingly, some EFL teachers believe this strategy of collaborative learning can be further enhanced by using some technological tools. As can be seen in the following excerpt, the participant indicated that involving technologies can diversely help students structure their schematic presentations of academic genres.

(Excerpt 7)

> Sami: "Blending or involving technology will help our students to . . . write collaboratively and individually at the same time. So, for example, if we are [as teachers] using wikis or blogs, students might think between minds to brainstorm, to write sentences, to edit each other, to help each other compose the paragraphs, and negotiate meanings."

Crucially, these features may be constructed by analyzing other texts in which students can re/configure the writing conventions within a particular academic genre. The following excerpts are illustrative of this kind of teaching strategy.

(Excerpt 8)

> Hassan: "The first thing that I do in my writing classes is that I bring to them [the students] an essay and then I ask them to reorder sentences. So, I split the paragraph into sentences and I ask them to order the sentences in a logical flow."

(Excerpt 9)

> Nour: "When you [as a learner] imitate the structure of other writers, you will find that your writing style is improving step by step."

Accordingly, there is a tendency among some EFL writing teachers to teach, clarify, and discuss the compositional and stylistic patterns of the assigned genres implicitly. They tend to encourage the students to analyze and discover these patterns either collaboratively or individually. However, in some cases, some EFL teachers may provide their students with explicit instructions that contour their cognitive representations of academic genres, as illustrated in the following excerpts.

(Excerpt 10)

> Hassan: "Instructors' feedback is very important. It is the students' opportunity to receive unique information."

(Excerpt 11)

> Khalid: "In each lecture, there was a picture. The picture can be, for example, of a bank with arrows pointed to all the things that might be found in the bank."

Apparently, the excerpts above highlight the fact that the interactive and dynamic nature of students' image-schemas of academic genres may affect their performance. Writing is a social and cognitive activity wherein EFL students need to understand the rhetorical conventions either explicitly or implicitly and, then, apply them in their written assignments. Teachers' explicit and implicit instructions offer invaluable information students may use to understand the conventionalized expectations of different types of academic genres.

One of the most salient features of EFL students' image-schemas is that they can be improved dynamically with practice. They are interpretive and interactive in nature. In other words, they can be constructed consciously and unconsciously through intensive exposure to various kinds of teaching strategies. The traditional logic of students' culture offers a solid and constant foundation of the structure of their image-schemas. Needless to say, students' cognitive representations can be affected by several external and internal factors, as discussed below.

4.2. The Most Prominent Factors that Affect the Structure of EFL Students' Image-Schemas of Academic Written Genres

Having analyzed the most salient features of EFL students' image-schemas of academic genres, it seems necessary to consider the factors that affect the structure of these image-schemas. The nature of these cognitive representations may be shaped by many factors that may hinder or facilitate the students' learning process of multiple writing conventions within multiple types of genres.

4.2.1. Positive and Negative Transfer

Specifically, some EFL teachers rely on students' prior knowledge to explain the conventional patterns of certain genres, as illustrated below.

(Excerpt 12)

> Hassan: "So, the idea is basically . . . that I start with what they have not only in English but even in Arabic! I take what they have from logic, language tools, . . . linguistic abilities regardless of language. Maybe because I am a linguist so that is why I do not consider the differences between English and Arabic."

As can be inferred from the excerpt above, the transfer can be regarded as an effective learning tool that could take low-proficiency EFL students deep into new linguistic systems. In other words, some EFL teachers believe that students' prior knowledge, especially, although not exclusively, their linguistic knowledge can be considered the base that their acquisition of English-specific writing tools and conventions stems from. Nonetheless, the negative transfer may influence students' performance and lead them to shift between styles of distinct academic genres or between stages within a particular genre, as Reem commented below.

(Excerpt 13)

> Reem: "Transfer from Arabic to English is one of the definite reasons for this kind of shifting."

Thus, both the negative transfer and positive transfer play a significant role in constructing EFL students' image-schemas. In fact, the transfer seems to be an indispensable factor that occurs because of the incorporation of familiar patterns with unfamiliar ones.

4.2.2. Cognitive, Social, and Affective Factors

It seems important to note here that other factors may affect the structure of students' schematic representations that are reflected in their writing performance, as Hassan reported.

(Excerpt 14)

> Hassan: "The cognitive factors . . . let us say the academic factors or the knowledge factors impact students' writing performance because the amount of knowledge they have about writing reflect

on their own writing. Also, social class indirectly impacts students' writing performance. In fact, the relationship between the teacher and the students absolutely affects their writing performance. This is related to the affective factors because if they [the students] are anxious, if they are not comfortable, and if the teacher is known to be a strict grader to grammar, they maybe lose the genre itself or cannot recall the appropriate vocabulary."

Therefore, one might claim that various cognitive, social, and affective factors play a crucial role in noticing, identifying, understanding, and utilizing different rhetorical patterns of academic genres. Indeed, they arguably affect the construction of students' cognitive and social genre knowledge.

4.2.3. Students' Linguistic Knowledge and Cultural Background

Hassan further added that, in addition to stylistic and rhetorical knowledge, other types of linguistic knowledge (i.e., lexical and grammatical knowledge) have a great impact on students' understanding of different types of academic genres.

(Excerpt 15)

> Hassan: "Their knowledge about the grammar of English is important. Their actual level of vocabulary is immensely important. Maybe even the cultural background affects their own writing."

As demonstrated in Excerpt 15, students' understanding and utilization of writing conventions may be affected by their varying cultural backgrounds.

4.2.4. Students' Motivation and Reading

This view has been further emphasized by Hamad and Reem in Excerpts 16 and 17.

(Excerpt 16)

> Hamad: "Students have cognitive differences. Since they come from different backgrounds, they have their own, for example, let us say motivation. So, if a student is not motivated to learn, he or she is more likely to exert more effort to learn. Students who learn a language in a motivating environment tend to be more motivated than others.

(Excerpt 17)

> Reem: "This can be attributed to something social or something in the small society that they live in. Some factors . . . maybe . . . like limitations or restrictions in the way of how they think . . . how they behave. Maybe they [the students] are not given enough time to practice activities. Maybe they have no motivations from the society."

Perhaps not surprisingly, motivation is said to be one of the most prominent factors in structuring students' image-schemas which most of the participants in this study agreed upon. Another important factor is reading and analyzing text models, as can be seen in the following excerpt.

(Excerpt 18)

> Sami: "The more they read, the more they will be exposed to different writing and understanding and acknowledging and recognizing of writing genres. One more factor is giving them examples although this is explicit exposure . . . but students might recognize different genres based on the example or models provided to them."

4.2.5. Acquisition of the Foundations

Additionally, the construction of the students' schematic representations of the writing conventions of certain academic genres may be affected by the inadequate acquisition of the foundations of these conventions. So, the

problem might be exacerbated when students can not receive sufficient instructions in writing because of their frequent absences, as can be seen in Excerpt 19.

(Excerpt 19)

> Hamad: "Teaching or learning actually a language is like building a multi-story building . . . You build the first floor first and then you move on to the second floor and so forth. You can not build the fourth floor while you have not built the foundations or the first, second, and third floor first."

As can be seen in the excerpts thus far, connections across various cultural, social, affective, linguistic, personal, and instructional factors create an orienting framework of understanding and constructing Saudi EFL students' image-schemas of social and cognitive genre knowledge. More significantly, such knowledge can be reflected in their writing performance.

4.3. The Impact of Insufficient Structure of EFL Students' Image-Schemas on their Writing Performance

Common sense presupposes that EFL students' writing performance involves the integration of a wide range of linguistic and cognitive skills. To use multiple writing styles and choose multiple textual and structural recourses, many EFL students rely on their schematic representation of the assigned genres. However, the insufficient structure of EFL students may lead them to shift their styles both locally and globally, as Nour and Sami reported.

(Excerpt 20)

> Nour: "style-shifting may result from lack of understanding and lack of knowledge."

(Excerpt 21)

> Sami: "This will affect their writing badly. If they [the students] do not have good genre knowledge this will directly affect the product! If they have no enough background, their performance will be affected directly."

As can be seen in Excerpt 23, style-shifting may take place in many students' written assignments because students may fail to construct and understand the conventions of different types of academic texts.

(Excerpt 22)

> Reem: "If I ask them [the students] to write an argumentative essay and they write a cause and effect essay this means that they do not understand what the argumentative essay is. And even if they know and without practicing they will make such style-shifting."

In the following example, the student was asked to write an argumentative essay. She is expected to state her thesis (i.e., her point of view) and support it, using evidence (i.e., reasons and relevant examples).

(Example 1)

> "It is believed that the traditions carry the past, while progress carries future. There have been several opinions about this, some believe that in order to be developed, traditions need to be forgotten.
>
> Every country has its own culture and traditions, these cultures and traditions have been built over thousands of years. Most of them are based upon religious and it usually makes them stronger and more believable.
>
> On the other hand, most countries nowadays want to be one of the most developed countries. However, to be developed means to have better education, better transportation system and a healthy environment. Most of what was mentioned is not related to traditions. To demonstrante, United Kingdom is a developed country that still holds and protects it's own traditions and praises them.
>
> To sum up, tradition defines what people are, where they from and what they belong to. Some are better to discarde and others it better to keep. It is indeed powerful to be one of the most developed and progressed countries, but only if it is done in the proper appropriate way."

As can be seen in Example 1, regardless of lexical and grammatical mistakes, the students shifted her style from one genre (i.e., exposition) to another genre (i.e., discussion). She discussed the issue by providing more than one point of view. Furthermore, she stated her final position on the issue in the conclusion, rather than clarifying it at the beginning of the text. As for epistemology and writer stance, she did not utilize specialized terms or attitudinal lexis to express her point of view in a more persuasive way.

As some participants commented, some EFL students focus on certain rhetorical patterns rather than others. This expressly highlights the incomplete structure of students' schematic representations of different types of genres that can be distinguished academically. The following excerpts are illustrative of this phenomenon.

(Excerpt 23)

> Khalid: "They [the students] tend to follow some of the rhetorical patterns like the topic sentences, thesis statements, supporting details, and conclusion."

(Excerpt 24)

> Hamad: "Some students have problems with the content. They do not give you [as a teacher] enough ideas and enough details."

(Excerpt 25)

> Nour: "They [students] have irrelevant ideas and they are incomplete most of the cases. They sometimes start with a hook but they fair with completing the introduction."

(Excerpt 26)

> Hassan: "The coherence is also problematic. The usage of transition words is actually not enough."

As Excerpts 25 and 26 suggest, some EFL students' assignments seem to be lack coherence. Some of them may not use appropriate discourse markers (i.e., transition words or connectors) at certain points in texts or they may not use them at all.

As can be seen in Example 2, the student wrote a two-paragraph essay to argue for a particular point of view. However, he shifted directly to the conclusion rather than supporting his argument.

(Example 2)

> "Technology is a necessity of the modern lifestyle. Every day there are new ideas and advancements in the technology as the world becomes more involved in discovering and utilizing the potential of natural resources. Technology has improved human lives significantly by providing convenience and efficiency. It has made easily possible for us to access education, communication, medicine, transportation, sports, etc.
>
> In this fast pace and ever-changing world, technological innovations take no time in becoming obsolete. However, today for only nation's development technology plays a vital role in improving its economy and lives of people. Technology is the present and future of this era."

As one might notice, in the example above, the student did not logically support his thesis. Moreover, he kept going back and forth in a recursive manner. This can best account for the fact that students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds have a great impact on the structure of their image-schemas.

Most interestingly, the occurrence of style-shifting may occur in one type of genre more than the other depending on the complexity of the rhetorical patterns of these genres, as can be inferred from the excerpt below.

(Excerpt 27).

> Hamad: "Following the rhetorical patterns depends on the level of knowledge about a specific genre. So, for example, if you go for the rhetorical patterns of a compare and contrast essay, they would follow the rhetorical patterns here. But if it is about analytical genre, they would probably not. So, they tend to shift in a style but not in the other."

Accordingly, EFL students' inadequate academic genre knowledge is one of the most important reasons that stand behind the occurrence of style-shifting in many written assignments. It can also affect the fluency of their

writing. Additionally, it has been found that it may lead them to concentrate on some patterns or generic stages more than the other.

5. DISCUSSION

An initial objective of the study was to explore EFL students' style-shifting in their academic written assignments through an examination of the dynamic process of image-schema constructions. It is perhaps useful to emphasize the fact that the construction of texts involves the application of numerous cognitive and linguistic skills. In many EFL contexts, students construct their knowledge based on the traditional logic of their own culture, their knowledge of language systems, their prior knowledge, and other contextual and instructional factors and learning experiences. These findings seem to be consistent with other studies (e.g., Fareed et al. (2016)).

EFL undergraduate students' image-schemas of different types of academic genres may provide them with an orientation that serves as a reliable guide for their writing performance. These image-schemas are primarily established as interpretive frameworks that enable students to understand and discuss certain textual features of a particular genre of a text. They can be improved progressively through extensive exposure to the conventional patterns of this genre. Thus, they provide them with consistent patterns that help them to communicate new ideas appropriately and cohesively.

However, the insufficient structure of EFL image-schemas may lead them to shift from one style to another. They may shift between stages within the same genre or between two or more distinct genres. Not surprisingly, this kind of style-shifting affects their writing performance negatively. Crucially, the cognitive-representational changes can be noticed by examining, analyzing, and comparing students' assignments throughout a certain period of time. In this sense, it should be noted that this study corroborates the idea of Hyland (2003) who argues that the analysis of students' texts can offer some insights into their linguistic and interactive schematic representations.

The dynamic nature of EFL students' image-schemas accounts for the fact that they tend to progressively construct several sophisticated hypotheses about writing conventions that help them to produce a more conventional writing performance in time. This finding is also consistent with those of other studies (e.g., Boscolo (2009)) and suggests that students' understanding of a particular genre seems to be gradually restricted to the determinable patterns of a given genre.

Moreover, the findings of the present study agree with the findings of other studies, which show that the writing process may be affected by different cognitive, social, and affective factors (e.g., (Cheng, 2002; Deb, 2018; Han & Hiver, 2018)). They also mirror those of the previous studies (e.g., (Dhanya & Alamelu, 2019; Henter, 2014)) that have examined the effect of motivation on students' writing performance.

One of the most positive aspects of the construction of EFL students' genre knowledge is the use of the traditional logic that enables them to apply their prior knowledge during the discussion in writing classes. There remains, however, a need to teach learners better composition skills. EFL writing teachers should focus more on the writing process, rather than just the product of writing activities. A focus on the cognitive and interactive aspects of learning to write may help EFL students whose communicative competence is the main aim of education. In time, it may help them self-regulate their interpretation, comprehension, and utilization of academic genres that determine their choices of various linguistic features and the distribution of these features in texts.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the current study was to explore the occurrence of style-shifting in EFL students' assignments by scrutinizing the features of EFL students' image-schemas of academic written genres, the factors that affect the structure of these schemas, and how their insufficient structure can affect students' writing performance. This study has shown that EFL students' image-schemas can be improved with practice consciously and unconsciously. They seem to be interpretive, interactive, and dynamic in nature. They enable students to construct their genre knowledge

based on the traditional logic of their culture. It was also shown that numerous cultural, social, affective, linguistic, personal, and instructional factors may affect the structure of academic genre knowledge positively or negatively. Crucially, students' written assignments are significant evidence of their cognitive-representational development.

Taken together, these findings suggest that EFL writing teachers need to keep in mind that students' comprehension of the local and global organizational patterns of their texts seems to be one of the most significant aspects of EFL writing classes. This is because, especially with the advent of technology, students are able to acquire a large amount of vocabulary and check their grammatical and spelling mistakes using several online applications. Hence, they may construct the local level of their assignments' structure; however, they may not organize them globally without a relatively high level of familiarity with stages of academic genres.

The study has gone some way towards enhancing both EFL teachers' and students' understanding of students' cognitive-representational development in various aspects of their writing as far as genre knowledge is concerned. Perhaps more importantly, evidence from this study also suggests that the interplay of explicit acquisition and implicit acquisition of academic genre knowledge serves to construct a reliable set of generic structures and their rhetorical patterns and goals. In other words, various kinds of appropriate and strategic interventions provide students with a set of expectations in relation to the assigned genres, whereas the frequent contract with different texts that fall into the patterns of that genre constructs students' abilities to write independently and strategically. The scope of this study was limited in terms of the research sample, participants, and contexts. More research is needed to better understand the nature of students' image-schemas in other pedagogical contexts. Further research might explore the relationship between the types of genre and the occurrence of style-shifting across academic disciplines. Additionally, further experimental investigations are needed to investigate the dynamic nature of students' image-schemas through an examination of students' performance in a more systemic way.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. The interview questions

The First Section

- What is your philosophy when teaching writing in EFL contexts?
- What are the most effective teaching strategies utilized by EFL teachers to upgrade their students' writing performance?
- Do you think that EFL students can attain a high level of proficiency in writing skills? Why?
- What are the most important aspects for EFL teachers to consider in their writing classes?
- Do you think gaining a considerable amount of genre knowledge is important in EFL contexts? Why?
- Do you think that cognitive, social, and affective factors impact EFL students' writing performance? How?
- Do you think that students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds affect their writing performance? How?

The Second Section

- What are the most prominent factors that might affect students' understanding of different types of written academic genres?
- As far as genre knowledge is concerned, what are the reasons behind the occurrence of style-shifting in different types of written academic genres?
- What are the most effective teaching strategies EFL teachers could utilize to help their students overcome any difficulties they may encounter in their efforts to acquire academic genre knowledge?
- What are the most salient features of EFL students' written assignments?
- Do EFL students follow the rhetorical patterns of the assigned genres?
- Do EFL students shift their styles in all types of their written assignments?
- What are the consequences of EFL students' inadequate genre knowledge?
- Do you think that EFL students' genre knowledge can affect their writing performance? How?
- Do you think that EFL students' genre knowledge can affect the fluency of their writing?
- Should EFL teachers explain the stages of different types of academic written genres explicitly or implicitly? Why?