FLOW

Foreign Language Opportunities in Writing

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CERTIFICATE OF PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH COURSE EVALUATION AND STUDENTS' PREPARATION TO WRITING IN REAL-LIFE SITUATIONS – DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

Abstract

The aim of this article is to present results of a case study carried out as a partial fulfilment for a Master Thesis. The case study referred to one of the parts of Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English. The Paper 2 includes Part 1, where a learner is required to complete a compulsory task such as an article, essay or a letter, and Part 2, in which a candidate is free to choose from four questions with diversified text types. Moreover, in CPE Paper 2 one can find a reflection of the social approach and as in all questions role of the reader is specified. Thus, a candidate knows to what type of a discourse community they have to write. What is also determined is the role of the writer and the purpose of writing in a breadth of task types. A candidate and their linguistic competence at this level could be compared to the ones of an educated native speaker. Therefore, they should be able to adjust their language register to a variety of culturally appropriate ways required to fulfil every task. Thus, the aim of the study was to observe whether a Certificate of Proficiency in English course prepares students to real-life writing outside a classroom context. For the purpose of MA dissertation a case study was conducted on a small group of students participating in a course at a private school of foreign languages.

1. Introduction

Presently, Cambridge certificates such as First Certificate in English (FCE), Certificate in Advanced English (CAE) and Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE) have gained an enormous popularity. Since their main purpose is to certify one's language skills in English as a foreign language, it is crucial for the researchers in the field of applied linguistics and methodology of foreign language teaching to investigate if the students undertaking them benefit in any other ways, or are they maybe prepared solely to a formal examination without any considerations of how they could use their skills in real-life situations.

Being a participant and a researcher at the same time gave the author a real insight into the mechanics of such a course. It was the researcher's third year in a row in a CPE group and as a result he decided to do a study and see if this kind of courses provide any useful tools to operate in a real life. For the purpose of this article it was decided that only Paper 2: Writing will be analysed.

2. Theoretical perspectives

2.1. The approaches to teaching writing

Further, a matter which must also be discussed in this chapter is "How writing is taught." Even though it seems to be a relatively straight-forward topic to examine, it is believed to be extremely controversial at the same time. Not only are the results ambiguous as to how writing should be taught, but there are additionally problems with incorporation of theories into practice. It is suggested that writing is learned rather than taught. Whereas the best thing the teacher can do is being open and flexible to students' suggestions as well as showing his support. What it means is that the teacher has to provide feedback to a given instructional context, especially to the age, mother tongue and the learner's experience, their writing aims, and the targeted writing groups. Moreover, it is imperative that the teacher extensively encourages students "in the form of meaningful contexts, peer involvement, prior texts, useful feedback and guidance in the writing process" (Hyland, 2002: 78). Throughout the last five decades these issues have been raised many times and each time a different approach was suggested.

There are many factors which play a crucial role in teaching writing. Since writing is a cultural phenomenon it must be borne in mind that despite differences in students' perception of culture, learners must be able to recognise the different situations and contexts that they are supposed to reply to. The teacher has to take into consideration L1 cultural background and somehow confront it against the target language cultural background. A great attention must be paid to genres since they are used to convey the sociocultural aims (Hyland, 2002). That is the writer must follow agreed social conventions in order to ensure that the reader is able to read the message correctly and see the purpose (Hyland, 2003).

Furthermore, since composing is said to be non-linear and goal-orientated, it is essential to present students with "a range of writing and revising strategies on which to draw" (Hyland, 2002: 79). Having done this students are able to revise techniques which are used in a given social context. Students must also be able

to organise a text according to the reader's expectations as to show conceptual relationship, cohesion of a topic, "and reader involvement in expected ways" (Hyland, 2002: 79).

What is more, if a writer is in the centre of the teacher's attention the emphasis is more on student discovering his or her thoughts then on ability to express those ideas appropriately. Not only should the teacher provide a relevant topic for the students, but he should also encourage peer cooperation for planning and writing tasks as well as "incorporate group research activities of various kinds" (Hyland, 2002: 80-1). Lastly, aims and strategies must be set clearly so the students are able to perform a given task.

2.1.1. Audience and feedback

Another important factor is bound with audience and feedback. It is undisputable that feedback is one of the major aspects in developing writing skill, however, because of the character of writing there is nothing that provides an immediate "stimuli" to help learners revise and modify form or content of their writing. Hence a following solution has been proposed that peers serve the purpose of the audience and are to provide some kind of feedback, however distorted or incomplete it maybe. On the other hand, teachers must be careful with assigning the role of the audience and assessors to peers as there may arise some troubles because of in-class rivalry or students overzealousness in criticising their colleagues (Porter, 1992).

2.1.2. The product and process approach vs. the social approach

As far as the approaches to teaching writing are concerned each approach is seen as "complementary and overlapping perspectives, representing potentially compatible means of understanding the complex reality of writing" (Hyland, 2003: 2). Therefore, it can be said that approaches present both teachers and students with alternative and additional solutions and suggestions as to how writing should be learnt and taught. Even though it is uncommon to use exclusively one approach in a classroom it is beneficial to analyse each idea separately in order to gain additional insight, which eventually will reinforce the teacher's methods of teaching writing (Hyland, 2003). For the purpose of this article the author will juxtapose the product approach and the process approach against the social approach. First and foremost the general characteristics will be

presented. Basing on the general aspects, discrepancies as well as similarities will be presented.

According to Krashen (1993) second language writing skills cannot be acquired successfully by practice in writing alone. They also need to be supported with extensive reading. Therefore, a great emphasis in the social approach is laid on content, which together with reading, is a kind of medium on the basis of which students are supposed to produce their own texts. Texts which are directed at a specific audience and which are characterised by a specific register, vocabulary or lay-out. What is more, it is crucial to see links between the social approach and other approaches like the product and process approach.

If one examines the social and the product approaches, one can see that activating learner's personal knowledge, which is characteristic of the social approach, is also a part of pre-writing in the process approach (Matsuda, 2003). Furthermore, there is an element of familiarisation present in all three of these approaches. Familiarisation is confined to introduction of topical vocabulary specific for a given issue. While in the product approach there is imitating the patterns of a parallel text in learner's own essay, in the social approach there is also concentration on a text and the aim is to find some concepts in parallel texts. In the social approach there is also a strong tendency to use brainstorming activities in order to get reactions from the students. It is of great help for students if they need to generate some kind of ideas and organise texts. This method was used for the first time in the process approach where during the phase of pre-writing students were supposed to think of and generate their ideas, list and organise them.

Finally, Swales (1990) believes that linking, classification and looking for a relationship between ideas is indicative of both process and the social approach. In both of these, this aspect seems to be of great importance since without a proper classification and prioritization of ideas it is difficult to produce a good and coherent text. It is claimed that the social approach, to a great extent, is based on the concepts from the process approach. However, there is at least one major difference between the two. Namely, the process approach fails to offer any clear perspective on the social nature of writing or on the role of language and text structure in effective written communication (220).

To achieve effective communication according to Hyland (2003) a correct genre or text type must be employed. Since texts are written for specific purposes they can be divided respectively to the role they are supposed to serve. Thus the following aspect might be expressed by a written text: giving/requesting for information, discussing a topic, presenting opinion, or persuading someone to do something. Writers use grammar structures,

vocabulary, register or layout to organise a text so as to be able to achieve a target purpose.

It is extremely important to bear in mind that the greatest innovation in the social approach is the view that the writer is "neither a *creator* working through a set of cognitive processes nor an *interactant* engaging with the reader, but a member of a *community*" (Hyland, 2002: 40). Writing is perceived as a social act where a text conveys certain message and meaning. This meaning can only be understood as a some sort of action within the targeted community. At the same time a given text must bare resemblance to the patterns and conventions which show the sociocultural understanding of the given community. It is therefore clear that an essay written by an IT student will use different type of argumentation, presentation of information and theories than that written by a business student (Hyland, 2002).

It is also worth emphasising that in the social approach and content-oriented methods a close relationship between reading and writing is drawn. As a result, the aim is to provide students with the necessary skills to read texts successfully and then base their writing on what they have read. What is more, in this kind of approach one tries to emphasise the importance of confidence in students' performances. Nevertheless, reading texts most of all serve as an example of a well-formed content, appropriate ways of expressing ideas, help to facilitate vocabulary, grammar, organisational patterns, interactional devices or layout. Finally it is of great importance that the writer does not write just for the sake of writing alone but to achieve various professional or academic purposes (Hyland, 2003).

2.2. Scoring approaches

When considering testing, one cannot forget to raise an issue of scoring which occurs after one has designed and administered an assessment task. According to McNamara (1996), the spectrum that is being employed while assessing, especially written performance, indicates "implicitly or explicitly, the theoretical basis upon which the test is founded; that is, it embodies the test (or scale) developer's notion of what skills or abilities are being measured by the test" (Cushing Weigle, 2002, 109). Therefore, the design and development of criteria and the descriptions for every criteria level are essential to have a valid assessment. In the past a traditional way to assess student's writing was by juxtaposing it with the performances of others. However, this norm-referenced method has been substituted with a criterion-referenced approach where the worth of each and every essay is assessed in its own right against an extrinsic

criterion such as cohesion, coherence, register and context appropriacy, grammar correctness, and so on and so forth. Criterion based methods have many various forms and they form three fundamental categories: holistic, analytic and trait-based.

2.2.1. Holistic scoring

Holistic scoring has become increasingly popular over the last 25 years and many programs of assessment depend on the holistic method of scoring. Its basic presumption is that writing performances should be assessed on the overall impression of a piece of writing. Typically, a paper assessed in a holistic way is read only once and very quickly and afterwards it is gauged against a rating scale, or a scoring rubric which is a framework of the scoring criterion (Cushing Weigle, 2002: 112). Advocates of this method additionally claim that the main advantage and the main objective of this scoring method is to assess a learner's general proficiency basing on "an individual impression of the quality of a writing sample" (Hyland, 2003: 227). As White (1994) claims, such a universal approach to assessing writing supports the idea that writing is one item, which is best represented by an idiosyncratic scale that incorporates intrinsic qualities and elements of the writing. What is more, the presence of a scoring rubric makes all the difference between holistic scoring and its predecessor, general impression marking, which is believed to be less dependable and unequivocal. In this kind of scoring, criteria are never clearly presented. Furthermore, "the rubric is complemented by a set of anchor or benchmark scripts at each level that are intended to exemplify the criteria for that level, and raters are carefully trained to adhere to the rubric, when scoring scripts" (Cushing Weigle, 2002: 112).

Nevertheless, some researchers underline that holistic scoring has some drawbacks especially when applied in L2 contexts. One of the imperfections is that on the basis of a single score no beneficial diagnostic information can be obtained regarding a given person's writing ability. It is due to the fact that raters are unable to discriminate between diverse aspects such as organisation, breadth of vocabulary used, control of syntax, etc. It is notably problematic when referred to second-language writers as various elements of writing ability tend to develop at a different rate for different learners (Cushing Weigle, 2002). A further weakness of the holistic approach to scoring is that holistic scores are rarely easy to comment since raters very often use different criteria yet they arrive at the same score. Lastly, it is claimed that holistic scoring is dependant on somewhat superficial facets such as handwriting and length of the written production.

2.2.2. Analytic scoring

One of the most important differences between holistic and analytic scoring is that in analytic scoring pieces of writing are "rated on several aspects of writing or criteria rather than given a single score" (Cushing Weigle, 2002: 114). There are different aspects to be assessed depending on the need and aim i.e. grammar, register, mechanics, content, vocabulary, and organisation. Consequently, this approach to scoring is favoured as it provides a specialist with detailed information about different features of a test taker's performance.

Furthermore, there are three main analytic scales used by raters. First of which being the scale introduced by Jacobs et al. (1981). This scale is further subdivided into five categories of writing which are rated, these are: content, organisation, vocabulary, language use, cohesion and mechanics (Cushing Weigle, 2002: 114). Each of these aspects carries a different amount of marks with content carrying the highest mark level and mechanics being the least emphasised feature. Jacobs et al. scale has been employed in various writing programs at college level and it was accompanied by tuition materials and exemplary compositions to make the scale easily applicable and learnable by new users (Cushing Weigle, 2002).

A slight difference is noticeable in another approach to analytic scoring in L2 context. It is an array of scales which was produced for the Test in English for Educational Purposes (TEEP). The man responsible for this scale is Cyril Weir whose main alteration was substituting a single scale further divided into numerous subscales for a scheme introducing seven scales, "each divided into four levels with score points ranging from 0 to 3" (Cushing Weigle, 2002: 115). Communicative effectiveness was reflected in the first four scales, while the remaining ones related to accuracy. Similarly to Jacobs et al.'s scale, Weir's scale was extensively overseen and re-examined for the purpose of achieving a product easily and reliably administered by qualified raters. Weir's scale bears the greatest similarity to modern scale applied in the Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE) which is the subject of the research.

The last concept of an analytic scoring system is the Michigan Writing Assessment which includes three rating scales: "Ideas and Arguments, Rhetorical Features, and Language Control" (Cushing Weigle, 2002: 115). Analogously to the TEEP scale the Michigan Writing Assessment scales are not combined and given as a single mark but rather as separate units. Owing to this fact they provide useful information which can be used for diagnostic purposes both by teachers and test takers. What is unique for this scale, however, is the fact that the scales were developed locally and were preceded by consultation with the university faculty, "both within and outside of composition, and

incorporate considerations of good writing as defined by a variety of constituents" (Cushing Weigle, 2002: 115).

Interestingly, examples of analytic scoring reflect a very common approach to writing assessment which places a great emphasis on clear, explicit and detailed rubrics. As noted above, the main advantage of analytic scoring scheme over holistic scheme is that it is an invaluable source of diagnostic information about learners' writing abilities. What is more, the analytic scoring system is more convenient for rater's tuition, since unskilled raters can more easily understand and adopt the criteria presented in separate scales then in a single holistic scale (Francis, 1977, and Adams, 1981, both cited in Weir, 1990). More importantly, analytic scoring is of particular use in second language context where students show, or are more likely to show, "a marked or uneven profile across" (Cushing Weigle, 2002: 120) various features of writing. Last but not least, as Hamp-Lyons (1991) and Huot (1996) claim that analytic scoring is more trustworthy when compared to holistic scoring. It is due to the fact that the more multiple scores are given to each script of a scoring scheme the more scoring scheme itself becomes reliable. Thus analytic schemes tend to be more reliable.

Nonetheless, except for its obvious benefits and advantages the analytic scripts have some drawbacks. One of the main disadvantages is that it is more time consuming then holistic scoring because it requires from a rater to undertake more than one decision regarding every script. Finally, another problem arises when separate scores from different scales are combined to arrive with a single score, which leads to a major loss of the information gathered from the analytic scale.

2.2.3. Primary trait scoring

The last approach to scoring which is primary trait scoring will now be discussed in short as it has not been applied extensively, or at all, in second-language context. It is linked with the activities of Lloyd-Jones (1977) for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The main purpose of primary trait scoring is that of comprehending how well learners are able to write within a strictly defined range of discourse (e.g. apology or explanation). Furthermore, the rating scale is established respectively to the given writing task and pieces of writing are assessed with accordance to the learner's accomplishment of the assignment. "For each writing task in a primary trait assessment, a scoring rubric is created" (Cushing Weigle, 2002: 110). It is common knowledge that primary trait scoring is very "time- and labour-intensive" (Cushing Weigle, 2002: 110), since a reader is required to develop a new scoring guide for every writing

assignment. According to Lloyd (1977), time needed to create a scoring guide varies from 60 to 80 hours per task. As a result, primary trait scoring has not been widely employed in various assessment schemes, although it can be a valuable source of information on condition that enough writing samples are collected. When focusing on second-language context little knowledge is available as this scoring has not been too commonly used and little is known how this scoring system might be incorporated in second-language testing.

3. The Study

The Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE) was introduced in 1913 in Cambridge, England, to satisfy the needs of foreign English teachers. However, in December 2002 there was a review of the examination content and its administration and henceforth the examination changed its applicability. CPE is placed at Level Five of the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE). One of the key features of the examination is to provide accurate and consistent assessment of each linguistic skill, i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing, at the appropriate level. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this article the focus will be solely on the writing section (cf. Paper 2). The paper itself includes Part 1, where a learner is required to complete a compulsory task such as an article, essay or a letter, and Part 2, in which a candidate is free to choose from four questions with diversified text types. Moreover, in CPE Paper 2 one can find a reflection of the social approach as in all questions the role of the reader is specified. Thus, a candidate knows to what type of a discourse community they have to write. What is also determined is the role of the writer and the purpose of writing in a breadth of task types. A candidate and their linguistic competence at this level could be compared to the ones of an educated native speaker. Therefore, they should be able to adjust their language register to a variety of culturally appropriate ways required to fulfil every task.

Thus, the aim of the study was to observe whether a Certificate of Proficiency in English course prepares students to real-life writing outside a classroom context. For this purpose a case study was conducted on a small group of students participating in a course at a private school of foreign languages and the following research questions were posed:

1. How much of the coursebook material regarding writing was covered in the course?
2. To what extent are the text types and tasks corresponding to the real-life situations?
3. How do students perform in those text types?

4. How do participants evaluate their preparation to writing outside a classroom environment based on their learning during the proficiency course?

4. Method

4.1. Participants

The data for the research study was derived from a CPE group of nine persons. However, what must be emphasised is the fact that only seven persons actively participated in the group. One student, a man 45 year of age, attended the course even though he was far from the proficiency level. Moreover, he hardly ever did written assignments and formal tests. If the group had been notified about a test he simply used the avoidance technique and never appeared. Nevertheless, he wanted to use the L2 all the time so he participated in a proficiency course for a sixth year in a row. Except for this case, there was also a secondary-school student who was reluctant to make her pieces of writing available if she got a grade below +4. Thus, the data collected from these subjects were to a great extent incomplete even though she was one of the most consistently-working participants. For the reasons already mentioned the former subjects were excluded from the analysis and a detailed description of the course participants. As the scope of this article is limited the researcher randomly chose five participants out of the group.

The first of the participants is Karolina (20), a student of the Institute of English Studies at Opole University. It is noteworthy that it was her second year in a row at the proficiency level. Previously, except for learning English in public schools, she had been attending English courses at various levels for 14 years doing in the meantime Certificate in Advanced English (CAE). Furthermore, she has been learning English for about 17 years, starting at kindergarten and she attended an English class at secondary school i.e. she had six hours of English per week and three subjects conducted in English (maths, biology and chemistry). She knows German, which she has been learning for five years and obtained a ZD certificate.

The second participant is Krzysiek (19), who was in the final class of a secondary school and it was his second year in a row in a CPE group. He has been learning English for over 14 years and only three years out of 11 he did not receive a private English tutoring. He participated in courses at a private school for 11 years and he has a CAE certificate. Additionally, he had English in

primary school, lower secondary school and secondary school. He knows German at a basic level.

The third participant is Damian (22), who at the same time is the participant-observer. He is a student of the Institute of English Studies at Opole University. His English education started in kindergarten so he has been learning English about 17 years. It was his third year in a row in a CPE group. He attended courses at various levels at a private school for six years. The subject has been to England three times spending about nine months altogether and he interacted for the majority of this time in English. He also knows German at an intermediate level and Russian at a basic level.

The fourth participant is Jakub (17). What must be emphasised is that it was the first year of him at such a high level and thus he had the worst results. He has been learning English for 12 years, for the last six years he has been learning at a private school apart from public education. He has never been to an English-speaking country and except from English he can speak basic German.

The fifth participant is Iwona D.(26) and she has been learning English since 1989. She had English at primary school and additionally she had a private tutor until secondary school. Since her first grade at secondary school she has been attending at a private school and it was her fifth year in a row in a CPE group. She has been in England twice as a participant of language courses. She knows three other foreign languages i.e. Spanish at an upper-intermediate level, French at an intermediate level, and basic German.

4.2. Materials

The whole course was based on New Progress to Proficiency student's book by Leo Jones (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK). The book included the new specifications for December 2002 examination session. Each section is devoted to developing and improving various aspects of English as a second language, for example, reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. For the purpose of this article only the writing elements of the exam will receive attention. In the course of a year-long preparation only once was the material for learning and practicing writing provided from a different source than the course book. What is worth pinpointing is the fact that the book contains some examination advice and study tips which are usually given either at the side or at the bottom of the page. They incorporate useful pieces of information regarding practicability of divers structures and techniques used to approach specific tasks. It is also stated what students are expected to do in each section as to gain the highest scores. Additionally, the book clearly presents the complete structure of

the proficiency exam with a comprehensive cross-section of each paper, providing students even with the exact time limits and total marks one can get from each part. Apart from this coursebook the author of this article also used notes taken during classes and the pieces of writing which students produced both in-class and at home.

4.3. Measures

The data were drawn from samples of students' written assignments and the participant-observer's notes, which were taken in the classroom. The students' pieces of writing include tasks done in-class, at home and those done during a mid-year exam, end-of-the-year exam, and finally in a MOCK CPE exam. The setting of the observation and data collection was classroom. However, the elicitation tasks were relatively unstructured although students knew that one of the participants is a researcher and is in the course of gathering data to his study. Consequently, it did have some bearing on the behaviour of some participants, leading to situations when they did not want to make their pieces of writing available to the researcher's use as they were ashamed of poor marks they had received and mistakes they had made. The pieces of writing were examined to see if they are real life. To achieve it text types, contexts and the presence or absence of an audience was considered. The sample papers were additionally analysed according to the following three criteria: fluency, accuracy and text format

1. Does fluency (length) increase?
2. Is the grammar accuracy satisfactory or not (holistic assessment)?
3. Is the text format appropriate or not?

The first criterion to be considered is fluency which was measured by the length, that is the total number of words, of each submitted piece of writing. It is an important factor in CPE as the appropriate length of composition is an essential part of task achievement. On the one hand, students who produce texts with considerably fewer words run the risk of not having covered the task completely. On the other hand, those who write too long a text risk that it will include some irrelevances or that it may have a negative effect on the target reader. If it comes to this, lengthy pieces of writing are penalised and students lose points. The second criterion investigated in the samples was grammar accuracy analysed holistically. Therefore, the compositions were assessed as either satisfactory or unsatisfactory. The final factor assessed in the papers was

text format. The most important determinant of whether a text layout is appropriate or inappropriate is paragraphing, headings and subheadings (where necessary) and register. In this criterion a text can be deemed either appropriate or inappropriate.

Except for the written assignments the researcher also analysed the coursebook content juxtaposing the writing tasks included in the book and the extent to which they were covered in the course.

4.4. Procedure

The sample writings were collected throughout the course duration and the frequency of writing tasks varied from month to month, which resulted in students sometimes having a month-long break from writing. At the other times, students had to produce even three to five various genres of writing of varying length. The first set of writing samples was collected on 20th October 2005 and the remaining ones as follow: 10th Nov 2005, 15th Dec 2005, 3rd Jan 2006, 10th Jan 2006, 11th Feb 2006, 7th Feb 2006, 15th Feb 2006, 2nd March 2006, 23rd March 2006, and the last set on 6th June 2006. Altogether there are 11 sets of writing assignments collected during the course. The CPE examination course consisted of 120 hours and the lessons were conducted on Mondays, hour and a half, and on Thursdays , also hour and a half. It was the only proficiency group in school, but also the only proficiency group in all the private schools in Opole. The course commenced on 4th October 2005 and finished on 22nd of June. There was no controlled writing at the beginning of the course to check the participants' writing skills. The first opportunity for them to write was at the end of unit one. There were, however, controlled writing tasks at the end of each semester, which were supposed to be indicative of how the students' writing skills had developed in the course time.

4.5. Analysis

The data collected in the course of the research were analysed employing the holistic approach. The papers of all students were compared between each of the students according to the specified criteria, such as: grammar accuracy considered holistically, fluency or the length of the samples, text formats, real-life context and target readers. Since it is a case study, every student received individual attention, however, there is also focus on the course in general.

4.6. Results and discussion

4.6.1. Interview

The results of the interview of the concerned students were as follows: Karolina believes that she is prepared for both writing in an examination context as in a real-life context. She is satisfied with the course content regarding writing skills and the progress she made in writing. Krzysiek finds himself well-prepared to perform any kind of a written task (a text type) regardless if it is a classroom environment or real-life situation. Damian says that the amount of practice he received makes him more than capable of producing any kind of written response to any kind of discourse community. Jakub claims to be prepared by the course to writing in a real-life context even though he performed worst of all four especially in in-class written assignments. Iwona D. believes that she is prepared adequately to an outside-classroom writing. However, at the same time she knows that she underperforms as she hates writing. It is this shortcoming of her that is responsible for her not submitting too many written assignments. Katarzyna is the only person claiming not to be prepared by the course. Nevertheless, it does not necessarily have to be true as it is very noticeable that she has a very low self-esteem and she believes that everything she does is failure. Finally, Iwona G. also seems to be confident that she was well-prepared to real-life writing.

What is interesting is the fact that even though the participants feel prepared, at least in writing, none wanted to undertake the real CPE at the end of the course. It can be further observed that this tendency is largely widespread especially in higher groups of language proficiency i.e. CAE and CPE groups.

4.6.2. Karolina – Case Study 1

4.6.2.1. Fluency

In Karolina's case there are five pieces of writing submitted out of possible 14. The first composition produced was a report of her choice of three pictures which fit as the icons of the 20th century the most. The number of words is just 115 (see Figure 1) whereas in the case of a report one is required to write between 300 and 350 words. Therefore, it can be claimed that the fluency is low and does not show the level of student's proficiency. What is more, in the examination itself, a report of such a length would most probably receive 0 points.

The second piece of writing to be analysed is a letter to a friend about a frightening story. This time the length is just perfect as it has 363 words whereas the required number is once again 300 to 350. The increase in fluency is thus clearly observed and it can be assumed that, in Karolina's case, the text format influences the length. As a letter is a very common genre and it is practiced starting very early she has no difficulties in fulfilling the criteria. However, what may be of interest is that with the fluency increase there is also an increase in grammar mistakes. This issue will be further developed in a section devoted to grammar accuracy.

The third sample is a summary regarding the British attitudes to local dialects. The expected number of words is from 50 to 70 and Karolina managed to write 68 words, which implies that again her fluency is at a good level and that she is able to produce a concise composition. What suffers , however, is the style of her piece of writing.

The penultimate piece of writing is an essay, written in class as it was an end-of-semester test. Despite the CPE requirements of 300-350 words in an essay, in this case the students are asked to write only 150 words on one of three issues, all of the topics are to be written in the same text type. Karolina wrote 155 words on the subject of face to face communication. It can be said that since she met the length requirements, her fluency proved to increase with every single piece of writing. Nevertheless, it must be emphasised that in spite of showing the right fluency the whole composition received just 55% of possible points, which , in turn, shows that the fluency improvement is not parallel to style or grammar development.

The fifth assignment is an article written in class as a part of the end-of-year test. What is worth noticing is the fact that, compared to the end-of-semester test, students are told to write 300-350 words. So they have to produce exactly what is demanded of them in CPE. Karolina's length was 315 but unfortunately she underperformed in all other areas of writing.

It can be concluded that there is a noticeable fluency increase in Karolina's texts. However, it can be also said that the more formal the piece of writing is the less satisfactory her work is.
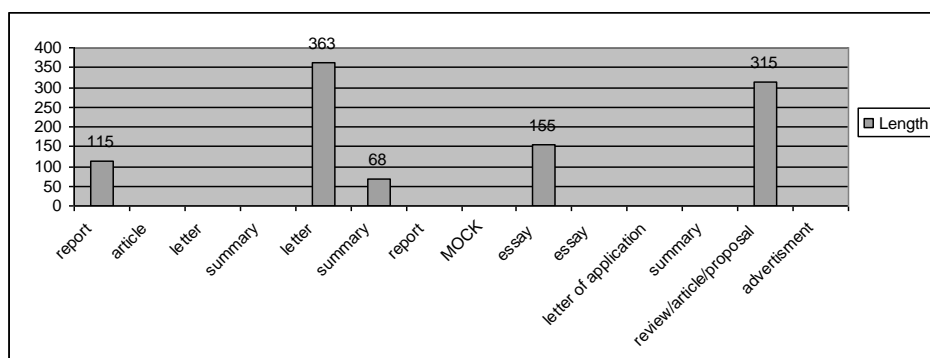
Figure 1. Karolina: Fluency

4.6.2.2. Grammar accuracy

The second criterion investigated in the samples was grammar accuracy analysed holistically. Therefore, the compositions are either assessed as satisfactory or unsatisfactory. As for Karolina two texts which she produced proved to be unsatisfactory on the grammar-accuracy level. In the report not only did she have little fluency but she also made some grammar and spelling mistakes, which should not have occurred taken the length of the composition. Her main problem was with the sentence structure; there were a few examples of a literal translation from Polish into English e.g. "*some other way*". It is even more striking as this was a home assignment and she had enough time and resources to revise and polish her writing. The second piece of writing with unsatisfactory level of grammar was written in class. The article includes many ambiguous sentences, stylistic errors and grammar errors e.g. *I'm not obliged to asking anyone* (…)

Although only two samples were considered grammatically unacceptable the grammar accuracy in the remaining tasks is also far from being perfect.

4.6.2.3. Text format

It can be seen that compositions with adequate format are at the same time the ones which have the best grammar accuracy. Each of these pieces of writing is of varying length which additionally might imply that given more practice Karolina would be able to perform any kind of task at a suitable grammar and

format level. Considering the report and the article Karolina was not far from achieving the required layout. However, she seemed to forget about the most basic elements of all compositions i.e. paragraphing new ideas, putting headings and sub-headings before new paragraphs in the case of a report and possibly article too.

4.6.3. Krzysiek – Case Study 2

4.6.3.1. Fluency

Krzysiek was one of the best performing students and one with a decent consistency in producing written assignments (see Figure 2). He submitted nine out of 14 tasks which is 64% of accomplishment. The MOCK task includes two pieces of writing. In his first composition, a report, Krzysiek wrote barely 112 words which is far below the requirements. However, virtually every other writing was proving a very good fluency of the participant. In a letter to a friend ho wrote 169 words whereas he was asked to write about half a page. In task 5, which once again was a letter to a friend, the length was 369 with word limit 300-350. Next in a report about dialects in Poland, in a letter and an essay written in class during a MOCK exam, he wrote 376, 406 and 373 words respectively. So in all three pieces of writing he exceeded the word limit to some extent. The following two assignments were essays, one written at home and the other in class during the end-of-semester test. Consequently, the length of the former one is 179 words and the latter one 380, showing once again that the student is really very consistent with his performances and fluency regardless of a genre. The last two text types are a proposal, 319 words, and an advertisement, 53 words. The lengths of these are appropriate and match the rubrics.
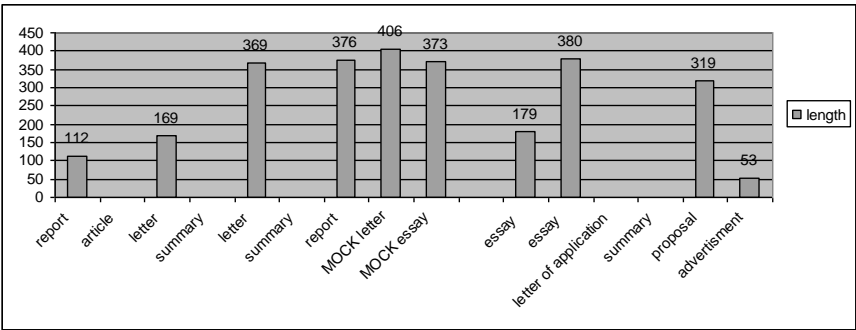

Figure 2. Krzysiek: Fluency

4.6.3.2. Grammar accuracy

The issue of grammar accuracy in Krzysiek's case is fairly simple as he demonstrated a really high level of grammatical structures and a breadth of vocabulary. The grammar errors present in his samples are rather non-impeding. Consequently, all of his pieces of writing were identified as satisfactory on grammatical level regardless whether they were written in a classroom context or at home.

4.6.3.3. Text format

Similarly to two previous criteria, also this measure is fulfilled in 100%. Although there are some shortcomings in some of his assignments they are of lesser relevance and an improvement in this area would only make the student more proficient-like. The cohesion and coherence of his text is very good and easy to follow, there are clear paragraphs and subsequent parts of writing i.e. the introduction, main body, conclusion. Furthermore, it is also possible to see the differences between genres by looking solely at the layout.

4.6.4. Damian – Case Study 3

4.6.4.1. Fluency

Damian was the most consistent of the participants submitting 11 out of 14 (78%) pieces of writing (see Figure 3). If one considers his fluency there is hardly any growth or decrease. All of his assignments match the requirements from the rubrics. Therefore, it can be said that he is the most fluent writer in the group. To prove that point, the amounts of words from each of his paper will now be presented. In the second task, an article, he produced 335 words. Next in a letter, task 3, he wrote 183 words (half a page was required). In task number 4 and 6, both being summaries, there are 79 and 68 words respectively. In the next three consecutive pieces of writing, all written in class (MOCK exam and end-of-semester test), there are 370 words in the proposal, 376 words in the essay and finally 194 words in the essay written during the test. The lowest fluency can be observed in the essay on advertisement which was written at home. The length is 222 words so it is below the threshold of 300-350 yet he still received a 5,5 mark (the highest possible mark being 6,0). Therefore, it can be assumed that in this case the length did not have any bearing on the content and

accomplishment of the task. Finally, in the remaining four compositions he wrote 291 words in a letter of application, 49 in a summary, 343 in a proposal and last but not least 31 words in an advertisement.
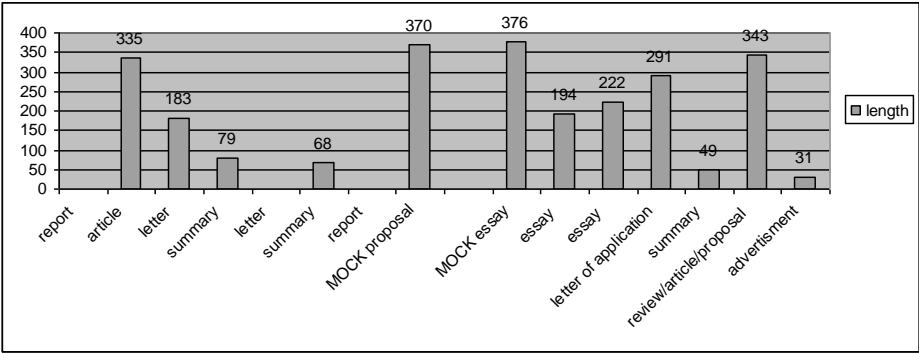

Figure 3. Damian: Fluency

4.6.4.2. Grammar accuracy

As far as grammar accuracy is concerned it is of no greater concern for this participant. In all of his 12 submitted writings level of grammar is at a satisfactory level and generally the way he uses grammar structures and vocabulary is highly assessed by the teachers. Naturally, there are some grammar errors, however, they are few and do not obstruct meaning. What is interesting, in some cases the grammar accuracy is higher if the assignment was done in class rather than at home. It can be result of the writer wanting to outperform and using too many and too complex structures, whereas writing in class is more natural.

4.6.4.3. Text format

Alike grammar accuracy and fluency, text formats match the requirements of genres in each of the submitted papers. Moreover, the pieces of writing are clearly and logically organised, suitable registers are used and an examiner can differentiate the genres by looking at the layout, just like in Krzysiek's case. Finally, there is a clear paragraphing apparent in all papers.

4.6.5. Jakub – Case Study 4

4.6.5.1. Fluency

Despite being devoted to what he did, Jakub performed the worst out of the group. There may be various reasons behind him underperforming, one of them being that he was the youngest in the group and it was his first year at a CPE group. He failed to submit ten assignments which means that he produced only 28% of the written tasks administered during the course. The first sample from Jakub is from task 8 written in class, a MOCK exam (see Figure 4). The fluency in both parts of the written section of CPE is good as there are 303 words in an article and 350 words in an essay. The next sample is also written in class, during the end-of-semester test, and this essay has 145 words which again indicates that Jakub is capable of matching the length criteria. Lastly, he wrote a review and an advertisement which included 318 and 20 words, respectively. Therefore, from the point of view of fluency, if Jakub submitted a paper, he showed a satisfactory level of fluency given that three out of five of his samples were written in class.
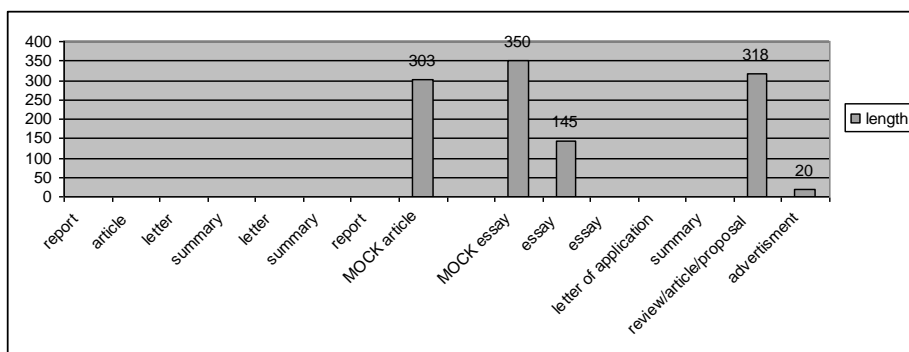
Figure 4. Jakub: Fluency

4.6.5.2. Grammar accuracy

In regard to grammar accuracy, Jakub performed at a decent level as out of five of his samples only one represents unsatisfactory level of grammar accuracy. What is more, this piece of writing, an essay, was written in class during a MOCK exam. In this essay he had a number of errors some of which sometimes impeded communication. However, the other two in class assignments are well

composed without any serious errors. Therefore, it can be expected that Jakub will perform rather consistently not only on fluency but also on grammar level.

4.6.5.3. Text format

Notwithstanding Jakub's young age and inexperience at a CPE level, the appropriateness of his text formats, when compared to other participants, is generally well executed and satisfactory. In only one sample was the text format considered inappropriate as Jakub produced a description of his holiday instead of writing a review. Other than that, his register and layout were mostly suitable with some evidence of stylistic devices. As a result, it can be said that he is knowledgeable enough to apply distinctive text formats.

4.6.6. Iwona D. – Case Study 5

4.6.6.1. Fluency

Since Iwona D. submitted only three tasks, including a MOCK exam consisting of two papers (a proposal and an essay), it is not so straightforward to make a claim that her fluency is at a good level. What is more, in two out of four of her samples she exceeded the word limit considerably, having written 467 words in the proposal and 435 words in the essay; she surpassed the limit over 33% and 24% respectively (see Figure 5). Interestingly, she did not lose points for an overlengthy text. To the contrary, the former composition received 12 out of 20 possible points and the latter 15 out of 20, which is a really good result. The last two assignments prove a good level of fluency as the summary has 50 words and the review 382, which is also acceptable.
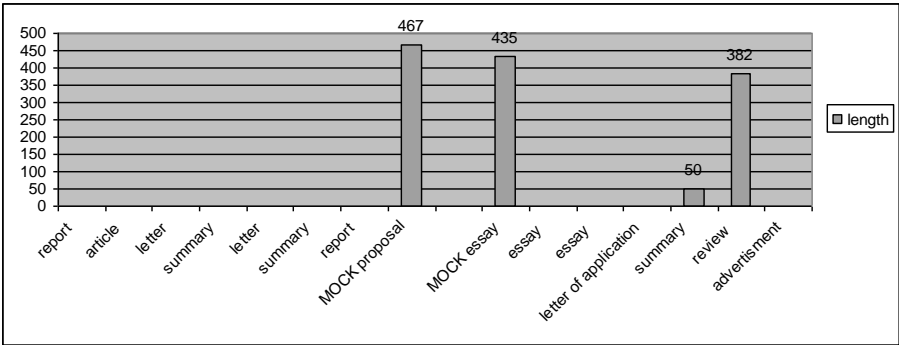

Figure 5. Iwona D.: Fluency

4.6.6.2. Grammar accuracy

The grammar accuracy issue does not pose any problem to Iwona and she performs on a consistently high level. Naturally, she does make some errors, however, these are of minor importance and they are unobtrusive. Therefore, it is needless to say that Iwona achieved 100% grammar accuracy in all of her written assignments.

4.6.6.3. Text format

Iwona's pieces of writing are case in point that if one displays good grammar accuracy and good fluency then he is most often able to employ a fitting text format too. It is clearly noticeable in Iwona's samples as she chose appropriate style and text formats in all her assignments. However, even though the format is most often suitable there is still room for improvement as, for example, in the proposal and in the review she did not use neither headings nor sub-headings, which are recommendable. These are the features which enable the target reader to determine in which genre a given piece of writing was written. If included, they raise the quality of the paper as well as. Moreover, they guarantee a better final mark since such a division of an article resembles what one can find in a real-life magazine.

4.6.7. A course analysis – Case Study 6

Following the discussion on the participants' performances and accomplishment of the course tasks, it is imperative to present the detailed information regarding the material offered in the book and to what extent this material was covered during the course itself. Furthermore, it is also of interest to the researcher what genres are practiced in the coursebook, how frequent they are, and finally what percentage of them can be classified as real-life text types. Last but not least, the focus will also be on the issue of the target audience, i.e. if it is specified, or if there is any audience at all.

4.6.7.1. Coursebook and course analysis

In New Progress to Proficiency Student's Book there are altogether 37 writing tasks, however, there are three tasks which offer more than one different task type at one time to choose from. One offers two various text types, the second three text types and the last offers four text types. Therefore, one can find altogether 43 tasks (see Figure 6). The remaining 34 tasks include one task type each. To the genres revised in the book belong: an article, a summary, a letter (including a letter to a magazine, to a friend or to a shop), a report, an essay, an advertisement, an application letter, a review, a proposal and a handout. As it is clearly seen from the numbers in the Figure 6, the majority of the written assignments are essays, articles and short, 50 to 80 word, summaries respectively. The least popular text types include handouts and advertisements, which as a matter of fact are not examined in Paper 1 or Paper 2 of CPE, but also proposals and letters of application, which are tested in CPE writing paper. Out of 43 tasks only 14 were accomplished by the participants which account hardly for 32,5% of the course accomplishment in regard to the preparation to Paper 1 and Paper 2 of CPE. What is more, it needs to be emphasised that students were supposed to write 14 essays. Yet in the course of the two semesters no one did all the assignments. From the randomly chosen participants the one who was the closest to writing all the tasks was Damian, who wrote 11 essays which means that he realised the course written tasks at the level of 78,5%. At the opposite end of the continuum, having submitted just four papers, are Jakub and Iwona who realised barely 28,5% of the writing exercises alike. The last two participants, Krzysiek and Karolina, submitted 64% and 35% of their written projects accordingly. This leads to a conclusion that the participants did not gain too much and they were not prepared properly for the exam purpose, let alone for the real-life situations.
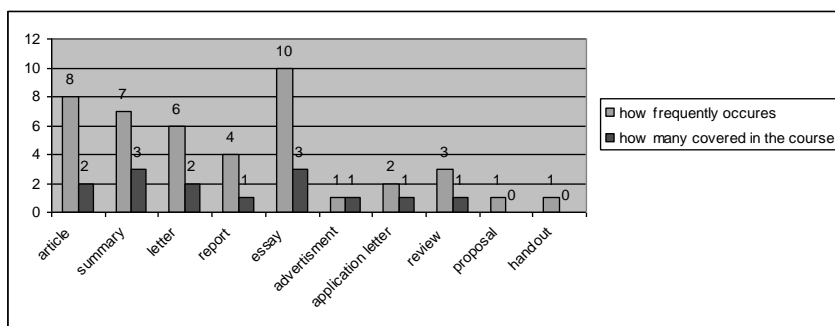

Figure 6

Interestingly, according to the researcher-participant notes, all classes devoted to writing skill were conducted by the Polish lecturer. In those classes one could find reflection of the social approach, as heavy emphasis was put on the issue of the target audience and suitability of the register. Furthermore, all the assignments were marked applying the holistic approach of assessment. There were always valuable comments of the teacher, and again only the Polish lecturer checked the papers.

What must also be analysed is whether the tasks' rubrics included information regarding the target audience. Unexpectedly, only in 16 tasks was the audience clearly identified, which is just 43%. This situation is to the contrary of what CPE writing papers are meant to check. Namely, their first and foremost purpose is to see if one is able – given the role of the reader, the role of the writer, and the purpose of writing – to produce a satisfactory piece of writing which will have a positive, holistic, influence on the target reader. Nevertheless, it may just be the case of the coursebook having some considerable shortcomings. Thus, it is advisable to analyse and compare particular student's books for CPE.

4.7. Research question 1

As it was already discussed in the previous section the material covered in the course is, or was supposed to be, at the level of 32,5%. What should be noticed, however, is that the lecturer did give some additional written assignments to the participants. Nevertheless, the students who failed at accomplishing the compulsory tasks could hardly be expected to produce some extra pieces of writing. What is more, in the context of the preparation to the examination the material covered is a very small ratio and, especially for those who are the first year at this level, it would be very hard, if not impossible, to pass the writing part of the exam. Naturally, it is impracticable to prepare students only to one part of the examination, taken that there are five papers. Still it is certainly possible that simultaneously improving production skills like writing and speaking and reinforcing them with reading accompanied by grammar and vocabulary exercises will influence writing. Faced with the limits of the course the lecturer has to devote time to every single aspect of the foreign language development, but it would certainly be a good idea to ask the participants to produce more in-class writing, as it would ensure a higher rate of the course curriculum accomplishment. The leading approach to teaching writing in the course was definitely the social approach so the texts are directed at the specific target reader, they also represent a particular text type and, last but not least, they

require use of an appropriate register and vocabulary. Nonetheless, the data gathered show that there are serious doubts whether the students are suitably prepared to writing outside the classroom, or even in the examination context.

4.8. Research question 2

The participants were asked to complete a questionnaire and to determine, by answering yes/no questions, which text types are real-life according to them. Therefore, based on the derived data the researcher-participant identified the following real-life genres: a letter to friend/magazine/shop, a handout, an e-mail /a fax, personal notes/messages, a memo, and an application letter. Thus, if the above-mentioned text types are considered by the participants as real-life then only three tasks, out of 14 done in the course, can be claimed to be authentic. If one considers the whole coursebook material then there are 19 genuinely real-life text types, constituting 32% of all the tasks. Furthermore, out of ten differentiated genres in Figure 6, scarcely three are perceived as authentic and out of all written tasks offered in the coursebook only 16 include precise information regarding the discourse community. Although the designers of the examination stress the importance of clearly defined rubrics and the lecturer emphasised the need of targeting a suitable target audience, there is little one can learn from the information provided in the tasks. Moreover, the other genres described as real-life include a memo, personal note or message, and an e-mail or a fax which are not covered in a CPE course. The text types that are done can rather be classified as texts used in English For Specific Purposes, or to be more precise in English for Academic Purposes. Consequently, it cannot be stated that the participants are prepared to real-life writing simply for the reason that the course curriculum and the course requirements do not include sufficient number of text types most frequently used in everyday life.

4.9. Research question 3

Considering the performances of the participants in the real-life text types one can reach a conclusion that, provided the tasks were completed, the students did well. However, it is difficult to determine to what extant Iwona and Jakub can perform in such tasks as they did not write any authentic text type essay. In addition, there cannot be made any overgeneralization based on the other genres they produced since they wrote very little during the course. Two genuine pieces of writing were produced by Krzysiek and Damian alike. Krzysiek wrote a letter

to a friend and a letter to magazine. In the case of the former one he ignored the instructions given in the rubrics and his final mark (3.5) reflected it. Although he lost on the criteria fulfilment he still showed good range of vocabulary and grammar structures, as well as a clear organisation. The latter letter was written to a magazine and he performed very well (15 points out of 20). Krzysiek showed reasonably fluent use of a breadth of vocabulary and structures with good use of stylistic devices. The register and format were suitable and topic was well developed. Damian also wrote two letters, one to a friend and another was an application letter to a university. In the first one he made only two mistakes and received 5.0 whereas in the second one he performed a bit worse being awarded with only 4.5 and making more mistakes. Generally, however, there were no serious problems in neither. His organisation was good just as was vocabulary and grammar accuracy. The last participant, Karolina, wrote only one letter to a friend. She showed mostly appropriate style and register but unfortunately, she made some grammar errors and there were no clear paragraph division, which was one of the reasons why she received 4.0 for her composition.

It is interesting that the only real-life pieces of writing produced by the students were letters. It can be said that these three students, who did produce some samples of authentic genres, are prepared to writing outside the classroom and they should encounter little, or no, difficulty.

4.10. Research question 4

Did the participants become skilful enough to use their knowledge on a daily basis outside the classroom? At the end of the course they were asked a question: "How do you evaluate the preparation you were provided with during the course to write outside a classroom environment?" Everyone gave a positive answer to this question, which is interesting given the number of papers they wrote. What is more, the researcher noticed that in general the students are reluctant to writing any sort of genre. From the investigated group only Krzysztof and Damian were really confident about their level of writing skills. The remaining participants claimed that their lack of consistency in submitting the written tasks was not a result of lack of skills but rather a result of lack of time. Nonetheless, they are confident about their skills and they do not seem to notice any problems in the fact that they had hardly ever written, what they considered, authentic text types. Therefore, it can be said that the results of the interview are misleading since there was very minor emphasis on the considered

genres. Consequently, if the participants can not objectively assess their skills, it cannot be claimed that they were fully prepared to writing in a real-life context.

4.11. Conclusion

The main purpose of this article was to present the results of the research done during a course preparing to Cambridge CPE, with the focus on the writing paper. The article was divided into sections: the first three sections were devoted to describing the procedure of the research, its participants, and the collected and used materials. The remaining sections' foci were on describing the results of the study and the discussion based on the data gathered.

The results and their discussion led the author to the following conclusions:

Even though the participants found themselves prepared to write outside the classroom context and to pass CPE writing paper, the data gathered pinpointed at the discrepancies and shortcoming of the course, as well as, at the absence of the real-life genres in the course and indeed in CPE curriculum. Therefore, the author concluded that given the amount of input the participants were exposed to, it is dubious and ambiguous if the students would be able to use their knowledge in everyday life to write appropriate essays. The final conclusion was that the course does not prepare its participants to writing in life.

5. Implications for further studies

A case study was used in this research to investigate the concurrent process of the students' preparation to the formal examination (CPE), and to real-life writing. The research was concluded with the assumption that the participants are not prepared to produce authentic pieces of writing, even though they are well prepared from the point of view of vocabulary range, grammar structure or stylistic devices. Consequently, it can be claimed that the course did help students develop writing skill in general. Nevertheless, it is recommended that further research, experiment, is done in the future to verify the claims made in this article. A group of CPE students should be chosen from a private school as an experimental group and the second group, a control group, should be chosen from the public school. It is advisable that the participants in both groups are of the same, or similar, age and the span of the research is one school year. All participants should write the same number of compositions and accomplish the same tasks so it is possible to draw a comparison if there are any dependencies between a genre and how the student performs. What is more, at the end of the

course, the participants can be asked to write something which is considered a real-life text type and the researcher should examine if the preparation to the examination, even if it did not include authentic genres, is enough to make the subjects ready to write in everyday-life contexts.
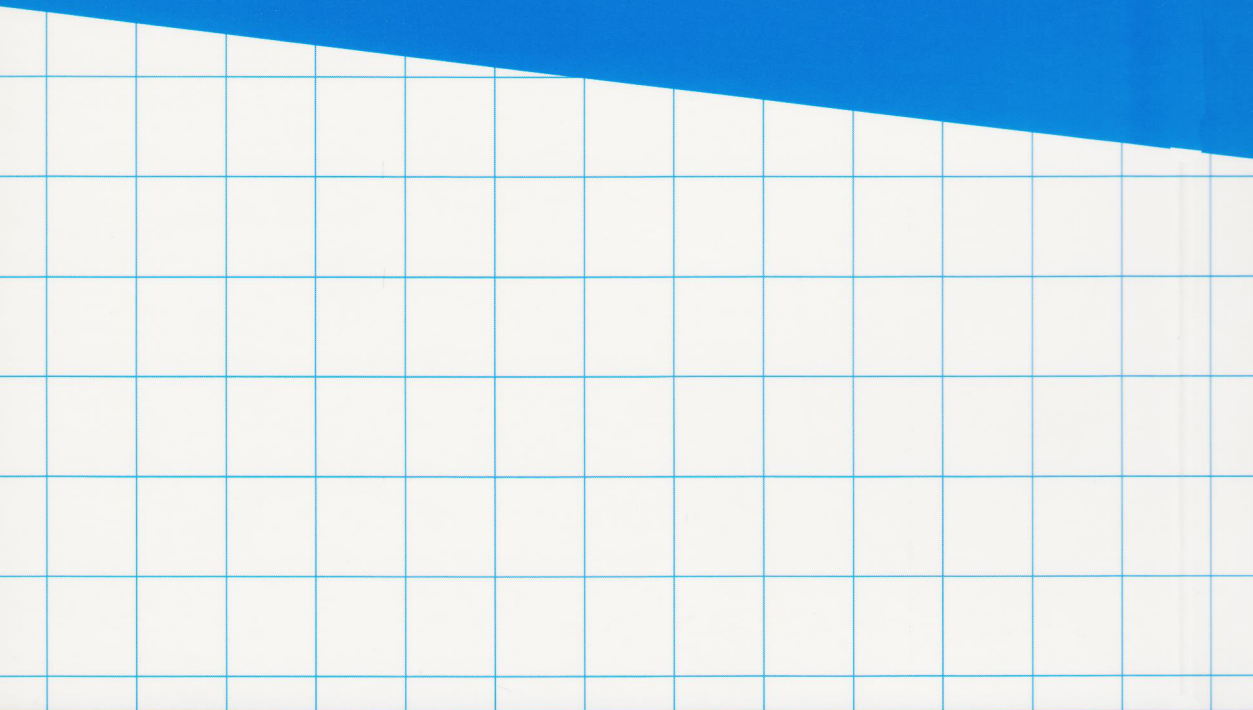
5.1. Implications for EFL classroom

It can be inferred from the interview of the participants of the CPE course that they are suitably prepared to write in any type of context and any genre. However, since the researcher's results and conclusion are contradictory and the group of subjects included only nine persons, and just five were further randomly chosen to be analysed, it is problematic to make any definite statements. Nonetheless, it must be said that the approach employed in the course seems to be successful so it is certainly worth continuing, but what the lecturers should aim at is achieving a higher rate of consistency in the task accomplishment. Provided this is the case the participants may indeed be prepared to write freely and successfully any text type in any circumstances.

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