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Writing Skills of Pre-Service Teachers: Basis for a Proposed Intervention Program

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Abstract: ***Writing is considered as the most difficult skill for learners because they need to have a certain amount of L2 background knowledge about their rhetorical organizations, appropriate language use or specific lexicon with which they want to communicate to their readers. To assist instructors to improve writing competency and produce good writing, this study aimed to determine the writing skills of 40 pre-service teachers of the University of Saint Louis-Tuguegarao along content, grammar, organization, and mechanics as basis on the proposed intervention program. Specifically, it aimed to give an analysis on the writing skills and errors committed along the different components of writing. This qualitative study employed content analysis. Data were analyzed to determine the level of competencies and errors in essay writing. The level of achievements was categorized into exceptional, good, below average, and poor. The results of the study revealed that majority of the pre-service teachers have good competency along content, organization, and mechanics. Considering this, it is necessary to determine the writing skills to address the existing problem of pre-service teachers along the different components of writing.***

Keywords: ***Writing Skills, Pre-Service Teachers, Content, Grammar, Organization, Mechanics.***

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is a vital skill in language development. The students must develop something related to their knowledge, which is one of the reasons for this. As a result, writing necessitates numerous preparations, such as considering the concept and how to address it (Oshima & Hogue, 2017). Writing expresses the recent language skills that English pre-service teachers should grasp after listening, speaking, and reading. Compared to the three other skills, writing is more challenging to learn than speaking, especially for native English speakers, because it necessitates knowledge of various linguistic features and factors outside of the language (Haerazi & Irawan, 2019). To produce cohesive and coherent paragraphs, pre-service

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teachers must possess great writing skills. In order for pre-service teachers to achieve cohesive writing, the elements of language and content should be carefully organized (Haerazi & Irawan, 2019). Pre-service teachers should use grammar and writing mechanics, such as capitalization, spelling, and punctuation, to attain these aims, because writing is an active and productive skill (Haerazi & Irawan, 2019). Pre-service teachers, on the other hand, find it difficult to build practical writing abilities because they are uncomfortable writing an English essay (Miatin & Wiedarti, 2019).

Students must learn the English components before producing written material. Thus, writing outstanding essays and other written works necessitates critical thinking and accurate features of well-written material (Sadiah & Royani, 2019). In line with this statement, writing, thus, is the consequence of thinking, drafting, and revising (Brown & Lee, 2015). Hence, the writing activity and the English components are intertwined. If the students do not master the English components, their writing activity will be insufficient. Kumala, Aimah, & Ifadah (2018) supported this fact, in which they postulated that writing needs broad knowledge to create sentences and paragraphs with good English grammar at the same time. However, the pre-service teachers had difficulty putting these norms into written form. They continue to use a careless framework and disorganized paragraphs (Haerazi & Irawan, 2019). However, it is undeniable that it is never easy to determine students who produce writings with relatively few grammatical errors. It is, therefore, believed that writing challenges include the creation and organization of ideas and the translation of those ideas into understandable writing. Moreover, students must recognize all of the standard components found in writing when studying writing skills. For instance, learners must select appropriate language to describe the item that will be written (Olsen, 2016). Also, students with inadequate vocabulary knowledge, organization, grammar, and mechanics still have poor writing skills. Hence, the errors committed by students in writing demonstrate that they still require considerable attention, as these errors impede the achievement of writing learning.

However, the shift in the paradigm of face-to-face learning to online-based learning (Abidah et al., 2020; Chang & Fang, 2020) disrupted the close supervision and corrective feedback to students' essay writing. A number of studies revealed that relevant and appropriate teaching-learning strategies can increase students' writing skills (Ismiati & Pebriantika, 2020). Such innovative recommended strategies are necessary to provide ongoing solutions for facilitating writing practices in order to improve writing skills of students (Ismiati & Pebriantika, 2020). Collaborative learning, critical thinking, and autonomous learning are examples of these strategies as developed by Joseph (2017). However, because of the limited time available for classroom discussion, the considerable benefit of the collaborative technique is no longer accepted by the students (Ismiati & Pebriantika, 2020) because applying this strategy takes a lot of time, the instructor is expected to devote more time to classroom activities such as group discussion rather than giving a longer lecture (Ismiati & Pebriantika, 2020). Another study suggested that cooperative learning strategy improves students' writing abilities (Yusuf, 2019). Using a diary writing technique also improved students' writing including grammar and vocabulary skills as it was revealed in the study conducted by (Hanan et al. 2015). Nonetheless, many learners who are using the diary writing method produce run-on sentences and pay little regard to the writing norms. Although

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the goal of this strategy is to encourage students to practice writing on a regular basis and on authentic situation, it was revealed that students' writing ability does not increase greatly since they take minimal feedback on their work (Ismiati & Pebriantika, 2020). Therefore, since there are a lot of strategies to prompt and improve the writing skills of students, there exist a fact that no strategies fits all needs of diverse learners. Some learning practices may be appropriate for one group of learners but not for another (Ismiati & Pebriantika, 2020). Moreover, writing activities should involve a close guidance from the teacher. It means that after students have completed their writing output, they must discuss it with others, especially with the teacher to determine their writing skills and address writing errors.

Students' poor writing skills have been attributed to various factors such as the student teacher's weakness in that area. Moreover, the intricacies of English writing standards may have an influence on learners' writing difficulties. Most students at a higher level of education, especially those who study English as a major specialization, still lack the capacity to write exceptional writing products (Ismiati & Pebriantika, 2020). Based on the preliminary studies conducted by Nanning, Saepudin, Munawir (2020), the error of applying the English rules in writing academic papers still persists. Although practically, all researchers in the area agree that writing challenges are an inevitable part of the English language learning process and that students should be assisted in overcoming them, there is no universal agreement on how to manage students' difficulties (Yundayani et al., 2019). Hence, a better understanding of the skills in writing is first required to inform subsequent steps to improve pre-service teachers' written language proficiency. Thus, content analysis needs to be performed to identify writing skills and frequent errors plaguing pre-service teachers (Kwan & Yunus, 2014). With the different literature gaps presented, this study was conducted to determine the writing skills of pre-service teachers in their written essays. Furthermore, this study aimed to address a persisting problem, as shown in their assessment.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a content analysis employing conceptual analysis to determine the writing skills along content, grammar, organization, and mechanics. The study was conducted at a Teacher Education institution in Northern Philippines.

The data was from one (1) assessment on the Learning Management System. The data analyzed were from third-year teacher education students enrolled in EDUC 1123 Assessment of Learning-2. Students were assigned to write a paragraph with at least 150-300 words to answer the essay question: Do grades matter? Why or why not? This essay question was constructed by the course instructor and was utilized in the study as it is relevant to the topic of grading, which was the lesson focus for the week.

This study utilized a learning task among third-year teacher education students who were enrolled in EDUC 1123 Assessment of Learning-2 in the second semester of the academic year 2022-2023. To avoid absolute judgments and to maintain the consistency of the raters in measuring the students' writing, inter-rater reliability was established by utilizing one essay of the pre-service teachers for a sample grading. Each essay was given a separate score along

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content, grammar, organization, and mechanics by the rater. After which, the data were presented in tables with corresponding qualitative descriptions.

The study utilized the following data analysis tools:

1. The language expert and the researchers utilized an analytic rubric in checking and interpreting the writing skills of the pre-service teachers' written output. The rubric as a guideline for checking the students' writing skills was adopted from a research literature, modified by the researchers, and validated by two experts.
2. Frequency counts and percentage were used to determine the occurrence of the level of achievement that the pre-service teachers obtained in each component of writing.

3. RESULTS

Table 1. Writing Skills if Pre-Service Teachers along Content, Grammar, Organization, and Mechanics

Proficiency Level	Content		Grammar		Organization		Mechanics	
	n	%	n	%	n	5	n	%
Exceptional	15	37.50	0	0.00	8	20.00	18	45.00
Good	24	60.00	18	45.00	25	2.50	22	55.00
Below Average	1	2.50	22	55.00	7	17.50	0	0.00
Poor	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Mean Score	18.60		8.93		9.42		8.98	
Description	Good		Good		Good		Good	

Table 1 shows the writing skills of pre-service teachers along content, grammar, organization, and mechanics. It can be gleaned on the table that majority of the pre-service teachers have good writing competency along content. This means that most pre-service teachers' essays content contains developing understanding of the topic, confidence with subject matter and presented fragmented argument. Meanwhile, some of them obtained an exceptional competency in writing along content. The table also shows that the pre-service teachers' written essays clearly understand the topic among all the responses. It has clear language, complex ideas, and confidence in the subject matter, leading to a strong and consistent argument. Further, only one written essay was categorized as below average, whereas none of the responses were 'Poor. In general, this shows that most pre-service teachers rated good in writing competency along content.

Along grammar, none of the pre-service teachers achieved exceptional level of competency. This suggests that no one observed correct sentence structure, subject-verb agreement, tenses of verbs, and use of articles among the pre-service teachers. Meanwhile, some of the pre-service teachers obtained a good level of competency in observing grammar rules in their written essays. This implies that their responses contain two to four errors in sentence structure, subject-verb agreement, tenses of verbs, and use of articles. Further, below average competency category constitutes the highest frequency of errors in grammar rules. This means that the majority of the pre-service teachers committed five to nine errors in sentence structure, subject-verb agreement, tenses of verbs, and use of articles. This also means that

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pre-service teachers are still confused with basic grammar rules. In general, most pre-service teachers rated below average in level of competency along grammar.
Along organization, some of the participants have exceptional writing competency. This infers that their essays maintain a clear purpose, are powerfully organized, and fully developed. The depth and complexity of thought are supported by rich, pertinent details and supporting evidence that leads to high-level idea development. Further, majority of pre-service teachers are good in their written responses. This implies that the essays of the pre-service teachers generally maintain purpose, include a logical progression of ideas aided by clear transitions, and focus on the topic that is supported and elaborated. Moreover, some of the pre-service teachers acquired a below-average level of competency in their essays. This means that their responses attempt to communicate the purpose but lack transitions. It focuses on the topic but includes a few loosely related and unelaborated ideas that are not fully explained or supported. Fortunately, no one among the pre-service teachers got a poor level along with organization. In general, majority of the pre-service teachers have good level of competency in their essay along organization.

Along mechanics, some pre-service teachers acquired an exceptional level of competency. This indicates that most of their answers are free from spelling, punctuation, and capitalization errors, reflecting clear understanding and thorough proofreading. On the other hand, the majority of the pre-service teachers have good competency implying that participants' essays have one to four spelling, punctuation, and capitalization errors. Further, none of the responses have below average or poor competency. In general, most pre-service teachers have good writing competency along mechanics.

4. DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to explore the writing skills of pre-service teachers along content, grammar, organization, and mechanics. Since English has been widely used in many courses and online-based learning, it also caused many writing activities mandated to students, particularly pre-service teachers, to anticipate distance learning. The shift in the paradigm of face-to-face learning to online-based learning (Abidah et al., 2020; Chang & Fang, 2020) disrupted the close supervision and corrective feedback to students' essay writing.

5. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that pre-service teachers have a good writing competency however, along grammar pre-service teachers obtained below average competency. As an offshoot of this study, an intervention program was developed that aims to improve the writing skills of the pre-service teachers.

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Appendix A
Proposed Intervention Program to Enhance the Writing Skills of Pre-Service Teachers Project WRITES
(Writing Remediation Inculcated Through Enhancement Session)

Rationale
Writing is an active macro skill that plays a crucial part in expressing one's thoughts and feelings in a written format. Therefore, one must be equipped with proficient writing skills to effectively convey the intended message and meaning. On the essentiality of the writing skill, nonnative English speakers and learners are required to observe the standards of high-quality written output along the different components of writing skills such as content, grammar, organization, and mechanics at both academic and professional levels. This means that being a writer, one must have the ability to use vocabulary in this productive and expressive activity (Kennedy & Shiel 2019; Maskor & Baharudin, 2016). Also, it implies that writing in the sentence level for instance, it must consist of control of the contents, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, spelling, and letter formation (Alfaki, 2015). After a sentence level, the writer must be able to organize and include information into cohesive and coherent paragraphs and text (Faradhibah & Aliyah, 2017). Hence, good writing skill is indeed indispensable activity to accomplish specific types of writing like writing an essay, a paper, a proposal, and an application form (Latifa, Ernawati, & Budiman 2020).

On the outset, writing is believed as a complex cognitive activity that the writer must be skilled to demonstrate control of variables simultaneously (Rao, 2018). Thus, it is essential to note that because of the many components to be considered, writing has been regarded as complex and difficult activity in which learners encounter writing errors in composing written outputs. Difficulties in writing can become more pervasive at the college level, whereby learners must deal with mature, proficient, and sophisticated academic writing to match their level of intelligence (Ismail et al., 2012). Among English as a Second Language

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learners, the pre-service teachers are frequently engaged in writing activities. Even though they have the knowledge of basic components of writing, it is very evident that still, many pre-service teachers commit errors in writing.

The result of this study clearly shows that majority of the pre-service teachers are already good in writing in terms of content, organization, and mechanics. However, these results, still majority of pre-service teachers obtained below average along grammar. This implies that majority of the pre-service teachers encountering difficulties and problems in the aspect of grammar. Hence, the birth of Project WRITES. Project WRITES is an intervention program that will help both instructors and pre-service teachers to improve the writing skills of pre-service teachers along content, organization, mechanics, and especially grammar.

a) Content

Along content, majority of the pre-service teachers obtained good competency in their written essay. This means that most pre-service teachers presented developing idea of the topic and contains confidence with the subject matter. However, they need more improvements in their writing to make their arguments strong, consistent, and convincing. Majority of students' essays consist of only background information and conclusion. They are not detailed in using thesis statements that constitute the core of argumentative essay writing. The result of the study agrees with the previous study by Sujito, Muttaqien, and Wildan (2016) that the use of thesis statement and supporting details to back up the claims will contribute to the better quality of content in writing essays. Most importantly, essays' connection to the question is somehow less observable by the majority of participants who obtained good in their written responses. As a result, the organization of their answers is negatively influenced. Previous study affirms this result that the topicality should be considered as an element in the overall coherence of the essay (Somasundaran et al., 2014; Beata Beigman Klebanov, Michael Flor, and Binod Gyawali, 2016).

Meanwhile, few of pre-service teachers obtained exceptional competency in writing. This means that there are pre-service teachers that write exceptionally along content. An essay per se needs a well-crafted idea to build a good essay and be interesting for the reader. In making the reader keeps reading until the end of an essay, the content of that essay should impress them as well (Oktavianti, 2021). Also, another study affirms that quality of content is then related to integrating information from the source materials (Klebanov et al., 2014). Moreover, explaining and justifying ideas based on information and examples from reliable sources are qualities that define an exceptional content of essay writing. This means that the exceptional pre-service teachers did not only use their background knowledge and past experiences in terms of answering the essay question. Some of them based their answers on credible sources that would strongly support their arguments.

b) Grammar

Grammar constituted the highest number of errors committed by the pre-service teachers compared to the other components. Majority of the participants obtained below average competency in writing along grammar which means that pre-service teachers should double their efforts in improving the sentence structure, subject-verb agreement, tenses of verbs, and use of articles in their writing. In student writing, grammar is a significant concern. It

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involves knowledge of the language and rhetorical techniques and intellectual and evaluating aspects. Therefore, pre-service teachers are deemed to have a difficult time when it comes to assessing their grammar. Students need to use standard grammar and adhere to grammatical conventions to succeed in academic writing at universities (Caveleri & Dianati, 2016). Hence, the research findings of Ghabool, Mariadass, and Kashef (2012) confirm the fact that most students have difficulty with grammar and punctuation in writing. The rationale is that pre-service teachers are non-native students. Despite mastery of grammar rules, these non-native students have difficulty applying these rules into practice. Thus, it affirms in their writing that almost every non-native student makes grammatical errors (Abdulkareem, 2013).

Moreover, pre-service teachers commit a number of mistakes in verbs (forms and tenses), articles, and sentence structures. Non-native speakers make a variety of errors with verbs (for example, wrong tense choice, incorrect tense form), articles (a/an, for learners unfamiliar with these terminologies), and word structure (Kraichoke, 2017). Since pre-service teachers are also a non-native speakers, common errors found in their written essays were incorrect usage of prepositions, followed by verbs (active or passive), forms of verbs, and articles. Although grammatical errors are familiar to students, especially non-native speakers, which includes the pre-service teachers, the participants of this study were expected to pose fluency and accuracy in grammar usage, adding to the note that they are pre-service teachers.

c) Organization

Along organization, majority of the pre-service teachers have good competency in writing. However, although they are rated good, it suggests the need for improvement of the pre-service teachers in their written essays along organization. In fact, organization in writing must be clear and requires many components, such as content, organization, vocabulary usage, grammar use, and mechanical consideration, such as spelling and punctuation (Wahyuni, 2017; Alka, 2021).

Similarly, the previous study on college students revealed that second language learners face difficulties writing a “well-organized” presentation of information (Farooq et al., 2012). The findings of the study by Farooq et al. (2012), validates that some students, especially the participants of this study are still having a hard time writing essays exceptionally along organization. Likewise, the pre-service teachers are also having a difficulty improving the organization and clarity of their written essays. Since organization is as important as the other domain, pre-service teachers must be reminded that words and sentences should be carefully selected and arranged to achieve cohesion and coherence through various semantic, syntactic, and contextual ties.

Meanwhile, some of the participants obtained exceptional level of writing competency. *This* highly suggests that pre-service teachers provide clear and elaborated ideas, supported and fully developed.

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d) Mechanics

Along mechanics, some of pre-service teachers obtained exceptional competency in writing which implies that most of the participants' essays are free from errors in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization, which reflects clear understanding and thorough proofreading. Meanwhile, majority of the participants have one to four spelling, punctuation, and capitalization errors. As observed, punctuation, specifically the comma, is a common problem committed by pre-service teachers. The participants do not use commas before coordinating conjunctions (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) to complete ideas (independent clauses). Moreover, a study affirms that the lack of accuracy, omission, and misunderstanding of using punctuation correctly, as well as due to ignorance are the factors that lead to the punctuation errors (Nurhayati, 2013); Rahmawati, 2014; Benjamin & Akampirige, 2014). In some cases, students find it challenging to apply punctuation rules, even if they are familiar with them. They may be perfectly capable of using proper punctuation, but they inadvertently overlook it due to the numerous other demands on their time. The study of Khan (2016) is inclined with the findings of this study that a thorough command of punctuation is required for any writing since punctuation resolves ambiguities and makes writing easy to understand. Hence, the pre-service teachers must take into consideration the commas, and other punctuation marks in their essay writing as these punctuations clarify a written sentence's meaning.

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