

Academic writing literacy of Grade 10 students in the modular distance learning modality in public secondary schools

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Abstract: This study determined the level of academic writing literacy of Grade 10 students in the modular distance learning modality as basis for developing skill builder activities for writing. Specifically, it measured the level of academic writing skills through an objective type of test and a writing activity of the Grade 10 students in modular delivery learning modality along the six features of academic writing namely Syntax, Content, Grammar, Organization, Mechanics; and Word choice. After determining the performance of the Grade 10 students in writing, the researcher designed and developed a skill-based builder activity that was focused on the skills least performed by the students. The skills builder was also assessed by identified jurors regarding its acceptability in terms of content, format, presentation, organization, accuracy and up-to-datedness of information. The data was treated statistically through frequency count, percentage technique, weighted mean and chi-square since this is a descriptive-evaluative method of research. The study revealed that the performance of the Grade 10 students in academic writing along the six features of writing namely syntax, content, grammar, organization, mechanics and word choice is at an intermediate level of proficiency which means that there is a need for intensive integration of more writing activities in the modular distance learning. The statistics highly indicated that there is a significant difference in the academic writing literacy level of the Grade 10 students along syntax, content, grammar, organization, mechanics, and word choice. This result rejects the null hypothesis of this study. A skill builder activity material for writing can be developed to improve the academic writing skills of the Grade 10 students along the six features of writing. The developed skill builder activity material is excellently acceptable in terms of content, format, presentation, organization, accuracy and up-to-datedness as assessed by the jurors. The research recommends that teachers should still exert more effort in helping Grade 10 students reach the maximum level of basic and academic writing skills and utilize the developed skill builder activities in writing from this study.

Keywords: Academic writing literacy, Modular distance learning, Secondary schools

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INTRODUCTION

As the number of languages spoken around the world decreases its usage, a few tongues have become dominant in their respective regions. As the global market and internet are largely dominated by English, it claims the largest share of contemporary second-language learning throughout the world (Baker, 2015).

Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think according to Einstein (1921). Giving emphasis to the writing literacy of students will provide them a foundation in writing that will have long-term benefits by introducing focused writing skills development earlier than the years when writing becomes more complex. Writing has a role in the academic arena globally and it is equipping students with communication and thinking skills.

As emphasized in Republic Act No. 10533, the K to 12 aims to address the deficiency in the Philippine educational system to meet the standards of the international education criteria and for the students to be at par with the students in neighboring countries. In the DepEd discussion paper

(2010), the K to 12 curriculum aims to enable every child “to achieve mastery of core competencies and skills” and develop academic tracks based on the student’s interests and competencies such as developing skills in academic writing.

This study was conducted to assess the academic writing literacy of the Grade 10 students amid the modular distance learning modality implemented as stated in DepEd Order No. 18, s. 2020 because of the global health crisis. In academic writing, writers are required to be clear in their explanations and reasoning, direct in communication and ability to make their readers understand their topic (Roozen, 2015). The competencies in Grade 10 curriculum in English are more focused on writing skills and it prepares them for a complicated writing task in senior high school (DepEd MELC,2020).

Assessing the students’ academic writing literacy will lead to development of an intervention that the teacher can conduct to help them address the challenges they face in writing without the physical interaction and assistance of the teachers. Modular distance learning reduces a lot of time in teaching and learning practice both for the teachers and students which can be a reason for the poor performance of students in their different writing activities.

Statement of the problem

This study determined the level of academic writing literacy of Grade 10 students and the relevance of modular distance learning modality as basis for developing skills builder activities for writing.

Specifically, it answered the following problems:

1) What is the level of writing skills of Grade 10 students in modular distance learning modality along the following features of academic writing: syntax; content; grammar; organization; mechanics and; word choice?

2) Is there a significant difference in the level of writing skills of the Grade 10 students among the different features of academic writing?

3) What is the level of academic writing literacy of Grade 10 students in modular distance learning modality along the six features of academic writing?

4) Is there a significant difference in the level of academic writing literacy of the Grade 10 students among the different features of academic writing?

5) What skills builder activities can be developed to improve the academic writing literacy of the students based on the findings of the study?

6) What is the level of acceptability of the skills builder activities in improving the academic writing literacy of students as evaluated by jurors?

LITERATURE REVIEW

With the advent of globalization, the demands for competencies among individuals become higher and complicated. The implementation of the senior high school curriculum in the Philippines prepares learners to become more productive, more competent and comparable to the learners of the other countries. The educational setting of our country aims to develop students who can compete and who can cope with the global demands.

Educators agree that proficiency in the English language is the basis for success in academic pursuits. Reading, writing, and working with numbers are tasks that are based on language skills describes this as the interplay between everyday language skills and more advanced communication skills.

In 2020, the Philippines suffered a seven-spot drop in this year's English Proficiency Index (EPI) released by international education company Education First (Cellona, 2020).

Despite placing 27th in this year's list, the Filipinos have been given a "high proficiency" rating with a score of 562 out of 700. The EPI was based on the results of English tests administered by Education First to 2.2 million adults from 100 countries and territories in 2019. Education First described the "high proficiency" band of English language as those countries which can make a presentation at work, understand TV shows, and read a newspaper. The Philippines also holds the second highest English proficiency in Asia, behind Southeast Asian neighbor Singapore which finished 10th in the list.

For the past four years, the country has been declining in the EF English Proficiency Index. It was placed in the 13th spot in 2016, 15th spot in 2017, 14th spot in 2018, and 20th spot in 2019. During the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Philippines ranked the lowest in reading comprehension among 79 countries with an average reading score of 340. The global survey showed that one in four students is unable to complete even the most basic reading tasks, which OECD said could mean they may struggle in their lives while living in a digital world.

As stipulated in the Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda (2006-2010), the Department of Education (DepEd) is currently implementing the Schools First Initiative, an effort to improve basic education outcomes through a broadly participated, popular movement featuring a wide variety of initiatives undertaken by individual schools and communities as well as networks of schools at localities involving school districts and divisions, local governments, civil society organizations and other stakeholder groups and associations. Even as the Schools First Initiative seeks to improve the way all public schools perform now, the DepEd is also undertaking fundamental reforms to sustain better performance. These policy reforms are expected to create critical changes necessary to further accelerate, broaden, deepen and sustain the improved education effort already being started by the Schools First Initiative.

One of the measures of determining learner's competence is the aspect of academic writing. Teachers are encouraged to continue professional development through post graduate studies and through academic writing. In college, it is a requirement that all programs offer a separate subject in research. In senior high school, there are subjects that require academic writing. This way the learners will be able to prepare themselves to more complicated writing endeavors in college or use research skills in entrepreneurship or in the workplace.

Indeed, language proficiency is a key to academic performance. According to recent research, pupils must be good readers in order to continue learning academic content as they progress through the grades (Swanson et al., 2017).

Toba, Noor & Sanu (2019) investigated the issues of Indonesian EFL students' writing skills, covering ability, problem and reason why they got problems in writing comparison and contrast essay. A convergent parallel method was used to explore these issues. The findings of the study revealed that the Indonesian EFL students' writing ability was good that categorized with the mean score of 77.83. However, some of them encounter problems in writing aspects including content, organization, vocabulary, grammar and mechanics. Their reasons in experiencing these problems are not only limited knowledge of writing aspects and comparison and contrast essay itself, but also they had own personal reasons; lack of writing practice, writing dislike, writing anxiety, negative writing perception, low writing motivation, insufficient time given in writing test, and also inadequate teaching writing process taught by their lecturers.

Writing is a very difficult cognitive activity in which the writer must display simultaneous control of multiple factors. Students with strong writing skills may have a better chance of succeeding. Language is incomplete without writing. All students require good writing skills in order to complete their school and employment requirements (Durga & Rao,

2018). In other words, finding ideas, writing down the ideas, until students come to their final product, are long processes. Often, students find it difficult to start writing what they have to write even though teachers have given them a prompt.

Academic writing is clear, concise, focused, structured and backed up by evidence. Its purpose is to aid the reader's understanding. It has a formal tone and style, but it is not complex and does not require the use of long sentences and complicated vocabulary. Each subject discipline will have certain writing conventions, vocabulary and types of discourse that the learners become familiar with over the course of their degree.

Academic writing requires another macro skill especially reading. Grade 10 curriculum is focused more on writing and it is just necessary to help them master their writing skills especially that they are bombarded with information. The existence of internet may be helpful but can also hinder the development of writing skills. With the implementation of the different learning modalities because of the existing global health crisis, social presence become a problem in teaching and learning writing both to the learners and teachers. This situation calls for intervention that will still aim to develop high proficiency in writing so that students will be prepared for a more complicated academic writing activities in senior high school.

Ariyanti & Fitriana (2017) looked into the issues EFL students have when writing essays, as well as their learning needs in order to improve the quality of their English composition. Examining essays and administering open-ended questionnaires to 33 English Department students at Widya Gama Mahakam University in Indonesia were done to identify students' challenges across the board. In addition, a semi-structured interview with the writing lecturer was undertaken to learn more about his perspective on difficult issues associated to teaching essay writing. The data revealed that students struggle with grammar, cohesion, and coherence issues. Furthermore, small features of students' writing, such as paragraph order, dictions, and vocabulary errors, were identified.

Belkhir & Benyelles (2017) identified EFL learners essay writing difficulties together with the sources associated with their difficulties in an attempt to find out the possible remedies for the achievement of better productions. Data as regards the topic in question were collected by means of questionnaire, interviews and some students' finale essay writing drafts. The attained data reveal that students meet difficulties in both coherence and cohesion due to the lack of reading, first language transfer and low writing practice. In hope to decrease students' essay writing difficulties, attention to these sources is required.

Aunurrahman, et al. (2017) explored the students' academic writing competencies that also focus on critical thinking. The research involved thirty-six first-year tertiary English Foreign Language (EFL) students from a regular class of a private university in Pontianak, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. The source for data collection was the students' texts. Three texts were selected, and the students were categorized into low, medium, and high levels of writing achievement. The text analysis utilized functional grammar rooted in systemic functional linguistics. The analysis shows that the students, regardless of their levels of writing achievement, have little control over the schematic structure and linguistic features of an argumentative writing. The text analysis also shows that the students' texts have some limitations as regards their critical thinking capacity. Still, a few examples of academic language were detected in the texts. The findings suggest that the lecturer should incorporate explicit teaching and cooperative learning activities to alleviate the students' difficulties and develop their academic writing and critical thinking capacity.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study used the descriptive evaluative method of research. In this study, the descriptive evaluative research approach was used to measure the level of academic writing literacy of the Grade 10 students as it is complementary to the nature of the research variables. The descriptive approach aims primarily at gathering knowledge (i.e. descriptions and explanations) about the object of study but does not wish to modify the object. The target is to find out how things are, or how they have been (Shields, 2013). The study will describe and evaluate the academic writing literacy of Grade 10 students.

Students' academic writing literacy will be evaluated. This convinced the researcher to comprehend that the use of descriptive-evaluative type or method of research will enable him to present and interpret the results of the investigation.

The data were gathered through objective type of test focused on writing skills and through writing activities. These writing activities were composed of academic writing literacy skills. There are structured test and writing activities for each skill.

Locale of the study and respondents

This study was conducted in Albay, a province of the Philippines located in the Bicol Region in southeastern Luzon Island. It was conducted in public secondary schools in one of the clustered schools in Albay. This cluster is composed of 5 municipalities in Albay with 25 public secondary schools.

There are two groups of respondents that this study involved. The first group of respondents is the Grade 10 students in public secondary schools of Albay for the school year 2021-2022 and the second group of respondents are experts or jurors who assessed the developed output after the conduct of the study.

The grade 10 students were selected as the respondents of the study since they are at the grade level where preparatory skills in academic writing are taught. English curriculum in Senior high school and eventually in higher education include academic writing disciplines and courses require academic writing, therefore, conducting this study will Grade 10 students will help them develop and prepare the skills they need in the next level of their education.

The total population of the Grade 10 students from the five schools selected in Cluster D2 Albay Division was 752. To determine the sample population, the research employed random sampling by computing the sample population in each school that is equally distributed. Based on the computation, the total sample population is 261. The sample was determined through Slovin's formula. In determining the number of jurors, the researcher employed purposive sampling since the jurors who were selected are considered experts in this field. Five jurors (English Grade 10 and Master teachers) were selected

Research instruments

The research instrument of the study was categorized into two parts. The first was the objective type test about writing skills and an essay type test where academic writing skills can be measured through the use of rubric. The research instrument was appropriate in a way that their answers and output can be bases for describing their level of proficiency in academic writing.

The second set of the research instruments was an evaluation tool for the jurors who evaluated the developed skill builder activities based on the findings of the study. Likert scale was used in this instrument is as follows: 4-Excellent, 3-Very Satisfactorily Acceptable, 2-Acceptable, and 1-Not Acceptable. This instrument was the Evaluation Sheet for printed materials as proposed by the Department of Education.

The skills to be developed are based on the skills taught in reading and writing for Grade 11 students as preparatory skills for research writing. The content or items in the research instrument are taken from different sources.

Data analyses procedure

For the descriptive part of the research, the following statistical tools were used: Frequency Count, Percent, and Chi-Square Test. Frequency count, as defined by Jackson (2009), is the process of counting the responses. In this study, it was utilized to count all the student responses in the test and the responses of jurors in the survey. Percent, a number or ratio expressed as a fraction of 100 (Bennett & Briggs, 2005), was used to determine the percentage level of student performance, which served as the basis for describing their literacy level. The Chi-Square Test, a statistical test of significance used to compare observed frequencies with expected frequencies (Kenney & Keeping, 1951), was employed to determine the significant difference in the level of academic writing literacy among the different features of academic writing.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Level of writing skills of Grade 10 students along syntax

As shown in the dataset, Grade 10 students showed proficiency in differentiating fragments from sentences which is indicating skill in syntax with a mean percentage score of 67.21. Meanwhile, they demonstrated an intermediate level in transforming passive voice to active voice with a weighted mean of 47.15. Overall, the students belong to an intermediate level in writing along with syntax with an average mean percentage score of 56.62.

This outcome means that the student respondents are in the middle of literacy at this level because modular distance learning lack the opportunity to expose students to writing exercises that are guided by the teacher. Further, it implies that they still need to improve and do well in their writing ability along with syntax. Basically, the students showed an average level of arranging words and phrases to create well-formed sentences in the English language. If the physical and social presence of teachers is evident in the modular distance learning, they are likely to be monitored and guided in writing, thus may further improve their writing performances.

This result concurs with the study of Singh & Maniam (2020) which found out that the students are not basically using their own way of translating syntax because they are using translation method since English is not their first language. It was suggested that contrastive analysis for a better understanding of the differences in the syntax between the two languages should be taught intensively. Therefore, teachers still need to give more exercises and employ teaching strategies along with this skill for its further development in the modular distance learning focused on writing along with syntax.

Significant difference in the level of writing skills of Grade 10 students among syntax competencies

As shown in the dataset, the computed X^2 value of 64.812 is relatively higher than the tabular X^2 value of 21.026 at 0.05 level of significance with 12 degrees of freedom.

Therefore, in this study, the result rejects the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the level of academic writing literacy among syntax competencies of the Grade 10 students. It can be assumed that the deviations showed between what is expected and actually observed in terms of academic writing literacy among Grade 10 students could be due to mere chance that they are not learning the writing skills similarly and that the development of writing skills are different from that of modular distance learning.

Academic writing literacy of Grade 10 students in the modular distance learning modality in public secondary schools

It can be observed that parents are the facilitators of learning at home and these parents have differences in terms of knowledge and skills, educational attainment, age, experiences, etc. Furthermore, there is a need for the teachers to employ teaching strategies that will develop the writing literacy of students along syntax at similar higher levels of proficiency.

Level of writing skills of Grade 10 students along content

Since academic writing requires the student to become a reader and develop information literacy, content in writing academic outputs is important as it serves as the knowledge being transferred to the reader or it is basically the body of any academic writing pursuit. Writing ability along content refers to the ability of a writer to produce pieces of information that are informative, authentic and reliable. Students are expected to become knowledgeable in content writing and therefore should demonstrate skills along content. The result shows the writing skills level of Grade 10 students along Content.

The result shows that the Grade 10 students demonstrated an intermediate level of writing along content in terms of selecting the statement that expresses the main idea with a mean percentage score of 50.99. On the other hand, analyzing the short paragraph and identifying the main idea was only 29.59 and at a developing level. Overall, the respondents are at an intermediate level of academic writing literacy along content with an average mean percentage of 43.02.

This implies that the students are having difficulty in getting and comprehending the main idea written in a paragraph although their performance fell under the intermediate level when selecting main idea in a sentence or in a statement. This means that Grade 10 students need to develop their reading comprehension ability so they will be able to write or discriminate main idea in their future writing activities.

The result implies that Grade 10 students in the modular distance learning are having difficulty in analyzing paragraphs. The modality is expected to be a factor in the performance of the students but it is still necessary that the teachers are able to guide the learners so they can practice all the skills necessary in writing. In the traditional teaching and learning process, it is expected that the students will be able to learn any skill when teachers are around since teachers can immediately address the problems or difficulties exhibited by the students in writing. In the context of modular distance learning, the observation in this research suggests that their performances differ from that of the traditional educational setting. Feedback is necessary and should be understood by the students so as not to commit the same errors in future writing activities.

This outcome means that the student respondents are at the middle of literacy in this level. Further, it implies that they still need to improve and do well in their writing ability along with syntax. Basically, the students showed an average level of arranging words and phrases to create well-formed sentences in the English language. Thus, teachers still need to give more exercises along with this skill for its further development as suggested in the study of Melgar (2017). Teaching strategies addressing this learning area in language must also be enhanced.

Significant difference in the level of writing skills of Grade 10 students among content competencies

As shown in the data, the computed X^2 value of 288.843 is relatively higher than the tabular X^2 value of 15.507 at 0.05 level of significance with 8 degrees of freedom. In this study, the result indicates that there is a significant difference in the level of academic writing literacy along content of the Grade 10 students. It can be seen that the pattern of the observed

frequencies in academic writing literacy along content is significantly different from the pattern of frequencies which would expect to see by chance. Basically, if these students are taught in classrooms and are taught by teachers regularly, the results of their performances might be no different from each other but because of modular distance learning, students are exposed to factors that might be influencing or contributory to their performances in different ways.

With respect to the academic writing literacy along content, significant means that the pattern of the performance was different among of the Grade 10 students. It concurs with the result of the study of Husin, et al. (2017) where learners have good quality performance in terms of content in thesis writing. Furthermore, this means that more writing practices and learning opportunities are needed to improve the writing skills of the Grade 10 students in academic discourses to further improve the quality of their writing and have a uniform and higher performances.

Level of writing skills of Grade 10 students along grammar

Grammar does play a vital role in writing particularly in academic writing. Proper grammar is a necessity for credibility, readability, communication and clarity. This study aimed to determine the level of writing skills of Grade 10 students along grammar as shown in the data. With a mean percentage of 53.20, the Grade 10 students are at the intermediate level in identifying the correct words that observe grammar rules. Meanwhile, Grade 10 students are at a developing level in filling the blanks with correct grammar with a mean percentage score of 31.44. Overall, the average mean percentage score of Grade 10 students in academic writing literacy along grammar is 45.56 and described as at the intermediate level.

The result showed that the Grade 10 students are still able to meet practical writing needs but still rooms for improvement are evident. It is important to aim that learners are able to write at an advanced level which indicates a distinguished skill in writing where students are able to write with minimal or no errors and that their writing is comprehensible to native and non-native readers of the English language.

This finding resembles the result of the study of Akmal, Hikmah & Buffe (2019) where students are good in writing contents, style and organization but they are still poor in mechanics and grammar. Though the results indicate that students are able to meet all the practical writing needs of the intermediate level, it is still important to develop their writing that shows control of basic sentence structure and verb forms and make their writing preventive of declining quality and quantity as well as unclear messages.

Significant difference in the level of writing skills of Grade 10 students among grammar competencies

It can be observed in the data that the computed X^2 value of 41.330 is relatively higher than the tabular X^2 value of 15.507 at 0.05 level of significance with 8 degrees of freedom. In this study, it is clearly indicated that there is a significant difference in the level of writing literacy among grammar competencies.

With respect to the writing skills along grammar, significant means that the pattern of the performance in writing was different among of the Grade 10 students which can be deduced based on the learning modality implemented in their school. Therefore, there is a lack of uniformity in the performance of students in modular distance learning as far as writing is concerned. Similarly, the study of Toba, Noor & Sanu (2019) found that grammar is one of the issues encountered by the students in writing. Furthermore, this means that

teachers should be vigilant in the writing outputs of students and make sure that even small errors are corrected and given feedback.

Level of writing skills of Grade 10 students along organization

This study aimed to determine the writing skills of Grade 10 students along organization where results of the study are presented in Table 9. The way sentences and paragraphs are organized ensures the readers that the writer is focused and allows the writer to articulate, analyze and clarify thoughts. The data as shown in the table shows that the Grade 10 students performed an intermediate level of academic writing in terms of Arranging the ideas/sentences chronologically based on the story read with a mean percentage score of 53.18 and Recognizing comparison and contrast with a mean percentage score of 40.50.

On the other hand, they performed a developing level of academic writing in terms of writing a paragraph observing chronological order of ideas and information, identifying cause and effect, and recognizing problem and solution. Overall, they performed an intermediate level of academic writing skills along organization with an average mean percentage score of 41.48. The results indicate that the Grade 10 students are still having difficulty in organizing thoughts and ideas in the context of cause and effect, problem and solution as well as the development of the chronological structure of information. Organization is important in structuring sentences that are relevant and connected to each other throughout the paragraph and it is vital in academic writing as it is more technical in all its aspect.

It is vital that the students are able to develop their ideas that encourage readers to stick around. This means that the Grade 10 students need to develop their abilities in adopting organizational patterns in writing by using transitions or signal words that indicate cause and effect, problem and solution, and correct sequences of events, processes, thoughts, or ideas as suggested in the study of Akmal et.al (2019). Recognizing the right patterns that academic writing requires can help the reader put all the facts together and understand what the text is all about. This can be intensified through instructional materials in writing if modular distance learning is still implemented.

Significant difference in the level of writing skills of Grade 10 students among organization competencies

It can be seen in the table that the computed X^2 value of 52.310 is relatively higher than the tabular X^2 value of 26.296 at 0.05 level of significance with 16 degrees of freedom.

In this study, it is clearly indicated that there is a significant difference in the level of academic writing literacy of the Grade 10 students along organization. With respect to the writing skills along organization, the pattern of the performance in writing was different among of the Grade 10 students.

Similarly, Pablo & Lasaten (2018) found that the students have difficulties in writing academic essays such lack of connectives in terms organization. Therefore, the modular distance learning modality requires teachers to be provide holistic education amid the barriers brought by the pandemic. Teachers may be able to help learners achieve high performance in organizing their writing for academic discourse by providing them offline and online learning resources that will help them create a meaningful writing output and free from any technical error.

Level of writing skills of Grade 10 students along mechanics.

Learning the mechanics of writing is one of the critical components of learning to write. Writing mechanics are the established rules that should be followed when writing sentences. They go hand in hand with grammar to effectively communicate ideas. As presented in the table, the Grade 10 students performed an intermediate level on academic writing in terms of correcting sentences with wrong spelling and punctuation with a mean percentage of 46.48.

On the other hand, they performed a developing level of academic writing with a mean percentage of 38.55 in terms of identifying wrong spelling in the passage. Overall, the performance of the Grade 10 students showed an intermediate level of academic writing with an average mean percentage score of 42.60. The results suggest that learners are not into looking for technical errors particularly in spelling.

This means that the students exhibit a lack of vocabulary skills. With the vast information available in the internet it is easy to know the correct spelling of an unfamiliar word but because the respondents are under the implementation of modular distance learning modality in their school, they have limited access to the internet or other learning resources that can enhance their vocabulary skills. This can also be attributed to the number of modules and activities that the student needs to accomplish in a week without academic support from the teacher due to the modality as well as the academic support from parents who supposed to be facilitating their learning, students are not giving attention to small details such as spelling and other mechanics. Since they are in the modular distance learning, they are required to write, they do not focus on more on the mechanics of writing as they are pressured to finish and complete their modules at a limited time.

Similarly, the study of Ulit (2018) revealed that both in pretest and posttest, capitalization was the most persistent sentence error in mechanical category and wrong word choice in the structural category. This calls for teachers' innovation and support in the preparation of the outputs of the students. Language teachers particularly should require learners to write legibly and follow the standards of writing because learners may not be able to create a perfect academic write up or may not be able to provide adequate content required. Following the standards or mechanics in writing can be an additional set of criteria where learners can gain additional score in their outputs.

Significant difference in the level of writing skills of Grade 10 students among mechanics competencies

It can be seen in the table that the computed X^2 value of 25.054 is relatively higher than the tabular X^2 value of 15.507 at 0.05 level of significance with 8 degrees of freedom. In this study, it is clearly indicated that there is a significant difference in the level of academic writing literacy of the Grade 10 students along mechanics. With respect to the academic writing literacy along mechanics, the performance of the Grade 10 students in academic writing was significantly different as expected.

It is expected that the learners are conscious of their writing because the modular distance learning requires them to do so in all learning areas. This result concurs with the study of Urbano, et al. (2021) mechanics of the text is one of the struggles experienced by the senior high school students.

Level of writing skills of Grade 10 students along word choice

Word choice is an important element in writing with the goal of clearly, cohesively, and concisely communicating the ideas to the readers. Word choice extends beyond the simplicity of choosing the right words rather it involves considerations of meaning, specificity,

audience, and style. This can be achieved when the student or a writer has enhanced vocabulary skills.

As shown in the findings, the Grade 10 students demonstrated an intermediate level of academic writing in terms of transforming informal words to formal with a mean percentage score of 57.15. Overall, the students fall under an intermediate level of academic writing literacy along word choice with an average percentage score of 45.23.

The results signify that the Grade 10 students showed an average performance in writing in consideration of word choices. Academic writing involves writing cover letters, correspondences, and academic papers such as concept paper, position paper, research paper, etc. In view of this, formality is an important aspect of writing. It is therefore important to establish a tone, technical language, and layout that would best communicate ideas, convictions, arguments and the like. Word choice includes diction aside from tone, this refers to the use of jargons, colloquial words, slang, redundancy, fillers, etc. This should be observed by the writer in writing academic papers by considering when to use or not to use them. It also involves the use of connotative and denotative devices. With respect to formality and specificity, the use of these languages must be studied according to its appropriateness.

The findings of the study showed that the Grade 10 students are not excellent in writing along word with choice. This finding concurs with the study of Pablo & Lasaten (2018) where students have difficulties in writing academic essays without incorrect word or idiom and word usage in terms vocabulary and word choice.

The current situation brings student closer to the virtual world and changes are easily adapted without considering its impact to the real concept of language and the skills that go with it. Teachers must carefully remind students to observe the proper use of words especially in academic writing.

Significant difference in the level of writing skills of Grade 10 students among word choice competencies

It can be seen in the table that the computed X^2 value of 60.456 is relatively higher than the tabular X^2 value of 15.507 at 0.05 level of significance with 8 degrees of freedom. In this study, it is clearly indicated that there is a significant difference in the level of writing skills of the Grade 10 students among word choice competencies. The proficiency level of the Grade 10 students in terms of word choice means that their performance in writing skills among word choice competencies amid modular distance learning have significant differences.

‘Word Choice’ in writing is the usage of effective and precise language that conveys information not just in a functional way, but also to enlighten the reader. Effective word choice examples are the ones that use clichés sparingly, focuses on denotations and connotations, delivers straightforward meaning, avoids jargon, and is not characterized by a wide vocabulary. The results can be supported by the study of Pablo & Lasaten (2018) since word choice is another issue encountered by the students. This implies that the teachers should intensify their teaching in terms of language and providing learners guidelines in improving the use of words in academic writing.

Level of writing skills of Grade 10 students along the six features

Determining the writing skills of Grade 10 students along the six features of writing was essential in designing the skill builder activities for the Grade 10 students. In interpreting the level of academic writing literacy of Grade 10 students, the study employed 5-point Likert scale in describing the students’ performances. The result shows the summary of the results

on the academic writing literacy of Grade 10 students. This summary served as basis for comparison on the level of writing skills of Grade 10 students.

As shown in table 15, the Grade 10 students manifested an intermediate level of academic writing literacy along syntax with a mean percentage score of 56.62. It is followed by the intermediate level of academic writing in terms of grammar with mean percentage score of 45.56, next was academic writing in terms of word choice with mean percentage score of 45.23, 43.02 for academic writing along mechanics and finally, 41.48 academic writing literacy along organization. The overall mean percentage score on the six features of academic writing manifested an intermediate level with an average percentage score of 45.75.

The result implies that the Grade 10 students are still at the intermediate level of academic writing from the lowest to the highest phase of writing. The result further implies that although all six features of writing of the students fall under intermediate level, statistically they still differ. It also suggests that the students need intensive academic writing practices to move from intermediate to proficient or to a more advanced level of literacy in academic writing.

This finding is similar with the findings of Husin, et al. (2017) who studied the performance of the students in academic writing along with all these features which is quite good or at an average level.

Significant difference in the level of writing skills of Grade 10 students among the six features

As shown in the table, the computed X^2 value of 51.395 is relatively higher than the tabular X^2 value of 36.415 at 0.05 level of significance with 20 degrees of freedom.

The result states that there is no significant difference in the level of writing skills of Grade 10 students along the six features of writing. It means that the null hypothesis of this study is rejected. This further means that there are significant differences along with these features and that by chance could be attributed to different factors such as the skills of the student or the learning modality. This result is similar to the study of Ulit (2018) which revealed that the respondents' scores in pretest had highly significant difference to their scores in posttest in all the features of writing.

Level of academic writing literacy of Grade 10 students along the six features of writing

Academic writing is writing done for academic purposes. For Grade 10 students, academic writing can be observed when they were asked to write formal or argumentative essays, editorials, concept papers, book reviews, literature reviews, reading responses, position papers, research papers, and other writing concepts that involve expressing ideas that are carefully elaborated, well supported, logically sequenced, rigorously reasoned, or tightly stitched together.

Each of these types of academic writing has its own purpose, organizational structure, and linguistic features. The Grade 10 students were asked to write an essay about COVID-19. The essay is guided with rubrics so that they are aware of what will be measured in their outputs. The rubric contains a description where the reader will describe the essay using the following scale: 4 points is described as Advanced, 3 as Proficient, 2 as Basic, and 1 as Minimal. This evaluation of students' output is based on the criteria set for every scale in every feature of writing. This criterion is interpreted as the following scale: A score of 4 is interpreted as Advanced, a score of 3 is interpreted as Proficient, 2 is interpreted as Intermediate, 1 is interpreted as Developing and a score of 0 is interpreted as Beginning. The scores of the Grade 10 students were consolidated and interpreted based on the scale used in this study. Table 17 presents the writing performance of the Grade 10 students in their essay.

Academic writing literacy of Grade 10 students in the modular distance learning modality in public secondary schools

As shown in the data, 49.04 percent Grade 10 students performed an intermediate level of academic writing along syntax while only 3.07 percent of them are identified as advanced academic writers. Along content, there were 37.93 percent are also identified as intermediate writer while 1.92 were advanced. In terms of grammar, 35.25 percent of the students are considered Proficient and Intermediate while there were no students who fell under advanced level along grammar.

Along organization, 36.78 percent are intermediate, and 3.07 percent are advanced. Along mechanics, there were 44.44 percent are at the intermediate level while 1.53 are advanced and along word choice, 36.02 percent are intermediate while only 2.68 are advanced.

The findings of the study revealed that most of the Grade 10 students are at the intermediate level which means their performance is at an average level. Academic writing is a technique for creating, codifying, transmitting, evaluating, renovating, teaching, and learning knowledge and ideology in academic disciplines. The ability to write in an academic style is critical for disciplinary learning and academic success. As stated in the study of Altimakas (2018), control over academic writing provides the writer with capital, power, and agency in knowledge construction, identity formation, disciplinary practices, social positioning, and career advancement. It is therefore necessary that students should not be contented with an average performance but rather aspire to become proficient or advanced in academic writing.

Significant difference in the level of academic writing literacy of Grade 10 students among the six features of writing

As shown in the table, the computed X^2 value of 267.795 is very high than the tabular X^2 value of 36.415 at 0.05 level of significance with 20 degrees of freedom. This implies that the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference in the academic writing literacy of Grade 10 students among the six features of writing, therefore the null hypothesis is rejected. This further means that there are significant differences in the academic writing of Grade 10 students along these features.

Acceptability level of the developed skills builder activities in writing

The use of instructional materials such as pictures, charts, big books, reading modules, concrete objects even the use of multi-media are aids in the learning process to make teaching practically meaningful and real. Amid the modular distance learning, developed instructional materials are mostly printed.

The researcher developed a skills builder activity material as an output of this research. The researcher asked a set of jurors that is composed of Grade 10 teachers and master teachers to rate the level of acceptability of the material that can be used in enhancing the academic writing skills of the students amid modular distance learning. In this section presents the acceptability level of the skills builder activities, as assessed by the jurors in terms of content, format, presentation, organization, accuracy and up-to-datedness of information.

Acceptability level of the developed skills builder activities along content

Results show that the jurors rated the skills builder activity material as excellently acceptable in terms of content with an average weighted mean of 3.96.

The jurors perceived that the developed material from this research is equipped with content or information conveyed that is suitable to the level of development of the students. The jurors also assessed that the material was aligned with the objectives set and that it serves its purpose. They were also excellently satisfied with the ability of the material to develop higher cognitive skills like critical thinking, creativity, learning by doing, inquiry, problem-solving, etc. The material was also free from biases and has the potential to arouse the interest of the learners.

The results showed that the developed skills builder activities were excellently acceptable in terms of content. Those characteristics used to measure the skills builder activity material ought to be found in order for the material to be of quality and worth reproducing. Effective teaching may be unavoidable without functional instructional materials and with the event that teachers may not be able to be physically present in facilitating learning in the modular distance learning, quality instructional materials are needed and should be continuously developed.

Acceptability level of the developed skills builder activities along format

It is necessary that the format of the material should be user-friendly, clear, and readable. This study measures the acceptability level of the developed skills builder activities in terms of format as presented in the data.

Since the learning modality of the respondents is modular distance learning, the teacher is not present physically when the material will be used by the learner. Based on the data gathered from the jurors, the jurors find the material in compliance with the correct and acceptable format. The size of the letters, spaces, physical appearance and illustrations are excellently acceptable with an average weighted mean of 3.88.

The results showed that the developed skills builder material was excellently acceptable in terms of its format. The developed material is not only intended to impact learners but also consider the readability, simplicity and clarity of the material.

Acceptability level of the developed skills builder activities along presentation, organization, accuracy, and up-to-dated-ness of information

Based on the data gathered, the developed skills builder activity material was perceived by the jurors as excellently acceptable with an average weighted mean of 3.96.

The developed skills builder activities consisted of different activities that can be interesting to the students. Since the material was composed not only of activities but also contains input where learners can read and review the topics and competencies and master their skills. The skills builder activities were also excellently acceptable in terms of its vocabulary level.

The user of this material will be the Grade 10 students and therefore they are expected to be able to understand simple and complex content and activities. The material is not just intended for independent learning but also for the students to master the existing competencies observed from them. The material was crafted based on the features of academic writing and since the result of the study was that Grade 10 learners are at their intermediate level, therefore, supplementary instructional materials should be developed to support continuity of learning.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on these findings, the researcher formulated several conclusions. Firstly, the level of writing skills of Grade 10 students along the six features of writing—syntax, content, grammar, organization, mechanics, and word choice—demonstrated an intermediate level of proficiency. Secondly, the statistical analysis indicated a significant difference in the writing skill levels of the Grade 10 students across these features, thereby rejecting the null hypothesis of the study. Thirdly, the performance of Grade 10 students in terms of academic writing literacy was found to be at an intermediate level, signifying average performance. Fourthly, a significant difference in academic writing literacy was observed among the six features of writing, further rejecting the null hypothesis. Fifthly, a skill builder activity material can be developed to improve the academic writing skills of Grade 10 students across the six features of writing. Lastly, the developed skill builder activity material was assessed by jurors and deemed excellently acceptable in terms of content, format, presentation, organization, accuracy, and the up-to-datedness of information.

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed. Teachers should work harder to help Grade 10 students improve their basic and academic writing skills by providing more reading and writing activities to prepare them for higher education. The school should maintain high-quality education in English, focusing on instruction, learning environment, and opportunities. Teachers should guide students in modular distance learning and ensure they are learning the correct concepts through regular monitoring and assessments. Additionally, the school should enhance the quality of English education in the final stage of junior high school by using the developed skill builder activities, which will help students practice writing and improve their skills. The school should also provide professional development opportunities for teachers, including training and workshops, to help them continue their roles effectively during modular distance learning. Future research should compare the writing performance of senior high school students in modular and face-to-face learning and identify the least mastered skills in research writing for Grade 11 and Grade 12 students in Practical Research 1 and 2.

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