

Conference Paper

The Impregnable Composition Writing Competency and Teaching Writing Methodologies

Emejidio C. Gepila Jr.

Polytechnic University of the Philippines

Abstract

This study evaluated the composition writing competency of the Grade 7 students and focused on the following: teaching writing method/s used in the classroom; execution of the writing methods; composition writing competency of the PUP Laboratory High School grade seven students; and common errors PUP Laboratory High School grade seven students committed in composition writing. It used Descriptive Method in Quantitative-Qualitative Approach. A writing test was used in this study. These were written using two styles such as: Free Writing Style and Guided Writing Style, and were checked by the three (3) seasoned English teachers. The findings revealed that the only teaching writing method used in the classroom is the combination of Process and Genre Methods; composition writing competency of the PUP Laboratory High School seniors in all writing styles in terms of: Content, Thesis Statement, Organization, and Language Use and Editing are rated Very Good to Good. The researcher concluded that the compositions still need substantiation, well-defined introduction and conclusion, and zero error in mechanics and grammar though such are rated Good to Very Good.

Corresponding Author:
 Emejidio C. Gepila Jr.
 jrgepila@gmail.com
 ecgepilajr@pup.edu.ph

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1. Introduction

Language is comprised of basic skills also known as the macro skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. These macro skills are also arranged in hierarchy according to its acquisition and/ or learning. It has been known in the course of linguistics that language can be learned as it can also be acquired [10]. Using critical analysis, among all the skills, listening and speaking can be scored to be acquired. Thus, they can also be named as skills which are instinctive skills. On the other hand, reading and writing are the skills which should be learned in the most specific context. Hence, they can be

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labeled as productive skills. These are the skills which can and should be learned in the most specific and familiar context among learners.

Moreover, according to the hierarchy of the skills, writing comes last. Therefore, we can say that writing is the achievement of proficiency level in acquiring and learning a particular language. If a language learner can write in a language that observes and practices the finite rules of the language, the learner can be identified as proficient in the language.

Compared to other skills, writing is the most difficult to teach and learn. It must be taught and learned in the context in which it can be best taught and learned. A child who is learning how to swim should apply the theories, principles and practices in swimming. It can only happen if the child is in the swimming pool. He cannot learn swimming unless he is in the pool. Similar to writing, a child must practice the rules in writing only if he is asked to write [1]. Also, the writing teacher must identify the context of learning: this includes culture, literature and identity. Native speakers of English are direct and straight forward while the Asians, English language learners, are identified in a style which is circuitous [1, 6]. This observation must be considered as regards the Filipino language learners and must be observed by English language teachers.

The method/s used in teaching writing should be properly designed. Jack Richards and Theodore Rodgers [1, 10]. reformulated the concept of method. According to Richards and Rodgers, method is the superordinate term which comprises of three processes namely: approach which defines assumptions, beliefs and theories on language teaching; design which bridges the gap between the approach and the classroom activities, this may be a learning plan, learning taxonomy or a syllabus; and procedure which is about the practices derived from approach and procedure.

Moreover, there are two major approaches in teaching writing namely: process and product [1, 8], and teaching writing strategies such as controlled writing activities; process: prewriting, writing and post writing; practical writing process; and praise, question and polishing (PQP) method [12].

On the other hand, while others are focused on methods, Phillipson introduced a concept that should be considered. Language teachers should not practice Linguicism. Linguicism is the unequal division of power and resources among groups on the basis of language [9] A writing teacher who is linguicist when s/he practices linguicism or is assertive of the dominance of the western English. Language is the identity of the

society and its culture. Hence, when a language is taught, learners' identity and culture must not be dominated by either the second or foreign language.

Therefore, in the context of teaching writing in the Philippines, writing must be taught in the oriental style if we are using Kaplan's observation and analysis or the writing style of the learners must be considered and accepted. In teaching oriental writing, critical language awareness and cultural awareness should be included in the syllabus or teaching writing taxonomy. The very aim of the writing instruction is to teach writing without losing the identity of the learner but not teaching writing and be like the Americans or English.

It is understood that language in general must be taught in form, meaning and use. This concept must be applied to its underlying skills that include writing. Consequently, teaching writing in the Philippines should be taught in the most appropriate and accepted method. The teaching of writing-its form, meaning and use, should be in Philippine context.

1.1. Background of the study

The study was conducted in a Laboratory High School in the Philippines. It does not follow the prescribed curriculum of the Department of Education instead; it designed a specialized curriculum similar to other laboratory schools and science schools.

At present, it has 600 students from all levels. There are three sections each level with 50 students each section. In the seventh grade, the students are learning the macro-skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. Grade seven English highlights Philippine Literature, grade eight English Afro- Asian Literature, grade nine English Anglo- American Literature and grade ten English World Literature. Although each English subject highlights literature, it still includes the teaching of macro skills and writing is one of those skills.

Hence, the researcher decided to work on this problem to determine the competency level of the PUP Laboratory High School grade seven students in terms of their composition writing skill. It has been mentioned that the proficiency level of the learners in a language can be measured in either his or her composition. Because written language is described as formal discourse [8] and formal is considered academic and/ or scientific. Thus, the researcher wants to find out the competency level of the students in English specifically in the context of composition writing. Also, this study

aims to enhance the teaching writing methodologies without sacrificing the language learners' identity.

1.2. Theoretical bases

This study is supported by Jerome Bruner's theory of learning or Instrumental Conceptualism.

Bruner's theory of learning focuses on how individuals deal with information or knowledge to achieve understanding. This theory involves three cognitive simultaneous processes such as acquisition, transformation and evaluation [3].

Acquisition is the process of obtaining new information that can either replace or refine the existing ones. This reminds us that the respondents have had writing since elementary. That means, writing was introduced and refined through stages for first year high school.

Transformation is the manipulation of the information to fit in situations. This is the transfer of knowledge from the source. This is the instruction and this includes approaches, methods and strategies used that address the needs of the learners in this case respondents and the context of learning.

Evaluation is the checking or assessing whether or not the learned material has been manipulated properly [3]. This is the very purpose of this study for it simply looked into the competency of the students in composition writing considering the method/s used as a very significant factor that could result to developing another method in teaching writing and/ or improvement of the existing methodology/ies used.

Tom Wrath [13] in Strengths Finder 2.0 said that research supports the link between learning and performance, hence, the individual, referred to as the learner, has the ability to learn and grow. Therefore, the learner is anticipated to be more productive.

Thus, this makes this study plausible since there is a great relationship between the learning process and performance. Learning process means the delivery of lessons and method/s used in the development of the desired writing competencies in secondary level, whereas students' performance deals with students' competency.

Moreover, this study reiterates the teaching of English should not replace or sacrifice the identity of the learners. Using the interactive model proposed by the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), it includes the element of Context which means the intervention of the social and cultural values that shape the linguistic patterns, meanings and uses of the target language.

This also affirms the authenticity of the learning experience designed to every learner. Furthermore, it should respond to the needs and interest of the locality.

Hence, this study is supported with the principles focused on identifying the learning targets, the most appropriate pedagogical skills in carrying out the identified targets considering the present context, and the assessment methods to be used to the learners.

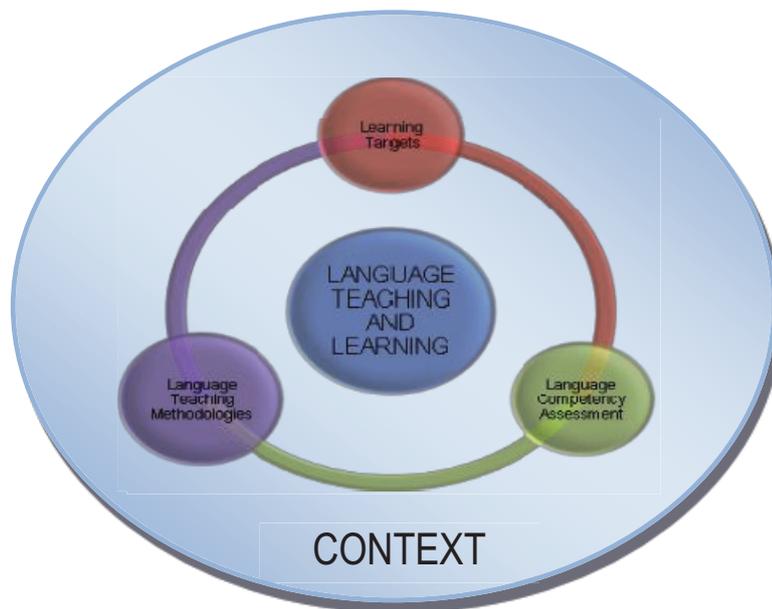


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework.

This framework, the very structure of this study, is supported by the theories presented in the theoretical framework. The theories are: Jerome Bruner's Instrumental Conceptualism, Tom Wrath's Learning and Performance Principle, and Interactive Model by IRA and NCTE.

The model represents the concept of language teaching and learning, which is the nucleus of the model. It is influenced by the following factors: language teaching methodologies which would vary depending on the language lesson and the type of students present in the classroom; language competency assessment which is very important in teaching, where instruction should always match assessment; and learning target/s which focus/es on a specific macro skill and its underlying micro skills or competencies to be developed among the learners.

Language teaching methodologies and language targets are supported by the Interactive Model suggested IRA and NCTE. This model includes the element of Context which means the intervention of the social and cultural values that shape the linguistic patterns, meanings, and uses of the target language. Therefore, language teaching

methodologies should be diverse depending on the language lesson, language targets, and the type of students present in the classroom.

On the other hand, language competency assessment element of the model is supported by Jerome Bruner's Instrumental Conceptualism Theory. Bruner's theory of learning focuses on how individuals deal with information or knowledge to achieve understanding. This involves three cognitive simultaneous processes such as, Acquisition, where new information is obtained which can either replace or enhance the existing ones; Transformation, which is the transfer of knowledge from the source, inclusive to this processes are approaches, methods, and strategies; and Evaluation, which the checking or assessing whether or not the learned material or skill has been manipulated by the learner properly in accordance to the preceded cognitive simultaneous processes.

Moreover, these elements of the model should be influenced by context of the learning situation, which identified by IRA and NCTE as the social and cultural values of the learners.

Furthermore, the Learning and Performance Principle is associated to the language teaching and learning process which is the delivery of the lessons and method/s used to develop the desired writing competency/ies, whereas students' performance deals with students' competency.

2. Objectives of the Study

The researcher believes that the abovementioned elements of the model should be considered and observed in the course of language teaching and learning

This study evaluated the composition writing competency of the Grade 7 students of PUP Laboratory high school towards the improvement of the teaching writing methodology/ies.

This study aimed to identify the teaching writing method/s used in the classroom by the writing teacher/s; extent of execution of the writing methods – Process, Genre and Process-Genre methods; level of composition writing competency of students in terms of content, thesis statement, organization, and language use and editing.

3. Materials and Methods

This study utilized descriptive method. According to Manuel and Medel descriptive method best describe what is happening in the status-quo. It also includes recording, analysis and interpretation of the present nature [4].

The method described, recorded, analyzed, and interpreted the present condition of the competency of grade seven students in a Laboratory High School in the Philippines in composition writing; the data then can be used to come up with a proposal that can enhance teaching writing methodologies through suggested activities and provide additional methodology/ies in teaching writing.

In addition, Explanatory approach was utilized. This is a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches where the gathered quantitative data was used to refine and explain the qualitative data gathered in this study [11].

The respondents of this study were the 2013- 2014 Grade Eight (8) students of PUP-LHS Sta. Mesa, Manila; since these students are belong the foremost batch of the K to 12 curriculum in the Philippines. Also, these students already finished and expectedly mastered the content standards or competencies of grade seven (7) in the present curriculum tested in this study.

Moreover, sooner or later they will become college students who are expected to be competent to both spoken and written language, and formal and informal use of language. Thus, it is significant to assess if the students have achieved the most acceptable competency mark based on the current curriculum.

This study asked the students to write two different compositions. The first composition is free writing while the second is guided or instructional composition writing. Free writing means students can work on a topic of their interest while guided or instructional writing needs instructions or guide question/s for the development of the composition. This was done with the interval of one hour after the first writing activity. Each written output was checked using the rubric the research made which was validated by a Senior English language Fellow of Philippine Normal University (PNU). Also, the researcher interviewed the only English teacher in Grade 7.

4. Results and Discussion

This shows the results and discussion of the data gathered from the respondents/ participants and the experts/informants, and the interview from the writing teacher.

The collected data are the compositions of the respondents/participants who were asked to write two compositions in different styles namely: Free and Guided/Instructional. These compositions were checked by the three informants/experts in the field of writing from Philippine Normal University (PNU) and Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP) using the researcher's constructed writing rubric which was evaluated by the Senior English Language Fellow of PNU.

4.1. The teaching writing method/s used in the classroom by the writing teacher/s

"I frequently use the combination of process and genre (methods) in writing" said the only Grade 7 English teacher.

This would mean that the teacher is using process-genre method. The teacher also said that as her pre-writing activity, she asks students to list down all the things/ideas that they can imagine, and those will be the components of their compositions/paragraph. This is a technique that will organize the details that they will include in the composition. According to Jose-Cruz [5], compositions can be developed at its best if it includes fully developed thoughts, ideas and actions.

Likewise, Keh [7] presented steps on how to teach writing using Process Approach highlighting the first step which is generating ideas.

On the other hand, the teacher also said that most of the time the students are writing narratives. She did not mention how she teaches narrative but simply ask students to write narratives. Hence, it could not be an authentic Process-Genre Method since the genre is very limited to narratives only and no mention on how the teacher really teaches the mentioned composition genre or product.

Teacher's execution of the following writing methods in teaching writing: Process Method; Genre Method; and Process-Genre Method?

According to the Grade 7 writing teacher the combination of Process and Genre Methods is the only teaching writing method she often uses. Moreover, she said that it can easily be understood by the students. Also, because the writing teacher would always ask the students to write using narration and description as techniques, she preferred to use the combination of Process and Genre Methods in teaching composition writing.

Since the writing teacher frequently asked the students to write using narration and description as techniques, thus the students in the classroom are restricted to these

techniques in paragraph development and not in its various kinds. The method present in the classroom is very limited to only one writing teaching method which is Process-Genre regardless of the needs of the writing students.

Techniques and styles in composition writing, together with its kinds, must be taught and explored by the writing students. Expectedly, students will soon be exposed to other techniques such comparison and contrast, analogy, example and classification, cause and effect, etc. and styles such as persuasive, argumentative, etc., and kinds such as reports, letters, articles, and recipes [14, 15]. As a result, the respondents/participants might be alienated as they encounter different composition/s and they will hardly write a kind of composition using a particular style with very limited techniques which are unknown to them.

In addition, the interviewed writing teacher would normally use writing as an assessment or reflection of the lesson. Hence, the teaching of writing is not evident in the English classroom.

4.2. Level of composition writing competency of students in terms of content, thesis statement, organization, and language use and editing

Utilizing the results of the informants' observation the respondents/participants would have problems/lapses in the following areas: Content; Thesis Statement; Organization; and Language Use and Editing.

For Content, the three informants shared the same observation. Some compositions have problems in providing relevant reasons, examples and substantiation. Thus, the composition's content is undeveloped. On the hand, the voice of the writers, respondents/participants, are either evident or very evident.

For Thesis Statement, the three informants arrived with the same observation. Some compositions were found to have limited thesis statement or no thesis statement at all. However, there are compositions that instead of having thesis statement, it used topic sentence. Hence, considering the structure of the compositions, it really affects the specimen because it lacks thesis statement and cannot be considered a composition instead a paragraph.

For Organization, the three informants came up with the same observation. Some compositions were found to be weak, when it comes to the use of cohesive/transitional devices; to have points which are not related to each other or unclear; to have missing introduction, since it lacks thesis statement; and to have problematic

or missing conclusions. Therefore, some compositions are unstructured with weak or limited transitional devices, and unclear and unrelated points or details.

For Language Use and Editing, the three informants arrived with synonymous results of observation, some compositions were found to have good but limited or **fair range of vocabulary; to have few mechanical errors;** and to have some ungrammatical items such as tense shifting, run-on sentences, and fragments.

Hence, employing the results of the study, informants' observation, the researcher arrived at the concept on improving the present approach/es in teaching writing.

At present, the writing teacher, which was interviewed in this study, is using the combination of Process Approach and Genre Approach. However, the claim of the teacher sounds dubious considering how the teacher teaches writing among students. A combination of the mentioned approaches should highlight on the steps/procedures in coming up with a more effective and developed output and the different kinds of compositions. Hence, the steps in writing should always be relative with the writing genre to be developed. As such, teaching writing achieves learners' satisfaction.

The results of the study would show that the compositions are most problematic in the areas of Thesis Statement and Organization to both Free and Guided/Instructional Styles. Hence, the focus of the present approach/es should be on the construction of a well-developed thesis statement and a cohesive organization of details. The thesis statement should be well developed, substantiated, and should not be in an interrogative structure. Likewise, the organization must be well substantiated with a very clear and relevant examples and points. These examples and points must be justified and must show relationship with each other within the paragraph and across paragraphs.

Also, enhancing the vocabulary of the students must be prioritized. The students have good vocabulary but simple and on fair range according to the informants. It must be enhanced so, the learners would be more capable to express themselves - their ideas, thoughts, desires, and objections, in the most appropriate and passionate language they know.

Similarly, the learners must also be introduced to complex or more complex structures of the English sentences. Because, the observation shows that students would use simple structures of sentences. Thus, this will refrain students from committing ungrammatical sentence structures because observation reveals that some are run-on and fragment. Such instances will result to ambiguity in message. It will interfere and greatly affect the content of the composition.

Composition genres must also be explained, taught, and learned by the writing students. Using different styles, each student should be capable to write different written outputs such as different kinds of letters, recipes, reports, research articles, newspaper articles, etc. However, the interviewed writing teacher failed to accomplish it. Because she focuses only on narratives and she is using the composition as a reflection assessment on a given literary text.

Moreover, the results show that the learners are more than capable to come up with the best output if a model is present. As such, the writing teacher should be prepared in presenting a model of a composition genre, and output of different steps in writing.

Consequently, using the above suggestions on how to improve the teaching writing approaches, the teaching and learning of writing will be more enjoying, fruitful, outcomes-based, and authentic.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The improvement of the existing teaching writing methodology/ies should focus on the weakest points of the learners which we found out in this study.

The weakest points are Thesis statement and Organization. the improvement of the methods should be on the development of the thesis statement and techniques on how to organize the points or details presented in the study.

Moreover, Content, and Language Use and Editing must also be included because there are some points in these criteria that needed attention.

Based on the drawn conclusions, the researcher endorses some ways for the Grade 7 students of Polytechnic University of the Philippines Laboratory high School achieve Excellent to Very Good competency mark and some are on the improvement of the teaching writing methodology/ies.

The writing teachers are expected to improve their execution of the existing teaching writing method/s considering the results of the study and bring success in every writing class.

The writing students are expected to practice writing in different genre and explore more about the techniques on how to be a more efficient and effective writer in the areas of Content, Thesis Statement, Organization, and Language Use and Editing.

The results of this study should be a spur to every researcher and therefore have an annual study on students' writing composition competency. This is to determine the students' improvement and functionality of the improved teaching writing method/s.

Author's Note

EMEJIDIO C. GEPILA JR. has been teaching English general education, English language education and professional education courses in various branches and campuses of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP) since 2009.

He also produced and published researches focused on the mentioned courses. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree from PUP and Master of Arts in Teaching English Language Arts from Philippine Normal University (PNU). At present, he is finishing Doctor in Educational Management in PUP.

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