COMPOSITION WRITING ABILITY OF PRE-SERVICE SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS: AN ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Thestudy aimed to analyze the composition writing ability developed through the process approach following both free and controlled exercises formats of the 84 junior pre-service special education teachers of the Leyte Normal University for AY 2014-2015. It adopted the descriptive cross-sectional survey research design and had used Jacobs' English as a Second Language Composition Profile as the instrument of the study. For valid and reliable interpretation of data, the mean and t - test were used. Results showed that the level of the respondents' composition writing ability developed through free-exercises in terms of organization, vocabulary and language component were rated to be at "average good" level. In terms of content and mechanics; the respondents' compositions were both rated "poor to fair" by the four raters. On the other hand, the level of the respondents' composition writing ability developed through controlled-exercises in terms of content, organization, and language were at the average to good level while their vocabulary and mechanics components were rated poor to fair level. The over-all or general level of the respondents' composition writing ability developed in both free and controlled exercises is at the average to good level. The raters noted that the respondents committed errors the most in mechanics, vocabulary and language use.

Keywords: *composition writing ability, process approach to writing, pre-service special education teachers*

1. INTRODUCTION

The curricular landscapes of the various teacher education programs offered by the Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) in the Philippines explicitly require students to write extensively. This is so as numerous studies point out that writing is the best platform to which thoughts and ideas are best structured. Likewise, the ability to write is the most salient manifestations of learning in higher education Hartshorn (2011). Researches also revealed that writing, which was considered the domain of language arts, has become an essential tool in today's global community Ru-Wang et.al, (2011). Further, El-Sayyed Sanad (2014) posited that that writing is one of the primary cornerstones on which content learning is built. However, of the four macro-skills of language learning, writing seems to be the most unpopular. Studies also reveal that this skill remains a dilemma to both the learners and the teachers. This is evident in the way it has been neglected and / or treated poorly in the past (Manguerra (2001); Zara-ee (2011)).

In its strictest sense, students in the tertiary level are often times bombarded with a myriad of activities requiring them to write. With the changing platforms of the world's economic affairs; various challenges to educational processes including teaching and learning engagement have emerged. Baraceros (2009) argued that the recent merging of economies of the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), in which the Philippines is a signatory state, would require graduates of higher education institutions, to have mastery in the verbal and written use of English language to ensure success in their interaction or networking as well as global competitiveness. In the same manner, Hansen, Randall and Hansen, Katharine (2015) posited that most potential employers of job seekers do care about writing skills. They care so much that they bemoan the poor preparation of the entry-level pool of grads. They further stressed that, in a labor force full of mediocre writers, someone who writes well is bound to stand out and succeed. Yet, a steady erosion in the writing abilities of graduates was noted by the academicians and business people.

If Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) would want its graduates to keep at par with their counterparts in the ASEAN region; then, they should graduate writing virtuoso. As such, college students in general and pre-service teachers in particular must be writing - literate.

These firm grounds prompted the researcher to conduct this study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Flower and Hayes Writing Process Model

Dujsik (2008) posited that The Flower and Hayes (1981) writing process Model is cognitive by nature. The model has three major elements: task environment, writer's long-term memory, and writing processes. The task environment refers to the information related to the writing assignment (e.g. topic, audience, and motivating clues) and text that the writer has created so far that has an impact on the writing performance. The writer's long-term memory includes the information such as knowledge of topic, audience knowledge, and various writing plans which the writer retrieves and refers to during the writing process. The writing processes consist of planning, translating, and reviewing, all of which are controlled by a monitor that "functions as writing strategist which determines when the writer moves from one process to the next". The model further claims that planning comprises three sub-processes: generating ideas, organizing information, and setting goals. While writing, writers take ideas from planning, information from the task environment and from long term memory, and convert them into written forms corresponding to information in the writer's memory (translate), and read/edit (review) to improve the quality of the text it added. Dujsik (2008) further noted that writing classrooms practice which typically involves planning, drafting, revision, and editing manifest the model.

2.2 Relative research on writing ability

Manguerra (2006) quoted Preciosa Soliven who pointed out that the writing ability of an average College student in the Philippines is just equal to that of a high school student graduate in China. In the same study, the late Bro. Andrew Gonzalez likewise emphasized that the quality of the country's College graduate is poor and that only few schools and research institutions are providing intellectual elite. These remarks are alarming since one of the measures in enhancing competitiveness is equipping students with adequate knowledge of the English language to cope with the demands of globalization. Thus, the ability to communicate in both written and oral English is imperative.

Undeniably, writing is essential to a learning process. It is regarded as a "unique mode of learning". It is anchored on the idea that the learner acquires the skill when writing form part of the total learning process. Likewise, it is deemed as the most difficult challenge of a student's manifestation of learning as it requires coming up with a response that are structured and concise. Furthermore, it must provide context for an audience that is not part of the environment but that exists apart from the learner as immersed in the writing process. Students are also compelled to be more careful and more engaged as learner-participants in the learning process (Raimes, 1987; Dizon, 1994; Manguerra, 2006; Hadley, 2014). Xuefeng (2010) argued that writing is a powerful means of learning because the more students manipulate content the more likely they are to remember and understand the content and reading process. Consequently, Alinsunod (2015) posited that writing is one of the most powerful tools to demonstrate what we know. Writing problems appear due to the different expectations of writing at tertiary level and that students need to be aware of the expectations of the readers, the content of writing, degree of formality in writing, and contextual elements in writing. Moreover, Viel-Ruma (2011) contested that writing is an essential skill for academic success across all curricular areas. Researches also posited that poor performance on writing tasks can lead to: decrease student achievement in all subject areas; difficulty in gaining admission to postsecondary educational institutions; and limited employment opportunities. On the other hand, (Valenzuela, 2014) argued that writing is always a political and sociocultural practice. Learning and teaching how to write are never neutral. Drawn on the notion of cultural capital, the researcher noted that some scholars argue that writing well in English as a second language requires the acquisition of such valuable capital. Writing in English comes with prestige. The study further stressed that, in the Philippines, students born into middle-class families are one step ahead of those from working-class families. Easier access to more valued linguistic resources at home and school

means a more powerful linguistics currency, which afford middle-class students almost exclusive membership in elite communities in practice. Cabansag (2013) found that high school students in aLaboratory High School in a State University in Cagayan Valley, Philippines are very proficient in structure and grammar but not so much in mechanics. The study also revealed the persistent errors committed by the respondents in their written compositions namely: use of verbs, verb tenses and proper use of capitalization. Attempting to determine the relationship between the reading habits and the English writing proficiency of the selected First Year High School students of Colegio de San Juan de Letran Calamba, AY 2009-2010; Gonzales et. al. (2011) pointed out that most of the selected first year high school students have moderate reading habits while they have below average both in grammar and paragraph writing as far as their total scores in the English writing proficiency are concerned. A similar study posted on-line examined the writing proficiency of the students enrolled in the programs BSED and BEED in Catanduanes State University S.Y. 2013-2014 .The study revealed that the BSED and BEED students in Catanduanes State University S.Y. 2013-2014 have an advance writing proficiency. This means that they can write routine, informal and some formal correspondence, narratives, descriptions and summaries of a factual nature in all major time frames in connected discourse of a paragraph in length. They also have good vocabulary and good control of the most frequently used structures. The results also showed that only 5 of the 27 respondents are leveled superior. This means that the 5 respondents can produce formal and informal writings on topics related treated on both abstractly and concretely. They can present well-developed ideas, opinions, arguments, and hypotheses through extended discourse; can control structures, both general and specialized vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, cohesive devices and all other aspects of written form and organization with no pattern of error to distract the reader. (http://www.slideshare.net/tinmay/remedial-research-final-na-to)

3. RESEARCH METHOD
3.1 Participants
        Participants were eighty four junior students of Leyte Normal University enrolled in the program Bachelor in Elementary Education in Special Education during the second semester AY 2014 - 2015.
3.2 Measures and Procedures
3.2.1 English as a Second Language Composition Profile by Jacobs
        To determine the level of the composition writing ability of the students, the researcher adopted the English as a Second Language Composition Profile by Jacobs, taken from English Teaching Forum, Vol. XVI, No.3, circulated in July 1983. The instrument was likewise used in a parallel study conducted by Solayao (1998) for his master's thesis submitted to the Philippine Normal University- Manila. The instrument basically examines a writing composition in terms of content (30%), organization (20%), vocabulary (20%), language use (25%), and mechanics (5%).
3.2.2 Demographic information
        Participants provided some demographic information, including gender, and age, types of students.
3.3 Data analysis
        For valid and reliable interpretation of data, the mean and t - test were used. The mean for independent data was used to describe the level of composition writing ability of the respondents. The t - test of independent samples on the other hand was used to compare the level of composition writing ability of the two groups in terms of content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics based on the free and controlled exercises given to the respondents. The 0.5 level of significance was used as basis for rejecting or accepting the null hypotheses. To obtain the desired data, the respondents were asked to write four compositions anchored on the themes: (1) **Surviving the Wrath of Super Typhoon Yolanda and (2)Travelling is Learning** for the controlled exercises and "**My Most Unforgettable Christmas Break" and "On Becoming a Special Education Teacher"** forfree exercises. The compositions were used to determine the level of the respondents' composition writing ability in terms of: content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics. They are likewise used to determine the composition writing ability of the respondents in free and controlled exercises as well as the linguistic units frequently committed. A copy of the table

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of equivalence of this profile was attached to each of the eighty four compositions. The compositions were then given to a panel of raters composed of two master teachers in English, a college instructor and the researcher himself.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Mean Scores in the Different Components for Two Compositions

Table 1: Mean Scores in the Different Components for Two Compositions in Free Exercises as Evaluated by Four Raters

Components	Content	Organization	Vocabulary	Language Use	Mechanics
Percentage	30%	20%	20%	25%	5%
Raters	**Mean Scores in the Different Components for Two Compositions in Free- Exercises as Evaluated by Four Raters (N=84)**				
R_1	21.20	18.22	18.35	22.21	2.98
R_2	18.32	19.24	17.45	20.24	3.12
R_3	17.29	17.12	14.22	19.21	3.34
R_4	17.01	17.26	15.23	23.32	2.68
Total	73.82	71.84	65.25	84.98	12.12
Grand Mean	18.46	17.96	16.31	21.25	3.03
Descriptive Level	P-F	A-G	A-G	A-G	P-F

In table 1, the mean scores obtained by the junior pre-service SPEd students were on the average to good level in organization, vocabulary and language use components as reflected in the mean scores of 17.96, 16.31, and 21.25 respectively. The respondents' content and mechanics were both rated poor to fair by the four raters. Reflecting against Jacob's ESL Profile; to be rated average to good level in organization means that theircompositions weresomewhat choppy, lousy organized but main ideas stand out with limited support and logical but incomplete sequencing. On the other hand, an average to good rating in vocabulary means that the compositions of the respondents have occasional errors of words /idiom form, choice, usage, but meaning not obscured. Further, an average to good rating in language use means that their compositions' use of languageis effective but simply constructed, has minor problems in complex constructions, with several errors of agreement, tense, number, word order function, articles, pronouns, preposition but meaning seldom obscured.

Table 2: Mean Scores in the Different Components for Two Compositions in Controlled Exercises as Evaluated by Four Raters

Components	Content	Organization	Vocabulary	Language Use	Mechanics
Percentage	30%	20%	20%	25%	5%
Raters	**Mean Scores in the Different Components for Two Compositions in Controlled Exercises as Evaluated by Four Raters (N=84)**				
R_1	22.32	16.27	12.23	23.31	3.20
R_2	20.21	17.21	12.24	21.23	3.23
R_3	23.43	15.23	11.22	18.19	3.45
R_4	23.24	16.51	11.34	24.31	2.77
Total	89.20	65.22	47.03	87.04	12.65
Grand Mean	22.30	16.31	11.76	21.76	3.16
Descriptive Level	A-G	A-G	P-F	A-G	P-F

Table 2 shows the mean scores obtained by the respondents for two compositions developed through controlled writing method. When taken in isolation, the scores of the junior pre-service SPEd students were on the average to good level in content, organization, and language use components as reflected in the mean scores of 22.30, 16.31, and 21.76 respectively. On the other hand, the respondents were rated poor to fair level in both vocabulary and mechanics in which they obtained the mean scores of 11.76 and 3.16 respectively. Reflecting against Jacob's ESL Profile; having been rated poor to fair in vocabulary means that their compositions were non-fluent; ideas confused or disconnected; lacks logical sequencing and development; frequent errors of word / idiom form; and choice usage meaning confused or obscured were noted by the raters. In addition, to be rated poor to average in mechanics means that their compositions have frequent errors of
spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, legible handwriting, as well as meaning confused and obscured.

Table 3: Joint Mean Scores in the Different Components for Two Compositions Developed through Free-Exercises as Evaluated by Four Raters

Components	Content	Organization	Vocabulary	Language Use	Mechanics	Jointly	Descriptive Level
Percentage	30%	20%	20%	25%	5%		
Raters	**Joint Mean Scores in the Different Components for Two Compositions in Free Exercises as Evaluated by Four Raters (N=84)**						
R_1	21.20	18.22	18.35	22.21	2.98	82.96	A-G
R_2	18.32	19.24	17.45	20.24	3.12	78.37	A-G
R_3	17.29	17.12	14.22	19.21	3.34	71.18	A-G
R_4	17.01	17.26	15.23	23.32	2.68	75.5	A-G
					Total	308.01	
					Grand Mean	77.00	A-G

The third table shows the joint mean scores of the two compositions of the respondents developed through free-exercises rated by four raters. Jointly, if language components are not taken / interpreted in isolation; the respondents' composition writing ability is at the average to good level as reflected in a grand mean of 77.00.

Table 4: Joint Mean Scores in the Different Components for Two Compositions Developed through Controlled-Exercises as Evaluated by Four Raters

Components	Content	Organization	Vocabulary	Language Use	Mechanics	Jointly	Descriptive Level
Percentage	30%	20%	20%	25%	5%		
Raters	**Mean Scores in the Different Components for Two Compositions in Controlled Exercises as Evaluated by Four Raters (N=84)**						
R_1	22.32	16.27	12.23	23.31	3.20	77.33	A-G
R_2	20.21	17.21	12.24	21.23	3.23	74.12	A-G
R_3	23.43	15.23	11.22	18.19	3.45	71.52	A-G
R_4	23.24	16.51	11.34	24.31	2.77	78.17	A-G
					Total	301.14	
					Grand Mean	75.29	A-G

The fourth table shows the joint mean scores of the two compositions of the respondents developed through controlled-exercises rated by four raters. Jointly, if language components are not taken / interpreted in isolation; the respondents' composition writing ability is at the average to good level as reflected in a grand mean of 75.29.

In terms of linguistic unit/s does/do students committed the most by the pre-service junior special education students; the raters noted that the respondents committed errors the most in mechanics, vocabulary and language use. Jacob's ESL Profile interpreted the compositions to have incurred the following:

A. Mechanics   : Frequent errors of spelling; punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, legible handwriting, meaning confused and obscured

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B. Vocabulary : Non-fluent; ideas confused or disconnected; lacks logical sequencing and development. Limited range; frequent errors of word / idiom form; and choice usage meaning confused or obscured

C. Language Use: Major problems in simple complex constructions, frequent errors of negation, agreement, tense, number, word order/functions articles, pronouns, prepositions and or fragments, run-ons, deletions, meaning confused or obscured.

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