ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 2| February 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

BACK TO BASICS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY ON THE WRITING MECHANICS OF POSITION PAPERS AMONG SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Eden Love M. Policios, LPT, Jeramie S. Pilayan, PhD

St. Mary's College of Tagum, Inc., National Highway, Tagum City, 8100, Philippines

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra20193
DOI No: 10.36713/epra20193

ABSTRACT

The study aimed to delve into the lived experiences of senior high school students as they navigate the complexities of writing mechanics in crafting position papers. A qualitative research design was used, specifically employing a phenomenological approach. In-depth interviews and focus group discussion were conducted with 14 senior high school students in the public secondary schools in Tagum City Division. The study uncovers recurring patterns of grammatical errors, vocabulary misuse, and syntactic issues that hinder effective argumentation. The findings also reveal the influence of students' prior language exposure, instructional methods, and self-perceived writing competence on their ability to construct coherent and persuasive position papers. This study is anchored on the theories of Cognitive Process Theory of Writing, Communicative Competence, and Argumentation Theory, which explain the experiences of students in their written works. This research highlights the critical need for foundational language support and targeted writing interventions in senior high school curricula. It underscores the importance of revisiting basic linguistic principles to enhance students' proficiency and confidence in academic writing. Ultimately, the study offers practical insights for language teachers, curriculum designers, and stakeholders to address these challenges and improve the writing skills of students in argument-driven academic tasks.

KEYWORDS: *Education, Back To Basics, Writing Mechanics, Position Papers, Phenomenvision Of Tagum City, Davao Del Norte*

INTRODUCTION

A rapid proliferation of knowledge marks the present era, and English has emerged as a crucial language for academic, personal, and professional growth. To excel in their studies and demonstrate expertise, students must successfully utilize English in oral and written communication, including competence in using vocabulary and syntax to shape language expression and meaning. In connection with this, individuals with writing difficulties have trouble communicating their ideas efficiently and expressing themselves in various language-based contexts, such as in class or other situations requiring language use. Substantially, this writing predicament might impact the academic performance of students across various fields, particularly in the realm of English composition.

From a broader perspective, a study conducted in Malaysia revealed that producing and distributing research articles in English in esteemed journals is challenging, particularly for inexperienced scholars in the context of English as a Second Language (ESL). This is because it is undeniable that following the recommended sequential organization and becoming proficient in the vocabulary and grammar used are essential for any field of study (Rahman, 2022). In addition, in Saudi Arabia, it has been observed that culture influences academic writing. Specifically, the choices of words and grammar and the connections between sentences, known as coherence, vary in second-language writing. With this, students' argumentative essays depict complications as to the influence of the cultural context on the use of coherent devices in their academic writing (Ahmad, 2022). Moreover, in Indonesia, the linguistic area plays a crucial role in addressing students' challenges in academic writing. It requires proficiency in both vocabulary and syntax. Unsurprisingly, students often struggle to write essays due to their limited understanding of linguistics, especially with verb tenses, articles, and pluralization. Additionally, the lack of verb conjugations in Bahasa Indonesia can lead to errors in English since language proficiency is a vital component of essay composition. Nevertheless, students have affirmed that the challenge they face when writing an essay lies in organizing the structure of their works, namely in arranging paragraphs and phrases (Linarsih et al., 2021; Bulqiyah et al., 2021).

Correspondingly, in a study conducted in one of the divisions in the Zamboanga Peninsula, Philippines, the data revealed that there are factors that language instructors believe to have played an attribute in the students struggling with their writing skills. These include a lack of vocabulary in the target language, difficulty in expressing and organizing thoughts, lack of motivation and interest in writing, and difficulties in spelling, grammar, and sentence building (Saavedra & Barredo, 2020).
Moreover, I have observed senior high school students from one of the schools in Tagum City Division encounter difficulties demonstrating their comprehension and knowledge in writing academic texts due to inadequate vocabulary skills and

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 2| February 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

grammatical foundation, such as sentence structure, punctuation, spelling, and capitalization. These result in subpar grades and restricted academic achievements, as they hinder students from expressing themselves precisely and distinctly and detract from the depth and complexity of their essays, ultimately weakening their overall academic performance.

Taking into account multiple research papers, there has been a significant upsurge in recent studies on the mechanics of writing across many contexts, such as international studies of Yuliawati (2021) on The Mechanics Accuracy of Students' Writing and Samuels et al. (2023) on Automated Learning Strategy to Reinforce Business Writing Mechanics for Accounting Students. The first study examines the accuracy of mechanics in writing and identifies the common errors made using content analysis. The second study explores the writing skills of accountants and analyzes the gap between their writing expectations and performance. Nevertheless, I have not found any study examining the challenges in writing mechanics that senior high school students face while writing position papers, particularly in my locality.

It is for this reason that this research work is conceived in response to the continuing and ever-changing challenges that our educational system has confronted. Besides, this urged me to research this study to provide new facts about the ordinary yet unresolved problems that most students are experiencing today while targeting to underscore the importance of instilling academic writing skills. It is due to giving priority to and recognizing their travails.

Most importantly, this research work has enormous social significance as this may create understandings that address and provide a foundation for developing or implementing a suitable instructional approach in composing scholarly papers, particularly position papers for secondary students. Hence, I intend to share impending results with other academic researchers, the school community, and community members involved in the research by means of looking for opportunities to disseminate my research findings once completed at a school-wide research symposium, conference, Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions and consider submitting this to the academic journal in my school or other relevant publications.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore and understand the lived experiences of senior high school students in the Division of Tagum City concerning their challenges with writing mechanics in writing position papers. In particular, this study aims to understand how students deal with the difficulties of analyzing a specific issue and developing an argument using proper grammar and precise lexis.

At this stage in the project, the challenges of students with writing mechanics in writing position papers are generally defined as the difficulty in employing a set of rules and conventions that govern the technical aspects of writing to excellently make a convincing stand as well as present a compelling argument in their writings.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the lived experiences of senior high school students regarding the writing mechanics of writing position papers?
2. How do senior high school students cope with the challenges in writing mechanics of position papers?
3. What are the insights of senior high school students on the writing mechanics of writing position papers that can be shared with others?

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative research design using the phenomenological method. Qualitative research is an investigative approach that aims to construct a comprehensive, predominantly narrative portrayal of a particular phenomenon in order to enhance comprehension of it (Creswell, 2016). This study adopted a qualitative approach using a Phenomenological design. It is targeted at uncovering knowledge about how individuals respond to situations they can relate to based on their personal experiences without passing judgment on the validity of their thoughts and feelings. Researchers can participate in adaptable endeavors to explain and facilitate comprehension of intricate phenomena, such as diverse facets of the human social experience (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022).

Research Participants

The participants of this study are the 14 senior high school students from different public secondary schools in Tagum City Division. Regarding my discretion on how my informants were equitably selected and identified to participate in the study, I used purposive sampling in conducting an In-depth Interview (IDI) with seven participants and a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with another seven participants.

The participants were identified through the following inclusion criteria: (a) Grade 11 or 12 senior high school students aged 16-17 years old; (b) students undertaking English subjects such as Reading and Writing and English for Academic and Professional Purposes; (c) students who have experienced challenges in grammar and vocabulary usage; and (d) students from public schools within Tagum City Division.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves systematically collecting, organizing, and interpreting qualitative data to understand its meaning and significance comprehensively. After data collection, researchers have access to a range of analysis approaches. Selecting a particular technique is contingent upon the specific study objectives and the nature of the collected data (Dye, 2023).

Moreover, I applied Thematic Analysis. It is a widely used approach for examining qualitative data for a fundamental component of the inquiry framework, which comprises a data

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 2| February 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

collection method and thematic analysis that is proposed as a suitable approach for qualitative research. Typically, this method analyzes textual materials, such as interviews or transcripts. I thoroughly analyzed the data to find recurring themes, including subjects and ideas on the SHS students' lived experiences, as well as the patterns of meaning concerning their coping mechanisms and insights on writing mechanics. Multiple methodologies exist for doing thematic analysis, with the most prevalent being a six-step framework: familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up. By adhering to this procedure, individuals can also mitigate the influence of confirmation bias while developing their analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013; cited by Caulfield, 2023).

RESULTS

Lived Experiences of Senior High School Students Regarding Their Writing Mechanics in Writing Position Papers

Table 1 shows the major themes and the core ideas regarding the lived experiences of senior high school students regarding their writing mechanics in writing position papers. Four (4) major themes emerged, such as (1) dealing with limited knowledge and use of the English language, (2) having a lack of mastery of textual organization, (3) struggling with clarity while balancing perspectives, and (4) facing challenges with redundancy in argument development.

Table 1
Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Lived Experiences of Senior High School Students Regarding Their Writing Mechanics in Writing Position Papers

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Dealing with Limited Knowledge and Use of the English Language	• committing grammatical errors, thus having difficulty in position papers • opting to use simpler words • translating English to the native language and the other way around • struggling with appropriate word choice • difficulty with parts of speech and subject-verb agreement
Having a Lack of Mastery of Textual Organization	• finding it hard to organize thoughts logically • viewing it necessary to write a draft first • struggling with coherence and cohesion • using transitional devices inappropriately • struggling with what to add or what to write next
Struggling with Clarity in Balancing Perspectives	• finding it hard to construct statements that align closely with opinions • considering it hard to create sentences that support clear judgment • having difficulty in balancing perspective despite having ideas • relying on resources for templates and format • having difficulty avoiding unnecessary remarks
Facing Challenges with Redundancy in Argument Development	• acknowledging the need for unambiguous work • admitting weak points in dealing with repetitive words • having difficulty in ensuring smooth flow • repeating arguments until it becomes incomprehensible • facing challenges in linking similar thought

Coping Mechanism of Senior High School Students in Dealing with the Challenges in Writing Mechanics in Writing Position Papers

On the second main question during the interview, the participants shared their ways of coping with the challenges they encountered using writing mechanics while writing position papers. Table 2 shows the major themes and the core ideas on the coping mechanisms of senior high school students regarding their challenges writing mechanics in writing position papers. After careful analysis of the documented data, four (4) major themes emerged, such as (1) using reading as a technique, (2) employing varied writing strategies, (3) seeking guidance and supervision from others, and (4) exploring available learning resources.

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 2| February 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

Table 2
Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Coping Mechanism of Students in Dealing with the Challenges in Writing Mechanics in Writing Position Papers

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Using Reading as a Technique	• emphasizing reading as a way to improve writing • reading samples to connect ideas and learn different perspectives • exposing themselves to essays with profound and uncommon words • considering written speeches for vocabulary improvement • engaging with various types of literature to broaden their comprehension
Employing Varied Writing Strategies	• adopting strategies such as rereading and rewriting to improve their output • proofreading and revisiting their work • engaging in writing practice at home • engaging in writing tasks at the same time while browsing online • integrating writing into their daily routines, using methods like journaling and prayer
Seeking Guidance and Supervision from Others	• seeking help from various sources, such as teachers and more knowledgeable others • asking seniors and discussing with classmates • supporting their learning process by approaching professionals to tackle difficult aspects of writing • valuing feedback from siblings who review drafts and suggest improvements • adjusting their writing to stand out in competitions or assessments and meet judges' or teachers' standards.
Exploring Available Learning Resources	• using examples to get ideas and look for more suitable words • browsing online to learn the procedure for writing, such as dictionaries and documentaries • identifying grammar mistakes from tools such as Grammarly and Quillbot • accessing educational websites and electronic books • comparing one's work with samples online

Insights Drawn from the Experiences of the Senior High School Students Regarding Writing Mechanics in Writing Position Papers

In this part, the participants shared their insights from their experiences regarding writing mechanics in writing position papers. The analysis revealed four (4) themes; these are: (1) pursue improvement and mastery of writing mechanics, (2) build the importance of building self-confidence, (3) value directions and corrections, and (4) consider future endeavors.

Table 3
Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Insights of Students in Dealing with the Challenges in Writing Mechanics of Position Papers

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Pursue Improvement and Mastery of Writing Mechanics	• grasping knowledge to adapt • listening to the class discussion and reviewing it • practicing vocabulary and grammar skills • reading books and comprehending them well • relating their learning process to their engagement in other activities, such as music
Build the Importance of Self-confidence	• trying repeatedly even after failures • promoting willingness to learn and confidence to practice • acknowledging that the teacher's encouragement and positive reinforcements are crucial • acknowledging the role of approachable teachers • understanding the role of peer support and a nurturing environment
Accept Directions and Corrections on Elaborations	• valuing corrections and feedback on their work • appreciating the provision of examples and meanings • needing thorough and step-by-step explanations of concepts • appreciating varied teaching methods

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 2| February 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

	• seeking help proactively, asking questions, and doing self-assessments
Consider Future Endeavors	• reflecting on future job applications and professional goals • helping oneself in preparation for entering college • bearing in mind future research pursuits • recognizing that proficiency makes them more competitive candidates for prestigious companies • understanding that strong language skills are important for navigating the digital landscape

DISCUSSIONS

Implications for Teaching Practice

The study's findings revealed the experiences of senior high school students with writing mechanics in crafting position papers. This would give future solutions, offer valuable insights, and provide practical support to everyone in the educational field.

Furthermore, the following are the justifications of the importance of this inquiry:
The findings of the study may be essential to students since this can broaden their understanding and allow them to move beyond simply memorizing rules and delve into the nuanced ways writing mechanics shape meaning and persuasion. This research may encourage them to engage in language self-assessment practices. By analyzing their own writing and that of others, they can identify areas for improvement and refine their writing options to create more effective arguments.

The results of this inquiry may be beneficial to teachers since they can use the research findings to create engaging and relevant activities that focus on the writing mechanics needed to write effective position papers after identifying common errors. Specifically, the language teachers may implement and assign time for English-speaking policy to promote open communication and incorporate real-life scenarios and practical exercises. Furthermore, this research can guide the development of more effective lessons, foundational language support, and targeted writing interventions that address the specific challenges students encounter in writing position papers, such as conducting a remedial class during Catch-up Fridays.

The results may be grounded in principals or school heads making action plans supporting teacher development since they can use the research findings to provide professional development opportunities for teachers, focusing on specific strategies for teaching writing mechanics in persuasive writing. These strategies can be implemented during learning action cell (LAC) sessions within each department.

The result of the study may give DepEd officials a further understanding of the need to strengthen the writing competence of students. This research can guide the prioritization of resources and effective allocation of funding to address the specific needs of students through revisiting basic linguistic principles in senior high school curricula and conducting targeted programs, interventions, and training initiatives.

The findings of the study may enable future researchers to have follow-up studies and build up on the existing knowledge, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. Also, this research may inspire new research questions, leading to more focused and insightful investigations into the role of writing mechanics in other types of writing activities besides persuasive writing.

Indeed, the results of the study conformed to the Cognitive Process Theory of Writing by Linda Flower and John R. Hayes, Communicative Competence championed by Dell Hymes, and Argumentation Theory developed by philosopher Stephen E. Toulmin, as their works have been instrumental in shaping the understanding of writing mechanics and presenting stances.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study productively achieved its primary goal of uncovering the experiences of senior high school students as they employ writing mechanics in crafting position papers. It explores the viewpoints of students across various public schools. Nonetheless, it is acknowledged that the scope of this qualitative research is confined to the experiences of students from selected public schools in Tagum City. The insights of this research are restricted to a small group of participants who encountered challenges in employing writing mechanics to write position papers.

To improve the validity of findings, it is important to conduct further research. This research should involve more participants to ensure diverse representation from various educational institutions. It should also include schools from different regions and socio-economic backgrounds. By doing this, the research can collect a wider range of perspectives and insights. Involving participants from different locations will help deepen the understanding of the topic and enrich the data collected. This approach will aid in drawing clearer conclusions and may reveal new aspects of the study.

Conducting follow-up interviews with selected participants would be valuable in assessing the consistency of their perspectives and insights over time. This method would enhance the concepts explored in the study and offer a more thorough understanding, leading to a broader range of themes. Furthermore, it would provide participants with an opportunity to express thoughts they may not have fully articulated during the initial study.

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 2| February 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

It is recommended that a thorough examination of the experiences of senior high school students across various public and private institutions be conducted. This understanding can provide valuable insights to other students facing comparable challenges, highlighting the effective strategies employed by their peers to achieve academic success, particularly in the area of writing.

It is also recommended that future researchers explore text types at the junior high school level, such as informative essays and written campaign speeches. By doing so, they can tackle potential challenges proactively and foster a deeper understanding of these crucial writing forms.

Finally, considering that this study focused on senior high school students, future research could explore junior high school or college students who are required to write position papers in English as part of their curriculum or coursework. Additionally, it may be beneficial to examine the experiences of teachers who have untold stories about teaching subjects that involve requiring and emphasizing writing mechanics in writing assignments.

Concluding Remarks

This research has successfully realized its goal of uncovering valuable insights into the role of writing mechanics in developing position papers. The findings have practical implications for strengthening writing skills and highlight the importance of pedagogical practices that will contribute to the development of more effective writing instruction. Throughout my journey in conducting this study, I faced several challenges, one of which was coordinating a Focus Group Discussion with senior high school students from different schools at the same time. Balancing everyone's schedules proved to be a daunting task. We adjusted our timelines multiple times to cater to everyone's availability. What truly stood out was the patience and cooperation of the students until the end.

Despite the difficulty, I am grateful that I gained firsthand insight into the research process throughout this study. With the guidance of my intellectual adviser, I followed the necessary steps to ensure the success of this project. It was a challenging endeavor that required considerable time, patience, financial resources, and determination to gather quality and relevant data to support my research.

As a teacher myself, I have taken the opportunity to reflect on the deeper issues surrounding the nuances of language, including challenges with complex sentence structures and specific vocabulary choices. This experience has broadened my perspective, allowing me to gain valuable insights from my participants regarding navigating the experiences and challenges highlighted in this study. The lessons they shared are instrumental in helping me internalize and apply them in an actual classroom setting.

Finally, I would say that diligence always yields rewards. Witnessing the completion of this study inspired me to reap the fruits of my labor. While the research process was challenging and demanding, my patience and dedication as well as the help of other people, including my research adviser, empowered me to overcome every obstacle and successfully carry out this journey. This research is a celebration of growth – a reminder that each challenge faced is an opportunity for a breakthrough.

REFERENCES

1. *Ahmad, Z. (2022). Textual Variation in L2 Academic Writing: A Study of Cultural Visibility in Lexico-Grammatical Choices. ResearchGa*
2. *Alhazmi, A. A., & Kaufmann, A. (2022). Phenomenological Qualitative Methods Applied to the Analysis of Cross-Cultural Experience in Novel Educational Social Contexts.Frontiers in Psychology, 13, 785134.*
3. *Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2013). Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. The Psychologist, 26(2), 120–123.*
4. *Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches. Sage publications.*
5. *Dye, T. (2023). Qualitative Data Analysis: Step-by-Step Guide (Manual vs. Automatic) |Thematic.*
6. *Linarsih, A., Irwan, D., & Putra, M. I. R. (2021). The Interferences of IndonesianGrammatical Aspects into English: An Evaluation on Preservice English Teachers' EFL Learning. Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching andApplied Linguistics, 5(1), 69-81.*
7. *Rahman, M., Darus, S., Amir, Z., & Karthikeyan, J. (2022). Lexico-grammatical Features of Introduction in ELT-related English Research. International Journal of English:Literature, Language & Skills.*
8. *Saavedra, A. D., & Barredo, C. (2020). Factors that Contribute to the Poor Writing Skills in Filipino and English of the Elementary Pupils. ResearchGate.*
9. *Yuliawati, L. (2021). The mechanics accuracy of students' writing. English TeachingJournal, 9(1), 46-53.*