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ENHANCING THE ACADEMIC WRITING ABILITIES OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL PURPOSES

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ABSTRACT

This study explored strategies to enhance the academic writing abilities of senior high school students enrolled in an English for Academic and Professional Purposes (EAPP) course in the Philippines. Guided by Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory, the research focused on how peer interaction, guided writing exercises, and vocabulary building could improve students' writing skills. Using a mixed-method design, 30 students were assessed before and after a five-week intervention targeting common writing difficulties such as organizing ideas, vocabulary selection, and grammar accuracy. Results showed significant improvements, with average scores rising from 62.3% to 81.8%, particularly in organization and vocabulary usage, both increasing by 21%. Qualitative feedback highlighted increased confidence, appreciation of peer collaboration, and the value of structured support through guided activities. Despite overall progress, grammar remained a challenging area for some students, indicating the need for ongoing focused practice. The findings suggest that combining social learning methods with targeted exercises effectively enhances writing performance, aligns with curriculum goals, and prepares students for academic and professional communication demands. Recommendations include breaking down writing tasks into manageable steps, fostering peer review opportunities, and providing continuous, constructive feedback to support steady skill development and confidence building.

KEYWORDS: *Academic Writing, English for Academic and Professional Purposes, Peer Review, Senior High School, Social Constructivist Theory*

INTRODUCTION

The Senior High School (SHS) program in the Philippines, rolled out as part of the K to 12 curriculum, was created to give students a stronger foundation for college, the workforce, or even starting their own businesses. A key part of this curriculum is the English for Academic and Professional Purposes (EAPP) subject, which is meant to help students develop the communication skills they need to succeed both in school and in their future careers (Department of Education, 2016). Still, many students found academic writing challenging, a skill that is critical for their continued studies and professional life.

Academic writing is important because it prepares students to express their ideas clearly and professionally. However, a lot of students struggled with organizing their thoughts, choosing the right words, and following grammar rules. These hurdles often made them feel less confident and impacted how well they did academically.

This study was guided by Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory, which highlights how learning happens best through interaction with others whether classmates or teachers who offer guidance (Vygotsky, 1978). By using methods like peer reviews and guided writing exercises, the study aimed to create a supportive environment where students could gradually build their writing skills.

The main reason for this research came from noticing that strong writing skills are not only important for doing well in school but also for being ready for college and the workplace. Since the SHS curriculum aspires to nurture well-rounded students who can communicate effectively, this study sought to offer practical teaching strategies that could help students overcome common writing challenges and build their confidence.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the common difficulties students face in academic writing.
2. To implement targeted interventions that improve students' writing skills.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions in enhancing writing performance.

METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out with a group of 30 senior high school students who were enrolled in an English for Academic and Professional Purposes (EAPP) course. To best address the research objectives, a mixed-method research design was adopted. This approach allowed the study to gather not only measurable results from student writing performance but also rich, descriptive feedback about their experiences and challenges, providing a more complete picture of their learning journey (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

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The research focused closely on three key objectives: first, to identify the common difficulties students encountered in academic writing; second, to implement specific teaching strategies designed to improve their writing skills; and third, to evaluate how effective these strategies were in boosting their performance.

The study was conducted in distinct phases to systematically address the research goals. First, during the pre-assessment phase, students were assigned an academic writing task to complete. This initial activity established their baseline skills, revealing both their strengths and the specific areas where they faced difficulties, such as organizing ideas, vocabulary selection, and grammar accuracy (Brown, 2014).

Next came the intervention phase, which spanned five weeks. During this time, students participated in carefully selected activities designed to target common writing challenges. These included peer review sessions that fostered collaboration and critical thinking, guided writing exercises that offered structure and step-by-step support, and vocabulary-building practices to enhance word choice. These strategies were chosen based on research highlighting their effectiveness in developing language skills (Hyland, 2019). Following the intervention, a post-assessment was conducted where students submitted a new academic writing task. This allowed for a direct comparison with their initial performance, providing measurable evidence of any progress made.

Finally, during the data collection phase, students' writing assignments were evaluated using a standardized rubric to objectively quantify improvements. In addition, focus group discussions were conducted to capture students' personal experiences, challenges, and insights on which interventions they found most helpful. This qualitative feedback provided a richer understanding of how the interventions influenced their confidence and overall learning process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study involved 30 senior high school students whose academic writing skills were measured before and after a five-week intervention. Table 1 below shows the average scores from the pre-assessment and post-assessment writing tasks, scored with a standardized rubric covering organization, vocabulary use, grammar, and coherence.

Table 1

Comparison of Senior High School Students' Academic Writing Performance Before and After Intervention

Writing Skill	Pre-Assessment Average Score (%)	Post-Assessment Average Score (%)	Improvement (%)
Organization	60	81	+21
Vocabulary Usage	63	84	+21
Grammar Accuracy	62	79	+17
Coherence	64	83	+19
Overall Average	62.3	81.8	+19.5

The results presented in Table 1 show a clear and substantial improvement in the academic writing skills of senior high school students after the five-week intervention. Scores in all key areas, organization, vocabulary usage, grammar accuracy, and coherence increased significantly, with an overall average improvement of nearly 20 percentage points. This quantitative evidence strongly suggests that the targeted strategies of peer review, guided exercises, and vocabulary building effectively addressed students' writing challenges (Hyland, 2019).

The notable rise in organization and vocabulary scores, each improving by 21%, indicates that students learned to structure their ideas more clearly and use more precise academic language. Improvements in grammar accuracy and coherence, though slightly lower, were still significant, showing progress in sentence-level correctness and the logical flow of their writing.

Qualitative Insights

Focus group discussions revealed several recurring themes:

Increased Confidence

Many students expressed feeling more confident about their writing. One student shared, *"Before, I was always unsure if my ideas made sense. After the peer reviews, I understood how to organize better."*($P_{1)}$

Value of Peer Interaction

Students appreciated peer review sessions as they identified mistakes they previously overlooked and learned from others. They highlighted how collaborative learning motivated them to improve (Vygotsky, 1978).

"I realized that when I checked my classmates' work and they checked mine, we found errors we both missed. It helped me learn a lot and stay motivated." (P8)

"Working with others made the writing process less lonely. It was easier to improve when I saw how my friends wrote and explained their ideas." (P15)

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Structured Support Helped

Guided writing exercises gave students clear steps to follow, reducing the overwhelm often associated with academic writing. Vocabulary activities also enriched their word choices, making their writing more precise.

"The guided exercises gave clear steps, so I wasn't confused about what to do next. The vocabulary activities also helped me use better words." (P22)

"Having a plan to follow made writing less scary. I liked how each part of the task was broken down." (P10)

Ongoing Challenges

Despite the success, some students noted that grammar remained a challenge, pointing to the need for continued practice and feedback.

"Grammar is still hard for me. I need more practice and feedback to get it right." (P26)

"Even though I improved, I sometimes still make mistakes in sentence structure and verb tenses." (P4)

The significant boost in students' confidence, as reported in the qualitative feedback, echoes the principles of Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory (1978), which emphasizes learning through social interaction. Peer review sessions created an environment where students could critically analyze their own and others' work, promoting deeper understanding and cooperative problem-solving.

The persistent challenges in grammar accuracy align with Ferris's (2018) findings that grammar remains a complex aspect of second language writing requiring continuous attention. This suggests teachers should maintain ongoing targeted grammar support alongside broader writing strategies.

Overall, the study demonstrates that combining peer collaboration, guided practice, and vocabulary building can lead to meaningful improvements in senior high school students' academic writing. These findings support the SHS curriculum's goal of equipping students with practical communication skills essential for their academic and professional futures. These findings also align with broader research emphasizing that writing skills develop best through a combination of guided practice, social feedback, and vocabulary enrichment (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

CONCLUSION

Based on the results, the following conclusions are drawn from the study:

1. The study successfully identified that senior high school students commonly struggled with organizing ideas, using appropriate vocabulary, and maintaining grammatical accuracy in their academic writing.
2. The targeted interventions involving peer review, guided writing exercises, and vocabulary-building activities were effective in significantly improving students' academic writing skills across multiple dimensions, including organization, vocabulary, grammar, and coherence.
3. The interventions positively impacted students' confidence in writing by providing structured support and opportunities for social learning, aligning with Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory.
4. Despite notable improvements, some students continued to face challenges with grammar, highlighting the need for ongoing practice and focused feedback in this area.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn from the study, the following recommendations are given:

1. Teachers should gently guide students through focused lessons that tackle the common struggles they face in writing like organizing their thoughts, choosing the right words, and polishing grammar. Breaking down writing into manageable steps with structured exercises and vocabulary activities helps students feel less overwhelmed and more capable.
2. Creating opportunities for students to work together through peer review and group activities is invaluable. Not only does this spark critical thinking, but it also builds motivation as students learn from one another. This social connection makes writing a shared journey rather than a solitary task, encouraging learners to grow with support.
3. Providing regular, encouraging feedback in a positive classroom atmosphere helps students build confidence and keeps them engaged. Continuous grammar practice paired with honest, caring feedback allows students to improve steadily without fear of failure. Celebrating progress and fostering a supportive space invites students to take risks and develop their voices as writers.

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