



HOW CAN GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS DEVELOP THE HIGHER LEVEL WRITING SKILLS OF SELECTED GRADE 7 STUDENTS IN MAYAMOT NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL?

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ABSTRACT

The present study attempts to determine the level of communication skills in the written language and to prove how graphic organizers develop the higher level writing skills of the students. The study determined the least mastered skills of selected grade seven students through their composition writings. The common graphic organizers utilized by the grade 7 English teachers were also determined by means of survey. Content analysis was used as a research technique for the objective systematic, quantitative and qualitative description of the manifest content of communication. Through the theme writing compositions, pre-test and post tense, errors committed by the students in composition writing were computed. That is to determine if graphic organizers help the students to develop the writing skills.

KEYWORDS: *writing difficulty; writing skills; graphic organizers*

INTRODUCTION

Writing has always been difficult to learn and to teach. But writing opens opportunity for a person to understand the world and be understood as well. Learning to speak and write in English in this age of globalization is necessary especially if a person would like to compete in the knowledge-based world (Nauman, 2008). Writing effectively is especially important for students with and without disabilities in middle and high school students as they prepare for higher education and careers (Sundeen, 2014). With this, trainings and exercises can be done in the classroom.

Given all good benefits of writing, it seems that skills attached to it have been least prioritized. This might be one of the reasons why students do not pay much attention in acquiring skills for writing especially the higher level composition skills.

My grade 7 students belong to those who least to love writing and that is very evident in their submitted writing compositions. Maybe Carroll (1990) is true about his study. My students probably had traumatic experience in their previous writing activities. Some of them do not exert effort in writing in English. They tend to literally write in Filipino and use open and close quotation marks on it. The over flowing fragments are

demonstrated as well in most of my students compositions. The over used, misused and abused usage of the conjunction, “and” is clearly observed in their composition writing.

The problem is not only the acquisition of the English language skills in general, but the whole educational system (Licunan, 2007).

Demands for students in the new K-12 Curriculum as far as writing skills are concerned challenged the students and most especially the teachers. After revisiting Department of Education (DepEd) English 7 curriculum, it is found out that as early as 13 years old, ideal age of grade 7 students, students can already compare and contrast, recognize features of literary writing and academic writing, identify the purpose of writing, craft paragraphs with five to seven sentences, extract information from a text using a summary, precis, and paraphrase, compose short personal narrative texts and a lot more.

I just wonder if the skills needed for student’s to meet expectations for writing in the K-12 curriculum and the writing standards are met. And if those writing skills are mastered, how come that students’ composition are still found problematic?



STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The present study attempts to determine the level of communication skills in the written language and to prove how graphic organizers develop the higher level writing skills of the students.

On the basis of the identified writing skills, answers will be provided to the following specific questions:

1. What are the common difficulties that grade 7 students have in composition writing?
2. What are the graphic organizers that can help grade 7 students develop higher level writing skills?
3. How effective are the proposed graphic organizers based on the result of the pre-test and post-test scores?

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to prove that graphic organizers develop the higher level writing skills of grade seven students.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It is the basic assumption of this study that there are writing skills that grade seven students have not fully developed. For this reason, there is a need to revisit the K-12 curriculum for Grade 7 English. Furthermore, based on the previous studies that will be discussed in this paper, graphic organizers can develop the least mastered writing skills of the students. The language teachers, on the other hand, might consider this tool in teaching higher level writing skills to their students.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

This study aims to describe how graphic organizers develop the writing skills of the students. The study focused on the writing skills that grade seven students have not yet developed and tried to explain how complicated the writing process is. Still, the results of this study are constrained by three main factors. First, respondents of the study can be improved by having a larger and more diverse population. Second, the elicitation instruments such as formal theme book can be turned as a standardized test which will undergo validation of experts. In that note, there will be a reliability of test result. Third, the graphic organizers can be explored and modified to accurately or appropriately address every least mastered writing skill. Thus, it will definitely develop the students' writing skills in general.

Definition of Terms

Writing Skills- are composition skills on which students develop for composition writing

Writing Difficulties- are writing skills on which students have not yet developed

Less Competent Writers- are group of students on which teachers considered as strugglers in acquiring composition skills

Graphic Organizer- is a visual displays on which students clearly visualize how ideas are organized.

Formal Theme Book- is an assessment tool on which students demonstrate writing skills through written compositions.

Higher Level Writing Skills- are composition skills on which generating ideas, sequencing the content and revising are concerned.

ESL Learners-are students on which English is their second language

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

On order to determine the position of the study in relation to other studies which have already been written on the same problem, a review of related literature and studies already conducted is hereby.

Writing in the Eyes of ESL learners

The writing process can be extremely demanding for students because it calls upon many experiential, cognitive, linguistic, affective and psycho-motor memories and abilities (Westwood, 2008). Writing is interpreted in the same way by Berninger et.al. (2002). Their simple view of writing considers that the active creation of text involves on the one hand lower-order transcription skills such as handwriting, punctuation and spelling, and on the other hand, higher-order self-regulated thinking processes involved in planning, sequencing and expressing the content.

Choudhury (2013) expressed the struggles of English as a Second Language (ESL) students. She stated that,

“Of the four core language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, writing is obviously the most difficult skill for second and foreign language learners to master. The main reason for this difficulty is the fact that writing is a very complex process which involves both creating and organizing ideas and translating them into cohesive texts which are readable. However, in the English classrooms in India, this skill is generally taken for granted with little or no focus on the complex process of writing. This article takes up this issue, beginning with a few introductory remarks on the teaching of English language skills in the Indian context, and then moving on to a discussion about the differences between speech and writing before proposing a five-step



procedure for the development of writing skills in English.”

Saddler (2006) confirms that poor writers typically exhibit major difficulties at two levels, namely coping with grammar, spelling, punctuation and handwriting (lower level), and generating ideas, sequencing the content and revising (higher level).

In the study conducted by Zhaou (2009), ESL learners experienced difficulties in verbs (tenses and forms), noun forms, articles, prepositions and sentence construction. Learners needed guidance as well concerning vocabulary, word choice and grammar. The study documents an ongoing inquiry into a group of ESL learners' awareness and needs for language instruction. The fundamental question is what ESL learners perceive as their needs for language instruction and how teachers can act on that motivation in order to engage in effective instruction.

Silverman, Coker, Proctor, Haring, Kelly, Piantadosi, and Hartranft (2015) found out that there was an overwhelming number of ESL students who are not proficient in writing. The said study focused on vocabulary, morphology, syntax, handwriting, spelling and composition.

Similarly, in a case study conducted by Francisco (2014), ESL students found writing as frustrating because it's a repeatedly correction of grammar, margins, ideas, misspelling, and series of editing activities. She also acknowledged ESL learners in her studies were not beginners either considering language or academic skills. Moreover, even though they were not beginners, they needed clear and precise guidance in order to advance.

According to Sundeen (2014) students with disabilities often find expressive writing frustrating and difficult. The prospect of writing a well-developed five-paragraph essay can be especially daunting. One reason is that struggling writers may have difficulty conceptualizing how the elements of an effective essay are developed.

Applebee and Langer (2011) found that high school students spent over 80% of their writing time in tasks that would not be considered composition. Rather, high school writing consists mostly of fill in the blank, short answer exercises, and copying of information from teacher presentations. For struggling writers, effective writing instruction will be critical to their success at all grade levels.

Graphic Organizers as Tool in Teaching Higher Level Writing Skills

Graphic organizers are visual displays of key content information designed to benefit learners who have difficulty organizing information (Fisher & Schumaker, 1995). Graphic organizers are meant to help students clearly visualize how ideas are organized within a text or surrounding a concept. They provide students with a structure for abstract

ideas. They help students put their writing ideas in order and they are considered as great tools for arranging information in preparation for writing essay. These visual displays help the learners make connections and structure thinking for their writing projects. In addition, they act as instructional tools in student's writing process (Kim, Vaughn, Wanzek, and Wei, 2004).

Writing is a specific genre that usually begins after reading (Withington, 1996). Students are then given an opportunity to express what they learned from reading. Later on, they can be able to write effective compositions of their own.

One effective way to encourage students to write is by utilizing graphic organizers or visual representation of knowledge. In a study conducted by Ledo, Barbeta and Unzueta (2015), fifth graders with identified learning disabilities improved their composition skills with the aid of graphic organizers. The results of their study demonstrated that the use of computer graphic organizers during planning had positive effects on the participants' compositions as measured by three of four of the dependent variables. Increases in the mean scores across the following dependent variables were observed: (a) number total words written, (b) amount of time spent on planning, and (c) number of common story elements. It has been clearly explained in their study that when looking at mean scores, participants wrote more words (from 20.25 to 41.86 more), planned for longer periods of time (from 1.00 to 5.00 more minutes), and included more story elements in their compositions (from 0.80 to 3.10 more out of a possible 6.00). There were nominal to no improvements in overall organization across the four participants. The results suggest that teachers of students with SLD should consider using computer graphic organizers for narrative writing planning.

In another study conducted by Lee and Tan (2010), they have proposed that visual organizers (graphic organizers) can scaffold students' metacognition load. Therefore, those students can be able to coordinate information and had improved their relevance of ideas in writing. 14 students had a clearer interpretation of feedback from the teacher about the 3 pre writing activities with the help of graphic organizers. On the other hand, 12 of the respondents learned to be flexible in grouping and regrouping their ideas in writing.

Also, they would also like to propose ways in which visual organizers can scaffold students' metacognitive load. In online courses, students need to coordinate information across representations. Visual organizers like metacognitive maps are helpful in scaffolding students' metacognitive load. Tantamount to that, Visual organizers like graphic organizers could provide students with a simulation-like environment



where as students negotiate their learning goals and strategies they could revise and re-group their ideas in the organizers, without the need to elaborate them in sentences, in order to see the possible outcome of a chosen strategy.

However, the two researchers admitted that they did not differentiate the effect of feedback from the use of graphic organizers in this study. This is because they did not intend to set up an experimental study to examine the effect of feedback and organizer separately. Rather, feedback in the students' organizers is taken as a holistic strategy in this study.

Therefore, graphic organizers can bring positive effect in developing students' writing skills. Grade 7 students will surely enjoy writing as well with the aid of these visual organizers. In the proposed studies of Baxendell (2003), Cummins, Lopez and Maning (2015), Bromley, DeVitis, and Modlo (1999), Withington (1996) and Sundeen (2015), they have thoroughly explained the use of specific graphic organizers.

Graphic organizers can be divided into five. The concept maps consist the first group. Generally speaking, this kind of maps show a central idea with its corresponding characteristics. This strategy as explained by Sundeen (2015) allows the students to visualize the process of developing essays.

The second group consists the flow diagram or sequence chart. These graphic organizers deals with procedure in which according to Sundeen (2015) encourage interaction between the teacher and the students. Teachers provide a lot of practice for the students. Teachers also interact with the students in this step by step process.

Pre writing planner or the main idea and details chart is the third kind. The graphic organizers under this kind encourage the students to participate in narrowing the theme or general topic. Keywords may be collated in a circle, still visual displays.

Rough draft Planner is the fourth kind. Cause and Effect Diagram and Expository Essay planning Map can be under this category. The graphic organizers help emphasize the relationships. Color coding, shapes, arrows may be used for this. They help students to map their compositions with introduction, body and conclusion.

The fifth kind is Ah-Ha Moment of the other types of graphic organizers like Venn Diagram and a like. In this point in time, students have already gained confidence since they were able to accomplish the rough draft planner.

With the help of these graphic organizers, students will surely not get bored in the writing activities. They will never fear writing and tend to engage themselves in all writing practices. It will soon lead to a holistic writing skills development.

PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The researcher wanted to find out how graphic organizers develop the writing skills of selected grade 7 students in Mayamot National High School, school year 2015-2016.

Content analysis was used as a research technique in this study. It is a research technique on which provides an objective systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication (Calderon and Gonzales, 2011).

In this study, the compositions of 40 grade 7 students were analyzed by identifying the least developed writing skills that appeared in those compositions. On the other hand, Grade 7 English teachers were asked to answer a survey on how often they use graphic organizers in teaching writing in the 7th grade.

After the identified least developed writing skills of grade 7 students and the corresponding graphic organizers appropriate to teach each skill, a writing development program will then be conducted. Graphic organizers will then be utilized in writing activities in the classroom.

In a regular writing activity, those 40 participants will be using graphic organizers in their writing activities while the other member in the class will not. After the last two grading periods (third and fourth grading periods), their compositions will undergo analysis once again which will serve as post test and results will be compared to their first analyzed composition which will serve as their pre test.

Since the aim of the study is to compare two results based on average, weighted mean will be used. This statistical procedure is best used once variables like writing skills in this study are abstract or continuous. It means that they cannot be counted individually such as adequacy, efficiency, excellence, extent, seriousness of the problem and a like (Calderon and Gonzales, 2011).

Participants

The participants of the study are 40 selected grade 7 students who are 13 years of age. Singleton and Ryan (2004) studied one's first and second language acquisition is dependent on one's age. They have found out that in both scientific world and society at large, speech milestones are affected by age-related stages in early language development.

As a matter of fact, K-12 curriculum planners and education at large, considered age in education. DepEd's and even the Commission on Higher Education, governing the private schools, ideal age for grade students is 13. Thus, age factor was considered as well in the study.

Sampling Technique

The 40 selected grade 7 students and participants in the study were chosen since the



researcher happened to be their English teacher. The result of the study directly benefits the students. Therefore, a purposive sampling is utilized. Target population such as the researcher's own students are already identified. Since the aim of the study is to compare two results based on average, weighted mean will be used. This statistical procedure is best used once variables like writing skills in this study are abstract or continuous. It means that they cannot be counted individually such as adequacy, efficiency, excellence, extent, seriousness of the problem and a like (Calderon and Gonzales, 2011).

Research Instrument

Theme writing compositions are used as elicitation task and data gathering instruments. The theme given to the student in the first writing activity (pre test) and the theme given for the next activity (post test) are derived from the learner's manual in the revised K-12 curriculum for grade 7. "I am proud to be a Filipino." and "Why it is more fun in the Philippines?" are the specific themes.

Participants explore each theme using 250 words minimum for an hour writing activity. They write their own title as well. The first writing activity was conducted without the aid of graphic organizers

while on the next writing activity (after series of writing activities using graphic organizers), students will be using graphic organizers.

The said elicitation task is used because it is an interactive and negotiated process. It is considered as a guided writing. It is an assessment for writing on which it bridges between objective and subjective formats (Calderon and Gonzales, 2011). Students are already given guidelines, theme, and rubrics in writing.

On the other hand, grade 7 English teachers answered a survey form on how often they utilize graphic organizers in teaching writing. This is to find out if students are exposed to different tools in learning writing or developing skills in writing.

DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

Pre Testing

The identified 40 participants in the study wrote their first composition with the theme, "I am proud to be a Filipino." These compositions underwent analysis through identifying the errors committed by students in their composition.

**Table 1.1
 Least Mastered Writing Skills of Grade 7 Students**

Type of Errors	Number of Students Committing Errors	Percent Base = 40	Rank	Number of Errors Committed	Percent Base = 907	Rank
1. Capitalization	38	95.00	1	323	35.61	1
2. Misspelling	37	92.50	2	305	33.63	2
3. Margin	27	67.50	4	29	3.20	4
4. Fragmentary	35	87.50	3	180	19.84	3
5. Punctuation	18	45.00	5	27	2.98	5
6. Wrong Tenses (Simple Tenses)	9	22.50	6	20	2.20	6
7. Unnecessary Words	3	7.50	9	3	0.33	9
8. Number (Singular or Plural)	7	17.50	7	16	1.76	7
9. Compounding Nouns	4	10.00	8	4	0.44	8

It can be seen from the data in table 1 that the 40 students committed a total of 907 errors in composition writing. The most number of errors committed was in the proper way of capitalizing words. The number of errors committed was 323 or 35.61 percent of the total errors of 907 and committed by thirty-eight or 95.00 percent of the students. This was followed by misspelling. The number of error was 305 or 33.63 percent of the total errors committed by thirty-seven or 92.50 percent of the students. Fragmentary took the third spot. The number of errors committed was 180 or 19.84 percent

of the total errors committed by thirty-five or 87.50 percent of the students. The other types of error were not serious.

For instance, the fourth in the rank was observing margin where 29 errors or 3.20 were committed by twenty-seven or 67.50 percent of the students. Appropriate use of punctuations at the end of the sentence ranked fifth. The number of errors committed was 27 or 2.98 percent of the total errors committed by eighteen or 45.00 percent of the students. Sixth in the rank was the accurate use of simple tenses. The number of errors committed was



20 or 2.20 percent of the total errors committed by nine or 22.50 percent of the students. It was followed by number or the correct use of singular and plural pronouns. The number of errors committed was 16 or 1.76 percent of the total errors of committed by seven or 17.50 percent of the students. Compounding nouns like using hyphen or pace in between words or simply combining the two words without hyphen or

space took the eight spot. The number of errors committed was 4 or 0.44 percent of the total errors of and committed by four or 10.00 percent of the students. The last type of error committed was the appearance of unnecessary words. The errors were only 3 or 0.33 percent of the total errors committed by three or 7.50 percent of the students.

Table 1.2
Excerpts from the Students Composition

Type of Errors	Excerpts
1. Capitalization	Composition # 4- <i>"for me its more fun in the Philippines..."</i>
2. Misspelling	Composition # 10- <i>"...Foreners they are beilive in the Filifinos are friendly happy Ecited..."</i>
3. Margin	Composition # 15- <i>"In Palawan theres a Boracay its so Beautiful in the Baguio there's a chocolate hills. Puerto. Prencesa underground river you see Bats. In the Philippines we have festivals. Respect other people in my country. Od and helpful neighbour and beautiful festival. Because colourful praps and same dance..."</i>
4. Fragmentary	Composition # 17- <i>"Filipino to because this is my country and my lahi..."</i>
5. Punctuation	Composition # 21- <i>I'm a Filipino I'm proud to my color and we have so many many smart here in the Philippines and everyone is so industrious..."</i>
6. Wrong Tenses (Simple Tenses)	Composition # 28- <i>"...father and I were go to the market... I and my family were go to the sports center... and everyone is so happy"</i>
7. Unnecessary Words	Composition # 30- <i>"...I'm proud to Be a filipino my love my school I am to be my many to the future for tomorrow..."</i>
8. Number (Singular or Plural)	Composition # 33- <i>"...Philippines in proud of Beautiful Philippines and happy family they has tourist spats..."</i>
9. Compounding Nouns	Composition # 36- <i>"...my beleve my self and all that men are known that there Is any obstacle..."</i>
10. Composition in Filipino	Composition # 40- <i>"...in happy to my peresent proud to be Filipino because this is my Bayan at ditto ako nakatira sa Francisville..."</i>

Table 2 shows the excerpts from the writing compositions of grade 7 students. The composition # 4 demonstrated that the student did not capitalize the first letter in starting the composition. Student owning the composition # 10 committed four rows in a row. Foreigners became "Foreners". Beilive (believe) messed with its vowels. "Filifinos" (Filipinos) became problematic. And, with too much excitement, the student forgot the x of the word excited.

It is obvious that margin was not properly observed in composition # 15. While composition # 17, I believe, showed an unclear message. Therefore, the student was tagged for fragment. Thoughts in composition # 21 mixed and appeared as run on sentence because there were no proper punctuations like period to at least end a sentence. I have no idea why were was partnered with go in composition # 28.

The problem continued. Aside from fragment issue in composition # 30, the student ineffectively include about the school or about future and tomorrow. Multiple errors were found in composition # 8. Aside from capitalization and spelling concerns, number or pronouns used did not match with its antecedent. The student used they referring to the Philippines instead of it.

Aside from fragment issue, the word my self in composition # 36 is incorrectly written. It can be compounded without a space as myself. Finally, in composition # 40, if the student can really not translate the thoughts in English, writing such sentences in Filipino is the last sort.



Table 2
Graphic Organizers that Grade 7 English Teachers Commonly Used.

	Graphic Organizers	TOTAL	Average	Rank
1	Story Map	11	1.83	16
2	Detail Chart	9	1.50	6
3	Sequence Flow Chart	10	1.67	12
4	Clue Chart	9	1.50	6
5	Action Diagram	8	1.33	3
6	Dialogue	9	1.50	6
7	Time Order Spider	9	1.50	6
8	Reporter's Note-Taking Chart	6	1.00	1
9	Research Diagram	7	1.17	2
10	Biography Time Line	8	1.33	3
11	Step by Step Process	11	1.83	16
12	Narrowing a Writing Topic	9	1.50	6
13	Explanatory Paragraphs	10	1.67	12
14	Expository Essay Planning Paragraph Map	10	1.67	12
15	3 Paragraph Essay Planning Map	11	1.83	16
16	The Outliner	11	1.83	16
17	BLT Essay Sandwich	10	1.67	12
18	Sensory Observation Chart	8	1.33	3
19	Summarizing	11	1.83	16
20	Responding to Literature	9	1.50	6

Table 2 tells that almost all grade seven teachers do not use graphic organizers in teaching writing. They are asked to rate how often they use the graphic organizers in their writing activities. 1-1.99 means that the graphic organizer has never been used in teaching writing. 2-2.99 means that the graphic organizer has been used seldom. 3-3.99 means that teachers use the graphic organizer sometimes. 4-4.99 means that graphic organizer has used frequently in writing activities. Lastly, 5 means that the teachers let their students use the graphic organizers in their composition writing.

Based on the table, the result spoke that almost all cited graphic organizers have not been utilize by teachers in teaching writing to their students.

Post Testing

Since the least mastered skills have been already identified and the graphic organizers appropriate for each writing skill are pointed out, teachers may now use graphic organizers in conducting the writing activities. Then, students will write the final composition that will serve as post test. Errors will be then identified using content analysis. Its result will be compared to the pre test to

identify if students error lesson or the least mastered skills before in composition writing have been finally developed.

CONCLUSION

Writing indeed is a difficult process according to Westwood (2008). On the other hand, it is the most important human invention in the history said Carol (1990). However, students still found it boring and unrewarding Caroll, (1990) added.

As a matter of fact, ESL learners like the Filipino students share the same struggles with Indian students since the skills are taken for granted (Choudhury (2013). It is a very similar issue to that of Chinese students. The identified least mastered writing skills are very much the same to the finding of Choudhury’s study.

It just shows that these grade seven students are not alone in struggling and will never be alone as well in improving. Our neighbouring counties and fellow researchers are offering ways in improving teaching strategies though teaching tools like graphic organizers. This might be an invitation for teachers to engage their students in a more fun way of developing the students writing skills. And, hooking student’s attention and sustaining their



interest in writing through graphic organizers will provide students best experiences in writing.

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