

Writing Competence of First Year College Students at a State University

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ABSTRACT

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Writing is an essential skill for students doing many academic writing assignments. However, despite educational efforts to develop this skill, many still struggle for diverse reasons. This study determines the writing competence of first-year Bachelor of Elementary Education, Bachelor of Technical Vocational Education, and Bachelor of Science in Agriculture college students at Catanduanes State University, Panganiban Campus. It offers teaching or curricular strategies to improve writing interest. This utilized descriptive correlational research from 157 respondents derived through fishbowl sampling.

The findings revealed that the majority of respondent's parents were high school graduates. They are "often" exposed to broadcast media (movies, MP3, TV, internet) and "seldom" read print media (news, novels, commentaries, essays). They are "highly motivated" to learn from references and read stories while



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“slightly motivated” with book gifts and quizzes after reading. When correlated with Pearson chi-square, these two variables disclosed no significant relationship. Thus, a pressing need to analyze the gap and resolve writing difficulties aligned with Flower and Hayes’ Cognitive Process Writing Theory. Basic writing workshops, online webinars, and instructional material development on improving writing competence are research outputs to orchestrate the best writing techniques to improve writing competence.

INTRODUCTION

English has evolved critical to personal, academic, and professional advancement. Students must be proficient in English writing to succeed in their studies and perform effectively. In the K to 12 Curriculum, students are confronted with different academic writing tasks (Gatcho & Ramos, 2020; Roxas, 2020), enabling one to reflect on how effective and efficient the writing technique is (Cole & Feng, 2015; Zeng, 2018). Basically, this writing is a fundamental language that students learn, corollary to reading, listening, and speaking (Gatcho & Ramos, 2020; Fareed et al., 2016). On the other hand, writing is considered a complex cognitive ability where writers need to demonstrate control of variables (Durga & Rao, 2018; Hikmah et al., 2019; Reyes & Pawilen, 2021) intermingled with cognitive, affective, and values link in the writing process (Klimova, 2014). In this context, all learners are taught the rudiments of writing for a different purpose to create meaning and understand the intricacies of the language (Reyes & Pawilen, 2021).

These writing issues are supported by Republic Act 10533, or the Enhanced Basic Education Act, to improve the performance of Filipino students by implementing the K–12 program, with *academic writing* as one of the offerings. Furthermore, this aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No. 4, which emphasizes ensuring quality education that leads to relevant and effective learning outcomes by 2030.

These issues are not just happening locally. It is also proliferating in other parts of the world based on the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) 2019, where Filipino students have minimum proficiency in reading and writing lower than Malaysian and Vietnamese. Likewise, there is a decline in student’s performance on the national and international mathematics tests, attributed to poor reading comprehension (Imam et al., 2014) and inability to write a “decent” sentence in English. This problem is based on the article published by the Philippine Institute of Development Studies (PIDS). In addition, Russian learners also struggle in compositions, exhibiting a lack of

clarity, unity, cohesion, and coherence, and numerous rhetorical flaws (Griswold & Edlund, 2019). This problem is similar to that experienced by students in the USA who perform below grade level in writing (Anderson et al., 2023).

On this note, Mahbub (2018) and Sabarun (2019) pressed writing skills—in terms of grammar, content, vocabulary, mechanics, and attitude towards reading, be improved at their best using needs analysis (NA) in designing a language curriculum suitable for the learner's needs.

This research is anchored on Institutional Agenda 2- Disciplinary Topics and Language. Most significantly, this higher institution, the Catanduanes State University, Panganiban Campus, with the researcher's lead, is envisioned to address the challenges and issues in writing. Correspondingly, Arnold (2017) projected to cater the learning needs and to improve the writing skills of college students in no way exceptional manner.

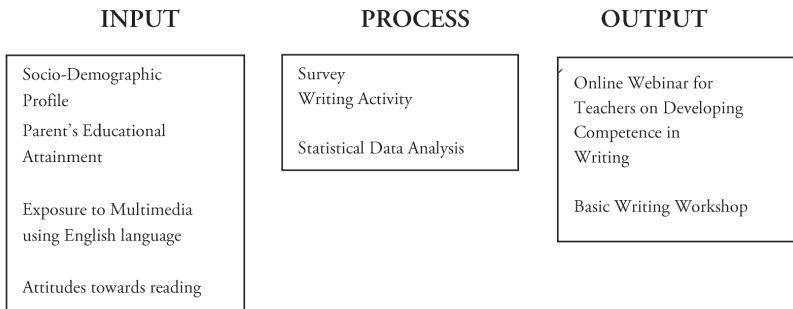
FRAMEWORK

The following theories on attitudes were found valuable for this study. According to Flower and Hayes' Cognitive Process Theory of Writing, writing is best understood as a set of distinctive thinking processes that writers orchestrate or organize while composing. The processes that connect with the present study, specifically in assessing writing, are planning, generating knowledge, drafting, and editing.

Given the purpose of this research, the study was framed within the context of various local and foreign literature and studies of Hikmah et al. (2019) Cervantez (2015) on reading and writing competence; Judith (2022), Roxas (2020), Gatcho and Ramos (2020) on writing issues and problems; Vega (2000) on student-related factors and composition writing performance; Aloairdhi (2019) on many sources of writing anxiety; and Andersen et al. (2022) on progress of writing ability.

This study determines the student's exposure to broadcast and print media and their writing competence. With the particular objectives of the study in the beginning Chapter, including the data gathered through the survey, the researcher generates imperative findings. Based on the findings of the study, hosting workshops on specific writing skills, online webinars on writing and language-related topics, and developing instructional materials (IM) to disseminate the current writing challenges that college students face are research outputs. This will, therefore, make the teachers well-informed of the appropriate tactics to address the needs of the students.

Figure 1
Schematic Diagram of Conceptual Model



OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study determines the level of exposure to multimedia using the English language of the selected first-year college students, including their attitude toward reading and, most importantly, their writing competence, organization, creativity, content, grammar, and vocabulary use. Moreover, it aims to identify if there is a significant relationship between the level of writing competence and the variables.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The descriptive-correlational research was selected to fulfill the aim of this study. It is descriptive in purpose, gathering salient language competence data to describe, record, analyze, and interpret the attitudes toward reading. The writing test results were treated using the frequency count, percentage, and weighted; meanwhile, Spearman's rank correlation was utilized to correlate the variables: the exposure to media using the English language and attitudes towards reading.

Research Site

This study was conducted at Catanduanes State University-Panganiban Campus, Panganiban, Catanduanes, Philippines, where the researcher is currently employed. This university was chosen because of its vision aligned with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No. 4 to address the quality education of the general population in all courses from the Bachelor of Elementary Education

(BEED), the Bachelor of Technical Vocational Education (BTVTED) to the Bachelor of Science in Agriculture (BSA).

Participants

Selected 157 first-year college students from the Bachelor of Elementary Education, Bachelor of Technical Vocational Education, and Bachelor of Science in Agriculture Catanduanes State University-Panganiban Campus comprised the respondents. These respondents are all currently enrolled in the said university. The samples were screened using the sample size calculator on raosoft.com. When selecting the respondents, the researcher did equal sampling, specifically the fishbowl method, based on the number of population per course and sex. Every name chosen as a sample was referred to the list, the class schedule, and the professor handling the subject to determine the student's whereabouts. All those who formed part of this sample were asked to sign the informed consent for ethical purposes.

Instrumentation

The research instrument comprised four (4) parts of a survey and scaled questionnaire. This is focused on the socio-demographic profile of the respondents, level of exposure to multimedia using the English language, and level of attitudes towards reading and writing activity of selected 157 first-year college students of Bachelor of Elementary Education, Bachelor of Technical Vocation Education, and Bachelor of Science in Agriculture. The data underwent exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis. To ensure its validity, the instrument was critiqued by research and language experts in the Department of Languages. Moreover, the research formulated a Table of Specifications (TOS) based on target competencies. For its reliability, the instrument was pilot-tested twice in the same courses at another university. The result of the reliability test in Cronbach alpha is 0.93, which means that the instrument used is highly reliable.

The said scaled instrument contained a five-point scale with corresponding descriptive ratings to determine the frequency of utilization and or exposure to media using the English language, including the respondent's attitudes towards reading: (5)- Extremely Motivating (EM) - when the motivation/ interest effect falls within the degree range of 76%-100%; (4)- Highly Motivating (HM)- when the motivation/ interest effect falls within the degree range of 51%-75%; (3)- Moderately Motivating (MM)- when the motivation/ interest effect falls within the degree range of 26%-50%;(2)- Slightly Motivating (SM)- when the motivation/ interest effect falls within the degree range of 1%-25% and (1)- Not at all Motivating (NM) -when there is no motivational effect at all. To determine

the writing competence, another set of percentage scores were used: (Exemplary) = 16-20; (Adequate) = 11-15; (Fair) = 6-10; and (Needs Improvement) = 0-5.

Data Gathering

A request letter to the Office of the Campus Director endorsed by the ARES Director was properly secured prior to the distribution of the instrument. The master list of the students officially enrolled at Catanduanes State University, Panganiban Campus, Panganiban Catanduanes, was secured at the Office of Admission and Registrar Services. Each participant was formally introduced to the nature, purposes of the study, and confidentiality of the data gathered, along with their signing of the informed consent. The respondents were grouped by course. The researcher ensured the conduciveness of the area during the data gathering. For the last part of the research instrument, the respondents were only given one (1) hour to finish the writing activity. The researcher again discussed the writing rubric to guide the respondents on how their writing output will be rated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1

Exposure to Media Using the English Language

Type of Media	Frequency Count					Weighted mean	Interpretation			
	5	4	3	2	1					
A. Broadcast Media	Broadcast Media	Broadcast Media	–	23	35	53	27	19	3.1	SO
	Broadcast Media	ANC	Media	5	18	49	58	27	2.5	SO
	Broadcast Media	Discovery Channel	Media	27	45	53	25	7	3.4	SO
	Broadcast Media	National Geographic Channel	Media	5	30	57	52	13	2.8	SO
	Broadcast Media	Music TV	Media	63	34	32	23	5	3.8	O
B. Electronic Media	Electronic Media	MP3	Media	91	31	27	5	3	4.3	O

	Electronic E-Books	Media	1	10	35	74	37	2.1	SE
	Electronic Movies	Media	87	44	22	3	1	4.4	O
	Electronic Youtube	Media	47	53	36	16	5	3.8	O
	Electronic Internet	Media	53	24	37	32	11	3.5	O
C.Print media	Print Media Article	News	7	27	35	54	34	2.5	SO
	Print Media Editorial		8	42	61	35	11	3	SO
	Print Media Commentary/Column		2	21	48	56	30	2.4	SE
	Print Media Entertainment		33	53	46	17	8	3.5	O
	Print Media Sports News		17	25	47	48	20	2.8	SO
	Print Media Short Stories		12	27	39	49	30	2.6	SO
	Print Media Poems		8	24	40	57	28	2.5	SO
	Print Media Dramas		33	36	34	34	20	3.2	SO
	Print Media Novels		8	20	23	62	44	2.3	SE
	Print Media Essays		1	23	61	57	15	2.6	SO
	General Weighted Mean							3.1	SO

Legend:

5- Always (A) - when 76%- 100% of the classroom discipline technique is adopted.

4- Often (O) - when 51% to 75% of the classroom discipline is adopted.

3-Sometimes (SO) - when 26%-50% of the classroom discipline is adopted.

2-Seldom (SE) - when 1%-25% of the classroom discipline is adopted.

1-Never (N) - when classroom discipline is not adopted.

The study revealed that most first-year college students are “often” exposed to movies. They are “sometimes” exposed to broadcast media except music TV. Likewise, they “sometimes” read print media dramas, editorials, sports news,

new articles, short stories, and essays. They “seldom” read or view commentaries, novels, and e-books. Hankerson (2022) stressed the need for a curriculum to leverage critical language awareness (CLA) in promoting written language skills. Ghanizadeh and Razavi (2015) warned that exposure to multimedia elements directly and positively impacts learners’ academic success and their goal orientation (mastery, performance, and avoidance).

Table 2*Attitudes towards Reading*

	Frequency Count					Weighted mean	Interpretation
	5	4	3	2	1		
1. How do you feel when you're reading a book during rainy days?	28	37	48	34	10	3.2	MM
2. How do you feel reading during a break	11	48	36	39	23	2.9	MM
3. What are your thoughts on reading for pleasure at home?	8	40	44	61	4	2.9	MM
4. How do you feel after receiving a book gift?	10	14	21	94	18	2.4	SM
5. How do you feel reading a book during a vacant hour?	16	33	33	24	51	2.6	MM
6. How do you feel about reading a new book?	26	46	23	48	14	3.1	MM
7. How do you feel reading over your summer break	2	20	95	33	7	2.9	MM
8. How do you feel shifting from playing to reading?	19	52	59	22	5	3.4	MM
9. How do you feel about going to a bookstore?	26	31	30	30	39	2.8	MM
10. How do you feel after reading a variety of books?	22	52	50	24	9	3.3	MM
11. How do you react when a teacher quizzes you about what you have read?	1	5	19	41	91	1.6	SM
12. How do you feel reading workbook pages and worksheets?	8	41	47	45	16	2.9	MM
13. What are your thoughts on reading when you're in school?	26	68	44	16	3	3.6	HM
14. How do you feel when you are asked to read schoolbooks?	6	33	37	49	32	2.6	MM

15. How do you feel about earning knowledge from books?	32	38	19	49	19	3.1	MM
16. How do you feel about earning knowledge from other references?	39	35	53	29	1	3.5	HM
17. How do you feel about reading stories in class?	27	61	39	19	11	3.5	HM
18. How do you feel about reading aloud in class?	28	45	48	31	5	3.4	MM
19. What are your thoughts on reading along with the dictionary?	17	28	37	53	22	2.8	MM
20. What are your thoughts about taking a reading test?	12	34	44	27	40	2.7	MM
	General Weighted Mean					3.0	MM

Legend:

5-Extremely Motivating (EM) -when the motivation/ interest effect falls within the degree range of 76%-100%	4-Highly Motivating(HM)- when the motivation/ interest effect falls within the degree range of 51%-75%	3-Moderately Motivating (MM) -when the motivation/ interest effect falls within the degree range of 26%-50%
2- Slightly Motivating (SM) - when the motivation/ interest effect falls within the degree range of 1%-25%	1-Not at all Motivating (NM) when there is no motivational effect at all	

Almost all items listed are “moderately motivating”, except items 4, 11, 13, 16, and 17. Items 13, 16, and 17, which dealt with thoughts in reading, earning knowledge from other references, and reading stories in class, are rated “highly motivating.” On the other hand, book gifts and quizzes after reading are “slightly motivating.”

The result manifests that college students nowadays have a waning interest in reading books because of their ubiquitous dependence on technology. Their lagging interest in books is domineering. Fewer of them read for fun for many factors. Klein (2021) named these factors social media and other digital activities, which heavily draw and gobble up students’ hours.

The same idea is corroborated by Akhmetova et al. (2022), Baba & Affendi (2020), and Udu, (2021), that habitual reading facilitates proficiency, literacy, and fluency in the language. In contrast, those who read less with poor attitudes towards reading are presumed to have limited knowledge in academic endeavors. Moreover, Ghanizadeh and Razavi (2015) asserted that exposure to multimedia

elements directly and positively impacts learners' academic success and goal orientation (mastery, performance, and avoidance). Hence, Şentürk (2015) concluded that high-proficiency learners had a positive attitude towards reading with his research on attitudes and motivation towards reading in English at Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University's School of Foreign Languages.

Table 3

Writing Competence of First Year College Students at Catanduanes State University Panganiban Campus

Writing Rubric	Frequency				Weighted Mean	Interpretation
	1	2	3	4		
Organization	24	108	23	2	3.0	A
Creativity	12	22	122	1	2.3	F
Content	8	129	18	2	2.9	A
Mechanics / Grammar	4	26	125	2	2.2	F
Vocabulary Use	3	27	118	9	2.2	F
TOTAL					12.54	
General Weighted Mean					2.51	A
Legend:	Exemplary- 4	Adequate- 3	Fair-2		Needs Improvement-1	

The writing rubrics are adapted from Salvador (2017) based on K–12 Learner's Material. Organization. The majority, or 68.79% of the respondents, were rated "adequate"; only two (2) or 1.27% were exemplary, and the rest "needs improvement." This implies that a clear organizational pattern makes a lot more sense as the writing reflects good order, such as being skilled in arranging the clauses so that the readers can easily draw connections (Organizational Structures for Clear, Effective Writing, 2022).

Novariana et al. (2018) highlighted that learners have the problem of structuring the paragraph, the whole discourse, and supporting ideas or generalizations with specific details. Similarly, Wang and Xie (2022) presented that common problems and issues in terms of organization are coherence breaks and unrelated idea progression. This is where students can write about a topic but fail to proceed to another topic, affecting the logical flow of information. Hence, it is suggested that audience analysis be conducted to help students understand the linguistic knowledge they need to write more readable, coherent texts.

Creativity. The majority exhibit a "fair" performance. This only means that

college students can communicate their ideas and exercise critical thinking and creative imagination with the reader, though not perfectly. This finding aligns with the idea of Marquez et al. (2004) that naturally inquisitive and creative children need their creativity to be nurtured; hence, their higher cognitive skills may be developed. Therefore, writing is a creative meaning-making process that can be achieved through thorough problem-solving with creativity and linguistic resources (Tarin & Yawiloeng, 2023). This can be observed from the students' outputs, wherein an attempt to use literary devices was evident; however, further effort on their part must still be exerted.

Content: The majority, or 82.17%, of respondents garnered a fair performance level; only two (2) were rated exemplary, while the remaining were adequate. This result implies that college students can produce ideas smoothly and grasp the subject more easily. The above result is in contrast to the result of the study of Wang & Xie (2022) on topic building, where students have often been observed to have difficulty identifying a clear focus for their writing, hence, drift away from the topic or only partially address the writing requirements.

Mechanics/Grammar. Most were rated adequate, while only two (2) were exemplary. This finding shows that college students have a disciplined attitude toward academic writing. Their grammar skill brings clarity to their writing. They can structure the text and effectively communicate with the readers. Imani and Habil (2012) and Hasan and Marzuki (2017) averred that grammaticality is one of the common difficulties experienced by students who use various strategies to compensate for their insufficient grammar mastery. Gamilo and Aggaba (2019) asserted that students are remarkably weak in grammar, structure, and voice. Thus, a recommendation to give appropriate attention to grammar teaching is highly emphasized.

Vocabulary Use. Most have adequate performance, while only nine (9) are exemplary writers. This performance further implies that students' robust vocabulary can lead them to express ideas highly and accurately produce words in writing. With this, they can produce a strong and more persuasive writing output. According to Salvador (2022a), vocabulary learning problems deteriorate students' comprehension, communicative skills, and, mostly, their writing ability. Hence, Hasan and Marzuki (2017) suggested carefully selecting the words to avoid communication breakdown. According to Lagayan (2018), the efficient writer needs to master the facets of writing.

Moreover, the frequent use of English in communication is good (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2018). Thus, teachers must be innovative to maximize productivity with a functional policy framework towards quality instruction (Salvador, 2022b). This is where self-regulated learning strategies (SRLS) and

writing self-efficacy contributed significantly to the prediction of students' writing proficiency.

Vega (2000) stated that research findings on determining the relationship between student-related factors and the composition writing performance of college freshmen are parallel with this study. The recommendation is to provide more opportunities for exposure to activities where English is used, such as sponsoring or holding essay writing contests, public speaking, or stage plays.

Given this difficulty, viewing skills are essential in language teaching to ensure student involvement and understanding. Inigo (2013) suggested modular multimodal teaching through different multimedia such as video, songs, and pictures, specifically in activating prior knowledge, motivating students in class activities, and positively changing analytical, critical, and appreciative reading skills.

Table 4

Relationship between Exposure to Multimedia using English Language and Writing Competence

Relationship between Exposure to Multimedia using English Language and Writing Competence	Mean	R	P value at significance level alpha=0.05	Decision	Remarks
Exposure to Multimedia using English Language	3.0	-.069	.392	Accept H ₀	There is no Significant Relationship
Writing Competency	2.5				
0.100 little correlation					

The writing competence variable was adapted to Cervantez (2015) and computed using the Spearman rank correlation. Based on the p-value at significance level alpha=0.05 of 0.392, it can be inferred that the student's exposure to media has no significant relationship with their writing competence. Other traceable factors could impact the relationship between the two variables, which is suggested for further research. Likewise, there could be other reasons that may be considered as limitations of this study, such as students' physiological and mental readiness when they answered the instrument.

The finding is similar to Judith (2022), who affirmed that Facebook use negatively affects students' writing composition skills. Electronic communication, an atmosphere of permissiveness in using languages and styles not per writing norms, becomes a habit.

Moreover, Kim and Chung (2021) also discovered a negative relationship between increased TV time and children's language and cognitive development. As a result, unchecked TV exposure may harm children's cognitive development. Similarly, Taylor et al. (2018) confirmed no evidence that screen media exposure reduced vocabulary size.

Table 5

Relationship between Attitudes towards Reading and Writing Competence

Relationship between attitudes towards Reading and Writing Competence	Mean Score	R	P value at significance level alpha=0.05	Decision	Remarks
Attitudes towards reading	3.1	-.105	.191	Accept H ₀	There is no Significant Relationship
Writing Competency	2.5				
0.100 little correlation					

The study shows a relationship between the attitudes toward reading and the writing competence of selected first-year college students.

The attitudes towards reading of the students gathered through the 20-item teacher-made instrument adapted to Cervantez (2015) garnered a mean of 3.1, while in writing competence, a 25-item composition test conducted on the same students garnered a mean score of 2.51.

Based on the p-value at significance level alpha=0.05 of 0.191, it can be inferred that the student's attitudes towards reading have no significant relationship with their writing competence.

This result implies that the students' foundation skills do not meet critical thinking requirements. Also, Salvador (2017) shared common findings that students' attitudes toward reading have no significant relationship with writing competence. If the relationship is present, there is only a minimal effect on writing competence caused by attitudes towards reading.

The limitation of this study is the potential bias introduced by the use of fishbowl sampling and the specific research site, Catanduanes State University, Panganiban Campus, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. Additionally, the study's focus on specific variables, such as parental educational backgrounds, media exposure, and reading attitudes, may

overlook other potential factors influencing writing competence among college students. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported data and subjective ratings for assessing writing competence and media exposure could introduce response bias and affect the reliability of the results. Finally, the study's emphasis on descriptive correlational research may restrict the depth of analysis and hinder the exploration of causal relationships between variables impacting writing skills.

CONCLUSIONS

The new knowledge contribution of this study lies in its emphasis on the relationship between students' exposure to multimedia, attitudes toward reading, and their writing competence, highlighting the need for tailored interventions to enhance writing skills in higher education settings.

The decline in reading creates an impact on education. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that college students spend more time on digital media and less interest in reading. The books do not interest them. They have to rekindle their love for reading with the presence of parental literacy skills, quality reading instruction, and sufficient reading paraphernalia. Also, they must engage more in academic activities to develop strong writing skills.

The study's findings contribute to policy development by prioritizing the impact of parental literacy skills, quality reading instruction, and sufficient reading materials on students' writing skills. They also advocate for developing policies promoting literacy support systems in educational institutions.

Future research should explore the interplay between parental educational backgrounds, digital media consumption habits, and peer collaboration in enhancing college students' writing competence, aiming to develop comprehensive strategies that leverage these factors to improve creativity, content development, and overall writing skills in academic contexts.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

The findings of this study could be translated into practical initiatives such as developing targeted writing workshops and online webinars for college students to enhance their writing skills and address specific challenges identified in the research. Additionally, creating instructional materials that improve writing competence based on the study's results could provide valuable resources for educators and students. Furthermore, collaborating with external stakeholders,

such as educational institutions and community organizations, to implement comprehensive training programs for language and writing enhancement based on the study's recommendations could significantly improve writing proficiency among college students.

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