

Writing Skills Development Of The Freshmen Engineering Students In Batangas State University

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Abstract: This study focused on the evaluation of the writing skills of the first year engineering students in Batangas State University in terms of grammatical, stylistic, mechanical, and judgment skills. The respondents took up an English grammar subject during the first semester of the school year 2014-2015. Specifically, it determined the diagnostic test results on writing skills in terms of grammatical, stylistic, mechanical, and judgement skills. Likewise, it identified the writing skills of the respondents that are adequately developed or undeveloped. This study utilized the descriptive method of research using the cross sectional-design. The researcher employed four hundred eighty-three (483) out of the total of one thousand five hundred seventy-four (1574) first year engineering students. These students were given the diagnostic tests designed to elicit information on their writing skills. Pre-validated diagnostic test was the main tool used in the study. Statistical tools used were frequency count, percentage technique, arithmetic mean, and Pearson Product-Moment Coefficient of Correlation. Findings of the study revealed that among the four writing skills, the students have adequately developed their grammatical and stylistic skills, like the use of the third principal part of the verb and modifier in the case of grammatical skills, the use of prepositional phrase, antecedent, and verb in the case of stylistic skills. The undeveloped skills of the students are due to their inability to spot errors on the use of unnecessary adverb and article, subject-verb agreement in the case of grammatical skills; the use of inverted sentence in the case of stylistic skills; the use of colon, apostrophe and exclamation point in the case of mechanical skills; use of contrasting ideas in the case of judgment skills.

Keywords: Writing skills, Grammatical skills, Stylistic skills, Mechanical skills, Judgment skills

1. Introduction

Learning a second language is a difficult process because one has to be adept in the four skills in communication such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. Of these four communication skills, the most exacting is writing. Because it is the least spontaneous of the four skills, it demands careful thought and deliberate planning. Ang because it does not enjoy the immediacy of a speaking situation, it demands precision in the translation of ideas into words. When one puts something down in writing, his intention is, generally, to communicate with someone who is not present. Since he will not be around to answer questions or clear up vague points, his reader has all the right to expect the former to have taken the time and care to minimize errors, misunderstanding, doubt and confusion (Guzman, 2005). When one writes, he is making a lot of effort with the chosen language in order to express his ideas in written form. When students complain regarding their difficulty in writing using a second language, they are simply saying that their difficulty is not limited to looking for the right words in expressing ideas but also to using the correct grammar of that language. In other words, the main problem of students is not limited to writing alone but on how to communicate their ideas. In an English-speaking situation, the terminology for the study or use of English by speakers whose native language is not English is English as a Second Language (ESL). Likewise, it refers to a language design fit for those who want to learn English other than their native language/tongue (Nordquist, 2018). Students studying and learning English as another language are reluctant to engage in writing activities. Some find writing boring, too. They perceive writing to be boring, most of the time. Many teachers claim that students can hardly tackle writing tasks. They spend hours but the results show little success. There is a crucial need to redefine the writing program in order to respond to the writing problem of the students. When a student writes, the traditional

aspects of writing and the structural patterns are involved- the sentence, the paragraph, the composition as a whole, and ultimately the term or research paper. The writing skills are not independent of critical reading, that the latter is a much legitimate part of the writing process. Knowing how to use these parts will enable one to write with greater clarity, accuracy, and style. Good writing, like any skill, involves mastering basic guidelines and learning how to apply them (Baugh, et al. 2005). In the General Engineering Department of the Batangas State University, many language teachers complain not just about the poor test results of some students but much more of the inability of the students to express their ideas clearly in written English. Teachers would often say that students lack mastery of the grammatical structure of the language and that their compositions usually reveal a mixture of incoherent clustered ideas. Knowing the significance of English as a popular and useful language worldwide, the researcher is challenged to conduct a research on the writing skills development of Freshmen engineering students in Batangas State University. The researcher believes that if the weaknesses of the students in written English are properly identified and analyzed, teachers can formulate measures to solve the problem on the said difficulties.

2. Methods

This study utilized the descriptive method of research using cross-sectional design. Four hundred eighty-three (483) Freshmen Engineering students during the first semester of the SY 2014-2015 served as the respondents of the study. These students were given the diagnostic tests designed to elicit information on their writing skills.

3. Results and Discussions

The students were tested on the following writing skills: grammatical, stylistic, mechanical, and judgment skills.

3.1 Diagnostic Test Results

3.1.1. Grammatical Skills

Table 1 shows the number and percentage of students who identified grammatical errors in the sentence.

Table 1
Percentage of Students Who Detected Grammatical Errors in Sentence Construction

Grammatical Errors	Frequency	Percentage
1. Use of adjective	268	55.50
2. Shift in modifier	380	76.67
3. Use of number	278	57.56
4. Unnecessary adverb	234	48.45
5. Unnecessary article	119	24.64
6. Pronoun and antecedent	366	75.88
7. Conjunction	315	65.22
8. Subject-verb agreement	211	43.68
9. Inconsistency of compound degree	309	63.98
10. Infinitive phrase	299	61.90
11. Interchanging adverb and adjective	307	63.56
12. Degree of adjective	309	63.98
13. Third principal part of verb	393	81.37
14. Use of "how much/ How many"	355	73.50

As shown in the table, majority of the students, 393 or 81.37 percent were able to identify the error on the use of the third principal part of the verb. Shift in modifier was also detected by 380 or 76.67 percent of the students. Likewise, 366 or 75.88 percent were able to identify the error on the agreement between pronoun and its antecedent. Other errors detected by majority of the students were the use of "How much instead of "How many" (73.50 percent), erroring conjunction (65.22 percent), inconsistency of the use of comparative degree (63.98 percent), interchanging adverb and adjective (63.56 percent), use of adjective (55.5 percent). On the other hand, less than fifty percent of the students were able to identify the following errors: agreement of subject and verb (43.68 percent), unnecessary article (24.64 percent). These findings revealed the grammatical skills possessed by the students, and the skills which need further development. Almost one half (49.90 percent) of the students belonged to the middle group. That is, although they have adequately developed grammatical skills, they need more exercises or activities to improve their grammatical skills. On the other hand, only a small percentage or 10.35 showed fairly developed grammatical skills for having obtained scores below 10. The average score obtained by the students in grammatical skills is 13.46 which implies that the students need more practice to enhance their grammatical skills. Result of the diagnostic test shows that the students need to improve on their skill on the use of modifier (article, adjective, phrase or clause). Other aspects of grammar which must be mastered are subject-verb agreement, correct form of the verb, consistency in person, number and tense, among others.

3.1.2 Stylistic Skills

The tests on stylistic skills were limited to the basic use of vocabulary and the manipulation of word or phrase in

completing a sentence. The first part of the test aimed to determine the students' skill in giving the synonym of the underlined word. The second part of the test is on stylistic skills which aimed to determine the ability of the students to complete the thought of a sentence by providing the needed part. Table 2 shows the students' percentage who gave the correct answers on stylistic skills.

Table 2
Students' Percentage with Correct Answers in Stylistic Skills

Stylistic Skills	Frequency	Percentage
1. Antecedent	416	86.12
2. Appositive	302	62.52
3. Infinitive Phrase	336	69.56
4. Prepositional Phrase	422	89.37
5. Verb	394	81.57
6. Adverb	429	87.16
7. Present Perfect Tense	316	65.42
8. Participial Phrase	373	77.23
9. Inverted Sentence	31	6.38

Completing a sentence by adding a prepositional phrase was quite easy to most students (87.37 percent), followed by the use of adverb (87.16 percent), antecedent (86.12 percent), verb (81.57 percent), participial phrase (77.23 percent), infinitive phrase (69.56 percent), the use of present perfect tense (65.42 percent), and appositive (62.52 percent). Out of the nine stylistic skills, the students found it difficult to manipulate inverted sentence, with only 31 or 6.38 percent providing the right answers. It can be inferred from the table that students need more drills or practice on sentence manipulation like the choice of descriptive word or phrase. Students, with the help of their mentor, must know when to use formal or familiar words. Moreover, Engineering students must learn to use formal or technical words in writing technical articles or reports, or when they describe scientific process.

3.1.3. Mechanical Skills

Table 3 shows the percentage of students who properly used punctuation marks.

Table 3
Percentage of Students who Used Punctuation Marks Properly (Mechanical Skills)

Mechanical Skills	Frequency	Percentage
1. Period	260	53.83
2. Quotation Marks	243	50.31
3. Comma	342	70.81
4. Exclamation Point	122	25.26
5. Hyphen	246	50.93
6. Colon	93	19.25
7. Semi-colon	243	50.31
8. Apostrophe	241	49.90

More than fifty (50) percent of the students used the following punctuation marks correctly : comma (70.81 percent), period (53.83 percent), hyphen (50.93 percent), quotation marks and semi-colon (50.31 percent). On the other hand, the following punctuation marks were difficult to most students since less than fifty (50) percent gave the correct answers: apostrophe (49.90 percent), exclamation point (25.26 percent), and colon (19.25 percent).

Data from the table imply that students have difficulties in the use of punctuation marks. Teachers must discover ways on how to develop students' knowledge and appreciation of the rules of grammar and mechanics.

3.1.4. Judgement Skills

The test on judgement skills asks the students to complete the thought of a sentence by adding a phrase or clause given in the options. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Percentage of Students with Correct Responses in Judgement Skills

Judgement Skills	Frequency	Percentage
1. Contrasting Ideas	120	24.84
2. Drawing Inferences	285	59.00
3. Addition of Ideas	294	60.86
4. Use of Subordinate Clause	324	67.08
5. Prepositional Phrase	299	61.90
6. Compound Sentence	310	64.18
7. Infinitive Phrase	384	79.50

The phrase or clause to be added depends on the nature of the idea in the initial part of the sentence. It might be contrasting ideas. This was answered by 120 students or 24.84 percent of the total respondents. It might be an inference or conclusion. Majority (59 percent) of the students were able to select the correct option. The sentence requiring an addition of idea but needing balanced structure was answered by 294 students or 60.86 percent. The use of subordinate clause in a complex sentence was answered 324 students or 67.08 percent. A sentence requiring the addition of a prepositional phrase to complete its meaning was answered by 299 students or 61.90 percent. Completing the thought of a compound sentence was answered by 310 students or 64.18 percent. The use of infinitive phrase was tackled by 384 students or 79.50 percent.

The findings show that majority of the students are equipped with most of the judgement skills. However, completing the thought of a sentence with contrasting idea appears difficult to majority of the students. More writing activities on this particular skill are therefore needed.

The second part of the test on judgement skills asks the students to choose the correct order of sentences in a paragraph. The paragraphs are categorized into narration, description, and exposition. Table 5 shows the results of the tests.

Table 5
Percentage of Students with Correct Responses in Paragraph Organization (Judgement Skills)

Paragraph Organization	Frequency	Percentage
1. Narration	169	34.98
2. Description	224	46.38
3. Exposition	186	26.08

Paragraph organization appears to be difficult to many students as shown by the fact that less than fifty (50) percent were able to give the correct sequence of sentences. It is in the expository type of paragraph that appears difficult to most students since compared to their scores in the narrative and descriptive types of paragraph, only 26.08 percent got the correct sentence sequence. In the narrative type of paragraph, more than one third of the students gave the right answers, while in the descriptive type, almost one half of the students or 43.38 percent gave the correct answers.

These findings indicate the need to hone the students' knowledge on paragraph organization.

3.2 Writing Skills of the Students that are Developed or Undeveloped

3.2.1. Grammatical Skills

Table 6 shows the number of students who have developed and/or undeveloped grammatical skills.

Table 6
Extent of Development of the Students' Grammatical Skills

Scores	Frequency	Percentage	Interpretation
15-20	192	39.75	Very adequately developed
10-14	241	49.90	Adequately developed
Below 10	50	10.35	Fairly/ Poorly developed
Total	483	100.00	

Out of 483 students, one hundred ninety-two or 39.75 percent showed that they have very adequately developed grammatical skills. Their scores were between 15-20 representing the highest bracket. Percentage-wise, the students who belonged to this group represented a little more than one-third of the total students.

Almost one half (49.90 percent) of the students belonged to the middle group. That is, although they have adequately developed grammatical skills, they need more exercises or activities to improve their grammatical skills. On the other hand, only a small percentage or 10.35 percent showed fairly developed grammatical skills for having obtained scores below ten (10).

3.2.2. Stylistic Skills

Table 7 shows the percentage of students who provided the correct responses on stylistic skills.

Table 7
Extent of Development of the Students' Stylistic Skills

Scores	Frequency	Percentage	Interpretation
15-20	129	26.71	Very adequately developed
10-14	315	65.22	Adequately developed
Below 10	39	8.07	Fairly/Poorly developed
Total	483	100.00	

As shown in Table 7, more than a quarter, 129 or 26.71 percent of the students whose scores were between 15-20 have very adequately developed stylistic skills. On the other hand, more than half, 315 or 65.22 percent of the students whose scores were between 10-14 have adequately developed stylistic skills but they still need some practice. Students with fairly developed stylistic skills represented less than 10 percent of the total group. This means that majority of the students need to further develop their stylistic skills, especially on the proper choice of vocabulary and the manipulation of modifiers.

3.2.3. Mechanical Skills

As shown in Table 8, only 79 or 16.36 percent of the students have very adequately developed mechanical skills.

Table 8
Extent of Development of the Students' Mechanical Skills

Scores	Frequency	Percentage	Interpretation
15-20	79	16.36	Very adequately developed
10-14	266	55.07	Adequately developed
Below 10	138	28.57	Fairly/Poorly developed
Total	483	100.00	

Majority, 266 or 55.07 percent whose scores were between 10-14 have adequately developed skills, but need additional practice to further hone their skills on the use of punctuation marks.

One hundred thirty-eight or 28.57 percent, or more than a quarter of the total students have fairly developed skills in mechanical skills as shown by their below average scores. The last group of students, together with those who have average knowledge of mechanical skills, need some immersion activities on the proper use of punctuation marks. The findings imply that the students need more practice on the proper use of punctuation marks.

3.2.4. Judgement Skills

Table 9 provides a general assessment of the extent of development of the students' judgement skills as shown by their scores in the tests on judgement skills.

Table 9

Extent of Development of the Students' Judgement Skills

Scores	Frequency	Percentage	Interpretation
15-20	704	21.53	Very adequately developed
10-14	278	57.56	Adequately developed
Below 10	101	20.91	Fairly/Poorly developed
Total	483	100.00	

One hundred four or 21.53 percent of the students have very adequately developed judgement skills, 278 or 57.56 percent have adequately developed skills, while 101 or 20.91 percent have fair to poor judgement skills. These findings imply that the students need to be exposed further to writing activities that will enhance their judgement skills.

The last part of the diagnostic tests which consists of two activities requires the students to identify the errors in the two paragraph selection in terms of grammar, misspelled words, and then ask them to apply the rules in punctuation marks and mechanics. Five points are allotted to errors in grammar, two in misspelled words, three in mechanics/punctuations, and ten in correcting the entire selection. In the second activity, the students are asked to replace the underlined word with appropriate word and to complete the article by filling the blanks with words, phrases or clauses. This is allotted ten points, or a total of twenty points or scores.

Table 10 shows the scores earned by the students in this test.

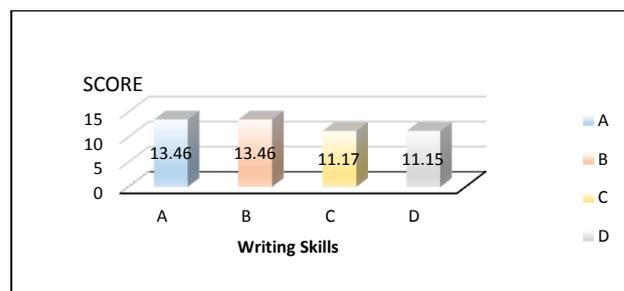
Table 10

Scores Obtained in Correcting a Composition

Scores	Frequency	Percentage	Interpretation
15-20	-		
10-14	7	1.45	Adequately developed
Below 10	476	98.55	Fairly/Poorly developed
Total	483	100.00	

This test appears to be difficult to the students as shown by the fact that not one obtained a score between 15-20 which is the highest bracket for students whose writing skills are very adequately developed. Only seven or 1.47 percent belonged to score bracket 10-14, and have adequately developed skills. Majority, 476 or 98.55 percent have fairly or poorly developed skill in correcting a longer composition. The average score obtained in the test I 3.57. The findings imply that the students need more exposure to longer writing, especially writings which test their four cognitive skills in writing namely, grammatical, stylistic, mechanical, and judgement skills.

Figure 1 presents a graphical illustration of the writing skills of the students based on the average scores they obtained in the diagnostic tests.



Legend: A-Grammatical Skills; B- Stylistic Skills; C- Mechanical Skills; D- Judgement Skills

Figure 1

Graphic Illustration of the Writing Skills of the Students

It can be gleaned from the figure that the average score obtained by the students in grammatical as well as stylistic skills is 13.46. The average score in mechanical skills is 11.17, and 11.15 in judgement skills.

Figure 1 shows that the students have adequately developed grammatical and stylistic skills but need to further improve their mechanical and judgement skills. They have the lowest average score in judgement skills, therefore more exercises on paragraph organization, especially the use of exposition must be given to the students.

4. Conclusions

Among the four writing skills, the students have adequately developed their grammatical and stylistic skills, like the use of the third principal part of the verb and modifier. In the case of grammatical skills, the use of prepositional phrase, antecedent, and verb. In the case of stylistic skills, subject-verb agreement and the use of some punctuations, like colon, apostrophe, and exclamation point.

The undeveloped skills of the students are due to their ability to spot error on the use of unnecessary adverb and article, subject-verb agreement in the case of grammatical skills; the use of inverted sentence in the case of stylistic skills; the use of colon, apostrophe and exclamation point in the use of mechanical skills; use of contrasting ideas in the case of judgement skills.

5. Recommendations

There is a need to evaluate other aspects of writing skills not covered in this study with the students being made to play active role in discovering their skills. Likewise, English teachers must devise ways of helping their students develop mastery of some writing skills. Moreover, teachers must devise their own teaching guide as a supplemental material in teaching writing skills and as their contribution to the promotion of writing skills among their students.

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Therezia O. Conti received the B.S. in Secondary Education, Major in English and Minor in Filipino, from Universidad de Santa Isabel, Naga City in 1991. She likewise studied Master of Arts in Education Major in English at the University of Saint Anthony, Iriga City in 2002. She received her Doctor of Education Major in Innovative Education Management degree from the University of Makati in 2012. She also obtained her Doctor of Philosophy Major in Filipino degree from the University of Batangas in November, 2016. She is presently connected with Batangas State University as an Associate Professor teaching General Education courses.

