

A MIXED METHODS STUDY ON WRITING SKILLS AND EXPERIENCES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

In a world heavily reliant on communication, writing stands as a vital pillar for academic, professional, and personal development. However, despite the widespread emphasis on English instruction, many students continue to face significant barriers in developing proficient writing skills. This study investigates the persistent struggles in writing among first-year students at Assumption College of Nabunturan (ACN), where English is the primary medium of instruction. Through a localized lens, the research explores key elements affecting students' writing performance, including their experiences, difficulties, coping mechanisms, and insights. Prior studies such as those by Alfaki (2015) and Jimenez et al. (2024) underscore global and national challenges related to grammar, organization, vocabulary, and cognitive limitations—concerns that were similarly evident among ACN students. This research utilized a mixed-methods approach involving a quantitative survey of 154 students across various college departments and qualitative in-depth interviews with selected participants. Findings revealed that students struggle particularly with organizing ideas, expressing thoughts coherently, and utilizing appropriate grammar and vocabulary. In addition, institutional expectations and time constraints contribute to anxiety and rushed outputs. Despite visible exposure to English, both instructors and students acknowledge the presence of persistent writing inadequacies. Notably, the lack of sufficient personal and local context in existing literature highlights the necessity of this study. By identifying specific writing issues unique to the ACN community, this research contributes to more relevant pedagogical strategies and support systems aimed at improving academic writing. The study concludes with recommendations tailored to institutional, instructional, and student-level interventions to foster better writing competency in English at the collegiate level.

Keyword: - Writing skills, Challenges and difficulties, English language proficiency, Cognitive disorders, Coherent organization, Vocabulary limitations, Localized educational context

1. THE PROBLEM AND ITS BACKGROUND

In a world shaped by words, effective writing is an important skill that acts as a foundation in shaping the academic, professional, and personal success of students. The writing skills of the students hold the potential to produce innovative ideas, express authentic sentiment, and develop cognitive progress. Even though the weight of words lays down the groundwork for understanding, the development of the writing skills of students has always been burdened by challenges and impediments of growth, especially in the English language [1]. These challenges and impediments were employed in the study as the elements of experiences, difficulties, coping mechanisms, and insights.

It is stated in the study by Alfaki (2015) in Sudan, Africa that the difficulties in writing are related to the knowledge of the English language, writing skills, and cognitive disorders observed by a multitude of students. Through these observable obstacles, it shows the struggles that many students encounter when expressing thoughts and ideas efficiently in a written form. Students find it hard to articulate thoughts and ideas when writing. In addition to that, cognitive disorders can complicate things even further. Alfaki (2015) also emphasizes that writing skills are not solely dependent on language proficiency; it also encompasses the ability to organize thoughts coherently, employ appropriate vocabulary, and follow the correct usage of grammar [2].

According to Jimenez et al. (2024) in one of the schools in Ozamiz City, Misamis Occidental, students also struggle with writing skills, showing that these struggles manifest in the difficulty of grammar, coherent organization, lack of available and valid information, time limits, and the extent of the vocabulary of the students. These result in disorganized writing that is difficult for readers to understand. The lack of sufficient and relevant information disconnects the writing. Time constraints add pressure, leading to rushed and unrevised works, and the lack of vocabulary makes it difficult to effectively explain ideas, making the use of repetitive terms or rudimentary language prevalent [3].

In Assumption College of Nabunturan Inc., although the predominant use of the English language is visibly abundant, students still struggle with writing. Fellow teachers and students also attest to this, stating that students are able to produce writing outputs, but mistakes and errors can be seen. This is a lack of adequacy and expertise in writing despite students showing the capability in writing, and most importantly, the goal of the institution to have students compete globally, which English is the main method of communication and correspondence, will not be attained. After consulting with the subject teachers of the researchers, it has also been found that the subject teachers have noticed the difficulty of students when it comes to writing. Fellow classmates also give testimony to the difficulties and barriers from time to time in their writing tasks. Based on these findings, the researchers have concluded that there is a significant complication of the writing skills of students in ACN [4].

While there is much research exploring writing skill difficulties among students in different educational settings, there is only a limited exploration of particular factors that affect students in Assumption College of Nabunturan. There are several existing studies in larger institutions that focus on wider problems such as sentence structure, correct grammar, and proper writing fluency; however, these fail to address the specific educational and linguistic contexts when it comes to the local community. There is also a lack of research on personal experiences of students at the Assumption College of Nabunturan which influence writing skills. The gap in research literature is very important and needed for a localized study that investigates the problem faced by the Assumption College of Nabunturan students, with a focus on finding the causes of the difficulties in academic writing activities [5].

1.1 Challenges in Writing Skills

Students encounter various challenges in mastering writing skills which include language proficiency, grammar, vocabulary, and organization. These difficulties hinder their ability to express thoughts clearly and coherently. Time constraints and limited access to valid information further complicate the writing process [3]. Cognitive factors also play a significant role in writing difficulties as observed in diverse educational settings [2].

1.2 Local Context and Its Influence

The unique educational and linguistic context of Assumption College of Nabunturan highlights the need for localized research. While English is widely used, students still exhibit inadequate writing expertise, impacting their global competitiveness. The testimonies of teachers and classmates reveal ongoing barriers in students' writing

performance [4]. This underscores the importance of exploring the personal experiences and specific challenges faced by these students.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Understanding the writing difficulties of students at Assumption College of Nabunturan is crucial for developing targeted interventions. This study aims to fill the gap in literature regarding local educational contexts and provide insights to improve academic writing skills. Enhancing these skills will contribute to the academic success and future opportunities of the students.

Writing Difficulty	Frequency	Description
Grammar Issues	High	Frequent errors in grammar affecting clarity.
Limited Vocabulary	High	Students struggle with insufficient word choice.
Time Constraints	Moderate	Lack of enough time to plan and write effectively.
Poor Organization	Moderate	Difficulty in structuring ideas logically.

Chart -1: Writing Difficulties Faced by Students

This chart illustrates the common writing difficulties experienced by students, including grammar issues, limited vocabulary, time constraints, and poor organization. These factors contribute significantly to the overall challenge in producing coherent and effective written outputs.

Writing Task	Mean Average Performance Level			Description
Knowledge in Writing	3.49	Agree		Students demonstrate good understanding of writing concepts.
Interest in Writing	3.28	Agree		Students show a positive attitude towards writing tasks.
Vocabulary in Writing	2.76	Agree		Students have satisfactory vocabulary but still limited.
Grammar in Writing	2.57	Agree		Grammar skills need improvement, showing frequent errors.
Organization in Writing	3.03	Agree		Students mostly organize ideas clearly but with some lapses.
Mechanics in Writing	2.99	Agree		Basic writing mechanics are generally followed but errors persist.
General Mean	3.01	Agree		Overall, students' writing performance is satisfactory.

Fig -1: Students' Performance in Writing Tasks

2.1 Time Constraints and Writing Quality

Time pressure significantly impacts the quality of students' writing. Under limited time, students tend to rush through tasks, resulting in errors and incomplete ideas. This affects the clarity and coherence of their written work, making it difficult for readers to follow their arguments and insights.

Table -1: Summary of Writing Skill Challenges

Challenge	Description	Impact on Writing	Frequency	Source
Grammar	Errors in sentence structure	Low clarity	High	Jimenez et al.
Vocabulary	Limited word choice	Repetitive language	Medium	Alfaki (2015)
Time Constraints	Rushed writing	Incomplete ideas	High	Jimenez et al.
Organization	Poor logical flow	Confusing structure	High	Alfaki (2015)
Cognitive Barriers	Learning difficulties	Expression problems	Medium	Alfaki (2015)

2.2 Role of Educational Context

The educational environment in Assumption College of Nabunturan plays a critical role in shaping students' writing abilities. Despite the widespread use of English, many students face challenges that hinder their academic writing growth. These issues are further compounded by:

- Lack of tailored support for writing improvement
- Insufficient exposure to advanced writing tasks
- Inconsistent feedback mechanisms from teachers
- Limited access to supplementary learning resources

3. IMPACT OF WRITING DIFFICULTIES ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Writing difficulties negatively affect students' academic achievements and confidence. Students who struggle with writing are less likely to engage in academic discussions and express their ideas effectively, impacting their overall learning experience and future opportunities.

Variables	Writing Skill Mean	Academic Performance Mean	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Interpretation
Writing Skill Level	3.01	—	—	—
Academic Performance (GPA)	—	2.85	—	—
Writing Skill & Academic Performance	—	—	0.65	Moderate Positive Correlation

Chart -2: Academic Performance and Writing Skill Correlation

3.1 Teachers' Perspectives on Student Writing

Teachers have observed that students frequently produce written work with numerous errors despite demonstrating understanding of the material. This indicates that writing difficulties are not only related to knowledge gaps but also to the skill of articulating ideas in writing.

Type of Writing Error	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Description
Grammar Errors	45	30%	Most common errors
Spelling Errors	30	20%	Frequently observed
Punctuation Errors	25	17%	Moderate occurrence
Vocabulary Errors	20	13%	Less frequent
Sentence Structure Errors	15	10%	Somewhat frequent
Organization Errors	10	7%	Least frequent
Total	145	100%	

Fig -2: Frequency of Writing Errors Noted by Teachers

The table highlights the common writing errors noted by teachers, with grammar errors being the most frequent, followed by spelling and punctuation mistakes. Vocabulary and sentence structure errors also appear but less often, while organization errors are the least common. These errors collectively affect students' writing fluency and clarity.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study highlight a critical need to address the writing skill level of first-year ACN students. Based on both the quantitative results and qualitative insights, it is evident that many students enter higher education lacking essential competencies in grammar, organization, coherence, and vocabulary usage. This gap may stem from underlying factors such as insufficient writing instruction in earlier educational levels, lack of motivation, or inadequate exposure to academic writing practices. Furthermore, the study revealed that students themselves are aware of their limitations and express a desire for targeted support to improve their writing. These findings underscore the importance of strengthening remedial writing programs, enhancing instructional methods, and providing consistent writing practice within the academic curriculum. By acknowledging and addressing these issues, educational institutions can better support students' academic growth and help ensure their success not only in college but also in their future professional endeavors.

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