COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE WRITING COMPETENCIES OF GRADUATE STUDENTS ENTERING IN A HIGHER TEACHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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Abstract

This study aimed to analyze and compare the writing competencies of graduate students entering in higher teacher education institution. This study utilized the descriptive research method. The main instrument in gathering the data was the validated writing rubrics. The respondents were 101 purposively selected graduate school students who took the Graduate School Admission Test (GSAT) at The National Teachers College-Manila. After the data were gathered, the researcher found out that there were 28 MAPEH, 48 Mathematics, and 25 Science majors who took the GSAT for the past three semesters. The respondents had a fair writing performance in content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. The overall writing performance of the graduate students was fair. There was no significant difference in the writing performance of MAPEH and Science groups, however, there was a significant difference in the Mathematics group. Lastly, there was a significant difference in the writing performance in content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics when the respondents were grouped according to area of specialization. Based on the findings of the study, it can be noted that Graduate School Students were more knowledgeable in content compared to organization, language use, vocabulary and mechanics. Moreover, Science majors were more knowledgeable in writing performance compared to MAPEH and Mathematics majors. It is recommended that, Graduate School Professors should monitor the writing skills of every student in their class; Higher Education Institutions must see to it that in their curriculum, they give emphasis on the importance of having good writing skills. The National Teachers College, School of Advanced Studies may offer additional course in the curriculum that offers an intensive training in writing academic papers.

Keywords: Graduate Students, Higher Teacher Education Institution, Writing Competencies, Writing Performance.

1. Introduction

Writing is one of the most important skills that every person must develop; this is important for a man to succeed in whatever field of interest in life. Man's ability to express feelings and ideas, to persuade, to convince, to react and to respond are all features for successful life and career.

On the other hand, some people may see writing as a laborious and even dreaded exercise of struggling to place thoughts on paper while developing mastery over the rules of writing, such as mechanics, citation format and grammar. English language plays an important role in a man's everyday life. That is why, it is important that everyone should develop the good command in English language whether it is spoken or written.

Learners set themselves demanding goals. They want to be able to master English language to a high level of accuracy and fluency so that they will become successful in whatever field they choose. In the Philippines, one who is good in the English language has an edge in academics and opportunity to be employed. However, even though the learners know that writing is an important skill, they still having difficulty in mastering or having fluency in this skill. A lot of people even in the academe are seemingly not so adept in writing. All learners could be good writers with the guidance and help of a competent writing teacher. It is expected therefore that all teachers possess good writing skills so that they could impart these to the learners. But, reports by the Social Weather Stations (SWS) indicate that in the Philippines, the national proficiency in English has declined by 10 percent in the last 12 years (Araneta and Punongbayan, 2006).

Moreover, according to Sales as cited by Gamiao (2010) on his study said that the Philippines used to pride itself in its citizens possessing proficiency in English but now, only one out of three Filipino speaks and writes fluent English and this does not excuse the teachers. In addition, Al Fadda (2012) found out that post graduate students are having difficulty also in academic writing and other skills needed to become a successful writer.

In view of these issues and problems in the educational landscape, this study that focuses on comparing and analyzing the writing competencies of graduate students entering in a higher teacher education institution may help to find out the writing difficulties being experienced by the teachers enrolled in the graduate studies.

2. Research Problem

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of area of specialization?
2. What is the writing performance of the respondents in terms of the following skills;

   2.1. Content;
   2.2. Organization;
   2.3. Vocabulary;
   2.4. Language Use; and
   2.5. Mechanics?

3. What is the over-all writing performance of the respondents?
4. Is there a significant difference in the writing performance in five criteria of each group of the respondents?
5. Is there a significant difference in the writing performance in each criterion of the respondents when grouped according to the area of specialization?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested in the study:
1. There is no significant difference in the writing performance in five criteria of each group of the respondents.
2. There is no significant difference in the writing performance in each criterion of the respondents when grouped according to the area of specialization.

3. Review of the Relevant Literature

Nowadays, there has been a growing concern in enhancing ones writing skills as students in the higher education as education expands at this stage. Learners go on to a more detailed knowledge obtaining situation where their writing skills becomes more focus and more oriented. The immediate practical application of writing is not the reason why it is important in all university curricula, but because it is believed that, from a broader perspective, writing is a thinking tool (Afrin, 2016).

Writing is one of the four language macro-skills that every individual is expected to learn. It is corollary to the three other skills – reading, listening and speaking – and thus it cannot be learned in isolation. In whatever grade level, students are thought the fundamentals of writing for variety of purposes (Ramos, Jr. 2015).

Furthermore, writing is one of the essential skills which every individual acquires and improves in the formative years. Unfortunately, this area is not given due importance. The reason behind this is that, people nowadays give more importance on oral communication over written expression. In addition, school nowadays lack programs on specializing students' writing skills and unfortunately only in their language subject like English where they could practice their writing skills. Writing is the vital means of communication within organization. It is essential for achieving career and business goals that is why writing is imperative to enhance and hone one's skills (Thompson & Chhabriya, 2014).

In addition, like speaking, writing is a productive skill because at the end of the writing task, the student can create something. It is the result of employing strategies to manage the composing process, which is one gradually developing a text. It involves several activities such as setting goals, generating ideas, organizing information, selecting appropriate language, making a draft, reading and reviewing, then revising and editing.

Writing, therefore, is a complex process that allows writers to explore thoughts, and ideas, and makes these ideas visible and concrete. Moreover, Hedge as cited in Gamiao, (2010) underscored that writing is a complex process which neither easy nor spontaneously for many second language writers. Writing also is an act of communication which suggests an interactive process which takes place between the writer and the reader via text. Good writers also consider the purpose and the audience before putting anything on paper.

In addition, writing will make a persona stronger thinker. Writing needs mental discipline and close attention to a set of logical rules. It also obliges you to carefully sort out, think through, and organized your ideas. Writing strengthens the skills as a reader and a listener. As a reader, one becomes more critically aware of others' writer's ideas and evidences they provide to support those ideas. Therefore, a realistic attitude about writing must rest on the idea that writing is a skill, not a "natural gift". It is a skill like driving, typing, or cooking; and like any other skills, it can be learned (Langan, 2011).

Moreover, in the study conducted by Solinon et. al. (2013) on investigating the morphological errors committed by selected fourth year students of the same locality mentioned above, it was revealed that, Subject-Verb Agreement had the highest rank with a mean of 7.20 which is described as "moderate error committed". However, Misuse of Verb had a mean of 6.86 and Plural Markers had 6.25 which both described as "low error committed". Generally, the researchers found out that there are 6.77 total mean along the three categories of morphological errors committed by selected fourth year students with a given descriptive equivalence of "low error committed".

Furthermore, the findings of the study of Cequena and Gustillo (2011), indicate that the students' limited linguistic resources such as grammar and vocabulary knowledge, and lack of content knowledge, as well as lack of composing strategies are the perennial problems of writers. However, writing difficulties are not just happening in a high school and under graduate setting. Al Fadda (2012) found out that post graduate students are having difficulty in academic writing and other skills needed to become a successful writer. In the same setting, using Arab post-graduate students, Abdul kareem (2013) as cited by Ramos Jr. (2015) on his study, revealed that it is in sentence structure, mechanics, and vocabulary where most common writing problems were encountered by the students. Both studies concluded that one of the reasons why these problems

are being encountered by the students is because of the fact that English is their second language (L2).

University students must be competent to write clearly about the topics related to their specialization (Mustaque, 2014). Even after practicing writing for a long period of time, students encountered various writing problems when they enrolled in university for higher education. Uddin (2014) mentioned in his study, that writing is the most focused, but at the same time, the least developed English language skill among students in Bangladesh, and this situation is not different in the tertiary level.

Students may encounter many problems in their English writing as second language writers. In this regard, Mustaque (2014), mentioned in his study that, students are often found that they have acknowledge about vocabulary and grammatical aspects such as using the right tenses, collocation, and prepositions, but after evaluating them, students still facing problems in other English writing skills such as writing coherently, re-structuring their ideas, and developing supporting ideas.

4. Methodology

The study utilized the descriptive research method to gather data about present conditions and to interpret these data through contrast, comparison and relationship. There were 101 purposively selected graduate school students who took the Graduate School Admission Test (GSAT) at The National Teachers College-Manila that served as respondents of the study. In determining the areas of specializations to represent the study, the researcher utilized simple random sampling.

The main instrument used in gathering data was the validated writing rubrics used to check the essay of the respondents. The essay tests were personally checked by the researcher using the validated writing rubrics. To ensure the validity of the scores given by the researcher, the essay tests were also cross-checked by the two subject experts and the average scores were obtained. After the checking, the results of the essay tests were treated statistically to determine the writing competencies of the selected graduate school students.

5. Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Table 1: Profile of the Respondents in Terms of Area of Specialization

Area of Specialization	Frequency	Percentage
MAPEH	28	27.72
Mathematics	48	47.53
Science	25	24.75
Total	101	100.00

It can be seen that 28 or 27.72 percent of the total number of respondents are MAPEH majors, 48 or 47.53 percent are Mathematics majors, and lastly, 25 or 24.75 percent are Science majors. The data show that for the past three semesters, Mathematics has the most number of enroll lees while Science has the least number of enrollees among the three areas of specialization.

These differences in the number of enrollees per area of specialization could be attributed to different factors. Peer pressures, interest of the students, professional growth and demand in the industry are just some of those factors that could affect these numbers.

Table 2: Writing Performance of the Respondents in terms of Content

Rating	MAPEH		Mathematics		Science		Total	
	f	%	F	%	f	%	F	%
Very Good (4)	5	17.86	6	12.50	9	36.00	20	19.80
Good (3)	4	14.29	20	41.67	13	52.00	37	36.63
Fair (2)	10	35.71	14	29.17	1	4.00	25	24.75
Needs Improvement (1)	9	32.14	8	16.67	2	8.00	19	18.81
Mean	2.15	Fair	2.51	Good	2.71	Good	2.46	Fair

The table shows that MAPEH majors had 2.15 mean score which means that among the three groups or areas of specialization, they had the lowest performance in content compared to Mathematics with a mean score of 2.51 and Science with 2.71.

It can also be seen in the table that 37 or 36.63 percent of the total number of respondents had a good writing performance. This implies that the central idea and clarity of purpose, the critical, careful thought and analysis and/or insights and the good, relevant supporting example and evidences were generally present in the paper of most of the Graduate School Students. On the other hand, even though most of the respondents obtained a good writing performance in content, the over-all mean score of 2.46 reveals that as a whole, MAPEH, Mathematics, and Science majors had a fair writing performance in content.

Table 3: Writing Performance of the Respondents interms of Organization

Rating	MAPEH		Mathematics		Science		Total	
	f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%
Very Good (4)	3	10.71	6	12.5	4	16.00	13	12.87
Good (3)	3	10.71	6	12.5	9	36.00	18	17.82
Fair (2)	6	21.43	15	31.25	8	32.00	29	28.71
Needs Improvement (1)	16	57.14	21	43.75	4	16.00	41	40.59
Mean	1.81	Fair	1.98	Fair	2.39	Fair	2.06	Fair

It was revealed in the checking, that these students answered the question directly. The students abruptly gave examples as an opening sentence of their composition instead of using some of the different techniques in writing good introduction, such as giving questions or giving quotation. Most of the examples were just enumerated and give no further explanation that would give additional information about the topic. Summarization or other techniques in writing conclusion were not visible in their paper. After giving all the examples and answering the question, the respondents just automatically ended their paper.

Furthermore, the mean scores of 1.81, 1.98, and 2.39 of MAPEH, Mathematics, and Science major respectively, resulted to a mean score of 2.06. This means that the writing performance in terms of organization of 101 Graduate School Students was fair.

Table 4: Writing Performance of the Respondents interms of Vocabulary

Rating	MAPEH		Mathematics		Science		Total	
	F	%	F	%	f	%	F	%
Very Good (4)	1	3.57	7	14.58	4	16.00	12	11.88
Good (3)	10	35.71	13	27.08	8	32.00	31	30.69
Fair (2)	7	25.00	20	41.67	9	36.00	36	35.64
Needs Improvement(1)	10	35.71	8	16.67	4	16.00	22	21.78
Mean	2.01	Fair	2.34	Fair	2.45	Fair	2.27	Fair

Evaluation of the students' paper revealed that the respondents used simple and common words that can be easily understood by the readers, but on the other hand their writing lacks variety.

Further analysis on the table shows that, the mean score of MAPEH Mathematics, and Science majors reveal a total mean score of 2.27 which implies that graduate school students had fair writing performance in vocabulary. This means that, the written outputs of the students are lack of variety, although the words they used can communicate to the reader for easy understanding.

Table 5: Writing Performance of the Respondents in terms of Language Use

Rating	MAPEH		Mathematics		Science		Total	
	F	%	F	%	f	%	F	%
Very Good (4)	3	10.71	7	14.58	4	16	14	13.86
Good (3)	6	21.43	15	31.25	7	28	28	27.72
Fair (2)	7	25	18	37.5	12	48	37	36.63
Needs Improvement(1)	12	42.86	8	16.67	2	8	22	21.78
Mean	2.04	Fair	2.40	Fair	2.49	Fair	2.31	Fair

Table presented that there were seven MAPEH majors, 18 Mathematics majors, and 12 Science majors had fair writing performance. This implies that most of the graduate school students committed a frequent error in their written output. In addition, these errors may also cause the reader to stop and reread the part of the writing.

Further analysis on the table shows that, the mean score of 2.04, 2.40, and 2.49 of MAPEH, Mathematics and Science majors respectively reveal an over-all mean score of 2.31. This indicates that graduate school students had fair writing performance in terms of language use.

Table 6: Writing Performance of the Respondents in terms of Mechanics

Rating	MAPEH		Mathematics		Science		Total	
	f	%	F	%	f	%	F	%
Very Good (4)	0	0.00	7	14.58	2	8.00	9	8.91
Good (3)	7	25.00	16	33.33	11	44.00	34	33.66
Fair (2)	10	35.71	16	33.33	9	36.00	35	34.65
Needs Improvement(1)	11	39.29	9	18.75	3	12.00	23	22.77
Mean	1.92	Fair	2.35	Fair	2.47	Fair	2.25	Fair

It can be seen in the table that there were 10 or 35.71 percent MAPEH majors, 16 or 33.33 percent Mathematics majors and nine or 36.00 percent Science majors had fair writing performance in

mechanics. This means that majority, the 35 or 34.65 percent graduate school students, most of the sentences they had in their written outputs were well constructed, but these sentences had the same structure and length. On the other hand, these 35 students also committed several errors in mechanics and/or spelling that interfere with the understanding of their outputs.

Evidently, these errors in mechanics were reflected in the papers of these 10 MAPEH majors. The demonstrative pronouns "there" and "their" and the vowels "a" and "u" were often interchanged in terms of usage. There were also errors in spelling such as omitted letters or words with double letters that were visible in their paper.

Furthermore, it can be seen in the paper of these 16 Mathematics majors, that in terms of capitalization, they often write the first personal pronoun "I" into a small letter. Additionally, errors in spellings were also visible in their paper. They sometimes interchanged the two vowels "e" and "i", moreover, words with double letters were also additional problem of their paper.

Additionally, Science majors also had fair writing performance as they committed some errors in subject-verb agreement. They were confused when to use the singular and plural form of the verb. These errors were mostly visible in the long sentences, because the respondents were having a hard time in identifying the subject of the sentence which the verb must agree. Furthermore, errors in spellings such as excess letters were also noticeable in their paper. This could be due to typographical error, because during the examination, respondents were using computer in writing their essay, but on the other hand, it is still the responsibility of the writers to make sure that their composition is free from any error whatever tool they are using while writing.

As a whole, the MAPEH, Mathematics and Science major graduate school students had a fair writing performance in terms of mechanics. This implies that in general, graduate school students have well-constructed sentences, but these sentences had similar structures and/or length. Graduate school students also make several errors in mechanics and/or spelling that interfere with understanding. The fair rating in mechanics can be attributed to the lack of knowledge of the proper writing procedure such as punctuations, spelling, capitalization and grammar.

Table 7: Summary of Writing Performance of the Respondents

Criteria	MAPEH		Mathematics		Science		Over-all	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Content	2.15	1.09	2.51	0.92	2.71	1.10	2.46	1.04
Organization	1.81	1.04	1.98	1.04	2.39	1.00	2.06	1.03
Vocabulary	2.01	0.94	2.34	0.94	2.45	0.96	2.27	0.95
Language Use	2.04	1.05	2.40	0.94	2.49	0.87	2.31	0.95
Mechanics	1.92	0.80	2.35	0.97	2.47	0.82	2.25	0.86
Over-all Mean	1.99 - Fair	0.98	2.32 - Fair	0.96	2.50 - Good	0.95	2.27 - Fair	0.97

As illustrated in the table, among three areas of specializations, the respondents had the highest mean in content (2.46) and lowest in organization (2.06), the over-all mean of 2.27 indicates that the respondents possessed fair writing abilities.

Further analysis on the table reveals that, among the three areas of specializations, only Science majors, with an over-all mean score of 2.50 had a good writing performance. This good writing performance could be attributed to the exposure of the Science major in to the different writing experiences. Writing exercises such as writing investigatory project, experiment narrative, laboratory experiments, and other experiments that involved writing could be a big help to Science major to have this good writing performance.

On the other hand, MAPEH and Mathematics majors got an over-all mean score of 1.99 and 2.32 respectively, which reveals that they had fair writing performance. This fair writing performance could be due to the different expertise and concentration of these two areas of specializations. The MAPEH majors are more on skills development. They mostly study and concentrated on the different music and arts of the world, dances, sports and health related topics are the field where the MAPEH majors good at.

However, Mathematics majors are more on numbers, equations, formulas, measurements, and analyzing number problem are the field of specialization of these graduate school students. Generally, this fair writing performance of these two areas of specialization could not be due to lack of knowledge, but because of lack of exposure and training in the different writing activities. As mentioned by Wai Ling Lai (2010), that unsatisfactory writers were failed to deliver a clear focus in writing or the ideas were not properly supported, and this is due to lack of proper training given to the students.

Table 8: Over-all Writing Performance of the Respondents

Score	Description	MAPEH	%	Mathematics	%	Science		Total	%
20 - 25	Very Good	0	0.00	2	4.17	0	0.00	2	1.98
13 - 19	Good	8	28.57	16	33.33	11	44.00	35	34.65
7 to 12	Fair	10	35.71	26	54.17	14	56.00	50	49.50
0 to 6	Needs Improvement	10	35.71	4	8.33	0	0.00	14	13.86
Total		28	100.00	48	100.00	25	100.00	101	100.00
Mean		9.93	Fair	11.58	Fair	12.51	Good	11.34	Fair

Analysis reveals that only Science major had a good writing performance compared to MAPEH and Mathematics majors who only had fair writing performance. The mean writing performance of MAPEH, Mathematics, and Science majors were 9.93, 11.58 and 12.51 respectively. The over-all mean score of 11.34 means that generally, graduate school students had a fair writing performance.

These results conform with the study of Leu (2008) who revealed that communication in written discourse structure was marginally more difficult than versions with oral structures. The results also suggest that there are several concerns that must be addressed by an individual to become effective and good writer, as what Edades (2005) suggests, writing is a form of communication one must conscientiously and continuously learn.

Furthermore, Nik et. al. (2010), mentioned that it is evidently true that writing possess a number of problems to students, as it is a skill that is difficult to master because of some convention that the individual need to master before such person become good and proficient writer.

Table 9: Difference in the Writing Performance of the Respondents in the Five Criteria for each Group of Respondents

Group of Respondents	Computed F	Tabular F at 0.05	Description	Decision
MAPEH	0.83	2.44	Not Significant	AcceptH$_o$
Mathematics	2.71	2.41	Significant	RejectH$_o$
Science	0.34	2.45	Not Significant	Accept H$_o$

As presented in the table, only the Mathematics grouphad a significant difference in the writing performance in the five criteria. At significant level of 0.05 and with the tabular value of 2.41, that is less than the computed value of 2.71 the null hypothesis is rejected. For MAPEH and Science majors, the tabular values of 2.44 and 2.45are greater than their respective computed values of 0.83 and 0.34. This shows that at this juncture, the null hypothesis is accepted.

It can be inferred that the writing performance of Mathematics major in five writing competencies are significantly different from one another, while for MAPEH and Science majors, their writing performance in five writing competencies are not significantly different from each other. These two groups of students exhibited almost the same performance in the five writing competencies.

Moreover, it can be derived from the data that these differences in the writing performances were due to possible individual differences of the graduate school students. It can be noted also that even though they are taking up the same subject of specialization, there are several factors, such as background knowledge, linguistics ability and interest towards writing that may affect their writing performance.

Table 10: Difference in the Writing Performance of the Respondents in Each Criterion when Grouped According to Area of Specialization

Criteria	Computed F	Tabular F at 0.05	Description	Decision
Content	1.93	3.09	Not Significant	Accept H$_o$
Organization	3.18	3.09	Significant	Reject H$_o$
Vocabulary	1.48	3.09	Not Significant	Accept H$_o$
Language Use	2.45	3.09	Not Significant	Accept H$_o$
Mechanics	4.55	3.09	Significant	Reject H$_o$
Total Score	3.16	3.09	Significant	Reject H$_o$

At 0.05 level and tabular value of 3.09, the table shows that out of five writing competencies, the null hypothesis is accepted in the three competencies. Specifically, content (1.93), vocabulary (1.48), and language use (2.45), have computed values that are less than the tabular value, thus, accepting the null hypothesis. This means that the writing performance of MAPEH, Mathematics and Science graduate school students were not significantly different from each other in these three writing competencies.

On the other hand, in organization and mechanics the computed values are 3.18 and 4.55 respectively. These are both greater than the tabular value indicating that the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that the writing performances of the graduate school students were significantly different from each other in these two competencies.

The computed value of the total score was 3.16 which shows that, in general, the writing performances of the three groups of respondents in five writing competencies were significantly different from each other.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. MAPEH, Mathematics and Science majors are more knowledgeable in content compared to organization, language use, vocabulary and mechanics.
2. The Graduate School Students have least knowledge in organization compared to content, language use, vocabulary and mechanics.
3. Science majors are more knowledgeable in writing compared to MAPEH and Mathematics majors.

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