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Analysis of the writing performance and difficulties of Indigenous Junior High School students for the school year 2024-2025

Jona Jean C. Dela Cruz, Daryll Jim Angel
President Ramon Magsaysay State University

ABSTRACT: This study focused on the analysis of the writing performance and difficulties of Indigenous Junior High School students for the school year 2024-2025. The results of this study were utilized as a basis for the development of an enhancement module on English writing for Indigenous Students. The study utilized a mixed-methods and descriptive design, involving 150 Grade 10 Indigenous students and 15 English teachers from IPEd schools in Zambales. Quantitative data on writing performance was gathered using the Writing Assessment Measure (WAM) and analyzed with descriptive statistics. Qualitative data on teaching challenges and strategies was collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed thematically.

Results revealed that Indigenous students has a "Poor" performance across content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics, with significant challenges in content development and organization. While the interview with the teachers identified four key challenges: limited English proficiency, cultural and linguistic influence, cognitive and comprehension struggles, and expression and communication barriers. Teachers utilized strategies such as basic literacy skill development, bilingual approaches, culturally responsive teaching, and structured writing activities.

Indigenous students demonstrated consistently "Poor" writing skills, indicating systemic issues related to language proficiency and cultural factors. They faced multifaceted challenges in content development, organization, and mechanics. A holistic approach is necessary, integrating culturally responsive teaching and bilingual support. Effective teaching strategies and a specialized writing module were found to be crucial for improving students' writing abilities. To enhance the writing skills of Indigenous students, it is recommended to implement comprehensive, long-term early literacy programs with tailored interventions and increased resources, develop curriculum materials that explicitly teach writing strategies and provide targeted grammar and mechanics instruction, mandate professional development for culturally responsive teaching and establish bilingual education programs, support teachers in disseminating effective teaching strategies, and implement, evaluate, and expand the specialized writing module, integrating it into the curriculum and creating digital versions.

I.   INTRODUCTION

Effective English writing skills are crucial for Indigenous students as they engage in various academic and extracurricular tasks. Improving students' writing talents needs commitment, practice, and a methodical approach. Many factors are affecting the students English writing competencies primarily, these are their ability, the learning process and classroom situation, Zidan (2020).

Experts agree that writing is a highly regarded academic skill as it demonstrates a person's language proficiency, ability to develop concepts, and capacity for abstract thinking (Saladino, 2015; Lasaten, 2018). However, writing is a multifaceted task that necessitates the integration of diverse abilities. Proficient writing relies on the proficiency of fine motor skills, visual-motor planning, attention, sequencing, critical thinking, memory, and a comprehensive understanding of grammar, sentence structure, vocabulary, and the intended purpose of writing (Steven et al., 2017). Interestingly, good writing goes beyond mere accuracy in grammar, punctuation, and spelling. According to Nordquist (2017), it also involves addressing the readers' interests, having a clear purpose, presenting a specific point, supporting it with relevant and well-organized information, and using appropriate language.

Numerous students encounter difficulties with writing due to factors such as their communicative ability, learning style, and the extent to which English is used as a primary (L1) or second (L2) language in their home countries as stated by Gatcho and Ramos (2020). Based by the reported results of the 2019 Functional Literacy, Education, and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS), about half of Filipinos fell into the lowest skill category in writing, with only 6% of them meeting the requirements for their grade level, Inquirer (2023).

In the Philippines the literacy rate of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) faces significant challenges. One is language barrier. Instruction often occurs in Filipino or English, while many IP communities have distinct native languages, creating difficulties in writing and participation. Writing proficiency is one of the requirements for being literate, has proved problematic for the province's indigenous peoples. Indigenous learners of the Philippines always struggle when learning and writing English as a second language, Leaño et al. (2019). Based on the data analysis made by Usma et al. (2018), indigenous students' perceived English language proficiency was found to be low. The majority of these students experienced problems with writing in English at university, and they had trouble using the language for both academic and personal purposes. Further, large-scale standardized test results demonstrate that, in comparison to their non-Indigenous peers, Indigenous students score poorly in English writing, falling well short of the necessary standards, Shalley and Stewart (2017) as cited in Li et al. (2021).

In the Philippine context, enhancing language literacy is accompanied by several challenges that impede the learners from acquiring and learning a target language (Leaño et al., 2019). Although language literacy enhancement in the country was reflected in the K-12 curriculum through Language Arts and Multiliteracies Curriculum (LAMC) (DepEd, 2016), it is still a challenging task for Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) teachers to integrate some pedagogical strategies into language teaching given the diverse needs of the indigenous learners (Protacio, 2021).

According to Bastida et al. (2022), improving language literacy is among the most important learning objectives in the Philippine K–12 curriculum. But then, due to many limitations, these affected the language learning proficiency of the indigenous learners, and the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) teachers view this language literacy upgrading as a difficult endeavor. Additionally, Meneses et al. (2023) noted that because the curriculum is taught primarily in English, it might be difficult for students to improve their literacy skills, which include being able to read, write, and speak Filipino in a formal setting.

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In this study, the researcher used a mixed methods design, specifically quantitative and qualitative. A mixed-method approach is more than collecting and analyzing two kinds of data. Collecting and analyzing both types of data builds a stronger study than just qualitative or quantitative research (Creswell, 2014). This research design can be a powerful tool for analyzing the level of writing performance by Indigenous learners. This approach combines quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, providing a more comprehensive picture than either method alone (Dawadi et al., 2021).

This study utilized a descriptive design to analyze the level of English writing performance of the Grade 10 Indigenous Students in the Division of Zambales (quantitative phase). According to Grove, Burns, and Gray (2013), as cited by Baker, C. (2017), descriptive design "could be used to develop theory, identify problems with current practice, justify current practice, make judgements, or determine what others in a similar situation were doing." Bouchrika (2024) noted that descriptive research guides the researcher toward understanding the problem. This research design described variables without changing them, so it did not look at possible cause and effect.

And then, for the qualitative phase to get a rich, detailed understanding of the challenges experienced by the teachers in teaching writing, they purposely selected English teachers as participants. This approach stressed the investigation of participants' assigned meaning and employed a naturalistic viewpoint to comprehend a phenomenon in its natural environment (Bradshaw, Atkinson, & Doody, 2017 as cited in Lam et al., 2019). A qualitative descriptive study was all about capturing a clear picture of the topic. This design allowed for the rich descriptions of teachers' experiences, capturing their unique perspectives and challenges.

The application of the said design helped identify the overall level of English writing performance and difficulties of grade 10 students. Significantly, it assisted in recognizing difficulties in different aspects of writing: (a) content, (b) organization, (c) grammar, (d) vocabulary, and (e) mechanics, as well as exploring the challenges of teachers in teaching writing and the methods or strategies that they employed in enhancing the writing performance of the indigenous students. By using a mixed-methods design, the researcher gained valuable insights and used this information to improve their learning experience.

Data Collection

For the quantitative phase, the researcher adapted a flow chart scheme in administering the Writing Assessment Measure (WAM) to each class as per schedule in their English classes. This helped in visually depicting the steps involved in administering the WAM, ensuring consistency across test administrators. This minimized errors and maintained the integrity of the assessment. Figure three (3) below describes the phases that were followed in the implementation of WAM.
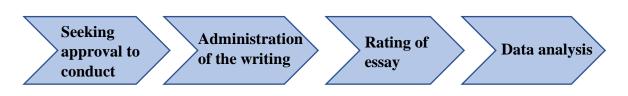
| Seeking approval to conduct | Administration of the writing | Rating of essay | Data analysis |

Figure 3. Flow Chart of the Writing Assessment (WAM) Implementation

As an application of the qualitative method, the researcher gathered the data by means of conducting individual interviews among the English teachers of an IPEd implementing school. According to Giorgi (2012), conducting interviews and focus groups should maintain a professional distance that allows adequate time for answering questions, discussion, observation, and recording of data. According to Doyle (2020), semi-structured interviews were chosen for several reasons. Firstly, this method enabled the researcher to gain subjective and narrative descriptions of the theme. Secondly, in semi-structured interviews, participants were asked the same questions, thus the information could be organized around areas of particular interest to address the research aims. There was also considerable flexibility, allowing participants to talk and freely express their feelings and perceptions. Finally, the fact that the researcher could ask for clarifications enhanced validity.

Data Analysis (Quantitative Phase)

Descriptive analysis was made in the quantitative phase using a standardized writing skills test to determine the level of writing performance of the students in terms of understanding of standard written English in content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. As well as their level of difficulty based on content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. Further, this research attempted to find out existing relationships among variables and to develop some generalizations. Specifically, the researcher employed the following statistical tools:

Percentage. Used to determine the proportion of the demographic profiles of the respondents.

Weighted Mean. Used to calculate the significance of individual data points among the variables identified in the study.

Transmutation Table. The following levels of writing competency and level of writing difficulty were used as the context of grading that translates the raw scores of the students based on their performance in the assessments. These levels of assessment and proficiency was adapted from the K+12 curriculum (2016).

Level of Writing Performance

Descriptive Rating	Score	Scale
Outstanding	4	3.25 – 4.00
Satisfactory	3	2.51 – 3.24
Fairly Satisfactory	2	1.76 – 2.50
Poor	1	1.0 1.75

Difficulty in Writing

Index	Difficulty
0.86 above	Very Easy
0.71 - 0.85	Easy
0.30 - 0.70	Moderate
0.15 - 0.29	Difficult
0.14 below	Very Difficult

Data Analysis (Qualitative Phase)

The researcher used the thematic inductive analysis method to analyze the data for this qualitative study. According to Braun & Clarke (2021) and McMillan & Schumacher (2010 as cited in Cruse, Holtzman, Gault, Croom & Polk, 2019), the thematic inductive analysis process helped synthesize and make meaning from the data. McMillan & Schumacher (2010 in Cruse et al., 2019) identified this process as a methodical process that included transcription, coding, categorizing, thematization, and interpretation.

In analyzing the qualitative data that described the challenges of the teachers and strategies and methods employed by the teachers in teaching writing to IP students, Thematic Inductive Analysis was applied to determine the themes present in the responses. It was done according to the following steps:

Transcription. This was the first step and involved converting the recorded data capture of every participant's detailed description of their experiences.

Coding. The researcher initially read the retrieved responses from the respondents several times for familiarization of the contents. Notes were given to relevant statements and words by combing through the phrases and paragraphs. After the initial coding, the collected data was further categorized and sorted. Recurring codes were grouped together, as were the related encryptions.

Categorization. The categories of codes reflected were then regrouped and classified to determine the themes emergent in the responses.

Thematization. This was the final step, where the researcher identified the overarching themes that ran through the categorized data. These themes represented the core meanings and significant patterns uncovered in the analysis. Thematization involved looking across the categories and summarizing the key insights which had been revealed about the research question.

III. DISCUSSION

1. Level of writing performance of Indigenous students

1.1 Content
The findings revealed that a majority (50.67%) scored "Poor" in writing content, with an overall mean score of 1.67, also categorized as "Poor," indicating significant challenges in structuring ideas, organizing thoughts, and elaborating on topics; this aligns with previous research highlighting language barriers, limited vocabulary, and difficulties in sentence construction as key obstacles, suggesting a systemic need for targeted interventions focusing on vocabulary development, sentence structure, and content organization to improve writing proficiency.

1.2 Organization
The findings revealed a significant deficiency in writing organization, with 64% scoring "Poor" and a mean score of 1.45, indicating major challenges in structuring their writing. Only a small percentage achieved "Fairly Satisfactory" (26.67%) or "Satisfactory" (9.33%) ratings, and none were "Outstanding." This aligns with previous research highlighting difficulties in developing and connecting ideas, crafting effective introductions and thesis statements, and using discourse markers, compounded by linguistic and cognitive barriers, particularly for low-proficiency learners.

1.3 Grammar
The results indicated a critical deficiency in grammatical accuracy, with 83.33% scoring "Poor" and a mean score of 1.21. Only a small fraction achieved "Fairly Satisfactory" (12.67%) or "Satisfactory" (4%) ratings, and none were "Outstanding." This highlights significant grammatical challenges, consistent with broader research indicating that ESL students struggle with grammar, vocabulary, idea development, and organization, particularly in academic writing, with common errors involving articles, punctuation, singular/plural forms, and prepositions.

1.4 Vocabulary
The findings revealed a severe vocabulary deficiency, with 84.67% scoring "Poor" and a mean score of 1.21. Only a small fraction achieved "Fairly Satisfactory" (10%) or "Satisfactory" (5.33%) ratings, and none were "Outstanding." This mirrors the similarly poor grammar results, indicating a systemic language proficiency issue. While organizational skills were slightly better, they still showed significant room for improvement. Students struggle with vocabulary mastery due to challenges in translation, meaning, pronunciation, spelling, and retention, compounded by external factors like limited practice and negative peer influence.

1.5 Mechanics
The findings revealed significant weaknesses in writing mechanics, with 74.67% scoring "Poor" and a mean score of 1.30. While still demonstrating a systemic language proficiency issue similar to grammar and vocabulary, a slightly higher percentage (20.67%) achieved "Fairly Satisfactory" in mechanics, suggesting a marginally better understanding. Common errors include punctuation, capitalization, and spelling mistakes, alongside broader challenges in topic development, sentence and paragraph structure, and vocabulary.

2. Writing difficulties of Indigenous students in terms of content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics.

The findings identified content development as the primary writing challenge for Indigenous students, followed closely by organizational difficulties. Mechanics, encompassing punctuation, spelling, and capitalization, pose a more significant obstacle than grammar and vocabulary, which are equally challenging. These findings highlight that generating ideas, structuring thoughts, and mastering mechanical conventions are the most pressing issues. These challenges align with broader research indicating that EFL students and those from non-English speaking backgrounds struggle across all aspects of academic writing due to factors like limited vocabulary, insufficient practice, and cultural differences.

3. Challenges of the teachers in teaching writing to IP students.

Four key themes emerged to explain the writing challenges faced by Indigenous students: limited English proficiency, cultural and linguistic influence, cognitive and comprehension struggles, and expression and communication barriers. Teachers observed significant difficulties in spelling, grammar, and sentence construction, stemming from translation challenges between native languages and English, and a lack of English exposure outside the classroom. Cultural nuances and code-switching further complicated language acquisition, requiring culturally sensitive teaching approaches. Cognitive and comprehension issues, exacerbated by limited resources and declining overall English proficiency, hindered students' ability to organize ideas and follow English writing rules. Finally, students struggled to articulate their thoughts in both written and oral forms, exhibiting low confidence and difficulty constructing coherent sentences and paragraphs.

4. Strategies and methods employed by the teachers in teaching writing to IP students.

Teachers employed four primary strategies to teach writing to Indigenous students: basic literacy skill development, translational and bilingual approaches, culturally responsive teaching methods, and structured writing activities. Recognizing foundational gaps, teachers focused on spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and sentence structure through repetitive methods and drills. They utilized English-Tagalog translation to bridge language barriers, allowing students to write in Filipino first and then translate. Culturally responsive teaching involved incorporating Indigenous perspectives, histories, and storytelling, fostering a sense of belonging and relevance. Finally, structured activities like sentence completion, word searches, peer-editing, and sequential patterning provided targeted support and feedback, enhancing students' writing skills through scaffolding and explicit instruction. These strategies reflect a commitment to building foundational skills, leveraging existing linguistic knowledge, respecting cultural backgrounds, and providing structured support for writing development.

5. Intervention material to enhance the performance of IP students in writing.

To address the identified writing deficiencies of Indigenous learners, a specialized module was developed, focusing on grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, and organization. The module aims to enhance fundamental grammar skills, expand vocabulary, improve mechanical accuracy, and cultivate effective organizational abilities, ultimately fostering confidence in writing. Structured into four interconnected units, the module progresses from foundational skills ("Building Blocks of Language") to vocabulary expansion ("Expanding Our Word Bank"), organizational strategies ("Organizing Our Thoughts"), and culminating in opportunities for creative expression ("Finding Our Voice"). This approach utilizes interactive games, practical exercises, and diverse writing prompts to strengthen writing proficiency and encourage self-expression.

IV. CONCLUSION

The analysis presented in this study led to several key conclusions, which were outlined below:

1. The findings indicate that Indigenous students consistently demonstrated "Poor" writing performance across content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics, with significant deficiencies in grammatical accuracy and vocabulary.

2. Based on the result the Indigenous students' primary writing challenges on content development, organizational difficulties, mechanical issues like punctuation, spelling, and capitalization, followed by grammar and vocabulary.

3. Teachers encountered significant challenges in teaching writing to Indigenous students; they have described these as limited English proficiency, cultural and linguistic influence, cognitive and comprehension struggles, and expression and communication barriers.

4. The teachers' diverse strategies demonstrate a comprehensive and adaptable approach to addressing the unique writing challenges of Indigenous students. Their methods, encompassing foundational literacy, bilingual support, cultural relevance, and structured activities, reveal a deep understanding of their students' needs. The emphasis on basic skills, combined with the integration of students' native languages and cultural contexts, underscores the importance of a holistic and culturally sensitive pedagogy. By implementing structured activities and scaffolding, teachers provided targeted support, fostering gradual improvement and confidence.

5. The development of a specialized writing module, tailored to address the specific needs of Indigenous learners, represents a targeted and comprehensive effort to improve their writing proficiency. By focusing on core areas like grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, and organization, and structuring the learning process through progressive, interconnected units, the module aims to provide a solid foundation for effective writing. The use of interactive and practical exercises, coupled with opportunities for creative expression, underscores a student-centered approach designed to build not only skills but also confidence.

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