Addressing the News Writing Skills of SPJ Students through News Writing Worksheet: An Action Research

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ABSTRACT

Thepaper aims to improve the news writing skills of grade 7 SPJ students by using the News Writing Worksheet. The paper opted for a quasi-experimental one-group pre-test—post-test design. Data gathered is analyzed using paired samples t test. Analysis of the data using paired-sample t-test indicates that there is a significant increase of post-test scores in the SPJ students. This indicates that News Writing Worksheet is effective in addressing the news writing skills of SPJ students. This positive outcome is affirmed by the results of the of the interview of ten (10) participants. Their responses are analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings discloses that the SPJ students developed innovative, self-guided, and informative learning while using the News Writing Worksheet. It also reveals that the SPJ students utilized technology to cope with the challenges in completing the News Writing Worksheet.

Keywords: Special program in journalism, news writing worksheet, pretest, posttest

1. Introduction

Under the mantle of the Republic Act 7079, schools need tosupport and promote campus journalism even in the New Normal, knowing the importance of establishinga communication system that would transfer and share information from the school to its community.

Further, campus journalism would enhance values of leadership, self-reliance, working ethics for campus journalists as well as ensure the reliable sharing of vital information of school activities to all the stakeholders involved in schools (Peralta, 2014).

After all, under Section 4 of RA 7079, it states that student publications should hone interested students in the necessary skills in journalism and that these students are going to apply what they have learned in the schools and communities where they belong.

So, in his blog site, Arao (2013) disclosed that a campus journalist must write competently and quickly under the technical demands of campus journalism.

I have spent lecturing, training, and evaluating student-journalists' written output in Campus Journalism in the different divisions in the Davao Region over the years.

And I have observed that campus journalists and even school paper advisers are still finding it a challenge to write a simple news story, which was supposedly the bread-and-butter of a school publication that seeks to report the facts and events accurately in school events.

So, here in Badas National High School, I had observed that our campus journalists would still find it difficult to write a simple news article for our school paper publication during the face-to-face classes and even on our online publication during the New Normal.

And as I checked the news writing articles, I immediately observed the common news writing errors my student-journalists had committed.

Even more, I also found similar news writing problems from our incoming Grade 7 students who also wrote news stories as part of their written examination for the Special Program in Journalism (SPJ). Some of the errors I found were errors in identifying important facts and details, unfamiliarity in writing the Lead of a news story, and issues in connecting the paragraphs as part of a news story.

Considering that we are now on the verge of implementing the Special Program in Journalism (SPJ), it is only appropriate to immediately provide journalism writing interventions that would prepare our SPJ Grade 7 students to hone their journalistic skills, particularly in news writing.

Taringan (2011) posited that writing is a productive and expressive activity. In this connection, writing can be used to report, notify, and influence others without meeting face to face. Therefore, in writing, one must be skilled. To become skilled, of course, you have to go through regular practice and practice (Kusumaningrat, 2005).

Further, Kapka and Oberman (2001) posited that writing skills can be improved by learning through repetition. If the teachers would be aware of the writing process this would help in teaching appropriate strategies and that would also improve the writing skills of the students.

So, with the present learning situation, I needed to come up with an intervention to help our SPJ Grade 7 students to cope up with their news writing problems.

This prompted me to devise a writing strategy to help improve the news writing skills of SPJ Grade 7 students in my school and allow them to perform news writing tasks often associated consistently and efficiently with writing.

That is why I used the News Writing Worksheets with specific writing prompts to guide SPJ Grade 7 of the step-by-step process of writing a simple news story. McKane (2006) states that good prose can be taught and needs to be as most journalists today emerge from journalism courses where the reporting skills are taught with the most demanding of these is writing,

I developed a news writing worksheet that catered their interest in gathering facts correctly while at the same time help them with their news writing problems in identifying important facts and details, unfamiliarity in writing the Lead of a news story, and issues in connecting the paragraphs as part of a news story.

Thus, this intervention aimed to improve the news writing skills of SPJ Grade 7 students in Badas National High School.

1.1 Action Research Questions

The main objective of this study was to determine the effectiveness of using News Writing Worksheets to help SPJ Grade 7 students at Badas National High School enhance their news writing skills. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the pretest and posttest scores of the SPJ students before and after the implementation of the intervention?

2. Is there a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores before and after the implementation of the intervention?

3. What are the experiences of SPJ students on the use of News Writing Worksheets?

2. INTERVENTION

The intervention used in this action research was the NewsWriting Worksheet, which is not yet utilized in the high schools in this division.

Further, Lee (2014) posited that activity worksheets performed a crucial part as mentors' means to practice effective teaching strategies. Convincingly, worksheets are the most often utilized instructional materials in classroom settings.

Besides, the Ministry of Education, Guyana (2016) revealed that using worksheets as partof the learning written materials can enhance student learning support, understanding of lesson structure, and differentiation of instruction.

With the identified intervention in mind, I proceeded to develop the News Writing Worksheet with guided writing prompts. The worksheet in News Writing was divided into three parts:the first partguidedthe participants to identify the Who, What, When, Why and Where. Next, the second part modelled for the participants to write basic lead of News Writing by completing the writing prompts.

And finally, the lastpart of the worksheet provided writing news structure for participants to write the remaining paragraphs of a news storyto complete writing a news article.

The developed news writing worksheet was virtually administered for one to two weeks based on the allotted schedule given by the Division and the permission of the involved high school students.

Further, I asked the approval of the Schools Division Superintendent to give permission to allow the virtual action research. Moreover, the following identified SPJ Grade 7 students also underwent the Pre-WritingAssessment to evaluate their news writing skill level.

Then, I crafted the News WritingWorksheet. Further, the crafting of the worksheet started from June to July 2021, and the implementation of the news writing worksheet started from September to October 2021.Thus, the selected SPJ Grade 7 students started using the news writing worksheet inSeptember 2021.

3. METHODS

3.1 Participants

There were 50Grade 7 students of Badas National High Schoolin this action research. They are also under my class in Grade 7 SPJ Major for School Year 2021-2022. The identified participantswere coming from Grade 7 – Jose Rizal as part of the informants of the study.

3.2 Data-Gathering Methods

This action research utilized sequential mixed method design by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) to answer the research questions. Before the conduct of this action research, I secured first approval from Schools Division Superintendent and Division Research Coordinator for the virtual conduct of my action research. Then, after getting the approval, I also secured the approval of our School Head and Class Adviser.

In light of the current pandemic, I issued informed consents and assents to the participants and their parents, explaining the study's purpose. The same communication letters also provided considerations to the participants that they will just be in their homes during the conduct of the study. The students were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. And to gain easy access and convenient transcriptions, I asked the permission from the participants to record the virtual interview.

Prior to the conduct of the study, the news writing worksheet has been validated first by the Education Program Supervisor in English. Following the validation of the news writing worksheet, it was pilot tested at Davao Oriental Regional Science High School to guarantee the reliability of the test. In testing the reliability of the test, Cronbach's Alpha statistics was used to explain the internal consistency among items. The reliability of the test using the statistics of Cronbach's Alpha is .711, which indicates that the test is reliable. The range of Cronbach's Alpha value lies from 0 to 1, whereas, a value of 0.7 or above represents higher reliability for a particular scale (Sahu et al., 2015). Furthermore, the material, specifically the News Writing Worksheet was validated by the Education Program Supervisors in English and Learning Resource Management Section. The questions for the interview were also validated by Dr. Mary Jean M. Francisquete, Principal II of Badas National High School.

2.3 Data Analysis

I used descriptive statistics for the study's pretest and posttest design since I used the quantitative design. The pre-test and post-test news writing exams follow the same format, with similar assessment items and difficulty levels. The pre-test set the SPJ students' baseline level of writing to access their news writing skill; and the post-test will measure the SPJ students' progress after the news writing worksheets were given to them. In the pre-test, students wereasked to write anews article of 5 to 7 paragraphs on a school event at Badas National High School. And they were required to write a news article of 5 to 7 paragraphs on another school event in the post-test.

Then, the pre and post-test results were treated statistically to determine the success of the interventions so as to answer my first and second research questions. Considering the pandemic, data gathering was conducted virtually and there were no face-to-face sessionsto complete this action research from October to November 2021. Post-testwas administered on the second week of October 2021.

For the qualitative design, the SPJ studentswerevirtually interviewed through Zoom or Google Meet for their experiences. Participants were selected through random sampling. The collection of data wasconducted through virtual focus group discussion (FGD). I virtually interviewedten participants from the respondents with reference to Creswell (2007) stating that in conducting qualitative study, the use of 5 – 25 participants were recommended.

For my data analysis strategy, I used a paired t-test to see if there was a difference between the SPJ students' pretest and posttest scores before and after the intervention.

For Qualitative analysis, I coded, transcribed and categorized the answers of the participants. Further, I also used thematic analysis. This helped me consolidate significant responses of the participants from the in-depth interview with the use of the interview guide.

4. FINDINGS/RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Presented in this portion are the results and findings of the study as wellas its discussion.

Table 1 below presents the pretest and posttest means as well as thestandard deviation of the participants.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Participants

	Mean	Number of Students	Standard Deviation
Pretest	35.36	50	6.75
Posttest	78.80	50	5.69

When the lecture approach was used with the news writing worksheets, a paired sample t-test was used on a sample of 50 students to see if there was a statistically significant mean difference between the scores in the posttest and pretest of the SPJ students. The participants scored higher during the posttest (78.80 ± 5.69) than the pretest (35.36 ± 6.75). Table 2 shows that the pretest and posttest of the informants has a $t(49) = -35.57$, $p < .00$. Since p<0.05, there is a significant difference between the SPJ students' pretest and posttest results.

Table 2. Results of paired-samples t-test of the Informants

Test	Number of Students	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	df	p-value
Pretest	50	35.36	6.75	-35.57	49	0.00
Posttest	50	78.80	5.69			

Test is significant if α=0.05

Results in the paired sample t-test show that there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the SPJ studentsbefore and after the implementation of the intervention. The SPJ students' posttest results have improved when they began receiving instruction utilizing the News Writing Worksheets.

As a result, I decided to pursue a qualitative approach to this research in order to truly comprehend and examine the students' significant experiences, which would eventually affect the SPJ students' learning success in the implementation of the Special Program in Journalism. Hence, ten (10) students, with reference to Creswell (2007) stating that in conducting qualitative study, the use of $5 - 25$ participants were recommended, were asked to answer a validated questionnaire with three questions. Then, their responses were analyzed thematically.

Presented in Table 3 were the generated themes of the Question 1: What are the lived experiences of the SPJ students in using the News Writing Worksheets?

Table 3 Emergent themes based on analysis of responses in Question 1

Themes	Example Interview Response	Translated Interview Response
Innovative Learning	S2: Nakatuon ko ug bag-o nga pamaagi sa pagsulat kay naghatag man siya examples nga nag-guide sa amua para makasulat sa worksheet. S4: Naexcited kaayo ko sa mga butang nga makat onan tungod kay gusto nako maexperience usab ang akong naexperience niadtong nakaabot mi sa region as participant in sports writing in english.Busa karon,happy kaayo ko nga kami gitagaan ug another opportunity nga makakat on niini. S6: Kuan..nabag-ohan ko sa gipabuhat kay wala pa sad ko ka experience ana sa elementary, pero naa jud koy bag-o nakat -onan… S7: Challenging siya kay karun pa nakasugat ug nay mga butang nag karun ra nako nahibal-an. S9: Una sa tanan nalisodan ko sa mga question tungod kay first time nako nakaapil ani na mga activity pero nakita nako nga importante diay	S2: I learned a new way to write because examples were given to guide us to finish the worksheet. S4: I was excited to learn new things because I wanted to experience again what I had experienced when we reached the regional conference as a participant in sports writing in English. That's why I am very happy that we were given another opportunity to learn this craft. S6: Umm..the experience was really new to me because I did not experience it in elementary, but I learned something new… S7: Challenging siya kay karun pa nakasugat ug nay mgabutang nag karun ra nakonahibal-an. S9: First of all, I had difficulty with the questions because is my first time to join this

	kayo siya labi na sa pagbuhat ug information. S10: Kanang bag-o siya nga practice sa pagsulat para sa akoa	type of activity but I realized that this is important, especially in writing information. S10: This is a new practice in writing for me.
Self-Guided Learning	S1: Naa diay jud steps para sa pagsulat ug klaro nga balita.. S2: Ganahan nako na butang sa paggamit sa news writing worksheet mao ang pag follow sa instruction ug makakat on ko ug bag o nga ways kung unsaon to pag answer ug pagbuhat ug paragraph. S4: Ang akong ganahan sa paggamit sa news writing worksheet han ay,klaro ug naay mga examples nga diin akong masabtan ang mga konsepto.ang mga pagtulun an nga akong nadawat maayo ng nakatabang gayud sa akong pagtuon. S5: Nakasabot ko sa pagsulat sa balita kay naa man gud mga examples nga mao jud nag guide nako para makasulat. S8: Naghatag siya ug mga instructions sama sa unsaon pagsugod ug sulat, unsaon pag explain, unsaon pagbuhat ug paragraph ug unsa ang akong himoon na news report.	S1: There are really steps to write a clear news story. S2: I like how the manner of using the news writing worksheet, especially in following instructions and learning new things or ways how to answer and write paragraphs. S4: I liked using the news writing worksheet because it was understandable and clear and there are examples where I can easily understand the concepts and the lessons really helped me to learn. S5: I was able to understand writing the news because the examples given guided me to write. S8: The worksheet gave instructions like how to start writing, how to explain, how to write a paragraph and how I can write a news report.
Informative Writing and Learning	S3: Dili diay ta magpataka ug sulat basta balita kay dili na mao. S4: Sa pagsulat sa news writing worksheet kay klaro ug unsay kelangan ibutang like kanang WHO ug WHAT sa balita. S6: Gituduan jud mi pagsulat sa balita ug mga butang nga dapat naa didtoa… S9: Na-challenge nako ang akong sarili sa pag-research,pag-sulat ug pagbasa sa mga balita.	S3: We should not write carelessly in news writing because that is not correct. S4: In completing the news writing worksheet, it was clear what to write like writing the WHO and WHAT of the news. S6: We were taught to write the news and the details that should be included… S9: I challenged myself to do research, write and read news stories.

Presented in Table 4 were the generated themes of the Question 2: How did the SPJ students cope with the challenges in using the News Writing Worksheets?

Table 4 Emergent themes based on analysis of responses in Question 2

Themes	Example Interview Response	Translated Interview Response
Learning with Technology	S3: Ang akong gibuhat para masulbad ge gamitan nako og Google translate. Aron mabuhat nako jud... S4: Naningkamot ko pagpangita ug answer sa akong problema through google S5: Testing ko basa mga online newspaper sa internet kay para makita nako ang pagkaplastar niya gikan sa worksheet. S9: Nang hulam ko ug cellphone arun maka-research ko…	S3: And I also used Google Translate to help me finish my task. S4: I made an effort to find answers to my problem through Google S5: I also tried reading online newspapers in the internet to link the structure from the worksheet. S9: I borrowed cellphone to search the Internet…

Presented in Table 5 were the generated themes of the Question 3: What are the insights of SPJ students in using the News Writing Worksheets?

Table 5 Emergent themes based on analysis of responses in Question 3

Themes	Example Interview Response	Translated Interview Response
Use and Enhance Worksheet	S1: Gamiton pa unta ang worksheet sa pag-explain sa imong mga gusto isulat na mag news bahin sa inyong lugar… S2: Maayo nga gamiton pa namu ang worksheet kay ganahan nako na butang sa paggamit sa news writing worksheet mao ang pag follow sa instruction ug makakat on ko ug bag o nga ways kung unsaon to pag answer ug pagbuhat ug paragraph. S4: Ipadayon pa unta ang worksheet kay klaro ang mga examples nga diin akong masabtan ang	S1: The worksheet should be use to explain the things you want to write as news and related to your place S2: It's good that we should continue using the worksheet because I like how the manner of using the news writing worksheet, especially in following instructions and learning new things or ways how to answer and write paragraphs. S4: We should continue using the worksheet because it has clear examples where I can easily

	mga konsepto ug leksyon nga nakatabang gayud sa akong pagtuon. S6: Dapat jud nga gamiton ang news writing worksheet kay para mas dali para sa mga SPJ nga students pareha namu makatuon sa news writing. S8: Pagkahuman sa news kay apil na pud unta tong lain pa nga pagsulat sa journalism ba… S9: Dungagan pa unta ang worksheet ug daghan pa nga sample sa news writing…	understand the concepts and the lessons really helped me to learn. S6: Using the worksheet should be continued because it would be easier for SPJ students like us to learn news writing. S8: After the news writing, other journalism crafts should be included… S9: Additional examples in news writing should be added in the worksheet.
Conduct Journalism Trainings and Contests	S3: Unta naa pay muabot nga training para sa amua nga mga SPJ students… S4: Makaapil na unta mi contest parehas sa una sa DSPC… S6: Mas nindot siguro ug muhatag training sa journalism amung skwelahan para sa amua SPJ students… S8: Kuan, maghatag pa unta si sir Paulo ug klase nga tudluan pa mi niya ingani nga mga butang… S10: Nindot ug naa pay lain nga training para sa amua…	S3: Hopefully, there will be coming trainings for us SPJ students… S4: We could join contest like the DSPC in the past… S6: It would be nice if our schools will conduct journalism trainings for us SPJ students… S8: Umm, it would be good if sir Paulo would hold classes to teach us about these things. S10: It would be good if there will be another training for us…

As presented in Table 5, students have gained learning insights from using News Writing Worksheet, particularly in utilizing step-by-step news writing prompts. The SPJ students suggested that the News Writing Worksheet must be used and enhanced because it honed them to write news stories with clarity and direction. Further, after using the News Writing Worksheet, the students believed that enhancing the scope of the worksheet and conducting journalism trainings and writing-workshops can further develop their potential in journalistic skills.

The SPJ students concluded that the writing workshop-based program had a significant impact on developing the subjects' knowledge of writing skills, improving their writing performance, and diminishing their fear of writing (El Said, 2006). Further, writing conferences also help students develop their writing abilities and habits, as well as their attitudes toward learning and rewriting (Bell, 2002; Eickholdt, 2004; Koshik, 2002).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results, this implies that the use of News Writing Worksheets instruction significantly improves the SPJ students' news writing skills. The outcomes of this study back up the findings of Ismail (2007), who found that writing skills may be developed when students' interests are recognized and they are provided numerous opportunities to practice writing. Following that, the conclusions revealed that in some nations, worksheets have even become a driving force of curriculum (Lesley &Labbo, 2003; Martin, Mullis, Foy, &Stanco, 2012; Reid, 1984). Furthermore, properly-designed worksheets provide a bright and enjoyable design as well as a variety of useful and contextualized tasks (Tomlinson, 2009).

The findings, however, contradicted Lesley and Labbo (2003), who claimed that mass-produced worksheets are ineffective in attaining instructional objectives. It also contradicts the findings of Ueckert and Gess-Newsome (2008), who found that students employ a word-matching approach to match words in questions with similar phrases in the textbook, keeping them in a passive learning mode.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to document the positive use of News Writing Worksheets to address the news writing skills of SPJ students as affirmed by the results presented in the tables above. However, the reach of the study's quantitative design can only measure the significant effect of the intervention. Hence, it lacked the rich experiences of the SPJ students who immersed themselves in the journalistic writing intervention, which would prove crucial in the growth of the school's beginning Special Program in Journalism.

As a result, this could be based on the premise that well-designed worksheets have improved students' learning outcomes (Sasmaz-Oren &Ormanci, 2012). Additionally, the findings confirmed that worksheets boost students' interest in the class and have a favorable impact on their success (Saka & Akdeniz, 2001; Kurt, 2002; Coştu&Ünal, 2005; zmen&Yldrm, 2005; Kurt &Ayas, 2010). On the other hand, Tuncay and Uzunboylu (2010) investigated student anxiety and resistance to learning through distance education. This explains the significant experiences of SPJ students of being anxious considering that for some of them, this is their first time experiencing a particular journalistic writing activity.

It can be noted in Table 4 that the SPJ students harnessed the power of technology to cope with the challenges in using News Writing Worksheet. Additionally, it can be observed that the SPJ students tapped the online services of search engines and online websites to supplement their understanding of the principles of news writing and the previous suggestions of their SPJ teacher to complete the writing prompts in the worksheetFurthermore, ICT adoption is a series of continuing and continuous steps that fully support teaching and learning as well as information resources (Young, 2003).

Furthermore, the usage of technology will improve the learning process and optimize students' active learning capacities (Finger & Trinidad, 2002; Jorge et al., 2003; Young, 2003; Jamieson-Procter et al., 2013).

The findings of the research suggest that the SPJ teachers in Badas National High School, schools offering Special Program in Journalism, and even school paper advisers in elementary and secondary levels may use the worksheet. Further, SPJ teachers in grade 7 can use the news writing worksheet as an instructional material in Grade 7 SPJ major lessons such as writing a clear, accurate, and meaningful news story, while school paper advisers in elementary and secondary schools may use the News Writing Worksheet as a tool for basic skills training in news writing for student journalists (SJ), especially those newly-identified SJs. This worksheet can be presented in class using a modular-worksheet format and can also be presented as a digital material using a projector or a monitor, in a computer laboratory, or even at home, wherein each student has access to a computer or tablet.

The News Writing Worksheet can be provided to the SPJ students and campus journalists as part of the schools' plan to cater the journalistic abilities of their students. This is based on several research studies that found that in school, writing experiences, expectations, genres, abilities, and objectives are often dictated by the classroom context and are aimed at improving student knowledge (Christie &Derewianka, 2008; VanDerHeide& Newell, 2013).Even for academic purposes, the variety of writing activities is frequently narrower than necessary, as those who have examined writing assignments in school have noticed (Applebee, 1981, 1984; Applebee & Langer, 2009; Hillocks, 2008).

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