Academic and Creative Writing Skills of College Students in Filipino Language

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ABSTRACT:

This study investigates the academic and creative writing skills of Filipino major students at Mindoro State University. It addresses the pervasive challenges of writing proficiency, which is crucial for future Filipino language educators. The research employs a mixed-methods design, assessing students' writing samples and conducting interviews and focus group discussions. Quantitative findings reveal that while most students demonstrate 'Proficient' academic (56%) and creative (50%) writing skills, a substantial portion exhibits 'Intermediate' abilities (34% and 44%, respectively), revealing areas for improvement. The study identifies key challenges, including difficulties with academic language, high expectations, organization, content generation, and lack of confidence. Students employ strategies like extensive reading and seeking feedback to enhance their writing. The study aims to inform curriculum enhancement and teacher preparation, addressing the urgent need to support national language proficiency goals.

Keywords: academic writing, creative writing, Filipino language, language policies, linguistic competence

1. Introduction

Writing is a foundational pillar of academic success, professional communication, and cultural expression. Despite its significance, writing proficiency continues to be a global challenge among students. In the United States, a national assessment revealed that only 27% of middle and high school students demonstrated proficiency in writing (The Tenney School, 2020). This finding shows the widespread struggle in mastering essential writing skills. Although rooted in a Western context, it mirrors the broader global issue of underdeveloped academic writing across the educational system (Nguyen, 2020).

At Mindoro State University, students preparing to become Filipino Language educators must demonstrate advanced writing skills. According to an internal assessment report and instructional feedback gathered in 2023 by faculty members of the College of Arts and Sciences (Mindoro State University, 2023), these students often face challenges in mastering coherent academic discourse and creative expression using the Filipino Language. Their role goes beyond personal academic performance; they are future Filipino language and culture mentors. However, classroom observations and recent research indicate that numerous aspiring Filipino teachers still face difficulties structuring their ideas, organizing their thoughts, and ensuring coherence in academic and creative writing. Portillo-San Miguel (2021) noted that these obstacles frequently stem from ongoing problems like restricted grammatical precision, improper application of relevant ideas, and poor vocabulary growth - elements linked to inadequate academic preparation and insufficient consistent support within the educational framework.

Writing proficiency, particularly in one's native language, is a multidimensional construct involving grammar, vocabulary, coherence, organization, critical thinking, and creativity. Academic writing, defined as structures, formal writing used in educational and scholarly settings, often demands the demonstration of logical reasoning, persuasive argumentation, and clarity of expression. Creswell and Creswell (2023) explain that academic writing requires systematic thought and technical composition, making it challenging for students without adequate scaffolding. Conversely, creative writing encompasses inventive storytelling, literary technique application, and emotional or cultural experience expression. Göçen (2019) further explains that creative writing is essential for developing student motivation and deepening their connection with the subject. Both writing forms are crucial in higher education, especially for students aiming to become language teachers, as they must not only master these skills but also model and teach them effectively. Salvador (2023) confirms that writing competence among language educators significantly influences their effectiveness in cultivating writing abilities in their future students.

Several national mandates and international standards show the urgency of addressing these writing challenges for teacher preparation. Article XIV, Section 6 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution declares that the government shall take steps to initiate and sustain the use of Filipino as a medium of official communication and as a language of instruction in the educational system. This constitutional mandate affirms the importance of developing robust Filipino communication skills, including writing, among prospective educators. Additionally, the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (Republic

Act No. 10533) institutionalised the use of the mother tongue and Filipino in the early years of education. It stressed the role of Filipinos in fostering national identity. However, these goals remain unfulfilled without competent and well-prepared teachers who possess excellent writing abilities (Meneses et.al., 2023).

A growing body of literature documents the persistent difficulties encountered by Filipino college students in academic and creative writing. Reyes and Cruz (2021) discovered that college students frequently have difficulty organizing their thoughts, ensuring coherence, and articulating themselves clearly in formal academic essays. The restricted access to structured writing teachings, inadequate feedback, and an excessive focus on grammatical correctness over content and organization exacerbate these challenges. Mendoza (2023) emphasizes that incorporating blended language styles, including colloquialisms and informal phrases, diminishes the formality and scholarly tone of student writing. Furthermore, Santos and De Guzman (2022) contend that the absence of regular, organized writing teaching and feedback systems greatly hinders students' progress in writing. Tan et.al. (2020) also show that varying assessment methods between institutions lead to the inconsistent growth of writing skills among college students.

Policy-wise, the Department of Education (DepEd) and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) have introduced initiatives to improve language instruction. The K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum, outlined in DepEd Order No. 31, s. 2012, emphasizes the importance of Filipino language proficiency and mandates academic and creative writing in Filipino as part of the Senior High School curriculum. The newer MATATAG Curriculum (DepEd Order No. 13, s. 2023) reinforces this emphasis by streamlining learning competencies to focus on foundational skills, including writing. Villaruz and Palma (2024) stress, however, that implementing these policies varies widely, and many students still lack metacognitive awareness and oral proficiency skills crucial to strong academic writing.

CHED Memorandum Order No. 20, s. 2013 likewise requires Filipino language instruction in general education programs in higher education institutions (HEIs). However, uneven policy implementation has led to inconsistencies in student proficiency levels. Lumbis and Manalo (2024) suggest that disparity can stem from the ongoing dominance of English in academic contexts, which undermines the promotion of Filipino as a language of scholarly discourse, as envisioned in Proclamation No. 1041, s. 1997.

Theoretical perspective can help illuminate the roots of writing difficulties. Cummins' (1980) theory of Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) differentiates between conversational fluency and the advanced language skills needed for academic tasks. Students may demonstrate everyday fluency in Filipino but lack the academic vocabulary and organizational techniques necessary for written discourse. Teng (2022) further emphasizes the significance of metacognitive awareness in writing, noting that students who engage in reflective learning strategies perform better in structured writing tasks. Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory complements these insights by highlighting the role of dialogue and collaborative learning in skill development. Salvador (2023) validates this theory, demonstrating that Filipino classes' peer interaction and cooperative writing activities improve creativity and logical organization.

Creative writing deserves particular attention due to its potential to nurture cultural identity, imagination, and reflective thinking. However, research shows that students struggle with generating ideas, using literary techniques, and maintaining structure in creative composition. Saavedra and Barredo (2022) identified grammar and vocabulary, lack of exposure to literary models, and minimal engagement with creative tasks as key contributing factors. Conversely, Banegas and Lowe (2021) emphasized that integrating creative writing assignments into the curriculum greatly enhances students' motivation, writing fluency, and overall language growth.

Integrating formative assessment strategies is another critical factor in improving writing proficiency. Formative assessments provide ongoing feedback, allowing students to reflect and improve iteratively. Cad and Carrera (2023) emphasized that self-assessment and reflective writing promote metacognitive awareness, which is crucial in academic writing. Similarly, Osman et. al. (2020) found that peer feedback and structured critique sessions helped learners identify areas for improvement and build confidence. Tuck (202) highlighted the importance of timely, specific, and constructive feedback in writing instruction, while Falaknaz et. al. (2020) documented students' positive perceptions of formative assessments in enhancing their writing.

Inquiry-based writing instruction has also gained traction as an effective pedagogical model. Wale and Nurie (2021) assert that such approaches promote active learning, critical inquiry, and deeper engagement with the writing process. When students are guided to explore topics, formulate arguments, and revise drafts based on feedback, their academic writing improves in substance and form.

Even with policy backing and theoretical understanding, a disparity remains between anticipated outcomes and real student achievement in writing. Studies indicate that poor metacognitive awareness, lack of writing practice, and insufficient access to quality writing examples impede students' ability to reach proficiency (Vacalares, Dela Cruz, & Santos, 2023). Additionally, the growing impact of digital communication, frequently characterized by casual language, acronyms, and emotional symbols, poses a fresh challenge. Salazar (2023) noted that Netspeak has permeated students' academic writings, resulting in a blend of formal and informal styles that reduces the overall quality of the written output.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach involving curriculum design, teacher training, and institutional support. Educational institutions must provide opportunities for sustained writing practice, guided peer interactions, and scaffolded feedback. Teachers must also be equipped with strategies to foster academic and creative writing through culturally relevant materials and interactive methodologies (Cad & Carrera, 2023; Saavedra & Barredo, 2022).

2. Research Objectives

This study investigates the level of writing skills demonstrated by Filipino major students, focusing on their competence in crafting academic and creative written outputs using the Filipino language. Understanding their current skill level, challenges, and writing strategies is essential for identifying areas for improvement within the curriculum and ensuring that graduates are well-equipped to communicate effectively, while contributing meaningfully to the advancement of the Filipino language. Specifically, this research aims to answer the following questions:

1. Assess the academic and creative writing skills of students using the Filipino language.
2. Determine the challenges experienced by students in writing academic and creative literary pieces using the Filipino language.
3. Identify strategies students use to enhance their academic and creative writing skills using the Filipino language.

3. Methodology

This study examined prospective Filipino language students' academic and creative writing skills at Mindoro State University. As future educators, their writing abilities will influence how Filipinos are taught by future generations. By identifying strengths and weaknesses in their writing skills, this research proposed evidence-based recommendations for curriculum enhancement, instructional design, and teacher preparation programs. It is timely and urgent to conduct this study to support national goals on language proficiency, academic excellence, and cultural preservation (Villaruz & Palma, 2024).

Research Design

This research employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. This approach involves collecting and analyzing quantitative data, followed by collecting and analyzing qualitative data to further explain the quantitative findings (Cresswell, 2023). In this study, the initial quantitative phase will assess the academic and creative writing skills of Filipino Major students using the Filipino language through researcher-made rubrics applied to their writing samples. This phase discusses the students' writing proficiency. Following this is the qualitative phase using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion with students. This explored the reasons behind the quantitative results, exploring the underlying challenges, experiences, and strategies related to writing in Filipino.

Participants and Data Collection

The participants were Bachelor of Secondary Education Major Filipino Language students from Mindoro State University. A sample of 50 students was selected using simple random sampling. The data collection started with the quantitative phase wherein students produced two types of writing samples: an essay and speech for academic writing and a poem and short story for creative writing, both within specified length parameters and guided by clear instructions. These samples were written and collected in a controlled environment to ensure authenticity and minimize external influences. Furthermore, a researcher-made rubric was developed which was used to evaluate the writing samples. This rubric assessed the critical aspects of writing proficiency, including content, organization, style, and grammar. Prior to the official data collection, the rubric was validated by three professionals and underwent inter-rater reliability testing with a 0.85 reliability index using the Fleiss Kappa test.

For the qualitative phase, it involved the selection of student participants for semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion. Students with extreme low scores were selected for the interview and focus group discussion (FGD). The interviews and FGD explored the students' perceived strengths and weaknesses, challenges faced, and strategies used for the quantitative findings. These interviews and FGD were conducted in a private setting and audio-recorded with consent, it was transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data, derived from the rubric scores was analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine the students' writing proficiency levels. The qualitative data comprising interview and FGD transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis. This method involves a systematic process of coding, identifying themes, and interpreting the data to uncover patterns and meanings related to the research questions. Thematic analysis, as described by (Braun & Clark, 2024), allows researchers to identify recurring patterns and themes within qualitative data, providing valuable insights into participants' experiences and perceptions. The quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated during the interpretation phase, allowing for triangulation and a more comprehensive understanding of the students' writing skills and the factors influencing them.

4. Results and Discussion

1. Writing skills of students using the Filipino language.

1.1 Academic Writing Skills
The table below illustrates the academic writing skills of Bachelor of Secondary Education majors in Filipino, revealing that the majority (56%) demonstrate 'Proficient' abilities, while 34% are classified as 'Intermediate.' A small percentage (8%) exhibit 'Advanced' skills, with only 2% 'Developing'

and none categorized as 'Beginner.' Despite the overall mean of 13.18 indicating a 'Proficient' level among respondents, the notable percentage of students within the 'Intermediate' range shows the necessity for targeted improvement in the academic writing abilities of these future educators.

Although 56% of the respondents are categorized as 'Proficient,' it is crucial to comprehend what this level implies. Students at this level can typically create structured and coherent writings, adhere to fundamental academic standards, and convey ideas with a fair degree of clarity. Nevertheless, they might continue to face challenges with more profound critical analysis, maintaining grammar accuracy, and using more complex language and reasoning abilities. This constraint emphasizes the need for educational strategies to enhance their writing skills. One of the primary reasons for these findings is the learner's lack of strong reading habits. Hicks (2022) states that regular and purposeful reading significantly contributes to academic growth. Panday & Napil (2024) added that frequent reading improves vocabulary and comprehension, improving academic achievements and writing proficiency. Lamorinas et al. (2024) support this result, stating in their study that many students often see English as a sign of intelligence and access to global opportunities, contributing to the reduced use of the Filipino language. This proves that most students exhibit a decline in their Filipino Language ability.

Considering that the respondents are future educators focusing on Filipino, these results present significant implications. Aspiring teachers of the Filipino language are expected to have strong academic writing skills and demonstrate these abilities in their future classrooms. Their existing skill level, though sufficient, will not entirely prepare them to satisfy the professional requirement of teaching Filipino as a subject. Consequently, given that this research concentrates on writing in Filipino, the findings stress the need for specific interventions to improve students' academic writing skills. Enhancing these skills is essential in equipping them to be competent and trustworthy educators who can maintain the standards of Filipino language teaching.

Table 1 – Level of Academic Writing Skills of Students Using the Filipino Language

Scale	Frequency	Percentage	Interpretation
16.50-20.00	4	8	Advance
12.50-16.49	28	56	Proficient
8.50-12.49	17	34	Intermediate
4.50-8.49	1	2	Developing
1.00-4.49	0	0	Beginner
Overall Mean: 13.18		**Overall Interpretation: Proficient**	

1.2 Creative Writing Skills

The data above shows the creative writing skills of Bachelor of Secondary Education students, revealing that most respondents are within the 'Proficient' (50%) and 'Intermediate' (44%) levels. A small minority (4%) demonstrated 'Advanced' creative writing abilities, while only 2% were classified as 'Developing,' and none were categorized as 'Beginner.' However, despite the majority falling within the 'Proficient' category, the overall mean of 12.15 indicates that the average creative writing skills of these future educators, when using the Filipino language, leans toward the upper end of the 'Intermediate' range, suggesting a need for improvement.

Given that these students are training to become Filipino educators, their writing proficiency directly impacts their ability to effectively teach and assess Filipino language skills in future classrooms. One reason for this is that they have limited access to reading materials in Filipino, especially creative and literary works. Santos (2020) stressed that the absence of engaging and accessible Filipino reading resources greatly restricts students' encounters with different literary styles and techniques, crucial for cultivating advanced creative writing abilities. Without a strong base of Filipino literature - comprising short stories, poems, essays, and novels - students find it harder to assimilate language usage, literary styles, and artistic expression. In addition to this, students also have limited opportunities to engage in creative writing during their studies, as their coursework frequently emphasizes academic and technical writing over artistic expression. Budjalemba and Listyani (2020) indicate that the time limitations, low motivation, and inadequate feedback on writing assignments are significant factors leading to poor writing skills. These motivational and structural obstacles reduce students' ability to cultivate creativity, literary style, and originality.

As future educators, these students are expected to cultivate an appreciation for Filipino literature and assist learners in honing their writing skills. Their current skill levels indicate a need for curriculum changes, including increased creative writing exercises, access to high-quality Filipino literature, and writing instruction filled with constructive feedback. Filling these gaps is crucial to adequately equipping them to become effective and motivating educators of the Filipino language.

Table 2 – Level of Creative Writing Skills of Students Using the Filipino Language

Scale	Frequency	Percentage	Interpretation
16.50-20.00	2	4	Advance
12.50-16.49	25	50	Proficient
8.50-12.49	22	44	Intermediate
4.50-8.49	1	2	Developing
1.00-4.49	0	0	Beginner
Overall Mean: 12.15		**Overall Interpretation: Proficient**	

2. Challenges experienced by students in writing using the Filipino language.

2.1 Challenges in Academic Writing

Filipino major students face significant challenges in academic writing. One of these challenges is their limited mastery of the Filipino language. Despite studying the language in depth, some students still struggle with grammar, vocabulary, sentence construction, and the proper use of formal and academic tone. These difficulties hinder their ability to express complex ideas clearly and coherently in written form. Some of the participants mentioned:

[I1,P2, Q2*]: *"I'm not good at writing and using the correct words and punctuation—I'm not good at those things. Sometimes it's also confusing whether to use the word 'ng' or 'nang', so I look that up on the internet to ensure the grammar I use in my writing is correct."*

[I1, P3, Q2]: *"Maybe it's writing essays and reflection papers, the use of punctuation marks, and the proper use of transition words to make the writing more organized."*

[FGD1, P2, Q1]: *"For me, even though I'm a Filipino major, I admit that I'm not that good when it comes to Filipino grammar, language use, and proper punctuation—especially in writing academic papers. Sometimes, I just express whatever comes to mind through writing, and I don't really pay attention to whether there are commas, hyphens, or apostrophes."*

Numerous students struggle in mastering the language needed for academic writing, especially in conveying complex ideas with clarity and precision. This problem is deepened by challenges in grammar, syntax, and appropriate use of academic vocabulary, resulting in unclear or disjointed arguments. Insufficient language skills prevent students from engaging with complicated texts and expressing their ideas in a formal academic manner, creating a significant barrier to effective writing. Research has consistently pointed out these challenges; Sreejak (2024) discovered that graduate students frequently face vocabulary difficulties, particularly words with various meanings and context-dependent uses, complicating their academic writing. For future Filipino educators, an added challenge lies in developing academic writing skills in Filipino—a language in which many also demonstrate low proficiency. For instance, a study conducted among students at UM Digos College revealed that while students generally exhibited high proficiency in using the Filipino language for academic communication, there were notable instances where lack of proficiency led to low grades and diminished confidence in seeking assistance from teachers.

Another challenge is the constraints brought by expectation, particularly when it comes to writing in Filipino. Many aspiring Filipino educators feel stressed by the elevated expectations established by their teachers and educational institutions. Participants stated:

[I1, P5, Q3]: *"When you're writing, you immediately start thinking, 'Is this correct? Does it need to be like this?' Sometimes it's actually already correct, but you still think it's wrong. It's also a stressful feeling like everything has to be right."*

[I1, P4, Q3]: *"It's the pressure from the teacher who will check the paper I wrote. When it's being checked, I feel like I'm expected to already know it or be fluent because I'm a Filipino major and supposed to already know the basics."*

[FGD1, P6, Q3]: *"For me, it's the overall judgment that becomes discouraging. It feels as though people assess and form opinions about you based on how you write. Their interpretations often come across as negative, which can be disheartening and make it even more difficult to express yourself through writing."*

This anticipation can result in stress and uncertainty, particularly for students who are unfamiliar with academic writing norms in Filipino. The gap between their past writing experiences and academic writing demands amplify feelings of inadequacy and obstruct their ability to succeed. Kao (2024) examines how stress from academic expectations, driven by pressures from teachers, parents, and peers, can result in anxiety, self-doubt, and reduced academic performance. Likewise, Ahmad Suhaimi et al. (2023) emphasizes that students' emotional turmoil, arising from the anxiety of letting others down or the chance of failing, adds to academic stress. These results emphasize the need to focus on technical writing abilities and the emotional and psychological challenges students encounter while learning to write in their native language.

Moreover, numerous students find it difficult to arrange their ideas logically, resulting in writing that lacks smoothness and consistency. Long & Teopilus (2023) states that difficulties with organization and content creation are common in student writing. Some of the participants mentioned:

[FGD1, P7, Q2]: *"I have difficulty with the sequence of sentences and the organization."*

[I1, P1, Q3]: *"Coming up with a suitable main topic was not easy, and determining the appropriate flow of the content was also challenging, as every part of the paper needed to be clearly connected to the overall discussion."*

[FGD1, P5, Q3]: *"My experience is quite similar to theirs. For me, the challenge lies in coming up with an appropriate theme and ensuring the structure and organization of the written work are clear. Otherwise, the output may appear disorganized or fail to effectively convey the intended message."*

These particular problems justify that students frequently do not fully develop their arguments, resulting in weak thesis statements and inadequate evidence. As a result, essays often appear to be lacking depth or overly simplistic. Sulaiman et al. (2023) observed that undergraduate students frequently face challenges in clearly arranging their ideas especially when using Filipino language, whereas Pasaribu and Elfrida (2022) discovered that students have difficulties with essay organization. These challenges hinder their academic achievement by impacting the caliber of their writing.

In conclusion, the problems encountered by Filipino major students are both linguistic and psychological in nature. Difficulties in Filipino grammar, proper selection of Filipino words, and organization of the ideas coupled with stress from high expectations from readers diminishes the students' academic writing skills.

2.2 Challenges in Creative Writing

When it comes to creative writing, university students commonly expressed doubts about their ability to produce original and engaging content. Common reasons include lack of self-efficacy, low technical writing skills and issues with content generation.

The first challenge reported by the participants is a lack of self-efficacy, which refers to self-doubt and anxiety regarding how their writing will be received. This emotional barrier, combined with low motivation or disinterest, makes it difficult for them to engage in the creative writing process. During the interview and focus group discussion, several participants shared:

[I2, P1, Q1]: *"In the writing process, it's difficult because you constantly think about whether it's okay for the readers. When I finish, will they like it?"*

[I2, P2, Q1]: *"The pressure lies in whether the readers will be impressed by what I write"*

[I2, P6, Q1]: *"I fear that once my work is read, it will be judged, and others may have negative comments because I don't consider myself skilled in writing. I'm also worried it might come across as boring or lacking in intensity, as I aim for it to be engaging and free from complications."*

[FGD2, P3, Q2]: *"It's frightening because they may not appreciate the central idea, upon which the entire concept depends."*

These self-perceived issues show how psychological pitfalls of personal doubt and pressure affect the overall writing process. The study of Arifin (2024) supports these findings, as he noted that lack of self-efficacy significantly contributes to writing difficulties among university students. It emphasizes the need for interventions to build confidence and foster a growth mindset, improving students' creative writing abilities. These insights suggest that lack of efficacy among students is not only an individual issue but also shaped by classroom dynamics and institutional culture. In addition to that, the study of Sun and Wang (2020) mentioned the importance of self-efficacy in writing proficiency. Furthermore, writing anxiety, self-efficacy and emotional intelligence were also mentioned to be factors affecting the writing skills of students as mentioned in the study conducted by Huerta et al. (2017).

Moreover, based on the interview and focus group discussion, students identified low technical skills as another major barrier in writing creatively. Students expressed difficulty in grammar, sentence structure, strategies, proper use of words, not good in Filipino language, use of idioms and symbolisms and elements in texts. As participants expressed:

[I2, P5, Q1]: *"When writing, I feel like I'm using the wrong Filipino words or I get confused about which Filipino words to use because some of them seem to have similar meanings, and I don't know where or how to use them properly."*

[I2, P8, Q1]: *"The main challenge for me is writing with proper grammar. I struggle with organizing the ideas in my head, and sometimes I forget to apply the correct grammar when writing."*

[FGD2, P2, Q1]: *"Using deep or complex words is a challenge for me because my limited vocabulary restricts how I express my ideas in writing."*

These responses show that the future Filipino educators were having difficulty in applying language rules, while trying to express ideas clearly. These statements align with the study of Alodos & Thomas (2024), which identifies several underlying causes of low technical skills in writing among university students, including insufficient knowledge of grammatical rules, poor organization of ideas, lack of topic understanding, low interest levels, and environmental influences affecting their writing abilities. Students shared that even when they have ideas, they struggle to translate them into coherent and well-structured texts. This weakness in technical aspects affects their overall writing quality and confidence. The study conducted by Saavedra (2020) enumerated several factors that diminishes the level of writing skills of students. These factors include; lack of vocabulary in the target language; difficulty in conveying and organizing ideas; and difficulty in spelling, grammar and sentence construction. With these, Cabigao (2021) discussed the importance of having learning activities that are appropriate to the level of learners' needs to improve or enhance the unique skills in writing.

The findings also show that students struggle with content generation or difficulty in generating content for creative writing tasks. This problem stems from lack of knowledge about writing, organizational features, structural elements and parts of written texts. This was evident in their written outputs where transitions between points were weak, and ideas lacked clear sequencing. Some of the participants also mentioned:

[FGD2, P3, Q1]: *"Aside from the challenge of getting started, I also struggle with the sequence of what I write in my creative piece. Sometimes, what I've written seems fine, but after reading something, I feel the need to add a part — and that's when things get messy. I end up not knowing how to connect my ideas properly."*

[I2, P6. Q4]: *"When it comes to sentence structure, the transitions between grade levels cause the sentences to become disorganized, leading to confusion about which ideas should come first in the following sentences."*

[FGD2, P1, Q2]: *"The main challenge is coming up with a theme, as it's one of the most difficult tasks—it's hard to decide on a theme and consider how it will resonate with our readers."*

This reflects how student's difficulty with organizing thoughts lead to weak transitions and disrupted flow in their writing. According to Sulaiman et al. (2023), students frequently encounter difficulties in organizing their ideas logically, leading to poor coherence in their writing. Poor organization not only weakens the impact of their arguments but also lowers their performance in writing tasks. The same results were found by Habibi et al. (2017) which stated that students' poor organization or illogical sequencing skills directly impacts their writing ability.

From those results, the challenges encountered by university students in creative writing point to deeper issues related to confidence, competence, and creative output. These problems are closely linked: weak technical skills can lower confidence, and both can block idea development.

3. Strategies utilized by students to improve their writing using the Filipino language.

3.1 Strategies to improve Academic Writing Skills

To address the difficulties of academic writing, many students employ Generic Higher-order Academic (GHA) strategies, especially those based on self-regulated and self-directed learning. Among these strategies, immersing oneself in comprehensive reading of academic articles is one of the most common and impactful approaches. During interview and FGD, some participants mentioned:

[I2, P3, Q3]: *"Other documents can serve as references for writing literature, and the process helps deepen my understanding of how to structure essays correctly."*

[I2, P5, Q3]: *"I focus more on writing and reading other works to further develop my skills in writing academic papers."*

By employing this method, students gain content knowledge while also learning about academic conventions, discourse structures, and stylistic nuances, which they later replicate in their writing. This type of cognitive apprenticeship, in which students absorb expert writing models, greatly aids in cultivating coherent structure, academic style, and discipline-specific writing abilities (Li, Majumdar, & Ogata, 2025). Additionally, engaging with a wide range of academic texts develops a richer vocabulary, boosts understanding, and strengthens critical thinking abilities like analysis, synthesis, and evaluation— essential skills for proficient academic writing. Rizkiani, Zamzam, and Arafiq (2023) state that self-directed reading enhances writing fluency and contributes to improved academic outcomes by promoting metacognitive awareness and habits of independent learning.

Along with these self-directed strategies, students often seek external support systems to enhance their writing skills even more. The following are statements collected from the participants during the FGD;

[I2, P2, Q3]: *"Maybe we should start by reaching out to other people—we can ask our friends and classmates. With friends or classmates, you can talk to them or even invite them to read various written works together. This can help provide insights into the correct and proper process of writing academic papers."*

Peer review, specifically, is crucial for fostering reflective writing practices and uncovering flaws that might be missed during individual revision. Osman et al. (2020) suggest that peer feedback prompts students to evaluate their own work as well as that of their peers, which enhances their grasp of academic standards and refines their revision techniques. In addition to peer collaboration, seeking guidance from instructors, engaging in writing centers or workshops, and utilizing digital writing tools like grammar checkers and citation managers offer additional support. As narrated by some of the participants;

[FGD2, P3, Q4]: *"Asking for help from professionals is important because they already have the skills and experience when it comes to different types of writing. They have more knowledge, and we can seek their help or opinions regarding our written work."*

[FGD2, P4, Q4]: *"For me, the solutions I can apply to the problems we mentioned include doing research or asking others, especially experts or teachers, about the correct usage and application of grammar."*

These resources provide focused, immediate assistance and expert feedback, enabling students to clarify complex ideas, tackle technical writing challenges, and enhance their writing confidence. Consequently, a blend of internal tactics (such as self-analysis and imitation) and external aids (e.g., peer and instructor feedback) forms a holistic approach to overcoming academic writing challenges.

3.2   Strategies to improve Creative Writing Skills

To address the challenges encountered in writing creative texts, university students engaged in various techniques and practical strategies. Improving writing begins with strengthening the basics—reading widely to expand vocabulary and exposure to writing styles, practicing regularly, conducting research, and refining grammar and organization. These are approaches that pertain to use of self-directed writing enhancement techniques and habits build competence and confidence in writing. As mentioned by the participants;

[I2, P1, Q4]: *"I just keep reading to gather more information related to what I'm going to write."*

[FGD2, P4, Q3]: *"Through reading and research, I will further improve my writing skills."*

[FGD2, P3, Q3]: *Just keep writing. Focus more on practice. Don't worry about the readers for now—just write and write.*

This reflects what Fitria (2024) stated that to improve creative writing skills, students should read diverse literary works and engage in regular writing practice. This approach enhances imaginn, language proficiency, and self-expression, ultimately addressing challenges in creative writing by fostering creativity and research skills. In addition, students engaged in collaborative learning initiatives such as gain advantage from evaluation, comparison with peers, engaged in the self-initiated acquisition of writing resources which can foster growth through interaction and reflection. The following are statements from the participants:

[I2, P3, Q3]: *"I usually ask my classmates or friends to write together and then ask for their opinion if what I wrote is okay or if the content I included is correct."*

[FGD2, P6, Q3]: *"I compare my writing with the works of my classmates and friends to determine which one is the more effective piece."*

Kurt et al., (2020) explained in their study that collaborative writing has been found to significantly improve students' writing abilities, particularly in creative contexts. Studies show that students who engage in collaborative writing activities, such as short story creation, experience notable improvements in their writing success. Moreover, students used self-initiated creative and motivational strategies by fostering confidence, interest and creativity by avoiding unhelpful comparisons, finding strategies that suit the needs and creating positive attitudes that support motivations. Syrewicz (2022) explained that self-initiated creative and motivational strategies can positively influence the creative writing process. It emphasizes the importance of understanding various motivational constructs to enhance writing skills and encourages future research in this area. Taken together, these solutions show how students actively responded to writing challenges by combining skill development, peer collaboration, and personal motivation.

5. Conclusion

The findings indicate that while Filipino major students at Mindoro State University possess a general proficiency in both academic and creative writing in Filipino, there remains a notable need for targeted improvement, particularly in moving students from the 'Intermediate' to the 'Advanced' level. The identified challenges, including difficulties with academic language, high expectations, organization, content generation, and a lack of confidence, suggest that interventions should address both linguistic and affective dimensions of writing. Furthermore, the strategies students currently employ, such as extensive reading and seeking feedback, provide a foundation upon which to build more structured and comprehensive support systems. The findings also showed the importance of enhancing writing instruction within the Filipino language curriculum to better prepare future educators and advance national language proficiency goals.

6. Recommendation

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- The Filipino language curriculum should be enhanced to provide more explicit and systematic instruction in academic and creative writing. This includes teaching academic language conventions, discourse structures, and argumentation skills; integrating more creative writing exercises that encourage idea generation, application of literary techniques, and structured composition; and ensuring a balanced approach to writing instruction, giving sufficient attention to both academic and creative forms.

- Teacher preparation programs should equip future educators with the knowledge and skills to effectively teach writing in Filipino. This includes providing training on how to address the linguistic and affective challenges students face in writing; developing teachers' ability to provide timely, specific, and constructive feedback on student writing; and introducing teachers to innovative pedagogies, that promote active learning and deeper engagement with the writing process.

- Educational institutions should provide support systems that foster students' writing development. This includes creating opportunities for sustained writing practice through regular assignments and writing workshops; facilitating guided peer interactions and collaborative writing activities; and providing access to a wide range of high-quality Filipino texts, including both academic and literary works.

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