The Performance of SHS Learners in Writing Scholarly Research with the Aid of Instructional Scaffolding

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ABSTRACT

A research paper is widely considered as an important requirement produced by learners. However, writing a research paper has been a common challenge for most Senior High School learners. In the Philippines, most of the Senior High School learners have difficulty in explicating their contentions in their study due to their lack of knowledge in conducting and writing a research paper. One of their problems is applying the academic writing conventions such as formality in writing, coherence, grammar, and other related skills involved in writing conventions in writing a scholarly paper. Hence, this study aims to enhance learners' research writing skills by utilizing Instructional Scaffolding as a teaching technique that provides support systems, like reinforcements or relevant activities in molding independent learners, until it becomes unnecessary for them. This quantitative study determined the effectiveness of Instructional Scaffolding by applying correction symbols as an intervention on the difficulties experienced by the Senior High School grade 12 STEM learners in writing a research paper. Twenty-five research papers were investigated by analyzing them with the checklist used by Erel and Bulut (2007), which was also subjected to

T-test formula. The results of this study revealed a decrease in Mean error scores from 75.52 to 20.52, which indicates a significant improvement in the learners' writings of learners in their research paper. This result implied that instructional scaffolding enhanced the writing competence of learners in writing a research paper.

Keywords — Research writing, instructional scaffolding, quantitative study, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is described as 'scientific writing' which is characterized as 'structured research' practiced and used by researchers at higher educational level" (Sajid & Siddiqui, 2015). Al Fadda (2012) defined academic writing as a "mental ad cognitive activity since it is a product of the mind" (p. 124). Myles (as cited by Fazdillah, 2013) believed that "when it comes to academic writing, student writers should have a strong awareness when dealing with the process of writing (composing, developing, and analyzing ideas). Hence, research writers observe the use of academic writing conventions, like the use of the appropriate word, shifting of tenses, coherence, and other academic techniques. Such conventions help research writers in presenting objective statements and descriptions which do away with possible stating a bias. These descriptions imply that amalgamation of ideas and writing formally are necessary for writing a research paper since it has a pivotal function in the academic field. Therefore, learners should have a better grasp of the facets of academic writing, so they can express their arguments clearly and accurately.

Writing an Academic paper becomes an essential requirement for some subjects in schools, colleges, and universities; however, most of the non-English speaking learners experience difficulty in writing an academic paper. For example, Mei-Ching (2013) learned that research-related issues (e.g. lack of material sources) and linguistic-related issues hindered the first-year graduate learners in Taiwan to communicate their arguments clearly. Also, Huy (2015) revealed that Vietnamese learners composed weak academic writing due to lack of vocabulary and knowledge on English grammar, insufficient time to check and enhance their academic papers, and scarcity of material sources. Another problem of EFL learners in Vietnam is paraphrasing a statement which stemmed from their lack of vocabulary in English language or inability to comprehend the text (Na,

Mai, & Xuan, 2017). Chuenchaichon (2014) perceived that the EFL writing learners in Thailand still have writing problems or difficulties because of the "continuous studies on L2 writing errors and discourse." Husin and Burbayani (2017) discovered that Indonesian learners have weak compositions because of their inability to organize ideas in the English language. In the Philippines, Albejuela (2014) believed that some causes of students' difficulty in writing a research paper were due to their lack of familiarity, a cause rooted in their limited knowledge of and exposure to writing academically and their experience in lack of advisor's support (p. 31). Recently, Pablo and Lasaten (2018) enumerated the difficulties in writing academic essays of grade 11 Filipino students:

> The prevalent difficulty of the students in terms of content and ideas is the absence of a variety of ideas, while the organization is the absence of connectives. For vocabulary and word choice, the students' most prevalent difficulty is the use of the incorrect word and word usage, while language use is the poor sentence structure. Meanwhile, the common problem of the students along formality and objectivity is the evident use of first and second person pronouns, while referencing is the lack of citations. (p. 56).

The result of these studies manifests that non-English speaking learners, regardless of learning writing, still experience morphological, syntactical, and lexical difficulties (Dubicki, 2015). As a result, most of the learners compose mediocre academic writing.

Learners' weak academic writing rooted from poor literacy, the ineffectiveness of writing teachers, and the lack of background knowledge on academic writing conventions. In the study of Pineteh (2014), the researcher determined that poor literacy of learners limits their expression of ideas since they failed to comprehend information on their topic (p. 20). In addition, Yuen and Mussa (2015) concluded that improper way of teaching writing, as well as a lack of reading and writing practice, impedes the development of their academic writing skills. For example, Badi (2015) noticed that most arguments of the learners were ambiguous due to the lack of knowledge on the academic writing convention (i.e. cohesive devices, academic words, and the structure and the organization of the academic writing). In contrast to these challenges, enough activities can enhance learners' communication skills in expressing their arguments. Furthermore, Al-Mukdad

(2019) observed that lack of motivation affects learners' writing style.

The outcomes of these studies revealed that learners are benighted with formal writing and unmotivated to write. In light of this information, teaching academic writing conventions should be redesigned to abate the common mistakes.

Intensive practices and guidance of teachers can help the learners grasp the process of writing an academic paper. These instructions have been widely supported by myriad recommendations of studies. Al Khairy (2013) and Al Mukdad (2019) suggested that teachers should employ teaching methods that could stimulate the minds and encourage active participation of the learners. Another strategy was also suggested by Al Fadda (2012) that teachers should promote and encourage self-reflection to their learners because it somehow deepens their awareness. In abreast of this suggestion, teachers should assist their students. These recommendations prompted the researcher to apply instructional scaffolding as a teaching technique in the research subject.

Veerappan, Suan, and Sulaiman (2011) described scaffolding as the "process by which a teacher provides students with a temporary framework for learning" (p. 934). This description presupposes that teachers temporarily guide and support the learners until they can independently do the task. In the study of Walqui (2002), three related pedagogical scales for instructional scaffolding were spelled out (1) providing a support structure for the students to enable certain activities and skills to develop, (2) carrying out particular activities in class, aqnd (3) providing assistance in moment-to-moment interaction.

These pedagogies stress the role of teachers as facilitators who guide the students at every step of the active learning process. Equally, this technique provides a student-centered environment that develops the creativity, motivation, and resourcefulness of the students.

Many studies proved that using the scaffolding technique enhances the skills of the students. For one, Faraj (2015) found that an application of a scaffolding approach through the writing process approach "provides a better basis for enhancing the students to write a good and an academic piece of writing." In the study of Veerappan, Suan, and Sulaiman (2011), the researchers concluded that "the scaffolding technique presented in this study has helped remedy the challenges faced by the target students by further developing the effectiveness in journal writing" (p. 939). Besides, Mulatsih (2011) concluded in his study that the scaffolding technique is effective to improve the students' competence in writing genre-based text. These findings hypothesize that instructional scaffolding might have a positive effect on students in composing a scholarly research paper.

FRAMEWORK

The Instructional Scaffolding has rooted in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and his learning concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Scott and Palincsar (2013) stated that "the focus of sociocultural perspective is on the roles that participation in social interactions and culturally organized activities play in influencing psychological development" (p. 1). This statement implies that social interaction plays a fundamental role in enhancing the cognitive development of a person. Through social interaction, a person gains much information that may enrich the knowledge and skills or clarifies a certain background knowledge. The success of this theory depends on the active involvement of both participants (teacher and students). However, some information or skills are not easy to comprehend; accordingly, the supervision of adults is necessary.

Aslam Khanam, Fatima, Akbar, and Muhammad (2017) described ZPD of Vygotsky as "the use of problem-solving techniques under the supervision of adults as well as mutual collaborations with more capable peers." This idea signifies that an adult can help other people who lack knowledge and skills in a certain field. In building an accurate learning environment, an adult should identify the potentials and needs of a person to match the level of development.

In this study, the teacher is the "scaffold" who helped the students broaden their learnings on what they should learn. Figure 1 shows that the first phase of this study is identifying the potentials and weaknesses of students in writing their research paper. This phase provides a focus on the development of their research writing skills. The intervention made in this study is the face to face interaction and correction symbols for essays. Through this kind of scaffolding, the students could produce a scholarly research paper.
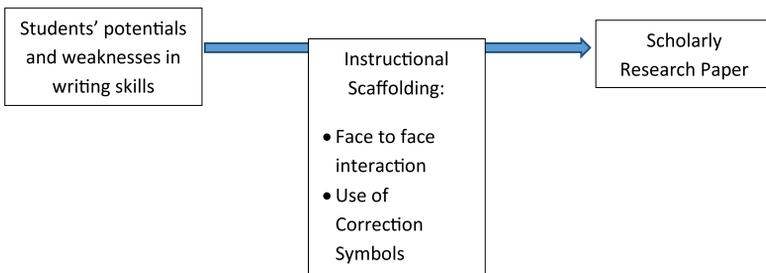
Students' potentials and weaknesses in writing skills → Instructional Scaffolding:
- Face to face interaction
- Use of Correction Symbols
→ Scholarly Research Paper

Figure 1. Conceptual Paradigm

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In the Philippines, the K to 12 program as prescribed by Republic Act 10533, also known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act aspires to improve the skills of Filipino students which could contribute to their future endeavors. The enactment of this law entails additional studies of two years for high school learners who are called Senior High School (SHS). One of the skills that SHS curriculum desires to develop is the communication skills of learners in speaking and writing. The development of this skill is covered by oral communication, English for Academic and Professional Purposes, Creative Writing, or Practical Research 1 and 2.

Practical Research subjects educate learners in the different methodologies in conducting the two types of research study: Practical Research 1 (Qualitative Research) and Practical Research 2 (Quantitative Research). As a response, writing a research paper becomes a requirement learners' need to accomplish at the end of a semester. Research writing is known as academic writing that provides opportunities for an individual to pursue an in-depth investigation with known issues and phenomena and to establish newly discovered facts. According to Marzo, Elnajeh, Ghanesan, and Sagadevan (2017), writing a research paper involves "the process of establishing new facts or conclusion through systematic investigations and study of material sources". This description denotes that researchers consider comprehending, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating the related literature and studies to achieve a strong conclusion. In addition, Tuyen, Osman, Dan, and Ahmad's (2016) believed that research writing "plays a key role in academic context because scholarly publications contribute to career promotion and reputation" (p. 19). For instance, Filipino public school teachers are motivated to conduct a research project because they believed that it positively influences their teaching methods. Furthermore, it is a requirement to gain a degree and to be promoted in their job (Ulla, 2018). Therefore, writing a research paper serves as a chance to impart information and to support the professional growth of an individual.

The present study seeks to identify the common errors of the Senior High Schools (SHS) students as well as to determine the performance of SHS learners' in research writing by utilizing instructional scaffolding as a teaching technique. Twenty-five research papers of the Senior High School grade 12 STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) track students were analyzed with the checklist used by Erel and Bulut (2007), comprising some academic writing

conventions that students should observe. The instrument of this data are the research papers of the learners. In gathering the data, a pre-test was conducted to examine the writing errors made in the first draft of their research paper. The website Grammarly-checker was used as an inter-reliability for the errors made. The correction symbols helped the learners reflect on their errors. After determining the common writing errors, the researcher applied instructional scaffolding as a teaching technique. This method assisted the students with the correction made in their research papers, using correction symbols to identify the errors made. Lastly, the researcher examined the writing errors made in the final draft of their research papers. The frequency of errors was subjected to the T-test formula for comparing the mean errors of the pre-test and the mean errors of the posttest. Therefore, the result of this study inferred the effectivity of instructional scaffolding as a teaching technique in writing a research paper and its implication on the students' research writing skills.

This study focuses on instructional scaffolding as a technique in teaching research writing. Specifically, this study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What are the common errors of students in writing a research paper?

2. What is the significant difference between the results of pre-test and post-test?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This quantitative study assessed the effectiveness of instructional scaffolding as a technique in teaching writing a research paper. The design helped measure the data from the first drafts, which identified the weaknesses of students in composing a scholarly research paper, and final drafts that evaluated the effectiveness of instructional scaffolding as a teaching technique. In addition, this study examined the progress made by the students in every activity.

Participants

The participants of this study were the grade 12 STEM students of Muntinlupa Science High School, Metro Manila, who took the subject Practical Research 2 (Quantitative Research). In each Quantitative Research class, five groups were made, which corresponds to 25 research papers.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher required the learners to compose an outline as their guide in writing their research paper. Then, each group was later mentored face-to-face. After the approval of their outline, the researcher instructed each group to compose the first drafts of their research paper. The first drafts of their research paper were analyzed for determining their common errors in writing an academic paper. In determining learners' common errors, the researcher used the checklist of Erel and Bulut (2007) as the basis for analyzing the errors made. The analysis of the researcher was checked using grammarly.com, an online grammar checker, spelling checker, and a plagiarism detector. Afterwards, the researcher applied correction symbols with the teacher's assistance as the intervention in treating the writing weaknesses of students. Subsequently, the researcher examined the second draft to investigate the changes made in the research papers. Also, the third and final draft was re-subjected to identify errors. Using the mean errors obtained from the first draft to the final draft, the researcher computed the significant difference.

Research Ethics Protocol

Before examining the first drafts of the students, the researcher sought permission to the students by discussing the nature and limitations of the study. The researcher also assured the students that their identity was anonymous and the identified writing difficulties in a research paper would not affect their grades.

Statistical Analysis

The data of this study were extracted from the first to the final drafts of each group by identifying the errors made in the 25 research papers. The T-test formula was utilized in computing the average error committed by the groups during the first and final drafts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To restate, this study determined the errors made by the students in writing a research paper as well as the significant difference between the means of pre-test and posttest. Table 1 presents the mean errors in their pre-test based on the checklist used by Erel and Bulut (2007).

Table 1. Pre-Test Mean Errors in First Draft

Category	Mean Errors
Inappropriate word	20.04
Tenses	17.68
Subject-verb agreement	9.2
Proposition	7.52
Singular – Plural form	6.4
Missing Words	5.32
Format	4.84
Article Usage	2.12
Capitalization	1.32
Punctuations	0.48
Pronouns	0.4
Spelling	0.2
Total	75.52

As shown in Table 1, inappropriate words and tenses obtained the highest mean errors among other categories. Such errors are similar with the findings of Pablo and Lasaten (2018) that incorrect word and word usage, as well as errors in grammar, are found to be the prevalent errors of SHS learners in academic writing. This result presupposes that the occurrence of these errors is due to learners' limited range of vocabulary (Pablo & Lasaten, 2018). In support of this result, Yuen and Mussa (2015) reported that their respondents admitted the mediocrity of their compositions was due to their lack of vocabulary. This problem emanates from the less exposure of learners to reading and writing academic papers (Yuen & Mussa, 2015). Thus, constant reading and writing of academic paper could heighten learners' writing skills. Through this activity, learners will gain familiarity with the lexical of an academic paper. Generally, most of the learners' compositions utilize words they are familiar with, which sometimes convey a slightly different meaning than they initially intended.

The tenses also received a high mean error, as seen in Table 1 – a result indicating that student's sufficient lack of knowledge of the shifting of tenses for a research paper. This category has been a common mistake of students in writing, a finding that supports the study of Darus and Ching (2009), who contended that the frequent error of tenses was due to the influences of L1 on students' L2 writing. Similarly, Ho and Ngoc Thuy Duong (2015) concluded that the

difference of tenses magnified the errors in tenses. Likewise, Widagdo (2017) explained that the misuse of tenses is formed by the unawareness of learners on the numerous possible tenses of the English language" (p. 51). In the present study, the students were found to have lacked enough knowledge of the shifting of tenses. Furthermore, this result hinders the ability of the students "to present ideas in an academically persuasive manner" (Abejuela, 2014).

These findings and the findings of Widagdo (2017) have its similarity and difference. In the study of Widagdo (2017), the researcher discovered that misspelled words are the most common writing problem of Indonesian learners while the misuse of words and word choice is less a problem. This problem of Indonesian language learners emanated from being dependent on orthographic rather than phonetics. Unlike the participants of this study, misspelled words are their infrequent errors. Filipino learners achieve familiarity with the English language due to their constant exposure with the language; for example, through watching, listening, and reading a material utilizing the English language. Another difference of the result is the order of misuse of words and word choice as the infrequent problem of Indonesian language learners. Presumably, the Indonesian language learners are undergraduate; therefore, they have an idea on the words they need to include in an academic paper and a non-academic paper. On the contrary, the participants of this study are a Senior High School learners who are still learning on the difference of an academic paper and a non-academic paper; hence these learners are a novice, academic writers.

Table 2. Pre-test and Posttest Mean Errors

Category	Pre-test Mean Errors	Posttest Mean Errors
Inappropriate word	20.04	11
Tenses	17.68	4.16
Subject-verb agreement	9.2	1.92
Missing Words	5.32	1.2
Proposition	7.52	1
Format	4.84	0.88
Singular-Plural Form	6.4	0.36
Pronouns	0.4	0
Spelling	0.2	0
Capitalization	1.32	0
Punctuation	0.48	0
Total	75.52	20.52

Table 2 indicates the improvement of students' writing skills due to the decrease in mean errors from 75.52 to 20.52. This result implies that instructional scaffolding enhances students' writing skills in composing a research paper. The lessening of the mean average reveals that students have gained more knowledge of grammatical sentences, written complete and structured sentences relating the ideas and forming coherence in writing. Equally, they used less frequent repetition of some vocabulary, and fewer errors in punctuation even made few mistakes in support of Aslam, Khanam, Fatima, Akbar, and Muhammad (2017) study which concluded that instructional scaffolding creates "a substantial change in the academic achievement of students… as compared to those who were taught with a traditional lecture or discussion method." This conclusion was also perceived by Dawn, Dominguez, Troutman, Bond, and Cone (2011) that lecture-based coursework failed to develop the skills of learners to evaluate clinical literature critically. Faraj's study (2015) also supports the notion that instructional scaffolding could both improve students' proficiency in English language and mold students' awareness in writing appropriately, accurately and meaningfully.

CONCLUSIONS

This quantitative study has revealed that inappropriate words and tenses are the most common errors made by SHS learners. The use of inappropriate words in an academic paper was due to learner's lack of reading an example of academic text such as research journal, critique paper, or term paper. Through reading an academic text, SHS learners can have an idea of what words should be applied in writing a research paper. The errors in tenses occurred due to learners' not enough knowledge of the other functions of tenses in a paragraph. Therefore, enough exposure can enhance the research writing skill of SHS learners.

The use of instructional scaffolding with the assistance of correction symbols improve the writing skills of students for a research paper. With this technique, learners develop their awareness as they get to reflect on what could they possibly have done wrong in their composition. Notably, the learners have gained critical thinking skills which help them analyze what words they should use and the shifting of tenses. The findings have validated that instructional scaffolding is a useful technique in teaching writing a research paper.

More pointedly, the study implies that instructional scaffolding can be practiced in teaching research to Senior High School students. Aligned with

this, research teachers may expose students to research journals and academic writing conventions. This study may be further investigated by other researchers employing the students' perspective, a technique that may be adapted to other subjects.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

The findings of the study can be translated into a teaching module for honing the writing skills of the students. The teaching module offers content and activities that sharpen students' skills in writing an academic paper by applying the scaffolding technique.

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