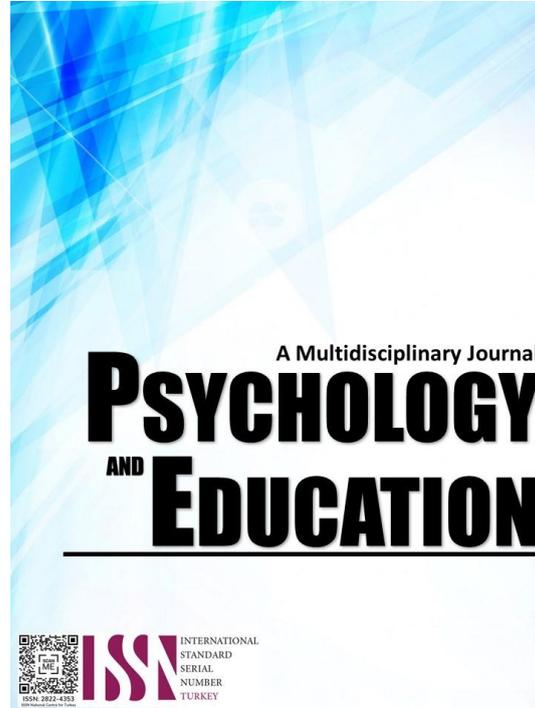


# WRITING SKILLS OF FRESHMAN STUDENTS OF THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION



## PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

2023

Volume: 7

Pages: 604-609

Document ID: 2023PEMJ581

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.7746077

Manuscript Accepted: 2023-13-3



## Writing Skills of Freshman Students of the College of Education

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### Abstract

Writing is one of the central pillars of language learning and should be major interest and concern to teachers and students. This study used the descriptive-comparative survey method. It determined the writing skills level of the freshman education students at Mindanao State University- Maguindanao in mechanics in terms of grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure and in rhetoric in terms of strategy, organization and style. Furthermore, the researcher utilized a researcher's-made communicative writing tests as research instrument of the study. The respondents of the study were the fifty six (56) BSEd freshman education. Based on the data gathered, the following summary of findings were presented: The writing skill level of the freshman college of education students in mechanics in terms of grammar was "satisfactory" with the mean of 4.09, punctuation was "satisfactory" with the mean of 4.06, sentence structure was "satisfactory" with the mean of 4.20, mechanics as a whole is "satisfactory" as indicated by the overall mean of 4.12; the writing skill obtained a Friedman  $X^2_r$  statistics of 2.153 and a p-value of 0.341 described as not significant; the writing skill level of the freshman college of education students in rhetoric in terms of strategy was "poor" with the mean of 3.71, organization was "satisfactory" with the mean of 4.44, style was "poor" with the mean of 3.72, and rhetoric as a whole was "satisfactory" as indicated by the overall mean of 3.96; the writing skill obtained a Friedman  $X^2_r$  statistics of 27.96 and a p-value of 0.001 described as significant; there was no significant difference between writing skills level in mechanics and rhetoric. Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that the freshman Education Students' writing skills in mechanic and rhetoric need further enhancement.

**Keywords:** *grammar, writing skills, tertiary students, rhetoric, sentence structure*

### Introduction

Writing is a crucial academic skill in college. As a matter of fact, Professors in college, who handle English language courses, are very particular on the correct subject-verb agreement, tenses of the verbs, punctuation marks, variation of sentences, and rules and principles in writing. This happens when students are asked to compose an essay, short stories, poems, scripts for drama presentation, and even reflection papers. Indeed, good writing skill is a prerequisite for the students to pass all English subjects and do better in school.

Writing is not only important as an academic skill, but it is also an important skill in one's career; nearby profession require some form of writing on the performance of the job. In the same perspective, good writing skills are valued in workplace. People who are good in writing appear to be more capable, intelligent, responsible and credible. Good writing skills do not only ease communication but also affects career.

Additionally, writing is the most popular ways of expressing emotions, and thoughts. Through writing, people can take time and can state their emotion clearly. Writing tasks are applied broadly during language practice for learning foreign language. Yet, students in all levels of education including tertiary education face many problems and often cannot make

sense or convey the meaning to the readers through their writing tasks (Chowdhury, 2015).

In fact, Bo (2014) conducted a doctoral study of Norwegian students in English higher education. The result showed that the Norwegian students often did not acquire the proper skills in English in school needed later in higher education and professional careers. He argued that English teaching had put too much focus on communicative method at the expense of accuracy.

In the Philippines, Rosa (2017) said that the writing skills of Filipino students need to be improved. Insufficient knowledge and skills in writing can greatly affect their college and career success. Additionally, the research study conducted by the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) in 1998 has proven that many college students are incapable of producing presentable English composition. This fact is undeniable, particularly in public academies.

According to some faculty members of the College of Education, Mindanao State University - Maguindanao, the writing skills of the freshman students from the English, Math and Science society are generally poor and needs to be improved through series of writing activities. To confirm this, it is necessary that their writing skills will be gauged so that if there's any problem immediate proper remediation shall be recommended.

## Respondents of the Study

### Research Questions

This study was conducted to determine the writing skill level of the College of Education freshman students at Mindanao State University- Maguindanao. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of the students' writing skills in mechanics in terms of:
  - 1.1 Grammar;
  - 1.2 Punctuation; and
  - 1.3 Sentence Structure?
2. Is there a significant difference among the areas in mechanics in terms of:
  - 2.1 Grammar;
  - 2.2 Punctuation; and
  - 2.3 Sentence Structure?
3. What is the level of students' writing skills in rhetoric in terms of:
  - 3.1 Strategy;
  - 3.2 Organization; and
  - 3.3 Style?
4. Is there a significant difference among the areas in rhetoric in terms of:
  - 4.1 Strategy;
  - 4.2 Organization; and
  - 4.3 Style?
5. Is there any significant difference between the level of students' writing skills in mechanics and rhetoric?

### Methodology

#### Research Design

This study used the descriptive-comparative survey method. It determined the writing skills level of the freshman college of education students at Mindanao State University- Maguindanao in mechanics in terms of grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure and in rhetoric in terms of strategy, organization and style. The descriptive-comparative survey method was appropriate to use because it best served to answer the research problem.

The respondents of the study were the fifty six (56) BSEd freshman education students. There were twenty eight (28) English, seventeen (17) Science, and eleven (11) Math. The study used simple stratified random sampling to ensure proper representation among the freshman students of the different society.

#### Research Instrument

The study utilized researcher's made communicative writing test to determine the writing skills level of the freshman college of education students. To prove the validity and reliability of the two communicative writing tests, the researcher conducted pilot testing conducted last February 18, 2019 with five examinees from English, Math and Science. After the researcher has checked the ten (10) samples of two communicative writing tests, it was found out that their scores are in average level. The researcher informed the target respondents on the schedule and venue of the test.

During the test proper, the respondents were asked to compose two descriptive essay based on the pictures given. The two communicative writing tests were limited to one hour and thirty minutes only. It was personally administered by the researcher himself. After the test, the respondents' outputs were collected and gave it to the two chosen qualified raters.

This communicative writing test was appropriate to use because writing is a process of organizing the idea, opinions and feelings into written form. It was a complex activity with the control language both of the sentence level (grammatical, structure, punctuations and spelling) and the beyond the sentence rank (organizing, and integrating information into cohesive and coherent paragraph or text.) It has great chance of possibility to measure the writing skills level of students by letting them write or compose paragraph by their own.

#### Data Gathering Procedures

The researcher wrote a letter to the Dean of the College of Education, Mindanao State University-Maguindanao, Dalican, Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao asking permission to conduct a study to the freshman students. The letter was duly reviewed and noted by his adviser. After the permission was granted, the researcher with the guidance of his adviser selected the respondents using simple stratified



random sampling. Then, the researcher asked the respondents to compose a descriptive essay based on the pictures given that was limited to two (2) hours only. Afterwards, the two (2) communicative tests were checked by the two raters, who are experts in the said competencies. The data were kept and treated with confidentiality to ensure that their names should not be revealed. Finally, the data obtained were tallied, analyzed, interpreted, and the manuscript was prepared for the final presentation.

## Results and Discussion

### Students' Writing Skills in Mechanics

Table 1 presents the data on the level of students' writing skills in mechanics in terms of grammar, punctuation and sentence structure. This also reflects the mean and its description.

Table 1. *Level of Students' Writing Skills in Mechanics in Grammar, Punctuation and Sentence Structure*

<i>Areas</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Description</i>
Grammar	4.09	Satisfactory
Punctuation	4.06	Satisfactory
Sentence Structure	4.20	Satisfactory
Overall Mean	4.12	Satisfactory

As shown in Table 1, grammar garnered a highest mean of 4.09 described as satisfactory. This means that when the students are given writing communicative test, they have average competence in writing appropriate tense with observable difficulty in writing. This further means that they are already aware on the appropriate use of the tenses of the verbs in grammar particularly in subject-verb agreement. It also indicates that students need to constantly develop their grammar competence in writing. This implies that the students need further reinforcement activities to master the basic skills in grammar. Thus, according to Freeman (1995) as cited in Abdullah, Langalan and Malasigan (2018), grammar is about form and one way to teach form is to give students rules; moreover, grammar is about much more than, and its teaching is served to students but giving rules.

Punctuation garnered a mean of 4.06 described as satisfactory. This means that the students possess minimum competence in using punctuation marks in communicative writing test. The data suggest that further training on writing discourse is needed to

master the basic skills in writing. This finding is supported by Carrol and Wilson (1995) as cited in Amil and Kodama (2018) stating that the possible cause why students are problematic when it comes to punctuation, saying that students' writing encounter punctuation problem as there are no universal rules of punctuations.

In addition, sentence structure garnered a mean of 4.20 described as satisfactory. This means that the students have basic foundation in sentence construction. They can construct sentences with different structures in the composition. Thus, the data imply that they still need to improve their basic skill in sentence construction to reach the high level of competence. Fareed (2016) found out in his study that Pakistani Undergraduate English as Second Learners have difficulty on varying sentences especially when they are asked to compose descriptive paragraphs. They are not exposed to different types of sentences during their previous education.

Finally, Table 1 garnered an overall mean of 4.12 described as satisfactory. This means that most all of the respondents have basic competency in composing the writing communicative test and they have minimum background about grammar, punctuation and sentence structure. Probably, it happens due to effective instruction provided by their teachers. Isaacson (2019), stated that teachers should have effective methods for helping students with learning problems overcome the mechanical obstacles to writing. Teacher should teach the process of writing from planning to final draft, is central to good writing instruction.

### Comparison Among the Different Areas of Writing Skills in Mechanics

Table 2 shows the comparison between the different areas of writing skills in Mechanics in terms of grammar, punctuation and sentence structure.

Table 2. *Comparison Among Different Areas of Writing Skills in Mechanics*

<i>Area</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Friedman X<sup>2</sup>r Statistics</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Description</i>
Grammar	4.09			
Punctuation	4.06	2.153 <sup>ns</sup>	0.341	Not Significant
Sentence Structure	4.20			

As gleaned in Table 2, the mean scores of different



areas are compared using the Friedman  $X^2_r$  statistics to show the significant difference among the areas of writing skills in terms of grammar, punctuation and sentence structure. The data show that the three areas of writing skill obtained a Friedman  $X^2_r$  statistics of 2.153 and a p-value of 0.341 described as not significant. Thus the null hypothesis claiming that there is no significant difference among the different areas of writing skills in terms of grammar, punctuation and sentence structure is accepted. This means that students' performance in writing in terms of mechanics were not significantly different from each other. This further explains that the students have basic competency in writing in terms of grammar, punctuation marks, and sentence structure. The students should strive more to meet the high level of competency in writing. Learning grammar rules and the mechanics in writing are essential components of learning to write. Having strong skills in writing and grammar allows writers to get their message or story to their readers in a clear and understandable way (<https://time4writing.com>).

### Students' Writing Skills in Rhetoric

Table 3 reflects the data on the level of students' writing skills in rhetoric in terms of strategy, organization and style. This also reflects the mean and its description.

Table 3. *Level of Students' Writing Skills in Mechanics in terms Strategy, Organization and Style*

<i>Areas</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Description</i>
Strategy	3.71	Poor
Organization	4.44	Satisfactory
Style	3.72	Poor
Overall Mean	3.96	Satisfactory

As reflected in Table 3, in terms of rhetoric, organization obtained a highest mean of 4.44 described as satisfactory. This means that students have observable difficulty in organizing their ideas to form logical arrangement of event in the given communicative writing test. This further explains that the flow or sequence of events in the composition is confusing. The data suggest that the students need further reinforcement to improve their basic skills in writing. Pablo and Lesaten (2018) said that writing is a complicated process primarily because it requires a combination of skills. Writing relies on good fine motor functions, visual motor planning, attention, sequencing, thinking, memory, and knowledge of

grammar, sentence structure, vocabulary and purpose of writing.

Furthermore, style obtained a mean of 3.72 describes as poor. This indicates that the students have not performed well in a writing communicative test that demands sensory words or figurative languages that are related to the topic and picture given. This means that the students have difficulty in describing the topic and picture using sensory or figurative languages. Thus, the data imply that the students need enrichment or reinforcement activities to improve their basic skills in writing. Osman (2016) found out that the students of Sudan University of Science and Technology can hardly write a paragraph with sensory description and unification because most of them adopt simple style of writing.

On the other hand, Table 3 shows that the strategy obtained a mean of 3.71 described as poor. The data indicate that the students have difficulty in giving quotes, lines or questions in the communicative writing test. They have difficulty in using related quotes, lines or questions in the composition. Thus, this further implies that the students should be exposed to various quotes, lines or questions to enhance their basic strategy skills in writing. Wigati (2014) also found out in his study that the students in the upper-immediate level of Karawang University had problems on how to write an introductory paragraph. They are often confused on how to begin the descriptive essay.

Generally, data on Table 3 obtained an overall mean of 3.96 described as satisfactory. The data explicate that the students have acquired basic competency in answering communicative writing test in rhetoric in terms of strategy, style and organization. Since their writing skills in terms of rhetoric belong to satisfactory level, they need to double their effort in improving their skills in rhetoric. According to Grabe and Stoller (2002), strategic reader, however, requires more than simply knowledge of reading strategies. Readers should also be able to apply the strategies consciously, effectively, and in combination.

### Comparison Between Different Areas of Writing Skills in Rhetoric

Table 4 presents the comparison between the different areas of writing skills in rhetoric in terms of strategy, organization and style.



Table 4. Comparison Between Different Areas of Writing Skills in Rhetoric

Area	Mean	Friedman X <sup>2</sup> r Statistics	p-value	Description
Strategy	3.71			
Organization	4.44	27.96	0.001	Significant
Style	3.72			

As gleaned in Table 4, the mean scores of the different areas are compared using the Friedman X<sup>2</sup>r Statistics to show the significant difference among the areas of writing skills in terms of strategy, organization and style. The data show that the three areas of writing skill obtained a Friedman X<sup>2</sup>r statistics of 27.96 and a p-value of 0.001 described as significant. Thus, the null hypothesis claiming that there is no significant difference among the different areas of writing skills in terms of strategy, organization and style is rejected. Therefore, the difference between the three areas of writing skills in rhetoric is significant. This means that there are disparities among the level of their skills in the strategy, organization and style. As shown in the Table, the students have acquired basic competency in organization. They have poor performance in terms of strategy and style. The data imply that that the students must improve their performances in different areas of writing skills in rhetoric. Oshima & Hogue (2006) said that writing is never a one- step action, it means that when the writers write, they do more than just putting words together to make sentences. They go through several steps to produce a piece of writing.

**Comparison Between Writing Skills in Mechanics and Rhetoric**

Table 5 shows the comparison between of the freshman Education in mechanics and rhetoric.

Table 5. Comparison Between Writing Skills in Mechanics and Rhetoric

Writing Skills	Overall Mean	Computed t-value	Tabular t-value	Description
Mechanics	4.12			
Rhetoric	3.96	0.6688	4.303	Not Significant

Table 5 shows the significant difference between the students’ level of writing skills in mechanics and rhetoric. As reflected in the Table, the students’ writing skills in terms of mechanics and rhetoric is compared using the t-test. The mechanics and rhetoric

have a computed t-value of 0.6688 which is lower than the tabular value of 4.303 described as not significant. Thus, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference between the students’ level of writing skills in mechanics and rhetoric is accepted. This means that students’ writing skills both in mechanics and rhetoric are on the same level. Since their writing skills belong to the satisfactory level, thus they need to exert effort in improving their writing skills. According to Lyerla (2010), students must learn to list ideas related to a topic; plan the point of view and verb tense to be used in the paragraph; plan the sequence in which ideas will be expressed; and write a variety of topic, detail and clincher sentences. In addition, students who master the paragraph writing strategy consistently produce written pieces that contain topic, details, and clincher sentences.

**Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that the freshman Education students’ writing skills in mechanics and rhetoric are both at the average level, thus needing further enhancement.

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following are recommended: (1) The program advisers of English, Math, and Science should conduct English diagnostic tests in writing to evaluate the writing skills of the freshman students as the basis for writing remediation. (2) English teachers should employ various activities that can enhance students’ writing skills specifically on strategy and style in writing. (3) Freshman college of students should strive and study harder to improve their writing skills specifically in strategy and style skills in writing. (4) The English instructors are encouraged to use the compiled writing activities as supplemental activities to further enhance the writing skills of the freshman students. (5) Lastly, other researchers may conduct a similar study on a wider scope using different research instruments to validate the results and findings of the present study. Likewise, they are encouraged to investigate the factors that may contribute to respondents’ writing skill levels.

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