

Exploring the Creative Writing Strategies of English Major Students

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Abstract

Creative Writing fosters academic success in developing essential skills and intellectual growth. This study investigates the role of writing strategies on improving the creative writing skills among English major students. A focus on grammar and structure in academic settings can sometimes hinder the flow of creativity and self-expression in writing. This Qualitative Phenomenological study examines the impact of constructive criticism on the writing skills of English major students in Davao del Sur State College. Through qualitative interviews with ten participants, the study investigates the role of writing strategies, constructive criticism, and proofreading that students experience during their writing. The study reveals that constructive feedback significantly impacts students' strategies in creative writing by also fostering proofreading and simplifying words usage. On the other hand, the fear of judgement, and language capabilities may hinder the students' participation, and limiting the variety of perspectives. The findings of this study highlighted the importance of providing structured and organize constructive feedback among students written outputs, and incorporate proofreading, and engaging students in writing workshops to enhance and develop their writing skills and overall learning experience.

Keywords: Writing Difficulties, Creative Writing, Constructive Feedback, Writing Strategies

1. Introduction

Writing is an essential component of language skills, providing a vital means for people to communicate their ideas, share viewpoints, and express feelings. However, some of the students in Davao del Sur State College having difficulties in terms of their written task like creative writing, based on the teachers that students lack of structure, limited vocabulary, on does not have any idea on what to write. Teachers tend to use strategies to help their students in written task, they let their students to observe around and tell their opinion or ideas, giving ideas on what to write, and giving them inspiration. A research study on the challenges and benefits of creative writing by Kumar, T. (2020) examines the challenges that students in New Delhi, India CBSE-affiliated schools regularly experience when producing creative writing and the academic benefit of creative writing for students. In most cases in Sudan, the study of Mahmood, R., Shah, H. A., & Alam, F. (2021) states that literary discourses are examined in academic English, creative writing, and literature writing courses in Sudanese EFL students. The study by Pablo, J. C. I., & Lasaten, R. C. S. (2018) identified an examined the challenges that Senior High School students in Laoag City faced when writing academic essays, as well as the overall quality of the essays that the students submitted. In accordance with the study of Galvez, S. (2019) states that students often refused to write because they struggle with knowing what to write, and the challenge of facing a blank page is daunting. A study of Belono (2018) in Mindanao State University-Maguindanao Senior High School were 10 randomly chosen Grade 12 students participated in the phenomenological study where it focuses on the factors influencing online English learners' writing motivation. Additionally, the idea of analyzing the techniques used by Grade 11 students in the division of Davao del Norte in their creative writing in their poems about politics and social issues. Students are incapable of expressing themselves in a clear, correct and comprehensible manner in writing, as teachers also having hard time to think strategies on what is the best for their students to offer aside from tailoring their discussions.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

This research adopts a qualitative phenomenological research design hence it seeks to explore and understand individuals lived experiences of a particular phenomenon, in this case, college students' writing problems. Phenomenology uncovered the essence or meaning of these experiences as perceived by the participants, focusing on their subjective perspectives and interpretations. This study followed the phenomenological approach to gain insight into the rich and distinct experiences of college students facing writing challenges. The study explored students' subjective perceptions, attitudes, and lived experiences, aimed to uncover deeper meanings and understandings of their writing problems beyond surface-level observations or quantitative measures.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at Davao del Sur State College which is situated at Matti, Digos City, Davao del Sur. Davao del Sur State College, located in Digos City, Davao del Sur, was a satellite campus of Southern Philippines Agribusiness and Marine and Aquatic School of Technology (SPAMAST) whose main campus is located in Malita, Davao Occidental. The institution is a great place to investigate students writing challenges because it provides a supportive learning atmosphere. Students from various courses and academic levels make up a diverse group that offers a wide range of study participants.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The study concentrated on surveying ten (10) English Major students who had enrolled in creative writing courses at Davao del Sur State College in S.Y. 2024-2025 varying in their area of grammar, mechanics, and sentence structure. The ten (10) participants of this study were selected based on their academic performance in their creative writing courses. Through interaction with these students, the study investigated their difficulties in writing comprehensively. The feedback gathered on the respondents provided a full insight into determining the challenges and exploring potential remedies and contributing factors that improved students' writing skills. The selection of the participants was based on their academic performance in creative writing subjects.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The selection of the participants was based on their academic performance in creative writing subjects. The criteria of the selection of participants were based on the following: (1) 10 Students officially enrolled in the S.Y. 2024-2025 in Davao del Sur State College under English Major 7 (2) Having difficulties in writing (3) Enrolled in creative writing courses (4) Willing to be a participant of the study.

2.5 Research Instrument

This study employed Interview Questionnaires to gather data in this phenomenological study. The questionnaires featured open-ended 45 questions designed to delve into the students' experience and perceptions of the strategies in their creative writing. The questions explored areas such as their experiences in different writing styles such as essay, short stories, novels, reflection etc. The interview was conducted face-to-face to facilitate direct interaction with the participants.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

In this study, the collection of data is through interview questionnaires, the researcher explained the purpose of the study to the participants. The information of the participants must be kept and protected as for confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy. In conducting research the data resulted from the interview were then recorded, transcribed, coded, analyzed, and presented in the form of an in-depth description Bulqiyah, S., Mahbub, M., & Nugraheni, D. A. (2021). (1) The researcher followed a certain procedure on how to conduct the research. (2) The researcher asked for consent of the students who will be going to be the participants in the study. (3) The researcher delivered permission to the Dean of Institute of Teacher Education. 46 (4) The researcher conducted the interview through questionnaires and give enough time for the participants to answer the questions. (5) The participants were done answering the interview questionnaires, and the researcher proceed with collecting data.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

This study used patterns, concepts, and structures found in participant narratives as the main focus of data analysis in phenomenological research. The process of analysis includes multiple ongoing stages, such as interview transcription and theme analysis to find patterns and differences in the experiences of the participants, such as examining errors in the written responses they provided. Through this process, we hoped to learn more about the typical grammar problems made by college students, explore the factors that influenced their writing style, and—most importantly—identify solutions for correcting these writing problems.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

When conducting research, it is important to take into account the ethical considerations and the challenges involved in protecting the identity of participants during the recruitment and dissemination process. Adhering to the ethical considerations in conducting research, the following should be followed: (1) Informed consent, to ensure that participants had all the necessary information about the study and the freedom to decide whether or not to participate. (2) Voluntary participation, in which participants are not forced into taking part in the research. (3) Anonymity and confidentiality were important to protect the identity of participants; they could use code names instead of real names, securely protecting their personal information.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Grammar and Syntax Problem

The first category deals with Grammatical Errors, which are mistakes in the use of language rules that govern structure, word order, and syntax in written task. These errors can include incorrect verb tense, subject-verb agreement problems, misuse of pronouns, and improper sentence structure. Grammatical errors can disrupt the clarity and readability of a text, leading to potential misunderstanding. They often result from limited language proficiency, lack of familiarity with grammatical rules or recklessness. The first category shows that student face difficulties on grammar upon creating their written task, students experience doubt on using words on creating essays or any written task. In accordance with the study of Mao and Yao (2024), states that grammatical errors are common in students' writing and, to some extent that hinder effective writing. One of the majority results that students face difficulties on creating grammatically correct written output or task. Students also had a short respond due to limited of time conducted. 53 Some of the participants responses that falls under this theme are: "Correct Grammar" (IDI1) "Grammatical Errors" (IDI4) "Grammar that I used when making essay or written task." (IDI9) Participant number one generalize his idea upon what he usually encountered upon writing which is the correction of its grammar. The data given is caused of limited time given. The use of correct grammar in writing ensured clarity and effective expression, as students used grammarly to correct their grammars as the study of Purnamika (2023), that grammarly is what learners used to correct their grammar mistakes. Teacher also used grammarly to meet their self-learning needs in teaching students (Thi et al., 2022). Participant number two also believe that grammatical errors are also one of the reasons in writing issues of students. One of the issues is written outputs and assignments as the students from University of Hong Kong encounter (Cheng, 2022). Linguistic competence also makes their language less reliable in writing (Lev-Ari, 2014), these errors may include issues with syntax, verb tense, subject-verb agreement, punctuation, and sentence structure. 54 Participant number three also deals with grammar issues as he created written pieces. The grammar employed in essays or written tasks reflects one's quality and readability of the output. The students' grammar issue may be evaluated through an English test were we can see their grammatical errors in writing (Thirakunkovit, 2021).

3.2 Struggles with Subject-Verb Agreement

A grammatical rule also known as subject-verb agreement makes sure that the subject and verb of a sentence have the same number, whether it be singular or plural subject uses a plural verb, while a singular subject takes a singular verb, with certain exceptions for compound subjects, collective nouns, and intervening phrases. Accurate usage of subject-verb agreement is essential for clarity and grammatical accuracy as errors can cause confusion or disrupt communication. The third category deals with the correct usage of subject-verb agreement. Subject verb agreement mistakes arise from some complexities in English grammar. Intervening phrases can obscure the true subject, leading to incorrect verb agreement. Students hesitated to what idea they want to write as they're not sure on what subject-verb agreement they 57 would use. The research study of Alican, M. P. (2020), states that subject verb agreement is relevant in determining one's grammatical ability. Subject-verb agreement plays a crucial in any type of written task as it gives unified and cohesive work or output. Some of the participants responses that fall under this them are: "When completing writing assignments, I often encounter grammar mistakes such as incorrect use of verbs and its participle. Although, I already got the idea and concept of subject-verb agreement, still, I'm a bit confused on what participle should I used in my sentence in paragraph." (IDI9) "It's hard to grasp for ideas and I'm not confident that I am using an appropriate grammar, such as subject-verb agreement." (IDI8) The first participant encounters grammar mistakes in writing, particularly with the use of verbs and their participles. In English students face challenges in understanding past participles and their role in complex sentences (Mammadova, 2023). Teachers should target lessons that emphasize the area of grammar and the use of verbs for students to overcome misunderstandings (Kumala et al., 2018). The second participant struggles to formulate ideas and lacks of confidence in their grammar usage, mostly in subject verb-agreement. Verb errors are some of the most common mistakes made by English students (Rozovskaya et al., 2014). Intensive instruction in English grammar and 58 vocabulary during writing classes and tailor lessons accordingly will students recognize and correct their mistakes effectively (Sermsook et al., 2017).

3.3 Writer's Block and Idea Generation

Writer's block and idea generation is a blockage that comes from many sources like perfectionism, fear of failure, lack of inspiration, or just mental difficulty. Most of the students having struggles on what to write and how to start their creative writing and they are unsure on what to write and the content of their text which is the cause of their mental block. The study of Ashida (2018), suggest that to address the writer's block there 61 should be a proposing question-based idea generation system that help authors, particularly beginners derive global scenarios and settings from themes, thereby facilitating the completion of their written works. Some of participants responses that falls under this theme are: "Difficulties on dealing of where and how to start the creative writing." (IDI2) "Writer's block, most of the time it's forgetting the context of what I am supposed to write." (IDI6) "One of the writing difficulties I often face is writer's block. I find myself starting at a blank page, unsure of how to begin." (IDI7) "The main content of the text on how to start." (IDI9) Participant number one encounter with determining where and how to begin their creative writing. While critical thinking is recognized as an effective teaching approach, there is insufficient research on how creative writing influences the development students critical thinking skills (Achilov, 2017). Having also pre and post-test help teachers identify students writing skill and have the idea to help them improve (Tok & Kandemir, 2015). Creative writing allows students to express themselves freely, explore imagination which help them foster their skills. Participant number two experiences writers

block, often forgetting the context of what they are supposed to write. Factors such as physiological, motivational, cognitive, and behavioral issues are one of the causes of writer's block (Ahmed & Guss, 2022). The impact of using flipped classroom improves writing skills, analysis, evaluation, and creation may help to eliminate writer's block of the students (Salem, 2018). Participant number three also faces writer's block, often forgetting the context of what they are supposed to write. The students also lack essential writing development skills, and their writing struggles are further compounded by graphomotor challenges (Alfaki, 2015). Other approaches of flipped classroom include student-centered teaching practices that improve their high-level thinking skills, critical thinking and creative writing (Salem, 2018). Participant number four's main difficulty is how to start his written task. Students with weak English language skills often struggle while dealing with written outputs or tasks (Ayton et al. 2021). Acquiring proficiency in English is not just about speaking or understanding the language; it is also crucial for effective writing (Wang et al., 2024). Students should take a few minutes to jot down any topics or themes that may interest them to write.

3.4 Lack of Vocabulary and Creative Confidence

People may find it difficult to express complicated ideas or fully engage in conversations as a result of this deficiency, which may hinder clear and accurate dialogue. Lack of vocabulary may have trouble finding the correct words, can hinder understandings, and be reluctant to express themselves for fear of being misinterpreted. The second category features the Lack of Vocabulary of students on composing creative writing. Students often have limited vocabulary in writing due to insufficient reading, infrequent writing practice, and a tendency to rely on familiar words. In the study of Gonzalez-Carrasco (2023), highlighted that a limited vocabulary greatly affects academic performance, especially for ESL freshmen. It restricts effective communication and reading skills, both crucial for learning and success in academics. Students' response was shortened due to time conducted. Some of the participants' responses that fall under this theme are: "The lack of vocabulary." (IDI3) "The lack of vocabulary." (IDI4) "With the words or grammar that I used to compose written task." (IDI10) Participant number one struggles with a lack of vocabulary, which hinders their writing. Vocabulary in the process of learning a new language is essential (Kormos, 2019), lack of vocabulary does not allow students to express freely. It is the building blocks that can be used to share information and express thought through writing (Halik & Jayasundra, 2021). Participant number two also faces difficulties due to a lack of vocabulary. Students mostly find difficulties in spelling, grammar, context usage and understanding idiomatic expressions (Muhammad, Y. (2022). Teachers' perspective should explore methods to use in teaching students' vocabulary in English (Afzal, 2019). Participant number three is concerned about the words and grammar they use in their written task. Many students having difficulty with understanding and using grammar effectively, which impacts their overall language proficiency (Cahya, 2023). A reconceptualized grammar instruction is an effective way of teaching students; it helps enhance their understanding and critical thinking skills (Larsen-Freema, 2015). Lack of Creative Confidence emphasizes the creative confidence of students upon creating their written task. Fear of criticism can discourage students from sharing their unique ideas, whereas perfectionism often results in overanalyzing and doubting their work. Moreover, a lack of comprehension regarding the creative process, along with insufficient support and guidance from the teachers intensifies their reluctance to fully engage in writing tasks. Some of the participants' responses that fall under this theme are: "Creative writing requires you to be imaginative and it's very hard for me to express myself in a creative way and that is one thing that I find difficult." (IDI5) "Creative writing requires a mind that is able to create unique concepts. It is free writing but as a writer I am bound to think depict a world of imagination through words. Basically, constructing pieces under creative writing is not easy." (IDI6) I find creative writing difficult because it requires a lot of different kinds of styles and thinking than the normal format of writing in academic writing. It's not all about conveying information but making your piece as creative, imaginative and unique." (IDI7) "I also have doubt on constructing essays or making reports that makes me unsure on my written task." (IDI10) Participant number one finds it difficult to express themselves creatively, as creative writing requires imagination, which they struggle with. Writing is a crucial skill for language production as stated by Fareed et al. (2016), but it is often challenging to students who face various difficulties. Engaging with blended learning, combining self-study with face-to-face interaction is a great solution (Tawil, H. (2018). Participant number two states that creative writing demands the ability to generate unique concepts and depict an imaginative world through words. The manner of expressing thoughts, writing styles, and other culturally varying factors greatly affect the writings of students (Ahmed, M. A. (2016). Students may review literature or articles that demonstrate effective writing skills (Baresh, 2022).

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The purpose of this study is to help students who struggle on their written task and help them give strategies on how they can improve their writing skills so they can improve their writing abilities. The study was conducted at Davao del Sur State College (DSSC) having 10 English major participants. The study employed phenomenological qualitative research design utilizing thematic analysis and the instrument used in this study is In-Depth Interview. The participants were interviewed thoroughly to gather detailed data. The interview started by students giving their own opinion on their struggles or difficulties they encounter while creating creative writing followed by their personal observation of their own mistakes in making written tasks or outputs and lastly is the strategies that English major participants did to address their difficulties in writing. The collected information was analyzed using thematic analysis, involving steps such as coding, transcription,

and identifying key themes. These main themes emerged from categorized codes, with support from a data analyst to ensure accuracy and reliability in the theme development process. The results showed several key themes at first is the writing issues that English major students mostly encountered in creative writing, were three themes was identified namely Grammar and Syntax Issues, followed by Writer's Block and Idea Generation, lastly is Self-expression Barriers. The first theme indicate that students most likely have issues with the formation or the structure of the piece under grammar and syntax. Additionally, other students would have mental block that affects the structure of their ideas and flow of their writing in general. On the other hand, the primary reasons of English Major students on encountering difficulties in their writing is Self-Expression Barriers and their Limited Writing Experience. This theme focuses on the weakness of the participants in writing including their confidence and lack of vocabulary which is vital in writing. Moreover, it shows that students also struggle due to limited background of writing together with the usage of format. This 90 highlighted the struggles and difficulties of the participants when they're making their written task. Lastly, the analysis also revealed the strategies that may help the students to uplift their difficulties and struggles with writing. Teacher intervention is one of the solutions that this study could offer as teacher will identify their mistake and give constructive criticism which make the students realize what is wrong with their piece and think ways to make it better and employing writing discipline by simplifying everything which makes their paper look unique and uncomplicated.

The first group of implications is derived from the outcomes of the first research question, who focused on the writing issues that mostly encountered by the students who participate the interview. The results shows that grammar are the most concern of students in creating their written outputs followed by misuse of punctuations. Offering resources or mini-lessons dedicated to organizing focused grammar workshops that cover rules, common mistakes, and effective writing techniques can give students practical experience and personalized feedback. By applying these 91 simple strategies, educators can support students in improving their writing skills and boosting their confidence in their abilities. The second set of implications is closely related to outcome of the second research questions it examined the cause of writing difficulties of English major students. Self-expression barrier lights up the most issue of students followed their limited experience that hinder their skills to create a unique and structured piece. This shows that educators should be essential to conduct thorough assessments to identify specific areas where the students face difficulties like, structure, grammar and self-expression. Increased writing opportunities is what educators should offer to students and a range of prompts to enhance their confidence and foster their unique skills. By implementing these measures, educators can gain a deeper understanding of the root causes of writing difficulties. The last set of implications came from the third question, that draws the and examined the teachers' strategies that students imply on their writing skills. Giving feedback to students is the focus of this category to give constructive feedback to students through identifying and correcting their mistakes. Understanding the teacher intervention would be helpful if educators would also add individualized feedback on students' output, which helps them identify their specific strength and weaknesses upon 92 guiding their improvement. Moreover, organizing also writing contest or challenges that can motivate students to practice writing in enjoyable and engaging manner. Upon implementing these strategies, educators can effectively address students' writing difficulties and promote their development as confident writers. In conclusion, the implications of this study highlight the role of creative writing strategies among English Major students of Davao del Sur State College. Analyzing the writing difficulties of the students helps educators finds the best solution that they could offer and possible solution that could help students writing difficulties turns to writing strengths. This not only enhances students writing capabilities but also help them to become a great writer in the future.

Compliance with ethical standards

The study strictly complied with ethical standards in conducting research. Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the appropriate authorities and the participants were properly informed about the purpose of the study. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were given the freedom to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Informed consent was secured from all participants, ensuring that they fully understood the nature of their involvement. The researcher also guaranteed the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents by not disclosing any personal information and by using the data solely for academic purposes. Furthermore, all gathered data were handled with honesty and integrity, avoiding any form of manipulation or bias. These measures ensured that the rights, dignity, and welfare of the participants were fully protected throughout the study.

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