**IMPLEMENTING FORMAL THEMES: A COLLABORATIVE ACTION RESEARCH TO ENHANCE WRITING PROFICIENCY OF GRADE 9 STUDENTS**

**ABSTRACT**

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| **Aims**: The aim of this study is to enhance the writing abilities of Grade 9 participants by implementing formal themes, observations and analysis of their initial and revised output. The research involves a series of writing tasks that focus on improving grammar, coherence, and critical thinking. Through a step-by-step process, the interventions help participants develop their skills by offering feedback and tailored assistance.**Study Design:** The researchers utilized the Triangulation method to obtain the necessary data from the participants.**Place and Duration of Study:** The study was conducted at Philippine Nikkei Jin Kai International School during the academic year 2023-2024.**Methodology:** The participants of this study were the five (5) selected Grade 9 students at Philippine Nikkei Jin Kai International School AY: 2023–2024. The chosen students were enrolled in an on-site class, who displayed difficulties in writing.**Results:** The writing intervention improved the writing skills of selected Grade 9 students. Students showed progress in capitalization, verb tenses, and punctuation through repeated writing and teacher feedback. While sentence construction and coherence still needed improvement, their final essays showed better writing overall compared to their initial work.**Conclusion**: The writing intervention effectively improved students’ proficiency, especially in capitalization, verb tenses, and punctuation. Although challenges in sentence construction and coherence remained, overall writing skills improved through consistent practice and feedback. |

**Keywords:** *writing proficiency, formal theme, teacher intervention, teacher feedback*

**1.INTRODUCTION**

**Background of the Study**

Students’ writing quality has become the focus of education research nowadays. A good quality writing should fulfil the requirements of coherence and cohesion (Diah, 2022). A rich literature (Akkaya & Aydin, 2018; Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2016; Kellogg, 2001; Wirantaka, 2016) asserts certain characteristics, such as good content, organization, language use, grammatical use, and mechanical consideration, are unquestionably required for successful writing. Humans basically have the ability to write, they need intensive learning and practice gradually to master the writing ability perfectly. Moreover, having academic writing skills is undeniably an obligation (Weigle, 2005). Thus, in order to be a competent writer, someone must be able to express their scientific ideas in standard academic writing which can be clearly read and interpreted.

Research conducted by Smith and Johnson (2019) revealed prevalent difficulties encountered by students in writing across various academic disciplines in the United States. Through a thorough examination of student writing samples and interviews, Smith and Johnson (2019) identified key areas where students struggle and provided recommendations for addressing these challenges in educational settings. Factors contributing to poor academic writing skills include under-preparedness due to ineffective teaching of writing at the school level, socio-economic issues, and inadequate reading (Chokwe, 2013). Rao (2019) emphasized that formal or academic papers such as essays, presentations, research papers, and reports must be written correctly to present a polished and professional image. Consequently, there is a global demand for stricter standards of writing proficiency, whether one is an English teacher, a student, or a businessperson (Wijaya, 2017).

In the Philippines, Aradillos et al. (2022) unveiled the writing errors of Grade 7 learners from three public High Schools in Cebu. Findings revealed that the students have common writing errors in terms of punctuation, spelling, and capitalization. It is also discovered that the perceived challenges of the students include a lack of guidance from teachers or adults, understanding difficulty, text construction difficulty, and physical distractions. The students’ perceived strategies include writing exercises like note-taking, reading materials, checking and validating, and asking for guidance from peers. Developing writing skills has been met with most challenges, alongside speaking. Vocabulary, organization, spelling, and grammar are few among the most prevalent English writing problems of Filipinos. (Estacio et. al, 2018).

In a local setting, a study conducted by Uka et al. (2023) at the University of Mindanao revealed that SHS students are experiencing difficulties in applying grammatical and writing rules in their academic writing, such as appropriate usage of prepositions, omission and addition of affixations, proper structure of sentences, and substituting elements of sentences. The findings imply that consciousness-raising approaches to teaching grammar should be used by teachers in schools to improve students' knowledge of English grammar and writing conventions. Graham and Harris (2018) highlighted that many students struggled with organizing their thoughts coherently and using appropriate sentence structures, which negatively impacted the overall quality of their writing.

The aim of this study is to enhance the writing abilities of Grade 9 participants by implementing formal themes, observations and analysis of their initial and revised output. The research involves a series of writing tasks that focus on improving grammar, coherence, and critical thinking. Through a step-by-step process, the interventions help participants develop their skills by offering feedback and tailored assistance. The effectiveness of these interventions is evaluated through assessments conducted before and after the interventions, self-assessments by participants, and feedback from teachers. Ultimately, the study aims to discover methods for encouraging lasting improvements in the writing skills of high school students, providing valuable insights for educational practices.

With this, the researchers sought to answer the following inquiries:

1. What are the commonly observed writing errors of Grade 9 students?
2. What intervention can be utilized to address the observed writing errors of Grade 9 students?
3. What is the result of Grade 9 students’ writing proficiency after the intervention?

**2.REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

This chapter presents the literature of writing difficulties of junior high school students and its interventions throughout the time on which the paper is anchored on.

**Writing Difficulties of Junior High School Students.** Students often encounter a range of writing difficulties that can pose challenges to their writing process and overall writing quality.

Writing difficulty may refer to the challenges that individuals may encounter when trying to produce any written content. When students struggle with writing difficulties, this will prevent them from achieving their objectives in writing.

Students’ difficulties in writing is one of the most essential English skills for students to learn (Brown, 2015). When it comes to learning how to write well, the word "difficulty" comes up frequently. According to Erisda (2017), learners would have difficulty in writing since generating a new concept, constructing a topic from that idea, and selecting sentences that link to each other were not a very easy task.

It is also said that the demands of the readers, the writer's goal, and the purpose and occasion define the various forms of writing (Urquhart, 2005). It implies that writing is a complicated process, so it stands to reason that teaching writing would also be complicated. Additionally, writing helps the students concentrate on using language correctly, since they think about language use during the writing process.

According to Rass (2015) cited in Lestari et al (2020:262), “Writing is a difficult skill for native speakers and non-native speakers because they need to be able write in multiple issues such as content, organization, purpose, audience, vocabularies, and mechanics, including punctuation, spelling, and capitalization”. This is because there are some aspects that the students should learn to make good writing.

Many students in junior high school still find it difficult to write compositions in English. These are some common writing difficulties faced by high school students that need intervention. (Qianqian Teng, 2023; Amalia et al., 2021; Peter and Singaravelu, 2020; Gumus, 2019; and Moses and Mohamad, 2019). First is the poor organization and structure. High school students may struggle with organizing their thoughts and ideas in a logical and coherent manner. They may have difficulty structuring their writing, resulting in disorganized and poorly structured paragraphs or essays that lack a clear flow and coherence. According to a study by Ronald Candy S. Lasaten and Jim Christzer I. Pablo (2018), it is clear that certain students find writing challenging, even when composing essays. Among these difficulties are the following: students find it difficult to come up with a variety of ideas and substance. Connectives and Organization: They frequently don't use the right connectives to keep their essays organized. Sentence construction: Bad sentence construction affects how language is used. Formality and Objectivity: A few pupils make improper usage of first-person pronouns. Additionally, incorrect citations have an impact on the caliber of their work.

According to Rehbein (2021) writing is valued highly in the Philippines, where it is expected of students to improve their writing abilities in a variety of courses and grade levels. But research indicates that a lot of Filipino students have trouble writing, especially when it comes to grammar and syntax (Balajadia & Calma, 2016; Llanes & Manalo, 2015). Balajadia and Calma (2016), for example, discovered that the common mistakes made by junior high school Filipino children were adverb tense, word choice, and subject-verb agreement. Similarly, Llanes and Manalo (2015) found that Filipino students required assistance in creating sentences and paragraphs that were cohesive and logical.

Second, grammar and punctuation errors. Many high school students struggle with grammar and punctuation rules, leading to errors such as incorrect verb tense, subject-verb agreement, word usage, and punctuation. These mistakes can impact the clarity and accuracy of their writing. In their study, Pablo and Lasaten (2018) found that the students struggled with academic essay writing due to things like a lack of ideas. Variance in the content, absence of organizational links, inappropriate language selection, and weak sentence structure frameworks in terms of language use, formality-related first-person pronoun usage, and absence of citations. In general, the students' academic essay performances varied in quality, from fair to subpar. Additionally, Mabuan (2015) listed the most common mistakes were tenses, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, morphology, articles, verbs, and pronouns were among the errors made by the participants. These findings led to recommendations being made for educators, syllabus planners, textbook authors, and text producers.

Lastly, limited vocabulary and word choice. A conventional definition of vocabulary is that it is about the words of a language, but in fact vocabulary is much more than merely a single word in language. High school students may face challenges in using a wide range of vocabulary and choosing appropriate words to express their ideas. They have trouble writing when they use improper words or idiomatic expressions (Lasaten and Pablo, 2018). This can result in repetitive and simplistic writing that lacks depth and sophistication. For instance, a study shows that by improving vocabulary learning strategies, students might become self-sufficient or independent of their teachers. These useful tools could be used both inside and outside of the classroom. Various studies have indicated that varied certain factors, including conviction or language proficiency, may influence the choice of vocabulary techniques. (Ali & Khan, 2015).

Consequently, Llanes and Manalo (2015) it's critical to look at the typical writing mistakes made by junior high school pupils in the Philippines and create efficient interventions to deal with these problems. Researchers found that students who primarily create help are required to develop an understandable English-language output when three or more essays are prepared in a quarter. Investigators heard the instructor is complaining that certain junior high school students—especially those in grade 10—need assistance with writing an appropriate and understandable essay for their level. They struggle, misspell words, and use words backwards, voicing their opinions and show little interest. As per the research carried out by Southeast Asian Ministers of the Education Organization, the Philippines' writing proficiency is lagging behind that of the other SEA nations due to their incapacity to articulate concepts clearly. The significance of attending to Filipino college students' writing requirements, particularly with regard to academic writing, shows that college-level students perceive junior high school pupils' writing errors to be almost the same.

An academic writing criterion checklist was used as a tool to analyze and interpret the data from respondents, who were Grade 8 Junior High School students at University of Saint Anthony in Iriga City, Philippines. It is clear from this that while the kids struggle with mechanics and language, they excel at substance, stylish writing, and organizational skills. The students make more mistakes in subject-verb agreement, appropriate tenses usage, thought organization, contracted words, and the distribution of ideas within sentences. They also make mistakes in mechanics, including punctuation usage, capitalization of proper nouns, proper paragraph indentation, and sentence breaks (Hikmah, Natividad and Esguerra, 2019).

According to Saavedra (2018), 75% of sixth-grade students at Western Mindanao State University in Zamboanga City believed that technology may have had an impact on their writing abilities. These students' writing abilities fall short of the national standard level of the students in the opposite manner.

Salvador’s et.al (2015) states that nearly 4000 students attend Malasiqui National High School, which serves a variety of barangays in Malasiqui, Pangasinan. The majority of pupils from various barangay high schools are not proficient writers. The various writing outcomes from the English writing exercises also corroborate this conclusion. Salvador’s et.al (2015). Writing assessments reveal that the majority of students struggle to write essays in English. They have used incorrect language, bad punctuation, grammatical faults, and misspelled terms. For this reason, the researcher is looking for ideas and answers to end the issue with English writing.

According to Callora and Sunas's (2023) study, the writing skill of senior high school students in Alamada, Cotabato's public schools was at the Developing level. Despite completing writing exercises and classes, it can be said that students still struggle with producing academic documents like essays. Only the fundamentals of writing and conveying thoughts have been taught to the kids. Students therefore require vocabulary expansion, proficiency with grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation, and—above all—writing abilities.

The aspects of writing students must comprehend some of the aspects in writing. Students must be aware of important competences in text production, such as the use of proper vocabulary, right sentence structure, proper capitalization placement, and others.

**Intervention on Enhancing Student Writing Quality.** The Department of Education recognizes that many of the secondary schools have already put in place remediation programs to address deficiencies in learning. The development of reading and writing skills is critical to effective learning, and in many cases deficiencies in these areas are often at the roots of why gaps in learning occur. A proactive approach to management of potential problems in learning beginning with a sound reading and writing program in schools, is therefore encouraged. (DepEd Order No. 39, series 2012). That is why DepEd is optimistic that following the K to 12 curricula will pave the way for improving the writing skills of the students, which has long been deteriorating. It is also an interesting point that curriculum planners, especially the language specialist, should look to help our students improve their writing skills eventually (Saavedra, 2020).

The quest to improve the quality of student writing has long been an endeavor in educational research and practice. Educators working in various educational institutions have explored various interventions and techniques aimed at developing skilled writers. Teaching English writing focuses on how different texts are taught, how students perceive their writing skills, and how feedback is used to improve students' writing skills (Horverak and Haugen, 2016).

Over the last twenty years, writing instruction for English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) has utilized feedback extensively (Zhao, 2010). According to several academics, peer feedback and collaboration is essential for raising students' writing proficiency and learning outcomes (Topping et al., 2000; Plutsky & Wilson, 2004).

According to Latifi and Noorozi (2021) peer feedback is a reciprocal process that helps L2 students write more effectively by providing feedback and information on one or more aspects of their peers' task performance or understanding. It also improves the writing products produced by the students (Noroozi et al., 2020, Yang et al., 2021). Studies by Pham et al., 2020 show that peer feedback has been shown to be useful for teaching and learning writing techniques. It can lessen EFL teachers' workload and enhance students' writing abilities. In the writing classroom, peer cooperation enables students to share knowledge, hear from a variety of viewpoints, and become closer to one another. Compared to teacher feedback, peer feedback allows students to connect with one another, stimulating critical thinking, and improving their sense of learning autonomy ([Wu et al., 2022](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0191491X24000166#bib43), [Zhang and Cheng, 2020](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0191491X24000166%22%20%5Cl%20%22bib53)).

Meanwhile, structured collaborative sessions in writing workshops, as outlined by Calkins (2013) and Graves (2019), foster a sense of community and peer collaboration, allowing for changes and improved writing quality. Scaffolded writing activities, as indicated by Graham et al. (2019) and MacArthur et al. (2015), offer students the required support and guidance to complete complicated writing assignments.

Alameddine and Mirza (2016) conducted a study on teaching essay writing for advanced level English language learners in Grade 10. As a way to teach students on how to write academic essays, an essay template was created. The findings showed that the students' academic writing did better when they followed the prepared essay template, hence the researchers advise using the model. The related study utilized an essay template to teach student respondents academic writing, which is how this study and the associated study are related. The fourth approach discussed in this study, the Cloze/Framed Essay, is a reference to the same strategy in the previously described related study. They diverge, though, in that the current study covers three more techniques in addition to the one it focuses on.

According to a conducted study, traffic light color coding, planning using an informal outline, and framed paragraphs are effective pedagogical strategies that teachers could utilize in teaching academic essay writing. Using different approaches can have varying degrees of impact on students' writing abilities. This emphasizes the importance of teachers having a diverse range of strategies to teach writing effectively, and the need to continually assess the effectiveness of different teaching strategies. (Lopres et al, 2023) It is suggested that the students should read extensively, practice essay writing continuously and get their teacher’s feedback frequently (Ali & Khan, 2015).

In the study conducted by Gomez and Mediavilla (2022) states that information and communication technologies, or ICTs  play a significant role in all areas of knowledge society education specifically, where these technologies are now indispensable resources across all subject areas, including the instruction of writing skills (Abu-Hudra et al., 2021).

With the advancements in technology, educators are now using technology-enhanced interventions to help students become better writers. Automated feedback systems, online writing communities, and computer-based writing programs give students access to practice, real-time feedback, and individualized learning possibilities. Technology-enhanced writing interventions have improved students' writing fluency, accuracy, and engagement (Warschauer and War, 2019).

Language teachers have long used the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), which emphasizes the translation of texts and sentences from the target language into the local language and vice versa. This approach emphasizes the acquisition of vocabulary and rigorous grammar through reading and writing skills. Badayo et al. (2024) investigated the usefulness of combining non-target language and GTM to improve the English writing skills of 10th grade students in Davao City, Philippines. Their quasi-experimental study involved 150 children from various public and private schools in Davao City. The purpose of the study was to find out if using the mother tongue can improve their English writing skills.

According to Cabigao (2021), teachers are the key for the learners to acquire effective writing skills. In order to effectively meet the learning needs of the class, teachers must first produce instructional materials and gain the necessary abilities themselves. Words of encouragement and sympathy can be a great help to boost the students’ confidence in writing. Students’ preparedness in learning the skill is also considered (Dumatay & Ramos, 2018).

**3.THE STUDY**

**3.1 Method**

This chapter of the paper presents the research methods employed in this study. This includes the research design and procedure, research respondents, research instrument, data collection procedure, and ethical considerations.

The participants of this study were the five (5) selected Grade 9 students of Philippine Nikkei Jin Kai International School AY: 2023–2024. The chosen students were enrolled in an on-site class, who displayed difficulties in writing. Sagor (2000) emphasizes the importance of involving a manageable number of participants to facilitate detailed data collection and thorough analysis. He suggests that smaller groups (such as classroom or school-based studies) can range from new individuals to an entire class or school staff, depending on the focus. Hence, the researchers arrived at a decision to have five (5) students struggling in formal writing so as to thoroughly facilitate and analyze the participants’ progress during the data gathering process. After having identified the number of participants in this study, the researchers prepared the necessary materials, venue, and time in conducting the data gathering process.

The researchers utilized the Triangulation method to obtain the necessary data from the participants. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources to test the trustworthiness to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Patton, 1999). Dosemagen and Schwalbach (2019) also discussed the importance of triangulation in action research which enhances the trustworthiness by providing multiple sources of data to analyze and confirm evidence for findings. Through this method, the researchers employed observations, student work samples, and pre- and post- utilization of formal themes to have a comprehensive grasp of the classroom phenomena.

**4.Design/Approach**

This study utilized an action research design considering that it aimed to explore classroom problems that need to be addressed. In carrying out the measures for this study, the selected students were exposed to a series of free writing and re-writing of essays through the use of formal themes. This activity enhanced the retention of their learned skills, through constant application, which will lead them in gradual improvement of their writing proficiency. This activity ran from 6th to 21st of May 2024.

In every session of implementing the formal themes, observations and analysis of their initial and revised outputs were recorded, through the use of the observation sheet. The teacher documented writing behavioral manifestations and patterns of their errors and improvements. Constructive feedback was also provided to the participants to aid them on their progress, as the implementation of the activities was being carried out.

In the final session of the data gathering phase, the students were assured that their performances would not, in any way, affect their grades particularly in their English subject.

**5.RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section of the paper discusses the results of the method implemented by the researchers to the participants experiencing writing difficulties. The results and discussion are chronologically outlined as per the administration of each procedure.

**5.1 Pre-implementation Activity**

This action research aimed to enhance the writing proficiency of selected Grade 9 students. This study is also intended to strengthen the significance of free writing and editing of students’ written works in order to prepare them for research writing and most importantly, for the school to produce responsible assets of the community.

To meet the research objectives, the researchers carried out the following procedures, during the pre-implementation phase:

* Students manifesting major writing difficulties were identified through the use of their submitted work samples during class English activities and assessment papers.
* Five (5) common committed errors were classified among the submitted work samples which are proper capitalization of words, correct verb tenses, proper punctuation mark placement, proper sentence construction, and coherence in their written work.
* After identifying the common committed errors, the five (5) selected participants underwent on a 10-minute microteaching on ways to correct their writing errors. Afterwards, the participants were made ready for the implementation of formal themes, by providing them with three (3) topics to write on.

The following steps enumerated above were implemented to answer the first and second questions on the statement of the problem.

**Implementation Activities**

*Implementation of Formal Themes.* This procedure consisted of two (2) stages in writing, which are the original formal composition and the rewritten formal composition. This cycle of writing gradually corrected the writing errors of the students and enhanced their writing skills, as they received constant feedback from the teacher, during the data gathering process.

*Original and Rewritten Formal Composition.* During this phase of data gathering procedure, the students underwent a three-session-series of writing and rewriting of essays with topics circulating around the school’s core values. The participants were given time to write their original pieces per session. Subsequently, their original outputs were checked and corrected by the English teacher, and feedback were relayed prior to the rewriting of their essays applying the corrections. With the five (5) identified writing errors from their submitted work samples, the same errors were also observed from their first written output. However, as the students were exposed in the series of writing process, their errors were slowly corrected such as proper capitalization of words, correct verb tenses, and proper punctuation mark placement. As the series of writing process reaches its conclusion, the writing errors of the students on proper sentence construction and coherence were not fully corrected, but there were manifestations of minimal changes from their written output. Hence, the constant correction and feedback of the teacher, on every writing session, revealed that there was an improvement on the writing proficiency of the students.

**5.2 Post-Implementation Activity**

 *Final Essay Composition.* This phase marked the final essay composition of the students, where they were to apply the procedures in formal writing. The participants’ final written outputs showed a significant change in their writing proficiency, compared to their submitted initial work samples.

**6.CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Conclusions**

Based on the collected information and relevant research, the researchers have come to significant conclusions about the writing proficiency of Grade 9 students at Philippine Nikkei Jin Kai International School. The predominant writing faults identified among the selected Grade 9 students included proper capitalization, correct verb tenses, improper punctuation placement, poor sentence structure, and a lack of coherence in their written compositions. The implemented activities showed that while most errors were corrected over the intervention period, sentence construction and coherence still needed more improvement. By engaging in a process of repeated essay writing and revision, students were able to gradually correct their errors, particularly in the areas of capitalization, verb tense usage, and punctuation. Despite correcting the following problems, throughout the intervention period, the implemented activities revealed a need for improvement in sentence structure and coherence. However, by the conclusion of the intervention, there were notable enhancements in the students' overall writing skills. The method highlighted the importance of continuous feedback and review. The teacher's persistent feedback progressively enhanced the students' writing skills, allowing them to recognize and correct their own mistakes in writing.

**7.Recommendations**

We provide the following recommendations to improve the writing skills of Grade 9 students.

* Implementation of a formal theme, as a structured approach to writing practice. This method has been proven effective in gradually correcting students' writing errors and enhancing their written skills. Ensure that students have ample opportunities to write and rewrite their essays on various themes, and that they shall receive feedback at each writing stage.
* Conduct of additional microteaching sessions that specifically address sentence construction and coherence. These sessions shall provide students focused and practical learning experience, with right strategies and examples to improve their writing skills.
* Conduct of consistent writing activities that especially focus on correcting the identified repetitive mistakes. Teachers should consistently provide thorough feedback and encourage students to modify their work, based on the given feedback. Teachers should implement regular writing assessments to monitor students' progress and to adjust teaching strategies accordingly. Continuous evaluation will help identify persistent challenges and address them promptly.
* Conduct of peer review sessions to enable students to assess and analyze each other's written work. This collaborative approach may help students gain new perspectives on their writing and learn from their peers' strengths and weaknesses.
* Conduct of writing assignments across the academic subjects to provide students with a variety of opportunities to practice their writing skills. This can aid students in harnessing their writing skills in diverse contexts and improving their overall proficiency.
* Integration of educational technology tools that offer grammar and style checking, as an additional resource for teacher feedback. Tools like Grammarly or Hemingway can provide immediate suggestions for improvement and may help students develop their self-editing skills.
* Engaging the parents by regularly informing them about their child's academic progress and giving them recommendations on how they may support their child's writing skills at home. Providing resources and guidelines for parents can extend learning beyond the classroom and reinforce writing skills.

The effectiveness of the following interventions is evident in the significant improvements observed in students' final written outputs, compared to their initial submissions.

**COMPETING INTERESTS DISCLAIMER:**

Authors have declared that they have no known competing financial interests OR non-financial interests OR personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)

Option 1:

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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