



## Writing Difficulties Encountered by Humanities and Social Sciences Students in Philippine Politics and Governance

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**Abstract**

Writing is a very intricate skill to acquire among the four language skills. This qualitative study was conducted to determine the writing difficulties committed by Humanities and Social Sciences (HumSS) students and analyze how they develop a topic in Philippine Politics and Governance (PPG). Participants of the study were the Grade 11 students of Morong National High School, Morong, Rizal, who took up the said subject for S.Y. 2019-2020 in its First Semester. Twelve (12) students from the six (6) HumSS classes were selected using the Systematic Sampling Technique. This study employed the Grounded Theory approach to examine written output using codes from the three (3) phases of coding – Open, Axial, and Selective Coding. After the coding process, significant themes emerged and were subjected to analysis. Findings revealed that the most common difficulties encountered by the participants when developing a topic are grammatical errors, inappropriate use of political concepts, and inappropriate choice of vocabulary. It is also found out that unnecessary shift in tense, ambiguous pronoun reference, loose sentence, sentence fragment, dangling modifier, and wordy sentence are next in line. Also, participants chose to develop their topics in Exposition, Narration, Analogy, and Examples. More so, participants also found it hard to create an issue when given a Philippine Politics and Governance writing task due to language constraints evident in their writing outputs.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Senior High School (SHS) students possess skills to fulfill different tasks in their chosen fields. It is expected for most Technical-Vocational and Livelihood (TVL) students to have technical skills, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) students to have mathematical skills, and Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM) students with their entrepreneurial skills, among others. For HumSS students, it is expected that they should possess several, if not all, of the four foundational language skills -reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

In Morong National High School, Grade Eleven Humanities and Social Sciences (HumSS) students took their Philippine Politics and Governance (PPG) subject in the First Semester of School Year 2019-2020. The subject requires HumSS students to share their thoughts and ideas on various matters related to politics. The only means for the HumSS students to do this, if not through recitations or speaking, is through writing.

Today, writing is vital to every HumSS learner. This is a necessary skill needed to comply with most of their requirements in their SHS years, including research subjects-

Practical Research 1, Practical Research 2, and 3I's (Inquiries, Investigations, and Immersions).

As to Barrot (2016), a composition can either be a paragraph or an essay. A paragraph is a group of interrelated sentences that talk about one main idea, while an essay is a group of paragraphs that talk about one central idea. A paragraph is composed of the topic sentence, the body, which consists of the supporting details, and the closing sentence. However, groups of paragraphs that have a more elaborate structure is then again, an essay.

In the study of Santos et.al. (2018), it was revealed that students struggled in choosing topics, crafting a good beginning paragraph, and paragraph development when given a writing activity.

In many instances, it is noticeable that HumSS students always emphasize the quality of being lengthy of their outputs, not in the content of their works. Though teachers give instructions and provide rubrics to follow, the quality of their works is affected by their mindset that a lengthy work is much commendable than a short one.

Thus, this action research is conducted to determine the difficulties of HumSS students in developing paragraphs and craft material to enhance students' writing skills.

This paper also aims to analyze the writing difficulties of HumSS students in Philippine Politics and Governance when given a writing activity based on a learning competency. Further, this study also seeks to explore how grade eleven HumSS students develop a topic when given a writing task.

Also, through this research, the researcher believed that the results would highly contribute to enhancing effective writing among HumSS students, especially in Philippine Politics and Governance subject in Senior High School.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Writing Difficulties**

In a study by Adas and Bakir (2013), students in the Arab world have experienced writing difficulties in English. However, through the blended learning approach and innovative modes of assessment, instructors were able to (1) develop students' understanding and use of some related points and writing mechanisms, (2) emphasize group effectiveness skills using technology, (3) emphasize communication skills that encouraged students to share ideas and opinions, and, (4) facilitate learning the foreign language quickly in informal settings among the students in their free time.

Meanwhile, in the study of Widianingsih and Gulö (2016) titled "Grammatical Difficulties Encountered by Second Language Students," the result showed that the students' major errors were made are related to plural markers, articles, verbs, and tenses.

Additionally, it was mentioned in the study of Chou (2011) that L1 interference, the lacking of ideas and unclear instructions of the task given to learners are some of the causes leading to difficulty in writing.

Also, it is emphasized by Richards (2019) that the primary reasons why students avoid writing can be (1) students have a hard time getting started and feel overwhelmed by the task, (2) students need to concentrate on how to form letters: it is not an automatic process, (3) students struggle to organize and use mechanics of writing, (4) students are slow and inefficient in retrieving the correct word(s) to express an idea, (5) students struggle to develop their ideas fluently (poor ideation), (6) students struggle to keep track of their thoughts while also getting them down on paper, (7) students feel that the process of writing on paper is slow and tedious, (8) students feel that the paper never turns out the way they want, (9) students realize that the paper is still sloppy even though substantial time and effort were spent, (10) students are dysgraphic, which causes multiple struggles at the basic

processing levels, and, (11) students are dyslexic, which causes very poor spelling and interferes with automatic use of writing mechanics.

An article from Rough Draft Solutions (2017) titled "How to Beat 5 Common Writing Struggles" identifies the five everyday writing struggles: thinking of a relevant topic, coming up with a catchy title, getting started writing, being too wordy, and spending hours editing.

In a study by Abderraouf (2016), it is concluded that improving students' writing skill is a challenging task, especially in the case of foreign learners. Writing as a cognitive process requires profound considerations of the rules and careful use of the target language. Students generally hesitate to write during writing composition, for they strive to find the right words, struggle with the language's grammar, or find the punctuation difficult. The majority of errors found were spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and vocabulary (word choice).

## **2.2 Paragraph Development**

There are various methods on how to develop a paragraph. Rieder (2007) emphasized the use of the acronym AXES to construct a well-developed paragraph. In the AXES method, A stands for assertion wherein the topic sentence provides the specific point an individual will make. Moreover, the assertion provides a connection between the paragraph and the thesis (claim). X stands for eXample where the examples are the evidence that supports assertion. These could be a direct quote or a detailed description of data. Thirdly, E stands for Explanation in the AXES wherein paragraph must have explanations in order to clarify how and why the evidences relate to assertions and central claims. Lastly, S is for Significance wherein statements of significance discuss the importance of issues made in the paragraph.

Moreover, Lorcher (2019) emphasized that there are various ways on how to be able to write and develop a good paragraph. The most frequent methods use is Definition, Classification, Comparison and Contrast, Process Description, Cause and Effect, and Narration.

Through the use of definition, a paragraph can be expanded. It could be done by showing the details, describing, giving examples, analyzing symbols, and more. Secondly, the classification method can be done if the information is broken down into smaller parts, simplifying a concept or explaining something like a series of things.

The following methodology is the Description of Process that is usually done in describing sequences of connected actions chronologically. The process of description might be in the form of natural, mechanical, or historical processes. Like the other methods, it can also be used to expand the idea in the paragraph. Another method is through Comparison and Contrast used to show some similarities with the given ideas. On the other hand, contrast is used to point out differences in ideas. The next is the use of Cause and Effect. This is used to elaborate certain ideas in the paragraph by establishing what happened. A writer can use signal words such as the words such as because, cause, due to, for the reason, and other words for the cause.

Another method is the use of Narration. The writer could provide further discussions on the concept of an idea by proper arrangement, in chronological, or in place, or based on the level of significance. Where, for chronological or time order, words like, such as first, second then, after, later are generally used.

## **2.3 Writing Intervention**

Writing intervention is significant in the study of Boscolo, Arfe, and Quarisa (2007). In this study, 52 undergraduate students of the University of Padua (Italy) were the participants for duration of 12 weeks. They practiced academic writing by composing texts which were revised by the teachers and discussing the samples of academic texts. At the end of the intervention, it was found out that the ability of students to write a synthesis showed an improvement.

Al-Gharabally (2015) pointed out tips and suggestions to aid L2 learners with writing. The following suggestions were getting ideas by brainstorming and discussion (i.e., planning and making idea maps), writing ideas in note form, using questions to plan writing, writing a draft-learners can be allowed to make rough drafts before producing the final draft, improving the draft, devising and correcting checklists before handing in the final draft, comparing/ sharing ideas with other peer groups whilst writing, and exchanging and reading each other's work.

In a study of Adas and Bakir (2013), students in the Arab world have experienced writing difficulties in English. However, through the Blended Learning approach and innovative modes of assessment, instructors were able to (1) develop students understanding and use of some related points and writing mechanism, (2) emphasize group effectiveness skills using technology, (3) emphasize communication skills that encouraged students to share ideas and opinions, and, (4) facilitate learning the foreign language easily in informal settings among the students in their free time.

### **Research Questions**

This study aims to determine and analyze the writing difficulties committed by Humanities and Social Sciences (HumSS) students in Philippine Politics and Governance when given a writing activity. Specifically, this action research seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What are the writing difficulties of Grade 11 HumSS students when developing a topic in Philippine Politics and Governance as revealed by the different coding phases?
2. What are the strategies/techniques of Grade Eleven HumSS students in developing a topic when given a Philippine Politics and Governance writing task?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study will provide HumSS students the awareness that as HumSS students, they are expected to provide write-ups with minor error. Also, this study will remind them of their task as "Humanista"; updated on the current societal and various pressing issues of the land.

In addition, preliminary studies are focusing on the combination of social sciences subjects and writing. The results of this study will contribute in enhancing teachers' strategies in dealing with HumSS students and will also develop students' writing skills, with an emphasis on Philippine Politics and Governance subject.

From the results of this study, the researcher echoed the outcome to the school administrator, including SHS Strand's Subject Group Head (SGH), parents, teachers, and students as partners for collaboration of possible initiatives in order to enhance students' performance in the Philippine Politics and Governance subject and other related learning areas.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Research Design**

Since the study focused on analyzing the written outputs of HumSS students to identify their writing difficulties they encountered and the strategies employed for topic development, the study was aided by grounded theory approach and qualitative content analysis.

The first problem of the study was answered by employing grounded theory approach. Grounded theory is a design of inquiry where it involves using several stages of data collection and the refinement and interrelationship of categories of data gathered.

According to Charmaz (2009), grounded theory is a set of systematic inductive methods for conducting qualitative research aimed toward theory development. The methodological strategies of grounded theory are aimed to construct middle-level theories directly from data analysis.

Meanwhile, content analysis was utilized to answer the study's second research questions. According to Warren (2021), content analysis is possibly the most common and straightforward Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) method. At the simplest level, content analysis is used to evaluate patterns within a piece of content (for example, words, phrases or images) or across multiple pieces of content or sources of communication

Content analysis is one of the most common methodologies used in research to analyze qualitative data. In using content analysis, a researcher will group large amounts of text into codes, summarize these into categories, and possibly even tabulate the data to calculate the frequency of certain concepts or variables. Because of this, content analysis provides a touch of quantitative thinking within a qualitative method.

### **3.2 Participants of the Study**

The participants of the study were the Grade 11 HumSS students of Morong National High School, Morong, Rizal, who took up Philippine Politics and Governance subject for the school year 2019-2020 in its First Semester. There were three hundred ninety-five (395) students coming from the six (6) sections of HumSS classes. However, for this study and for equal representation, systematic random sampling was applied. Two (2) participants of each HumSS section is the sampling size. A total of twelve (12) HumSS students as participants from the total population were considered for this study.

### **3.3 Sampling Technique**

For this study, systematic sampling was employed. It is a type of probability sampling method in which sample members from a larger population are selected according to a random starting point but with a fixed, periodic interval (Hayes, 2019).

Since this study followed the abovementioned type of sampling, names of all learners from each section were arranged alphabetically to get the two (2) participants from each of the six (6) sections after identifying the *nth*.

### **3.4 Data Gathering Procedure**

Data were collected through a written output from Grade Eleven HumSS students. The students were given a lesson for discussion by the subject teacher focusing on different societal issues such as death penalty, legalization of divorce, and the issue on the West Philippine Sea.

After a thorough discussion, they were instructed to develop a topic regarding the major political ideologies guided by the format/parts of an essay the subject teacher told them. Alongside this instruction, HumSS students were asked to develop their topics.

The researcher sought the permission of the School Head and the Humanities and Social Sciences (HumSS) Strand Subject Group Head (SGH) for the conduct of the study.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

This paper focused on the writing difficulties encountered by Grade 11 Humanities and Social Sciences (HumSS) students from Morong National High School, Morong, Rizal, when given a writing task in Philippine Politics and Governance.

This study is also conceptualized to explore the strategies HumSS students apply in developing a topic once instructed by a subject teacher.

Moreover, this research study does not focus on a verbose output of students, but on the analysis of the content of the written outputs.

***The Writing Difficulties Encountered by Grade Eleven HumSS Students When Developing a Topic in Philippine Politics and Governance***

Participants have encountered several writing difficulties that hindered them in expressing their views regarding the three (3) topics given to them. The written outputs of the participants served as the primary data which is essential in the discussion of the results of this study.

Table 1 revealed that the most common difficulties encountered by the participants when developing a topic in Philippine Politics and Governance are grammatical error, inappropriate use of political concepts, and inappropriate choice of vocabulary. It is also found out that unnecessary shift in tense, ambiguous pronoun reference, loose sentence, sentence fragment, dangling modifier, and wordy sentence are next in line.

The study also found out that there are erroneous grammars and unnecessary shift in tenses present in the output of the participants. This is similar to the study of Widyaningsih & Gulö (2016) wherein students' major errors are related to plural markers, articles, verbs, and tenses.

Significantly, the same findings from the study of Susanto and Widyaningsih (2018) titled "Grammatical Errors in Writing a Final Paper Written by the Eighth Semester Students of English Department of State Institute of Islamic Studies Walisongo Semarang"

PARTICIPANT	OPEN CODING	AXIAL CODING	SELECTIVE CODING	THEMES
1	Interrogatives Run-On Sentence Sentence Fragment Unnecessary Shift in Mood	Unnecessary Shift in Tense Sudden Shift of Ideas	Misspelled Word Improper Use of Diction	-----
2	Unnecessary Article Faulty Parallelism Loose Sentence Ambiguous Pronoun Reference Improper Use of Diction	Improper Use of Diction	Erroneous Grammar Improper Use of Diction	Improper Use of Diction Erroneous Grammar
3	Unnecessary Shift in Number Unnecessary Shift in Tense	Erroneous Grammar Sentence Fragment	Improper Use of Grammar Loose Sentence	Erroneous Grammar
4	Ambiguous Pronoun Reference S-V Agreement Unnecessary Shift in Tense Faulty Coordination Periodic Sentence Loose Sentence Erroneous Grammar	Improper Use of Grammar Ambiguous Pronoun Reference	Erroneous Grammar	Ambiguous Pronoun Reference Erroneous Grammar
5	Unnecessary Shift in Tense Improper Use of Diction Ambiguous Pronoun Reference Zigzag Sentence Wordy Sentence Loose Sentence	Ambiguous Pronoun Reference	Loose Sentence	Ambiguous Pronoun Reference Loose Sentence
6	Sentence Fragment Inappropriate Use of Political Concept Dangling Modifier Wordy Sentence Unnecessary Shift in Tense Improper Use of Diction	Erroneous Grammar Inappropriate Use of Political Concept	-----	Inappropriate Use of Political Concept
7	Loose Sentence Erroneous Grammar	Sentence Fragment	Erroneous Grammar Improper Use of Diction	Erroneous Grammar
8	Unnecessary Shift in Mood Improper Use of Diction Sentence Fragment Wordy Sentence Code Switch/Code Mix Improper Use of Diction Erroneous Reference	Improper Use of Diction	Dangling Modifier	Improper Use of Diction
9	Erroneous Grammar Erroneous Reference Improper Use of Diction	Unnecessary Shift in Point of View Interrogatives	-----	-----
10	Unnecessary Shift in Tense Unnecessary Shift in Mood Improper Use of Diction Ambiguous Pronoun Reference Sentence Fragment	Sentence Fragment	Erroneous Grammar	Sentence Fragment
11	Loose Sentence Wordy Sentence Dangling Modifier	Sentence Fragment Loose Sentence	Misspelled Word Dangling Modifier Improper Use of Diction	Dangling Modifier Loose Sentence
12	Faulty Parallelism Ambiguous Pronoun Reference Sentence Fragment Loose Sentence	Loose Sentence Improper Use of Diction	Erroneous Grammar S-V Agreement	Loose Sentence

Table 1: Writing Difficulties Encountered by HumSS Students Based from Coding was recorded. It was revealed that students produced 93 errors of 12 students' writing which could be grouped into 7 categories of errors. Those are errors in the production of verb group, errors in the agreement between subject and verb, errors in the use of an article, errors in the use of preposition, errors in pluralization, errors in the use of the pronoun, and errors in the use of a conjunction.

Furthermore, some of the participants also had difficulties in introducing topics and developing paragraphs in the course of the writing task given. This conforms to the study of Santos, et. al. (2018) titled "Overcoming Writing Apprehension Through Photovoice: Basis for Interdisciplinary Approach in Teaching Creative Nonfiction", it was revealed that students also struggled in choosing topics, crafting a good beginning paragraph and paragraph development when given a writing activity because of different factors.

Meanwhile, it was emphasized in the study of Gomaa (2010) that writing is the most difficult language skill for ELLs to master. Students' first language affects learning the target language. This is one of the reasons why students make certain mistakes and repeat them.

A participant of this study also committed code-switching and code-mixing, which is also a problem in an L2 classroom. This has a significant connection to the study of Chou (2011) wherein the students' first language, the lacking of ideas and unclear instructions of the task given to learners are some of the causes leading to difficulty in writing.

*“What if he do’s that crime because of problem and no one can help here to solve the problem that we have, it is not a time we need a peaceful mind and forget the bad memories that he had let’s give him a chance to correct the failure that he had, mahaba pa ang panahon para makabawi sa lahat ng nagawang kamalian, that we all people nilikha para matutunan ang pagkakamali not all goods.”*

-Excerpt from a participant’s written output where code-mixing and code-switching are evident

It is also noted by Krashen (1987) that there are ways in which a classroom can support language acquisition. Activities related to communication initiated by the teacher are the most direct way to promote language acquisition.

This implied that first language may be a contributing factor that prevents the participants from producing commendable written outputs in Philippine Politics and Governance.

Furthermore, some participants do not have sufficient background information about the issue they are writing about in Philippine Politics and Governance, though issues were tackled. A reason might be the lack of confidence of students in expressing their views through writing. Consequently, this made them uncertain to include ideas in their written work.

According to Becker (cited in Murry & Moore, 2006), comments advising students to not underestimate their aptitudes for skillfully expressing their views will be significant in the writing process.

This implied that lacking basic information related to the topics is a factor that hindered students to develop their paragraphs.

### ***The Students’ Strategies Employed for Topic Development***

The participants were oriented based on the purpose of this study. They were given three different issues related to the topics in Philippine Politics and Governance. Among the contemporary social issues that participants tackled through writing was the reinstatement of

the death penalty, legalization of divorce, and the country's claims on the West Philippine Sea.

It was revealed in the study that most of the participants used exposition, narration, analogy, and examples in developing a topic when given a writing task in Philippine Politics and Governance. It was also found out that participants also discussed and developed their topics by persuasion and comparison and contrast. The result is supported by the study of Lorcher (2019) that there are various ways on how to be able to write and develop a good paragraph.

*“Philippines is known as the one of the country that has many number of crimes. Many Filipinos, most of them believed that life is sacred so no one have the rights to kill someone, or anyone. Nowadays, there was a huge number crime. It increases day by day. Crime is an act that might get you in trouble. Worst is, you may be involve in the bigger situation. There are so many crimes that can be do by someone like killing, shipping illegal things but the most common is killing. When Marcos was on his position, killing is a legal act that controlled by the government. In some ways, there is an advantage and it lessen the people for doing such things. But we can't deny the fact that it worsen the situation and before it was lessen, the heinous crimes already spread.”*

-Excerpt from a participant's written output on the topic “reinstatement of death penalty” where the participant develop the paragraph through exposition

*“It is better to just set aside the issue than having a war with China. Being a Filipino citizen, I agree to set aside the issue to avoid any conflict. Set asiding this issue is better than having a war, cause we know that if we fight to the Chinese we don't have enough weapons to go against them. So if we know it better I agree to Pres. Duterte to set aside this matter. Being a Filipino students we also knowing the importance of our country to never be ruined by the other country. Set asiding something is better than fighting for nothing. Set asiding is like we're thinking for better solution.”*

-Excerpt from a participant's written output on the topic “country's claims on the West Philippine Sea” where the participant develop the paragraph through analogy

Furthermore, it was noted by Al Murshidi (2014) that one of the barriers that hinder students from pushing through in their writing is the generation of ideas. It can be implied that students found it hard to produce an effective written output because of underlying factors affecting their paragraph development.

In the study of Alsamdani (2010), it was mentioned that to have a free-error piece of writing, learners should carefully consider how to form a thesis statement, to write convincing supporting sentences, and finally edit them.

Meanwhile, it was unveiled in the study of Dallagi (2020) that students were unaware of some strategies which highlighted the significance of explicit instruction from their teachers. Also, students need to be taught how to reflect on and evaluate their performance and the strategies they used in writing.

### ***Socio-Political Theory***



Based from the study conducted, the researcher came up with a theory of writing that mainly focus on the difficulties encountered by students during the process of topic development in Philippine Politics and Governance.

In this study, students barely mentioned appropriate political terms related to given topics. Most of their output revealed that they even failed to provide the proper meaning of terminologies related to the topics of divorce, death penalty, and West Philippine Sea issue. This is because most of them do not have the political awareness since they do not even have personal encounters on the topics given to them.

From this, it is more empowering for students to write and develop a topic that they are familiar with. Personal experience and occurrence in the local environment they live will make them confident in providing and sharing information through writing.

In some way, developing a topic through writing will prevent a student to encounter difficulties might as well produce an error less output if a student is confident because of being socio-politically familiar of the topic.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

In view of the analysis of the written outputs of HumSS students, the results demonstrated that when developing a topic in Philippine Politics and Governance, the most common difficulties encountered by the participants are grammatical errors, inappropriate use of political concepts, and inappropriate choice of vocabulary. It is also found out that unnecessary shift in tense, ambiguous pronoun reference, loose sentence, sentence fragment, dangling modifier, and wordy sentence, are next in line.

Significantly, most participants committed inappropriate use of political concepts in the three (3) phases of writing activity.

Also, participants of this study chose to develop their topics in Exposition, Narration, Analogy, and Examples. More so, participants in this study also found it hard to develop a topic when given a Philippine Politics and Governance writing task due to language constraints evident in their writing outputs.

Lastly, most participants failed to mention appropriate persons, events, and concepts related to politics and current issues. Most societal current problems in this study are integrated with Philippine Politics and Governance (PPG).

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE AND FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Teachers of Araling Panlipunan in Junior High School, Philippine Politics and Governance in Senior high School, and other related HumSS subjects should motivate students and provide lessons that will develop their political and social awareness.

Moreover, Humanities and Social Sciences teachers specializing in language and communication are encouraged to provide HumSS students with different activities to enhance their language and communication skills. This is to lessen students' errors and extensively discuss political concepts when not apprehended by different language limitations.

On the other hand, students should also update themselves on current societal issues by reading newspapers, watching recent news, and visiting different social media platforms that are reliable and fact-based. This will make them aware of significant issues and events which are part of their concern as HumSS students.

Lastly, rigorous study on HumSS students writing difficulties using other research methodologies is highly encouraged since this study has its limitations.

Further studies on the writing difficulties of HumSS students in other learning areas are also recommended.

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