



Essay Assessment toward Determining the Writing Proficiency Level of STEM, HUMSS, and ABM Twelfth Graders

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Abstract

This descriptive- quantitative study is attached to the principles of Process and Product, and Error Analysis Approaches. Its ultimate aim is to identify the writing proficiency level of students enrolled in STEM, HUMSS, and ABM K-12 tracks. Significant differences among the three groups were also ascertained. In doing so, 75 Grade 12 students with 25 students from each of the three tracks took part who were tasked to develop an essay on a given topic. The evaluation was guided by the rubrics introduced by Robitaille and Connelly (2002) and its foci revolved on five components that include content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Participation of two inter-raters was also sought. The written outputs' assessment revealed that with regard to content and organization, the three groups recorded a good to average writing proficiency level. The vocabulary proficiency noted down a fair to poor remark for STEM students, whereas good to average description was obtained by HUMSS and ABM students. Further, regarding language use, both STEM and ABM students have fair to poor adeptness, while HUMSS group was good to average. As to mechanics component, HUMSS students documented an excellent to very good proficiency while STEM and ABM students' status is fair to poor. Overall, there is a significant difference among or within the three groups.

1. INTRODUCTION

Excellent writing is a skill that students should master (Heryanti, Sucipto, & Makmur, 2017) to reap a multitude of benefits, including the fact that it is tantamount to excellent proficiency. It is believed that effective writing skills enable students to earn higher marks and academic achievements. It also permits them to build their own distinct viewpoint of the world from a broader and more expansive perspective. In 2000, writing, as stressed by Conti, is a multipart course allowing writers to communicate their minds, philosophies and emotions, and since writing does not merely focus on transferring ideas into the composition being created, students should learn skills for innovation for them to hurdle any writing endeavor. This is justified by Jeremy (2004) as he underscored that when students write, they are expected to freely flow their ideas and to clearly and substantively present them in an orderly manner. In

other words, they need to generate compositions that are rich in content, coherent and apply language elements efficiently.

However, in spite of these writing canons, writing effectually is problematic (Alsher, 2021), and one pressing challenge still being faced by students in all academic levels. The prime reasons embrace inadequacy of knowledge of the topic (Kroll, 1990; Gamiao, 2008; Martinez, 2012; Pascua, 2013); vocabulary shortage and poor syntax (sentence constructions) and grammar (Yates & Kenkel, 2002; McWhorter, 2005; Darus & Subramaniam, 2009; Gustilo, 2009); and low awareness on correct spelling, punctuations, capitalizations, and paragraphing (Castro, 2012; Pascua, 2013; Mateski, 2014; Amiri & Puteh, 2017). Experts aforementioned argued that some students have low level of acquaintance and adherence to the writing norms. Hence, they are not cautious sometimes when writing that makes even the minor errors become easily perceptible.

Therefore, this study is carried out to assess the students' writing flaws as bases in finding out their level of writing proficiency in each of the five language components (i.e., content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics). This study focuses on Grade 12 students in the Philippines because they have been underutilized as research participants thus far, as evidenced by the fact that they were only introduced in 2017. Since they are the country's pioneer batch of senior high school students in various tracks, they are assumed to be innovative contributors to the existing literature on the concept of writing aptitude level.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing in English is considered difficult for first-, second- and foreign- English language users (Heydari & Bagheri, 2012; Amiri & Puteh, 2017). It is here that the vital role of English language teachers is recognized. One should understand that the nature of writing is recursive; hence, one writer may apply a distinctly unique technique to go through the process, and because of this laborious feature of writing, students can possibly not nail it on the first try. As a result, teachers need to determine the students' writing errors and writing competence level in order for them to be led, provided with needed remedial, be reinforced and be more motivated to write in the future. This backs up Martinez's (2012) claim that students who regard writing as a process, and value the necessity of knowing their errors are more likely to improve their thinking and language learning.

In the domains of education and applied linguistics, the concept that writing is a subject of investigation has persisted across time. As proofs, a variety of research studies have already been conducted in conjunction with writing, particularly in terms of investigating its many components. Others have led to the development of instructional materials (i.e., lesson plans, modules, and activities) in order to address students' writing challenges. In a study conducted by Portillo-San Miguel (2021) in a Senior High School, 12 HumSS students recorded lapses in grammar and unsuitable selection of lexis especially in writing a theme in Philippine Politics and Governance (PPG). Other errors include needless tense shift, obscure reference of pronouns, sentences that are loose, fragments, and wordy, as well as incorrect positioning of modifiers. They also utilized strategies like exposition, narration, analogy, and examples to explore their themes. The majority of participants used political concepts inaptly in the Open, Axial, and Selective phases of the writing task. They recurrently overlook relevant persons, events, and thoughts in politics and current affairs.

In Bahasa Malaysia, Bakar, Awal, and Jalaluddin (2010) researched on upper high school students' writing proficiency and styles of urban and rural students from four different zones, focusing on the analysis of language employed (i.e., sentence form, dialect usage, and punctuation), discourse (i.e., unusual lexis) and idea conceptualization. In 2003, Braddock and Jones investigated the English writing encounters of Iranian tertiary students especially when writing their reports. Their paper showed that language and writing skills are the most problematic areas for fifth- year EFL medical students and apprentices and noted that the study's respondents have a higher percentage of limitations with their writing abilities. Alsmadi's (2010) study was participated by 18 tertiary students from Saudi Arabian colleges. Results described the competency level of students in all four macro skills as poor, but their greatest deficit was in writing. This corroborates with Siddiqui's (2015) notion that students are low proficient in writing composition. Alsmadi (2010), therefore, argued that remedial programs are essentially needed toward a comprehensive evaluation of the instruction and learning methods of teachers from different universities. Similar to this is Olasehinde's (2002) notion that learners are susceptible to writing errors because it is already an innate parcel of the learning process. In 2000, Ancker echoed this belief, stating that writing errors are typical chunk of the learning process and discernment.

Additionally, discovering and categorizing writing difficulties in the context of non-native respondents was the intent of Darus and Subramaniam (2009) when they studied errors found in the essays of 72 Malaysian high school students using Markin programming. The participants' difficulties in writing contain tense of verbs, singularity and plurality forms, choice of words, agreements of subject and verb, word order, and preposition. This work equips educators with essential information in guiding students when writing and in creating a conducive atmosphere in learning a specific language. Castro (2012) also completed a study that identified the usual types of writing faults that most students make in their written works. She found out that their waterloos are grammar, punctuation, coherence, and cohesive devices, syntax, vocabulary, spelling, and organization. With her belief that these writing weaknesses must be addressed, she developed activities.

As regards writing proficiency level, some studies have also been undertaken. Vega in 2010 focused his research in the context of a school in Panganiban, Catanduanes. He investigated the performance of freshmen learners when writing composition. Conclusions defined the students' writing skills level as generally *good*; exposing the various factors that influence such skill and showing a strong link between their final grade and their composition writing ability. In 2013, Pascua subjected 95 English 2 students to a writing activity and evaluated their proficiency level as generally *fair to poor*. Their writing hitches are found in sentence construction, grammatical forms, agreement, pronoun and its antecedent, sequencing, coherence, vocabulary, capitalization, spelling, and mechanics.

Goldburg's research article from the same year zeroed in on three groups of ESL secondary students at a Southern California tertiary institution to find out their writing proficiency in English. Results disclosed that different types of second English language students' experiences and perceptions of academic literacy may not match the high requirements as specified in the curriculum of reading-to-writing among American ESL tertiary students. Still in 2013, Fati unveiled that the English writing proficiency of 97 Moroccan EFL students is greatly affected by the quantity and categories of errors they obtained when writing. Cabansag (2013) examined the written compositions of 140 high school students in one

University in Cagayan Valley, Philippines, using a descriptive-correlational approach. According to the findings, students have a high level of skill in structure and grammar but a poor level of proficiency in mechanics. The most difficult to deal with were verbs, verb tense, and capitalization. Respondents' profile factors had no significant link with their written language skill, according to chi-square p-values. Persistent written language problems, on the other hand, have no significant link with respondents' profile factors.

Lastly, Belaid (2020) looked at how independent variables (specialty, competency, and gender) correlated with dependent variables (writing methods) among students in Tunisian who are enrolled in courses such as Soft Sciences (English and French) and Hard Sciences (Medicine and Engineering). Overall methods are more likely to be used by language majors than by science students, as per the results. With the exception of Science students, who employ writing styles at a slightly lower rate, most students end up into same user category (High-Medium-Low). Students were also oblivious of several tactics, highlighting the significance of explicit education. She recommended that students be taught how to reflect on and assess their work, as well as the writing strategies they employed.

These related works synthesize, however, that unavoidability of errors when writing remains prolific; that is why, identifying such errors is deemed crucial. Despite the number of scholarly studies conducted dealing with students' writing, involving Grade 12 students in Philippine realm especially in finding out their writing proficiency level remained in dearth of attempts. The present researcher, therefore, perceived that their integration in this study would be a novel contribution in the fields of education and applied linguistics because 12th Graders were only piloted in the Philippines in 2017. Thus, the core of this study concentrates on the identification of students' errors and in determining their writing proficiency level based on these errors.

2.1. Research Questions

In general, this study aimed to identify the students' writing proficiency level. Specifically, it sought answers to two questions as follows:

1. What is the writing proficiency level of STEM, HUMSS, and ABM 12th grader students with reference to:
 - a. content;
 - b. organization;
 - c. vocabulary;
 - d. language use; and
 - e. mechanics?
2. Is there a significant difference on the writing proficiency level among the 12th graders from the three tracks vis-à-vis the five components?

2.2. Theoretical Framework

The standpoints of Process and Product Theory about writing premised the framework of this study. Just as this approach does, students are taught to produce writing ideas, analyze the goal and audience, and compose drafts in order to present written products that communicate their own thoughts.

However, since writing errors are inevitable, this study was also guided by Error Analysis Approach, which is naturally an instructive technique (Ellis, 1998), and a linguistic

scrutiny method (AbiSamra, 2003) that focuses on learners' errors, or in which knowledge is derived from errors. This was observed following the processes such as selection of a language corpus, identification of the errors from the corpus, categorization of the errors, detailed explanation of the identified errors through establishing their root causes, and lastly, assessment of the errors.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Participants and Setting

Unlike most research studies on students' writing proficiency that have focused on foreign academic settings, the current study took place in a public Senior High School in the City of Laoag in the province of Ilocos Norte. The student participants are Grade 12 enrolled in the courses of *Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)*, *Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS)*, and *Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM)* during the 2017-2018 academic year.

In this institution, each Grade 12 class has between 35 and 40 students. The researcher randomly selected the study's samples. On a piece of paper, all of the students' names from all three tracks were written. For the draw lots, these were folded and placed in a bowl and have chosen 25 students only from each track. Hence, 75 students in all took part in the research. The writing task was also given to them in their English courses, which is the finest venue to complete writing exercises. Two English teachers were also asked to participate in the study as inter-raters to corroborate the researcher's findings. They were picked according to their previous experiences teaching English writing classes for roughly three years already during the conduct of the study.

3.2. Research Design

Descriptive-quantitative was the design used in describing the writing proficiency level of Grade 12 STEM, HUMSS, and ABM students based on a writing output they completed in their English classes.

3.3. Research Instruments

The *students' compositions* and the *rubric in examining the outputs* were the two data gathering tools used. The former aids the researcher in determining the current proficiency level of students' writing skills, and the latter, a scoring rubric adopted from *Robitaille and Connelly (2002)*, functions as an evaluation tool for the students' works. Content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics are among the five criteria included in the assessment rubric.

The scoring rubric was pilot tested utilizing the Cohen's Kappa and Landis and Koch-Benchmark Kappa's Scales to determine the inter-rater reliability. Hence, the Kappa Statistic of the inter-raters was recorded as follows: content (0.624); organization (0.636); vocabulary (0.656); language use (0.632); and mechanics (0.657). It is very evident that all obtained p-values are descriptively interpreted as *substantial* (ranging from 0.61 to 0.80), which means that the inter-raters' agreement in all five components is *reliable*.

3.4. Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to conducting the study, the researcher got permission from the English teacher handling the selected Ilocano Grade 12 STEM, HUMSS, and ABM students allowing him to conduct a writing task in her classes. The students' outputs were used in the identification of their writing proficiency levels. The student participants were instructed to write a composition of 3-5 paragraphs in length centered on the topic "*Narrate the most painful event in your life and how you coped with it.*" One-hour time limit was given to the participants to compose as it was their subject time schedule. They were also urged to use pseudonyms on their papers. However, for the researcher's records, he provided the students a second piece of paper on which their pseudonyms alongside their real identities were written.

After the writing exercise, the teacher in-charge had no more involvement in the next steps (error identification and correction) of the data gathering process. Identification of errors in the various writing areas was made to determine the students' writing proficiency through the assistance provided by two English teachers who served as inter-raters. The Cohen's Kappa was used in calculating the inter-raters' agreement, which was then interpreted utilizing the Landis and Koch- Benchmark Kappa's Scale. Other variables affecting the students' proficiency were not considered.

3.5.Data Analysis

Grade 12 STEM students (STEM #1 – STEM #25); Grade 12 HUMSS students (HUMSS #26- HUMSS #50); and Grade 12 ABM students (ABM #51- ABM #75) had their compositions coded as mentioned for easy identification. Each student's work was evaluated and graded regarding the five categories specified in the rubric (Robitaille & Connelly, 2002), to wit: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. MS Excel was used to encode the quantitative data (scores), which was then analyzed using SPSS statistical software.

The researcher additionally used the following codes to guide him through the SPSS computations. For each track, the code was 0 for STEM, 1 for HUMSS, and 2 for ABM. The students' levels of writing proficiency were described employing descriptive statistics such as *frequency counts* and *percentages*. *Mean* and *standard deviation* were computed in determining their overall writing proficiency. The data, therefore, for each of the three-track samples were illustrated in tabular format. Further, the researcher performed a test of normality to determine which statistical tool should be used to answer research question #2. On that basis, data were tested for homogeneity using SPSS version 23. Thus, the test of normality results was summarized as follows: *content*, the Shapiro- Wilk p- values for tracks 0, 1, and 2 are 0.077, 0.078, and 0.252, respectively. As regards *organization*, the Shapiro- Wilk p- values for tracks 0, 1, and 2 are 0.158, 0.079, and 0.442, correspondingly. With regard to *vocabulary*, the Shapiro- Wilk p-value for tracks 0, 1, and 2 are 0.264, 0.090, and 0.164, respectively. Whereas, 0.055, 0.108, and 0.128, in that order, are the Shapiro- Wilk p- values for tracks 0, 1, and 2 in terms of language use. Lastly, regarding mechanics, the Shapiro- Wilk p- value for tracks 0, 1, and 2 are 0.053, 0.064, and 0.051, respectively.

It can be established that since all the p- values in the five components are greater than the alpha (0.05), then, data were normally distributed. Hence; parametric test, specifically, One- Way ANOVA was used in order to look into whether there is or there is no significant difference on the writing proficiency level among or within the three tracks of Grade 12.

Thus, the following hypotheses were considered:

H₀ – there is **no significant difference** on the writing proficiency level between and among Grade 12 STEM, HUMSS, and ABM students in terms of the five components.

H₁ – there is **a significant difference** on the writing proficiency level between and among Grade 12 STEM, HUMSS, and ABM students in terms of the five components.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study scrutinized compositions of 75 Ilocano Grade 12 STEM, HUMSS, and ABM students and identified their writing proficiency levels regarding *content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics*.

Table 1

Mean scores and standard deviations on the current writing proficiency of Grade 12 STEM, HUMSS, and ABM students in content

Range of Scores	Descriptive Interpretation	Tracks					
		STEM		HUMSS		ABM	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
27-30	Excellent to Very Good	1	4.00	8	32.00	4	16.00
22-26	Good to Average	13	52.00	12	48.00	10	40.00
17-21	Fair to Poor	11	44.00	5	20.00	9	36.00
13-16	Very Poor	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	8.00
	Total	25	100.00	25	100.00	25	100.00
	\bar{X}	23		23		23	
	SD	1.50		0.85		1.11	

Legend: f = Number of Students

\bar{X} = Mean

SD = Standard Deviation

With regard to *content*, Table 1 illustrates the current writing proficiency of Grade 12 students from each of the three tracks. STEM, HUMSS and ABM congruently documented a mean score of 23 with standard deviations (SD) of 1.50, 0.85, and 1.11, respectively; entirely construed as *good to average*. This suggests that students have some familiarity on the topic but showed little progress of their thesis statement which could be attributed to the shortage of details presented.

As evidenced by their writing structures, their writing goals look to be hazy. They seem to forget that their ultimate aim is to come up with an easy-to-read and unified output which requires critical thinking that prioritizes careful word choice and vigilant thought structure. It is also discernible that while students' ideas freely flow from their minds to their compositions, some of the students produced commending introductions, however, the topic's progress seems to be insufficient. Strikingly, there are even students who fail to write a three- paragraph essay,

putting them in the state of violating the element of completeness in their outputs. This is shown in the example below.

The most painFul event in my life is the time that when my parents nearly breakup. That time, I Feel like Im the only person hurting in this world. I can't stop crying seeing my mother crying because it hurt me so much when I see her cry. I love my mother very much but I never even say I love you to her even once in my entire life. That time I really hate my Father because All I remember is him not considering my mother's Feeling. I really hate him knowing that he only love himself he doesn't care about us. Then I did talk to my mother that day asking her "how about us?" "What IF we can't live?" "don't leave us with papa, take us with you." My mother answered and I will get you all when I earned money. Then I ran in to my Father asking him to stop my mother but he answered I don't care. That time I Feel like my whole world fell down I really cry a lot that I can't even breath. The time that my mother's living our house. I have seen my father ran into her and said don't leave. Stay with us, you have childrens don't let them grow with a broken Family. Then he get my mother bag and take it inside. BeFore the day ends the problem has already solved it's just a matter of my Fathers pride all he need to do is just lower his pride.

STEM Student # 16

The sample output evidently shows that the student failed to accomplish a complete composition because he only had one paragraph manifesting the absence of the other parts. The student was unable to effectively manage the writing process towards generating a sound text. As a result of this condition, the content of his work has limited substance and good to average development of topic. Gamiao's (2008) study, for example, addressed the complexity of writing process, in which the power of writing gives writers the authority to explore viewpoints and makes these thoughts visible. He elaborates that writing motivates thinking and learning. However, in the writing task provided to students, the bearer of the output above shows no attainment of this.

Further, the similarity of the three tracks' proficiency, particularly when it comes to the content of their compositions corroborates the statements of Martinez (2012) as cited in Pascua (2013), that in times wherein students are tasked to write an essay, often than not, they struggle with the writing process for they have scarce background on what and how to write. Besides, it becomes more upsetting because they have poor schemata or, worse yet, know nothing about the topic. Hence, this is very likely to happen when students are asked to compose about topics, which are out of their comfort zones or those that are not part of their usual experiences. The excerpt of an ABM student's composition below manifests relevance to topic but lacks details or content.

For me painful is not easy to forget of one people who continue happening in life. It is dangerous because can did a bad things causing of emotion you can feel, aside from this its distrust and can hurt yourself if never stop feel it.

In my life more painful event happened on me. It is a painful saying of people around about my life. if what I am and called a gossip, hurt is I feel everytime while thinking painful event happened on me. I don't know what i do to protect my self from the gossip I don't know how to communicate to everyone know about my self, the most I don't like is this issue because sometime gossip is not all true.

In our life we need to be strong and never give up every challenge comes in our life.

ABM Student # 72

The student considered the three parts of a composition. However, in terms of content, his composition manifests non- substance; thus, not enough to evaluate. He failed to include ideas directly related to the topic; instead, he merely recounted the most painful event in his life but he failed to elaborate his standpoints. This situation may be due to lack of information or experience perhaps on his part about the topic leading him as well to be unsuccessful to write a well- established composition highlighting the given subject. This finding favors Kroll's (1990) notion that because of students' incompetence in English writing, their composing and linguistic competences are also being challenged.

Also, another salient feature found in one of the outputs of the students is the instance of redundancy. Repeated statement just after the same statement is presented, that is either intentionally done or not. As a proof to this is the excerpt in bold from the composition of ABM student #54.

...These pains lessens my confidence **its hard to earn something that is take away from you its hard to earn something that is taken away from you** and start to build it again....

ABM Student # 54

Table 2 summarizes the mean scores and standard deviations gained by the students belonging to the three tracks. STEM students recorded a mean of 16 (SD=1.28) while HUMSS and ABM students similarly incurred a mean score of 15 with 1.13 and 1.09 standard deviations, respectively. These imply that their writings' organization are labelled as *good to average*.

Table 2
Mean scores and standard deviations on the current writing proficiency of Grade 12 STEM, HUMSS, and ABM students in Organization

Range of Scores	Descriptive Interpretation	Tracks					
		STEM		HUMSS		ABM	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
18-20	Excellent to Very Good	2	8.00	9	36.00	5	20.00
14-17	Good to Average	15	60.00	12	48.00	12	48.00
10-13	Fair to Poor	7	28.00	4	16.00	7	28.00

7-9	Very Poor	1	4.00	0	0.00	1	4.00
Total		25	100.00	25	100.00	25	100.00
\bar{X}		16		15		15	
SD		1.28		1.13		1.09	

Legend: f = Number of Students

\bar{X} = Mean

SD = Standard Deviation

In view of these results, it can be deduced that, by and large, Grade 12 students from the three tracks are identical in their expertise or skills in terms of organization when writing. Consequently, the mean scores and standard deviations of Grade 12 STEM, HUMSS, and ABM students indicate that they created compositions that are a little irregular and disorganized, but the key concepts stand out. The excerpts below show this difficulty (corrections are in bold and enclosed in parentheses).

Even though I was still young then, it was hard for me to recover because in that time(,) both of (**delete both of**) my parents were separated and both of them were Far (**far**) away From (**from**) me (**cohesive device needed here**) with the help oF (**of**) my grandparents which (**who**) I treated as my second parents, I recovered little by little as I grow (**grew**) up and I learned that I'm still lucky because there are a lot of people who made me Feel (**feel**) that I'm not alone. (**A word is missing here**) My Father (**father**) is the strength oF (**of**) our Family (**family**) and I'm happy that he's going home every year just to spend time with us even there are still situations that reminds (**remind**) us oF (**of**) the past.

STEM Student # 18

We have to realize that our lives could be gone in a split second. There are no guarantees that we will (**insert still**) be here this time (**delete this time**) next month, *let alone this time next year* (**something is wrong with the italicized statement**). Learn to live each day to its fullest. Accidents and illness (**illnesses**) are really rare (**rare? incorrect choice of word**) when you think about it so you just move throug (**through**) life (**life**) with 90% certainty that you'll be Fine (**fine**) and that really messes with priorities.

HUMSS Student # 48

I have (had) experienced and (**insert still**) experiencing sadness/pain in many (**my**) life(.) there (**There**) is (are) family problems(,) fake peopl (**people**) who brings (**bring**) me down. im (**I'm**) afraid to do something that will embarassed (**embarrassed**) me in the end. it (**It**) brings negativity in my life. I always wanted to be free(,) free from those pains (**insert but**) its (**it's**) like it chase you wherever you go, whatever you do you can't escape from it.

Accordingly, the three students produced paragraphs that have limited support to their ideas. It depicts that their thoughts were not expressed logically and there was an incomplete sequencing. Consequently, there is a failure on the students' end to contemplate on the insights of McWhorter (2005) that the goal of academic writing is to convey a collection of ideas that has unity to make meaning. Further, unfamiliarity on transitional markers usage is also learned as weakness of the students. This is very evident in the absence of logical order of their thoughts. They do not even know how to connect their previous statements to the succeeding ones. This is verified by Weber and Stolley (2013) as cited in Pascua (2013) that transitional devices make paragraphs connected with one another. They are probably separate ideas at first but when employed with appropriate transitional markers, they will turn out into a united composition. The sample excerpt below mirrored how the student failed to apply this significant consideration.

I grew up with grudges toward my family. I never got to bond with them like a normal son. I never showed who I really was just because of these wounds that will never heal.

(transitional device needed here) A dear child needs a father who will always love him **(delete him)** and support him, **(period not comma)** **(cohesive device needed here)** not **(unlike not not)** me, I never had one. **(Something is missing here)** Growing up, I've always felt jealousy whenever I saw **(see)** happy families, not broken ones....

HUMSS Student # 44

It is apparent that the student has difficulty of sustaining ideas in order. This resulted to failure of putting into practice what Huckin and Bloch (1993) emphasized that the use of transitional indicators or signal words is very significant when writing in order to assure a well-organized output for readers' easy decoding and comprehension.

Table 3 presented the complete details registered vis-à-vis *vocabulary*. There is an evident variance in the mean scores of STEM ($x=12$), HUMSS ($x=16$), and ABM ($x=15$) students correspondingly having 1.22, 1.13, and 1.29 standard deviations (SD). The figures gained by HUMSS and ABM have a descriptive interpretation of *good to average* implying an adequate range of vocabulary achieved by them. STEM's records, however, indicate students' failure to choose and use appropriate and correct words in their paragraphs. Confusion in word meanings is also very obvious.

Table 3

Mean scores and standard deviations on the current writing proficiency of Grade 12 STEM, HUMSS, and ABM students in Vocabulary

Range of Scores	Descriptive Interpretation	Tracks					
		STEM		HUMSS		ABM	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
18-20	Excellent to Very Good	1	4.00	7	28.00	3	12.00
14-17	Good to Average	11	44.00	12	48.00	10	40.00
10-13	Fair to Poor	13	52.00	5	20.00	8	32.00

7-9	Very Poor	0	0.00	1	4.00	4	16.00
Total		25	100.00	25	100.00	25	100.00
\bar{X}		12		16		15	
SD		1.22		1.13		1.29	

Legend: f = Number of Students

\bar{X} = Mean

SD = Standard Deviation

The following examples below show habitual lapses of students in terms of choosing and using appropriate lexis (word errors are italicized while corrections are written in bold and enclosed in parentheses):

...I felt the whole *word* (**world**) was falling down around me and I...

STEM Student # 8

... I really cry (**cried**) a lot that I can't (**couldn't**) even *breath* (**breathe**)....

STEM Student # 16

...It was a big part of my life getting *further* (**far**) away with my close friends...

STEM Student # 17

...My bestfriend is always there for me, she listens intently to all of my dramas in life and would just comfort me when I feel sad. Sometimes(,) I *let* (**tell**) all my frustrations *on* (**to**) her but she would understand me always...

HUMSS Student #

30

...When we *our* (**were**) in (**insert our**) childhood days, she always protect me *to* (**from**) our classmates who are bullying me..."There are things that you can be lose but *their* (**there**) are things that can be *gave* (**given**) to you and accept/ open your hearts to those things.

HUMSS Student #

34

Obviously, the three STEM students did an incorrect choice of words. In the case of student #8, he used the word *word* instead of *world*. Student #16, however, used the word *breath* instead of *breathe*. Student #17 did not also evade committing an error since he used the word *further* instead of *far*. Two HUMSS students also committed errors in word selection. The output of student #30 reflects her inappropriate choice of the word *let* instead of *tell*. Student #34, on the other hand, repeatedly done errors in terms of vocabulary. She used the

pronoun *our* when she supposed to use the helping verb *were*. She made also a mistake of using the preposition *to* where in fact, *from* is much proper. Also, she used the pronoun *their* rather than *there* and the word *gave* instead of *given*. The said vocabulary errors lend support to the finding of Darus and Subramaniam (2009) when they studied 72 essays composed by 72 Malaysian secondary school students. According to them, students' limits of vocabulary knowledge triggered these errors.

The vocabulary competence of ABM students likewise exhibits rare or irregular errors in their choice and use of words. Hence, some illustrations of these are listed below (errors are italicized while corrections are written in bold and enclosed in parentheses).

...I can't realize that things may happen *on* (**in just**) a *twinkling* (**blink**) of an eye. *In other words*(,) (**Nonetheless**,) I was very thankful because they left me to my very caring and loving Grandparents (**grandparents**)....

ABM Student # 51

... *Went* (**When**) they came back(,) I already knew that something terrible happened....

ABM Student # 52

...Thankfully, I chose (**insert to**) live and keep going with helped of *yourself* (**myself**) and prayers, (,)....

ABM Student # 62

Everyone of us has *their* (**his or her**) own significant moments (**moment**) in life. Some are good, some are bad....

ABM Student # 70

For me(,) painful is not easy to forget *of* (**by**) one *people* (**person**) who continue happening in life....

ABM Student # 72

In line with the excerpts provided, it is clear that ABM students committed errors on word choice. For instance, student #51 used the preposition *on*, the word *twinkling* and the transitional device *in other words* where in fact, she should have used the words *in*, *blink*, and *nonetheless*, respectively. The case of student #52 likewise shows that her using of the word *went* was her error since the adverb *when* is but more fitting. Student #62 used the word *yourself* instead of *myself*. Visibly, there was an error here done by the student simply because of the presence of the pronoun *I* in the beginning of the sentence which serves as its antecedent. Moreover, student #70 failed to use the pronouns *his* or *her*, rather she used *their* where in fact, she is referring to *everyone*. Finally, the experience of student #72 zero in on her error of selecting the preposition *of* instead of *by* and the word *people* instead of *person* since there is also the determiner or quantifier *one* to give a hint as regards the number of the noun.

In the same way as the errors done by the STEM and HUMSS students, the ABM learners are also seen to be not cautious in terms of their vocabulary choice and these are

manifested and observed in their pronoun errors. As a proof to this is the case of reference disagreement of nouns and pronouns in terms of number. As to the situation of ABM student #70, the pronoun *everyone* is singular, hence, the pronouns *his* or *her* should have been used and not *their* so that it would have been in accordance with the number of *everyone* which serves as its reference. In effect, vocabulary is described as the understanding of words and their meanings; nevertheless, according to Biemiller (2005), failure is caused by a lack of identification skills of vocabulary.

These students' errors of the students are considered to be among the usual ones that are always present in their compositions, however, these should still be mentioned as they can be seen as perennial. Thus, should not be taken for granted but rather be given more attention to minimize them if not completely eradicated. One plausible elucidation for committing these errors is due to scarcity of words in their schema or word bank. These results seem to be in agreement with the findings of Castro (2012) wherein she found out that vocabulary along with punctuation, cohesion and cohesive device, syntax, spelling and organization were the most committed errors of students when engaged into writing.

A more comprehensive analysis regarding the proficiency of the participants from STEM and HUMSS tracks also discovered that there are cases occurred when some students used a Filipino counterpart to express their thoughts for the lack of words. Notably, this is not evident in the essays of ABM students. This is shown in the following outputs (errors are italicized while corrections are written in bold and enclosed in parentheses):

...Despite the pain, I bowed and prayed to God, thanking him **(Him)** For **(for)** the liFe **(life)** the **(that)** He had given to my *lola*.

STEM Student # 2

...Me and my father **(My father and I)** was **(were)** left in the living room while my mother was at our neighbor and my *ate* is **(was)** late....So that night, my *ate* was home.

HUMSS Student # 33

It can be observed from the examples aforementioned that both *STEM student #2* and *HUMSS student #33* failed to use the English equivalents of the words "lola" and "ate," instead of using "grandmother" and "sister," respectively. They just utilized the Tagalog terms. Strikingly, *HUMSS student #33* repeatedly used this word in her composition. These may be due to the students' lack of access in their L2 (English) especially that they are Ilocano speakers.

Table 4 unveils the mean scores and standard deviations of each track as regards *language use*. STEM group acquired a mean of 13 (SD=2.06), 19 (SD=0.88) for HUMSS, and 13 (SD=0.94) for ABM. Inferring this data, both STEM and ABM tracks recorded a *fair to poor* proficiency while HUMSS students are described as *good to average*. Therefore, STEM and ABM have major problems in simple sentence or complex sentence constructions.

Table 4

Mean scores and standard deviations on the current writing proficiency of Grade 12 STEM, HUMSS, and ABM students in Language Use

Range of Scores	Descriptive Interpretation	Tracks					
		STEM		HUMSS		ABM	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
22-25	Excellent to Very Good	0	0.00	7	28.00	3	12.00
18-21	Good to Average	11	44.00	10	40.00	7	28.00
11-17	Fair to Poor	14	56.00	8	32.00	9	36.00
5-10	Very Poor	0	0.00	0	0.00	6	24.00
Total		25	100.00	25	100.00	25	100.00
\bar{X}		13		19		13	
SD		2.06		0.88		0.94	

Legend: f = Number of Students

\bar{X} = Mean

SD = Standard Deviation

Based on the excerpt below, the student produced simple sentences but with repeated additive (e.g., *and*) and adversative (e.g., *but*) conjunctions used. This finding is parallel to the result of Pascua's (2013) and Brown's (2000) studies that it is inescapable to commit grammatical flaws when writing. This also fortifies Wachs' (1993) contention that while students may be well-versed in grammar norms, they rarely implement what they have learned.

A member of the family was gone. **But** it didn't take long and we all moved on **but** I coped by thinking she's now in a better place **and** her suffering has finally ended **and** I know that she's now peacefully residing in heaven.

STEM Student # 21

Another example stated below justifies some gaps and lapses in sentence construction and frequent grammatical errors produced by HUMSS students.

...And I can't (**couldn't**) kept it anymore and just said. "So you'll left (**leave**) us? *What did I done* (**What have I done**), have I done something to you? I Am (**am**) only a student and your (**you're**) saying *your left us* (**you will leave**)? And my tears drop (**dropped**) one by one.

HUMSS Student

#33

This instance is consistent with Darus and Subramaniam's (2009) finding when they looked into the errors committed by students in writing. They explicated those grammatical structures should be taught to students. Also, students should have the chance to be adventurous with the language and get involved with the language at hand.

The mean score also specifies that the students struggled in constructing complex sentences, even worst, simple sentences. They also reflected confusion in word meanings that caused grammatical errors in their outputs. See example below to justify this claim.

...I've seen a lot of change (**changes**) of (**from**) my Father (**father**), he will not to anymore (**anything**) to (**a word is missing here; insert harm**) my Family (**family**), (**delete comma**) (**insert just like**) what he do (**did**) in (**insert the**) past, (.) I've been so lucky to solve my problem and to give an (**a**) solution. In every challenges (**challenge**) that may we (**we may**) encounter(,) we will (**should**) never give up, no matter what happens.

ABM Student #71

Similarly, this result conforms to the errors projected by HUMSS students as discussed in the previous part of this paper. At this point, the ABM student who is the bearer of the excerpt specified above has, undoubtedly, tried very hard to make his sentences grammatical yet ended unacceptable. Therefore, the student should be reminded of Bakar, Awal, and Jalaluddin's (2010) suggestion that high school students must construct sentences with coherence and parallelism for quick deciphering.

Further, the mechanics proficiencies of students are outlined in Table 5 demonstrating a parallel mean score of 3 (SD=0.00) for STEM and ABM tracks interpreted as *fair to poor*; while 5 (SD=0.00) emerged as the mean score of HUMSS track branded as *excellent to very good*.

Table 5

Mean scores and standard deviations on the current writing proficiency of Grade 12 STEM, HUMSS, and ABM students in Mechanics

Range of Scores	Descriptive Interpretation	Tracks					
		STEM		HUMSS		ABM	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
5	Excellent to Very Good	0	0.00	9	36.00	2	8.00
4	Good to Average	9	36.00	8	32.00	8	32.00
3	Fair to Poor	15	60.00	8	32.00	12	48.00
2	Very Poor	1	4.00	0	0.00	3	12.00
Total		25	100.00	25	100.00	25	100.00
\bar{X}		3		5		3	
SD		0.00		0.00		0.00	

Legend: f = Number of Students

\bar{X} = Mean

SD = Standard Deviation

Essay Assessment toward Determining the Writing Proficiency Level of STEM, HUMSS, and ABM Twelfth Graders

These results imply that comparing the three tracks, HUMSS group, in general, possesses a mastery of writing conventions, though, some still did not avoid to make errors in this criterion. While both STEM and ABM students create frequent errors in spelling, punctuations, capitalizations, paragraphing, as well as poor hand- writing. Here are some examples of students' errors as regards spelling (words that are misspelled are italicized while corrections are written in bold and enclosed in parentheses).

...My mind created every *scenerio* (**scenario**) possible but I...

STEM Student # 3

...I am the youngest when she still have *stregnth* (**strength**) and....

STEM Student # 4

...when I saw him (**insert with**) eyes closed at the *cuffin* (**coffin**)...

STEM Student # 19

...that I will be discharge (**discharged**) *tommorrow* (**tomorrow**)....

ABM Student # 55

... I've seen the way they despise (**despised**) me, comparing my *abelities* (**abilities**) to my siblings....I've become *rebelious* (**rebellious**)....

ABM Student # 75

...We as a family, rose to the *occation* (**occasion**) just like how...

HUMSS Student #

35

...I went outside and I did a *verry* (**very**) terrible thing....

HUMSS Student #

42

By looking at the excerpts given, the students from the three tracks misspelled the words *scenerio* (scenario), *stregnth* (strength), *cuffin* (coffin), *tommorrow* (tomorrow), *abelities* (abilities), *rebelious* (rebellious), *occation* (occasion), and *verry* (very), respectively. In other words, these cases simply uncover that at the level of students, they still face dilemmas on spelling. This proves that as students begin to encounter more difficult words, they can no longer rely exclusively on their prior knowledge to spell unfamiliar words. Accordingly, confusion occur and they have difficulties of understanding the nature of the English language and the repertoire of proper spelling. Relatively, this is not surprising as Castro (2012) pointed out that spelling is also one of the weaknesses of college students which she found out in the study she conducted focusing on determining the common types of writing errors that students commit. Fagerberg (2006) agreed, believing that ESL students and native speakers are very likely to encounter such.

In terms of **punctuations**, STEM students #12 and #17, HUMSS student #50 and ABM student #67 committed an error. They had problems on the correct usage of period and comma. These are reflected in the following examples (corrections are written in bold and enclosed in parentheses).

...I can still remember how he would let me eat a whole *lechon manok*, how he would give me anything I asked for (**delete for**) just to make me stop crying and most of all how he showed his love to me like I was his own daughter(.) It was the most sorrowful and hardest goodbye. Death is inevitable(.) Time is an infinity, we can either close to grieve for the rest of our lives or move on and keep going with our own lives(.)

STEM Student # 12

...Day by day(,) I noticed that relationship gap,...

HUMSS Student #

50

...One day(,) after coming home from school(,) my father sat me down (**sat down with me**) and we had a talk,...Every morning(,) we woke (**wake**) up early...

ABM Student # 67

Given the above excerpts, there is no doubt that STEM student #12 failed to consider in his output the importance of using a *period* (.). That is why, instead of having four sentences, it appears that he has only two. Contrariwise, the situations of HUMSS student #50 and ABM student #67 were still related to punctuations but this time, their failure was on incorrect use of comma (,). Relating to this, Mateski (2014) highlighted that those missing periods and commas are two of the 10 most common punctuations mistakes of students when writing. Consequently, the problem is that, the absence of commas in a sentence makes it a run-on block of text with no pauses or stops, and this is seen in the students' outputs.

Also, errors in punctuations usually happened due to having no knowledge as regards the proper use of apostrophe and this error became explicit in some of the students' outputs listed below (errors are italicized while corrections are written in bold and enclosed in parentheses).

Our story ended but my life *wont* (**won't**).

STEM Student #

13

Heres (**Here's**) a story, he became mad because there were (**was**) a situation that my ate (**elder sister**) has a boyfriend at that time....

HUMSS Student #

3

Its (**It's**) hard for me to accept that at first because....

I'ts (It's) hard for me to accept that I can't bond with him anymore....

ABM Student # 70

The array of excerpts above-mentioned exemplify how the four students had an error in using apostrophe as a punctuation. STEM student #13 failed to put an apostrophe in the word *wont* (*won't*) especially that it is a contracted form for *would not*. In like manner, HUMSS student #3 forgot to put an apostrophe in the word *heres* (*here's*) since it a contraction of *here is*. The word *its* (*it's*) was also the failure of HUMSS student #41 without knowing that it is the contracted form for *it is*. Given this error, Mateski (2014) attested that the words *it's* and *its* are too easy to misuse since its rules are different. The error of HUMSS student #41 is that he disremembered to consider that *its* in his sentence is short for *it is* where the apostrophe is needed to designate a contraction and is not possessive. However, one salient error was done by ABM student #70 because she did use an apostrophe in the word *i'ts* (*it's*) yet she placed it incorrectly. Again, as emphasized by Mateski (2014), this holds true because writers either tend to or inadvertently put apostrophes where they do not actually belong. Significantly, students must not only rely on words to convey meaning, but they also have to observe rules of punctuation and spelling to produce seamless compositions (Aquino, 2011).

Also, **capitalization** was a problem of the students. In the case of STEM student #2, she failed to capitalize the proper nouns *laoag* (Laoag) and *him* (Him) referring to the Lord. Yet, she capitalized the words *Found* (found) and *liFe* (life) which are not supposed to be. Whereas, in the condition of STEM student #20, she did not capitalize the proper noun *cagayan* (Cagayan), which is a name of a place. Surprisingly, she did it twice in her composition which proves that she really did not know. Also, STEM student #25 unsuccessfully capitalized the proper noun *monday* (Monday). Furthermore, HUMSS student #27 capitalized the word *Thank* (thank you), which actually should be written starting in a small letter while, HUMSS student #28 and ABM student #68 had an error in capitalization since they failed to capitalize the pronoun *i* (I), and the word *father* (Father) to refer to God, respectively.

With these cases in point, the English grammatical rules ascertain that these are indeed considered errors. English grammar says that all proper nouns should start in capital letters while common nouns are written in small letters. Hence, the students violated these norms.

...February came and I was here at *laoag* (**Laoag**) that time when I *Found* (**found**) out that she's gone...I bowed and prayed to God, thanking *him* (**Him**) *For* (**for**) the *liFe* (**life**) the (**that**) He had given to my lola...

STEM Student # 2

...he said that there are things that he must settle at *cagayan* (**Cagayan**),...We came (**arrived**) at *cagayan* (**Cagayan**) for his burial...

STEM Student # 20

...On the month of June in the year 2011, *monday* (**Monday**) morning,...

STEM Student # 25

...If I could go back in time machine, I'll hug him, I'll say *Thank* (**thank**) you for everything....

HUMSS Student #

27

...This is it. *i* (**I**) was injected with anti(-) tetanus...

HUMSS Student #

28

...And lastly(,) I become (**became**) closer to our Almighty God who is our *father* (**Father**) in heaven and give thanks in everything.

ABM Student # 68

In terms of the proper usage of hyphen (-), STEM student #20 was not able to cogitate on this. Her statement below in which she omitted the hyphen in the word *so called* (so- called) proves this claim.

People come and go, Your *so called* (**so- called**) friends are examples of it....

STEM Student # 20

Interestingly, ABM student #71 displayed an error in word syllabication. Due to limited space in his composition paper, she tried to cut the word *around*, however, she performed incorrect syllabication. Take a look at the excerpt below.

...Everybody

aro-

und (**a-round not aro-und**) us watched, laughed and some showed sympathy...

ABM Student # 71

Moreover, **paragraphing** has also been the struggle of some students because proper indentation in every paragraph was not considered. One student exhibited also a **poor handwriting** leading to being not legible and comprehensible. Surprisingly, one student from the STEM group has an unusual way of writing. He put spaces in between words that appears to be unique in some ways.

Significant Differences on the Writing Proficiency Level of the Students in the Three Tracks in terms of the Five Components

In addressing research question 2, Table 6 exhibits the computed p- values on the level of writing proficiency among or within the three groups in terms of the five components. One-Way ANOVA test was used since it is the most appropriate statistical tool.

Table 6

Results of One- Way ANOVA Test on the level of writing proficiency among/ within Grade 12 STEM, HUMSS, and ABM students in terms of the five components

Criteria	Grade 12 STEM, HUMSS, and ABM Students (among/within groups) p- value	Interpretation
Content	0.044	significantly different
Organization	0.042	significantly different
Vocabulary	0.008	significantly different
Language Use	0.014	significantly different
Mechanics	0.001	significantly different

Legend: p-value <0.05 is significant; p-value >0.05 is not significant

As presented, null hypothesis should be rejected because the p-values are 0.044 (content), 0.042 (organization), 0.008 (vocabulary), 0.014 (language use), and 0.001 (mechanics), which are all less than the alpha (0.05). In other words, the writing proficiency among or within Grade 12 STEM, HUMSS, and ABM students is significantly different. It can be inferred that students from the three tracks have distinct level of writing proficiency. One reason might have to do with the various factors affecting their adeptness or skills. This finding could also be explained by the individuals' exposure to the English language. This data supports Vega's (2000) findings that the writing competency of freshmen students from an institution in Panganiiban, Catanduanes is highly affected or influenced by a variety of factors. She noted that the learners' writing abilities are mostly good. To end, she is able to discover and realize that students' final grade is one factor which has a high relationship to their writing performance level.

5. CONCLUSION

In general, STEM, HUMSS, and ABM students got a descriptive interpretation of *good to average* level of writing proficiency. This result puts forward that the students have a basic understanding of the subject but with inadequate topic expansion. Other common problems exhibited by them are their ways of constructing simple, compound, or complex, or compound-complex sentences, and some grammatical errors like lack of agreement on subject and

predicate, subject and verb, and pronoun and its antecedent. They have also errors in correct word choice and usage. In addition, students have frequent errors in capitalization, poor handwriting, spelling, and even punctuations. Thus, the need for reinforcement.

Undoubtedly, writing task is one of the major features in a classroom. Writing helps a person with other language activities by teaching him or her how to compose words, organize, spell, and put together interconnected details. However, results show that participants of the study had *good to average* compositions. Thus, little improvement needed and they will be considered skilled writers equipped with the norms and standards of writing.

It is suggested, therefore, that teachers should explore ways of encouraging learners to explore their writing weaknesses so that reinforcement can be done. Teachers can use the information regarding students' writing proficiency and find innovative ways or interventions to address them. Also, the researcher recommends that proposals as regards activities or modules can be carried out which can be used in the future in English writing classes towards establishing good writing skills among students.

Moreover, the findings of the study can also provide baseline information to future researchers for more comprehensive studies on writing difficulties or proficiency, motivation or apprehension, among others, and how these can be influenced by students' profile. Hence, this study can also be done on a wider scale by increasing the number of participants, involving other tracks, and other secondary institutions not only in the same province but even outside in order to come up with more extensive projects that will attend these concerns. Furthermore, it would be interesting to see how teachers get into the picture of addressing this problem on the road to better and more effective teaching and learning in the classroom.

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