

Improving Grade 7 students' news writing skills using worksheets assessed through online interviews

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ABSTRACT. This paper aimed to improve the news writing skills of grade 7 SPJ students by using the News Writing Worksheet as an instrument to correctly write the lead and the transition paragraphs of a news story. The paper opted for a quasi-experimental one-group pre-test—post-test design. Data gathered were analyzed using paired samples t-test. Analysis of the data using paired-sample t-test indicates that there is a significant increase of post-test scores of 50 SPJ students. This indicates that the use of News Writing Worksheet is effective in improving the scores of SPJ students in writing the lead and transition paragraphs of a news story. This positive outcome was affirmed by the results of the interview of ten (10) participants who validated the use of the instrument. Results from the thematic analysis, showed that the News Writing Worksheet facilitated the acquiring of imaginative, self-directed, and informed comprehension by the SPJ students. In addition, it was revealed that pupils utilized technology to overcome problems encountered while completing the worksheet. These results were consistent with previous similar research.

Keywords: *journalism, news writing, pre-test, post-test, SPJ students*

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INTRODUCTION

Under the provisions of the Republic Act 7079, schools need to support and promote campus journalism even in the New Normal, knowing the importance of establishing a communication system that would transfer and share information from the school to its community.

Further, campus journalism is centered on students and attempts to promote the implementation of ethical and responsible journalistic values in academic institutions. This style of journalism aims to provide students with a forum for expressing their thoughts and stimulate civic engagement (Abiog-Ocampo and Ibanez-Sicat, 2021). In contrast, real-world journalism is the process of gathering, evaluating, creating, and disseminating news and information about significant events, subjects, and individuals for the benefit of the public (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2014).

After all, Section 4 of RA 7079 states that student publications should hone interested students in the necessary skills in journalism and that these students will apply what they have learned in the schools and communities where they belong. So, in a blog site, it was disclosed that a campus journalist must write competently and quickly under the technical demands of campus journalism (Arao, 2013).

According to Sutarno (2017), the biggest obstacles student journalists in Indonesia face include a lack of suitable institutional support, inadequate training and resources, censorship, and restricted freedom of expression. Moreover, According to Lao (2014), student journalists in the Philippines face a variety of difficulties, including low resources, time management issues, ethical dilemmas, and inadequate teacher support.

So, in my observation in Badas National High School, our campus journalists would still find it challenging to write a simple news article for our school paper publication during face-to-face classes. This

difficulty is multiplied even in our online publication during the New Normal. And in my assessment of the news writing articles of the students, there are common news writing errors which they committed.

I also found similar news writing problems from our incoming Grade 7 students who also wrote news stories as part of their written examination for the Special Program in Journalism (SPJ). Some of their common errors were identifying essential facts and details, unfamiliarity in writing the lead of a news story, and issues in connecting the paragraphs as part of a news story. This was corroborated by a study of Roxas et al., (2016) who found out that many campus journalists have difficulty in writing the lead and in connecting the paragraphs of the news story.

Considering that we are now on the verge of implementing the Special Program in Journalism (SPJ), it is only appropriate to immediately provide journalism writing interventions to prepare our SPJ Grade 7 students to hone their journalistic skills, particularly in news writing.

A study posited that writing is a productive and expressive activity (Tarigan, 2011). Further, another study also mentioned that writing skills could be improved by learning through repetition. If the teachers were aware of the writing process, this would help teach appropriate strategies and enhance the writing skills of the students (Kapka and Oberman, 2001).

So, with the present learning situation, the author came up with a needed intervention to help our SPJ Grade 7 students to cope up with their news writing problems.

This prompted me to devise a writing strategy to help improve the news writing skills of SPJ Grade 7 students in my school and allow them to perform news writing tasks often associated consistently and efficiently with writing.

Considering the lack of Campus Journalism writing training due to the

pandemic and lack of funding for that, the introduction of the News Writing Worksheet can be an intervention to alleviate the SPJ Grade 7 students' difficulty in writing the lead and in connecting the paragraphs of the news story. This was supported by a study about the need for the development of a news writing module that would focus on improving the students' skills in identifying essential facts and details, to write an effective lead, and to connect the paragraphs of a news story (Roxas et al., 2016).

The news writing worksheet was developed based on the guidelines stipulated in the National Schools Press Conference Score Sheet for News Writing. The process model started with students identifying and writing the 5 Ws and 1H. Further, the next steps covered the details that needed to be written in the succeeding paragraphs to write a complete news story. In relation to this, the intervention also aimed to improve the news writing skills of SPJ Grade 7 students in Badas National High School.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study utilized a sequential mixed method design to answer the research questions. Data were collected between September 2021 and December 2021. The respondents were the 50 Grade 7 students of Badas National High School, Mati City, Davao Oriental, Philippines. As the SPJ teacher, the researcher conducted a six-week news writing worksheet intervention.

Data collection was conducted after the researcher secured first the approval from the Schools Division Superintendent and Division Research Coordinator for the virtual conduct of the study. Then, after getting the approval, the researcher also secured the approval of the School Head and Class Adviser.

Considering the current pandemic situation, the researcher issued informed consents and verbally informed the 50 participants and their 50 parents, explaining the study's purpose. The same communication

letters also provided considerations to the participants that they will be in their homes during the conduct of the study. The students were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. To gain easy access and convenient transcriptions, the researcher also asked permission from the participants to record the virtual interview.

Before the conduct of the study, the news writing worksheet was validated by the Mati City Division Education Program Supervisor in English, and at the same time, the Division Journalism Coordinator, using the NSPC Guidelines Score Sheet for News Writing on the following details: Technical, Content, and Ethics. It was also pilot tested to 50 Grade 7 students at Davao Oriental Regional Science High School to guarantee the reliability of the test. In testing the reliability of the test, Cronbach's Alpha statistics was used to explain the internal consistency among items. The reliability of the test using the statistics of Cronbach's Alpha is .711, which indicates that the test is reliable. The range of Cronbach's Alpha values lies from 0 to 1, whereas a value of 0.7 or above represents higher reliability for a particular scale (Sahu et al., 2015). The questions for the interview were also validated by Dr. Mary Jean M. Francisquete, Principal II of Badas National High School.

This study used descriptive statistics for the study's pre-test and post-test design since the researcher used the quantitative design. The pre-test and post-test news writing exams follow the same format, with similar assessment items and difficulty levels. The pretest set the SPJ students' baseline level of writing to assess their news writing skills, and the post-test measured the SPJ students' progress after the news writing worksheets were given to them. Students were asked to write a news article of 5 to 7 paragraphs on a school event at Badas National High School in the pretest. And they were required to write a news article of 5 to 7 paragraphs on another school event in the post-test.

Then, the pre-test and post-test results were treated statistically to determine the success of the interventions to answer my

first and second research questions. Considering the pandemic, data gathering was conducted virtually, and there were no face-to-face sessions to complete this action research from September to December 2021. The post-test was administered in the second week of November 2021.

The SPJ students were virtually interviewed through Zoom or Google Meet for their experiences for the qualitative design. Participants were selected through random sampling. The collection of data was conducted through virtual focus group discussion (FGD). The researcher virtually interviewed ten participants from the

respondents stating that in conducting a qualitative study, the use of 5 – 25 participants was recommended (Creswell, 2014).

For the data analysis strategy, the researcher used a paired t-test to see a difference between the SPJ students' pretest and post-test scores before and after the intervention. For Qualitative analysis, the researcher coded, transcribed, and categorized the answers of the participants (Smith, 2021). Further, the researcher also used thematic analysis. This helped the researcher consolidate significant participants' responses from the in-depth interview with the use of the interview guide.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results:

The respondents included 50 SPJ learners in Badas National High School. The pretest and posttest mean as well as the standard deviation of the participants is presented in **Table 1**.

As presented in **Table 1**, when the lecture approach was used with the news writing worksheets, a paired sample t-test was used on a sample of 50 students to see if there was a statistically significant mean difference between the scores in the posttest and pretest of the SPJ students. The participants scored

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Participants

	Mean	No. of Students	Standard Deviation
Pre-test	35.36	50	6.75
Post-test	78.80	50	5.69

higher during the posttest (78.80 ± 5.69) than the pretest (35.36 ± 6.75). Table 2 shows that the pretest and posttest of the informants have a $t(49)=-35.57$, $p < .00$. Since $p < 0.05$, there is a significant difference between the SPJ students' pretest and posttest results.

Table 2. Results of paired-samples t-test of the Informants

Test	No. of Students	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	df	p-value
Pre-test	50	35.36	6.75			
Post-test	50	78.80	5.69	-35.57	49	0.00

Further, as shown in **Table 2**, results in the paired sample t-test show a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the SPJ students before and after the implementation of the intervention. The SPJ students' posttest results had improved when they began receiving instruction utilizing the News Writing Worksheets. As a result, the researcher decided to use a

qualitative approach to validate the students' significant experiences, which would eventually affect the SPJ students' learning success in implementing the Special Program in Journalism. Hence, ten (10) students were asked to answer a validated questionnaire with three questions. Then, their responses were analyzed thematically.

Table 3. Generated themes of the Question 1: What are the lived experiences of the SPJ students in using the News Writing Worksheets?

Themes	Example Interview Response	Translated Interview Response
Innovative Learning	<p>S2: Nakatuon ko ug bag-o nga pamaagi sa pagsulat kay naghatag man siya examples nga nag-guide sa amua para makasulat sa worksheet.</p> <p>S4: Naexcited kaayo ko sa mga butang nga makat onan tungod kay gusto nako maexperience usab ang akong naexperience niadtong nakaabot mi sa region as participant in sports writing in english. Busa karon, happy kaayo ko nga kami gitagaan ug another opportunity nga makakat on niini.</p> <p>S6: Kuan..nabag-ohan ko sa gipabuhay kay wala pa sad ko ka experience ana sa elementary, pero naa jud koy bag-o nakat -onan...</p> <p>S7: Challenging siya kay karun pa nakasugat ug nay mga butang nag karun ra nako nahibal-an.</p> <p>S9: Una sa tanan nalisodan ko sa mga question tungod kay first time nako nakaapil ani na mga activity pero nakita nako nga importante diay kayo siya labi na sa pagbuhay ug information.</p> <p>S10: Kanang bag-o siya nga practice sa pagsulat para sa akong</p>	<p>S2: I learned a new way to write because examples were given to guide us to finish the worksheet.</p> <p>S4: I was excited to learn new things because I wanted to experience again what I had experienced when we reached the regional conference as a participant in sports writing in English. That's why I am very happy that we were given another opportunity to learn this craft.</p> <p>S6: Umm..the experience was really new to me because I did not experience it in elementary school, but I learned something new...</p> <p>S7: Challenging siya kay karun pa nakasugat ug nay mga butang nag karun ra nako nahibal-an.</p> <p>S9: First of all, I had difficulty with the questions because it was my first time to join this type of activity but I realized that this is important, especially in writing information.</p> <p>S10: This is a new practice in writing for me.</p>
Self-Guided Learning	<p>S1: Naa diay jud steps para sa pagsulat ug klaro nga balita.</p> <p>S2: Ganahan nako na butang sa paggamit sa news writing worksheet mao ang pag follow sa instruction ug makakat on ko ug bag o nga ways kung unsaon to pag answer ug pagbuhay ug paragraph.</p> <p>S4: Ang akong ganahan sa paggamit sa news writing worksheet han ay, klaro ug naay mga examples nga diin akong masabtan ang mga konsepto. Ang mga pagtulun an nga akong nadawat maayo ng nakatabang gayud sa akong pagtuon.</p>	<p>S1: There are really steps to write a clear news story.</p> <p>S2: I like the manner of using the news writing worksheet, especially in following instructions and learning new things or ways how to answer and write paragraphs.</p> <p>S4: I liked using the news writing worksheet because it was understandable and clear and there are examples where I can easily understand the concepts and the lessons really helped me to learn.</p>

	<p>S5: Nakasabot ko sa pagsulat sa balita kay naa man gud mga examples nga mao jud nag guide nako para makasulat.</p> <p>S8: Naghatag siya ug mga instructions sama sa unsaon pagsugod ug sulat, unsaon pag explain, unsaon pagbuhat ug paragraph ug unsa ang akong himoon na news report.</p>	<p>S5: I was able to understand writing the news because the examples given guided me to write.</p> <p>S8: The worksheet gave instructions like how to start writing, how to explain, how to write a paragraph and how I can write a news report.</p>
<p>Informative Writing and Learning</p>	<p>S3: Dili diay ta magpataka ug sulat basta balita kay dili na mao.</p> <p>S4: Sa pagsulat sa news writing worksheet kay klaro ug unsay kelangan ibutang like kangang WHO ug WHAT sa balita.</p> <p>S6: Gituduan jud mi pagsulat sa balita ug mga butang nga dapat naa didtoa...</p> <p>S9: Na-challenge nako ang akong sarili sa pag-research,pag-sulat ug pagbasa sa mga balita.</p>	<p>S3: We should not write carelessly in news writing because that is not correct.</p> <p>S4: In completing the news writing worksheet, it was clear what to write like writing the WHO and WHAT of the news.</p> <p>S6: We were taught to write the news and the details that should be included...</p> <p>S9: I challenged myself to do research, write and read news stories.</p>

Shown in **Table 3** is the generated thematic summary of the experiences of the SPJ students in using the News Writing Worksheet. It can be noted that the News Writing Worksheet stimulated positive learning experiences for SPJ students despite the limitations caused by the pandemic. It can be posited from the first theme that the News Writing Worksheet fueled the innovative desire of SPJ students to develop their ability to direct their own learning through engaging in news writing prompts and structure. It provided them the opportunity to learn

new writing crafts, especially in journalistic writing crafts. Further, the second theme infers that the SPJ students, despite the physical presence of the SPJ teacher, were able to navigate through the self-guided learning in the news writing worksheet as they were afforded the step-by-step process on how to write a news story. More importantly, the SPJ students realized in the third theme the importance of providing accurate and factual information, which would also hone their fact-checking skills in the process.

Table 4. Generated themes of Question 2: How did the SPJ students cope with the challenges in using the News Writing Worksheets?

Themes	Example Interview Response	Translated Interview Response
<p>Learning with Technology</p>	<p>S3: Ang akong gibuhad para masulbad ge gamitan nako og Google translate. Aron mabuhad nako jud...</p>	<p>S3: And I also used Google Translate to help me finish my task.</p>

	<p>S4: Nangingkamot ko pagpangita ug answer sa akong problema through google</p> <p>S5: Testing ko basa mga online newspaper sa internet kay para makita nako ang pagkaplastar niya gikan sa worksheet.</p> <p>S9: Nang hulam ko ug cellphone arun maka-research ko...</p>	<p>S4: I made an effort to find answers to my problem through Google</p> <p>S5: I also tried reading online newspapers on the internet to link the structure from the worksheet.</p> <p>S9: I borrowed a cellphone to search the Internet...</p>
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It can be noted in **Table 4** that the SPJ students harnessed the power of technology to cope with the challenges in using News Writing Worksheet. Additionally, it can be observed that the SPJ students tapped the online services of search engines and online websites to supplement their understanding of the principles of news writing and the previous suggestions of their SPJ teacher

to complete the writing prompts in the worksheet Furthermore, ICT adoption is a series of continuing and continuous steps that fully support teaching and learning as well as information resources (Young, 2003). Furthermore, the usage of technology will improve the learning process and optimize students' active learning capacities (Finger and Trinidad, 2002).

Table 5. Generated themes of the Question 3: What are the insights of SPJ students in using the News Writing Worksheets?

Themes	Example Interview Response	Translated Interview Response
Use and Enhance Worksheet	<p>S1: Gamiton pa unta ang worksheet sa pag-explain sa imong mga gusto isulat na mag news bahin sa inyong lugar...</p> <p>S2: Maayo nga gamiton pa namu ang worksheet kay ganahan nako na butang sa paggamit sa news writing worksheet mao ang pag follow sa instruction ug makakat on ko ug bag o nga ways kung unsaon to pag answer ug pagbuhat ug paragraph.</p> <p>S4: Ipadayon pa unta ang worksheet kay klaro ang mga examples nga diin akong masabtan ang mga konsepto ug leksyon nga nakatabang gayud sa akong pagtuon.</p> <p>S6: Dapat jud nga gamiton ang news writing worksheet kay para mas dali para sa mga SPJ nga students pareha namu makatuon sa news writing.</p>	<p>S1: The worksheet should be use to explain the things you want to write as news and related to your place</p> <p>S2: It's good that we should continue using the worksheet because I like the manner of using the news writing worksheet, especially in following instructions and learning new things or ways how to answer and write paragraphs.</p> <p>S4: We should continue using the worksheet because it has clear examples where I can easily understand the concepts and the lessons really helped me to learn.</p> <p>S6: Using the worksheet should be continued because it would be easier for SPJ students like us to learn news writing.</p>

	<p>S8: Pagkahuman sa news kay apil na pud unta tong lain pa nga pagsulat sa journalism ba...</p> <p>S9: Dungagan pa unta ang worksheet ug daghan pa nga sample sa news writing...</p>	<p>S8: After the news writing, other journalism crafts should be included...</p> <p>S9: Additional examples in news writing should be added in the worksheet.</p>
<p>Conduct Journalism Trainings and Contests</p>	<p>S3: Unta naa pay muabot nga training para sa amua nga mga SPJ students...</p> <p>S4: Makaapil na unta mi contest parehas sa una sa DSPC...</p> <p>S6: Mas nindot siguro ug muhatag training sa journalism amung skwelahan para sa amua SPJ students...</p> <p>S8: Kuan, maghatag pa unta si sir Paulo ug klase nga tudluan pa mi niya ingani nga mga butang...</p> <p>S10: Nindot ug naa pay lain nga training para sa amua...</p>	<p>S3: Hopefully, there will be coming training for us SPJ students...</p> <p>S4: We could join contests like the DSPC in the past...</p> <p>S6: It would be nice if our schools would conduct journalism training for us SPJ students...</p> <p>S8: Umm, it would be good if sir Paulo would hold classes to teach us about these things.</p> <p>S10: It would be good if there will be another training for us...</p>

Based on student responses in **Table 5**, they have gained insights from using News Writing Worksheet, particularly in utilizing step-by-step news writing prompts. The SPJ students suggested that the News Writing Worksheet must be used and enhanced because it honed them to write news stories with clarity and direction. Further, after using the News Writing Worksheet, the students believed that enhancing the scope of the worksheet and conducting journalism training and writing workshops could further

develop their potential in journalistic skills. The SPJ students disclosed that the writing workshop-based program had a significant impact on developing the subjects' knowledge of writing skills, improving their writing performance, and diminishing their fear of writing (El Said, 2006). Further, writing conferences also help students develop their writing abilities and habits, as well as their attitudes toward learning and rewriting (Bell, 2002).

DISCUSSION

The use of News Writing Worksheets significantly improved the SPJ students' news writing skills. The outcomes of this study back up the findings of Ismail (2007), who found that writing skills may be developed when students' interests are recognized, and they are provided numerous opportunities to practice writing. Following that, the conclusions revealed that in some nations, worksheets have even become a driving force of curriculum (Lesley and Labbo, 2003).

Furthermore, properly designed worksheets provide a bright and enjoyable design as well as a variety of useful and contextualized tasks (Tomlinson, 2009).

The findings of Ueckert and Gess-Newsome (2008), however, contradicted the previously stated findings above, who claimed that mass-produced worksheets are ineffective in attaining instructional objectives. It also contradicted the findings of

another study who found out that students employ a word-matching approach to match words in questions with similar phrases in the textbook, keeping them in a passive learning mode.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to document the positive use of News Writing Worksheets to address the news writing skills of SPJ students as affirmed by the results presented in the tables above. However, the reach of the study's quantitative design can only measure the significant effect of the intervention. Hence, it lacked the rich experiences of the SPJ students who immersed themselves in the journalistic writing intervention, which would prove crucial in the growth of the school's beginning Special Program in Journalism.

This could be based on the premise that well-designed worksheets have improved students' learning outcomes (Sasmaz-Oren and Ormanci, 2012). Additionally, the findings confirmed that worksheets boost students' interest in the class and have a favorable impact on their success (Kurt and Ayas, 2010). On the other hand, another study investigated student anxiety and resistance to learning through distance education. This explains the significant experiences of SPJ students of being anxious considering that for some of them, this is their first time experiencing a particular journalistic writing activity (Tuncay and Uzunboylu, 2010).

The findings of the research suggest that the SPJ teachers in Badas National High School, schools offering Special Program in Journalism, and even school paper advisers in elementary and secondary levels may use the worksheet. Further, SPJ teachers in grade 7 can use the news writing worksheet as an instructional material in Grade 7 SPJ major lessons such as writing a clear, accurate, and meaningful news story, while school paper advisers in elementary and secondary schools may use the News Writing Worksheet as a tool for basic skills training in news writing for student journalists (SJ), especially those newly identified SJs. This worksheet can be presented in class using a modular-worksheet format and can also be presented

as a digital material using a projector or a monitor, in a computer laboratory, or even at home, wherein each student has access to a computer or tablet.

The News Writing Worksheet can be provided to the SPJ students and campus journalists as part of the schools' plan to cater the journalistic abilities of their students. This was supported by the study of VanDerHeide and Newell (2013) who found that in school, writing experiences, expectations, genres, abilities, and objectives are often dictated by the classroom context and are aimed at improving student knowledge. Further, a study by Gallagher and Froemling (2013) disclosed that students who completed the news writing module showed significant gains in their writing skills and aptitude for composing news stories compared to those who did not participate in the program. In addition, the module was rated successful in boosting students' knowledge of news values, the structure of news stories, and the ethical aspects of journalism. More importantly, Ebersole (2016) emphasized the importance of continuing education and experimentation in journalism education to equip students with the skills and knowledge necessary for success in their chosen field (Ebersole, 2016).

CONCLUSIONS

There were three objectives being identified and formulated to determine the effectiveness of using News Writing Worksheets to help SPJ Grade 7 students at Badas National High School enhance their news writing skills. The use of News Writing Worksheets instruction significantly improved the SPJ students' news writing skills. Further, the results showed that there was a significant difference between the pretest and post-test scores before and after the implementation of the intervention. The students' experiences revealed that the News Writing Worksheet offered innovative learning, self-guided learning, and informative writing and learning. Also, the SPJ students' insights while using the intervention involved using and enhancing the News Writing Worksheet and conducting

Journalism training and contests will be essential for them to reach their potential.

This research can be replicated in other schools considering the scarcity of contextualized news writing worksheets in Davao Region and even in the country.

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