

ASSESSING GRAMMATICAL AND DISCOURSE COMPETENCIES IN CAMPUS PAPERS TO ENHANCE JOURNALISTIC WRITING

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ABSTRACT - *Campus journalism is a necessity to uphold and protect freedom of the press through competent journalistic writing. With this, the campus paper ensures the implementation of the Campus Journalism Act of 1991. However, pressing issues and concerns confront campus journalism these days, specifically in the students' journalistic writing skills. Hence, this research is conducted to gain valuable insights through the campus papers from the Schools Division of Cagayan de Oro City with 84 articles from 20 campus papers across the Division which had been subjected to expert evaluation employing the Communicative Competence Framework of Canale and Swain in 1980, assessing grammatical and discourse competencies, in all the five areas of journalistic writing, namely, news, editorial, feature, science and technology, and sports writing. Findings revealed the fair need for training in grammatical competence according to syntax and lexico-semantics and discourse competence according to content and cohesion. Subsequently, the result suggests undertaking programs and projects to enhance and achieve excellence in students' journalistic skills and promote responsible and free journalism at the campus level.*

Keywords: Journalistic Writing, Journalistic Competencies, Student Publication, Communicative Competence

1. INTRODUCTION

Journalism is considered an essential component in a democratic society. Deuze [1] posits that journalism is and has been theorized, researched, studied, and criticized worldwide by people coming from a wide variety of disciplines because of such reasons. Peralta [2] presents that the importance of journalism is founded on the idea that it helps people to have informed choices, and it also shapes public opinion. Accordingly, journalism allows the practice of expression, awareness, cooperation, and nation-building.

The Republic Act 7079 or otherwise known as the Campus Journalism Act of 1991, is the declared policy of the State that advances the development and promotion of campus journalism significantly to uphold and protect the freedom of the press even at the campus level [3]. It seeks to promote the development and growth of campus journalism as a means of strengthening ethical values, encouraging critical and creative thinking, and developing the moral character of the Filipino youth [4]. In furtherance of the policy, the State shall undertake various programs and projects to enhance students' journalistic skills to promote responsible and free journalism, with the student publication being its primary machinery.

As much as campus journalism is concerned, writing is undetachable with student publication. However, as articulated by Laroya & Limjuco [5], there are issues and problems which confront student journalism these days specifically, in journalistic writing. The study of Tasarra [6] revealed and emphasized the unsatisfactory results in the secondary level learners' journalistic writing skills. Such findings corroborate Hyland [7], underlining that writing in the second language is valuable for reflecting on language structure.

Palmer (as cited in Paglinawan [8]), mentioned that like any other form of writing, in journalism, the writers must construct text discourse precisely in standard language and observe grammatical competencies and other aspects of text discourse such as creating cohesion and coherence in the text. Failure to perform this writing is said to be a painful and anxiety-producing task for many individuals. It is further

mentioned that difficulties in writing different types of texts may come from the fact that writers have to understand also linguistic features such as pragmatic, syntax and semantics, and other components of these different text types.

Additionally, the literature review of the study of Carpenter and Kanver [9] supports that journalistic expertise can be viewed as a communicative act. According to them, journalistic expertise refers to the skills, knowledge, and abilities associated with tasks or activities related to journalism. As previously mentioned, writing is detachable in a student publication, the primary machinery of campus journalism.

The linguists Canale and Swain [10] identified Grammatical Competence and Discourse Competence and Sociolinguistic Competence and Strategic Competence in their Communicative Competency Framework, according to Savignon [11], can be the basis for curriculum design and classroom practice. This can respond to the needed development of communicative competence in journalistic writing.

Heavily focusing on the relevant sub-competencies of communicative competence in journalistic writing, this study would like to determine the grammatical and discourse competencies of the campus papers and the level of need for training in journalistic writing. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following: (1) the level of grammatical competencies of the school papers in journalistic writing in terms of syntax and lexico-semantics; (2) the level of discourse competencies of the school papers in journalistic writing in terms of content and cohesion; and (3) the level of need for training in journalistic writing.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study used the descriptive-qualitative research design [12]. Purposive sampling was used in selecting the school papers from the Department of Education-Division of Cagayan de Oro City based on availability.

2.2 Research Sample

The school papers used as samples for this study were published from 2016 to 2020 before the COVID-19 pandemic. There were 20 school papers retrieved, and a total of 84 journalistic articles were considered for expert evaluation. The 84 journalistic articles were composed of 18 news articles, 18 editorial articles, 18 feature articles, 14 science and technology articles, and 16 sports articles. The number of journalistic articles per section varied primarily due to the availability of the type of journalistic texts available from the gathered school papers.

2.3 Data Gathering Procedure

A letter of consent to conduct the study and collect school papers was sent to the Office of Superintendent of the City Schools Division of Cagayan de Oro City through the division journalism coordinator and supervisors. The same permission was also sought from The Federated Cagayan de Oro School Paper Advisers and Editors Guild, Inc., (FCDOSPAEGI), an organization duly licensed by the Securities and Exchange Commission. Upon approval, the researcher then identified the secondary institutions with available published school papers, with the help and endorsement of the FCDOSPAEGI, which were used in the study. The researcher sent a formal communication to the school principals and school paper advisers to retrieve the needed school papers. The expert evaluators that assessed the journalistic articles were composed of the following: three media experts/practitioners, three school paper advisers, and the researcher. This was to ensure validity in assessing the articles of these campus papers.

2.4 Research Instrument

With the permission granted in using the Evaluation Rubric developed by Paglinawan [13] via email, this instrument was used to determine the grammatical competencies in terms of syntax and lexico-semantics and discourse competencies in terms of content and cohesion. As described, the Evaluation Rubric is a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from one (1) “poor” to five (5) “excellent” with a corresponding interpreted level of training need.

2.5 Research Treatment

Percentages, mean, and standard deviation was used in describing the levels of grammatical and discourse competencies in journalistic writing of the school papers in terms of the following: syntax, lexico-semantics, content, and cohesion. In addition, the same statistical tool was used to determine the level of the need for training related to the level of journalistic competencies.

Scale	Description	Interpretation
5	<i>Excellent</i>	Consistently exceeds all relevant writing performance standards. There is a low need for training (96-100%).
4	<i>Very Good</i>	Consistently meets and often exceeds all relevant writing performance standards. There is a fair need for training (85-95%).
3	<i>Good</i>	Somehow meets all relevant writing performance standards. There is a moderate need for training (75-84%).
2	<i>Fair</i>	Sometimes meets the relevant performance standard or seldom exceeds or falls short of desired results. Writing performance has declined significantly, or student has not sustained adequate improvement. There is a high need for training (50-74%).
1	<i>Needs Improvement</i>	Consistently falls short of writing performance standards. There is a very high need for training (1-49%).

The mean scores described the level of journalistic writing competence and interpreted the level of training needed in journalistic writing. Specifically, it discussed the needs of training as follows: 4.21-5.00 (Low Need); 3.41 – 4.20 (Fair Need); 2.61-3.40 (Moderate Need); 1.81 – 2.60 (High Need); and 0.01 – 1.80 (Very High Need).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 reveals the level of grammatical competencies of the campus papers in journalistic writing, according to syntax and lexico-semantics.

	Mean	SD	Description
Syntax	3.54	0.14	Very Good
Lexico-semantics	3.57	0.11	Very Good

Table 1 reveals that in examining the grammatical competence, it was found out that the school papers showed "very good" ability in all the five journalistic writing areas specifically, news, editorial, feature, science and technology, and sports writing in terms of syntax and lexico-semantics-with a noticeable higher mean score as shown in the table.

It is also important to note that the lowest recorded mean among the five journalistic writing areas (i.e., news, editorial, feature, science and technology, and sports writing) for syntax was 3.48. Such data referred to news writing which, separately, could be interpreted as a “good” ability in journalistic writing.

This further implied that the campus papers still have a moderate need for training despite the strong stance of the Division in news writing after it recorded a champion finish in the Best News Section for a School Paper in the Elementary Category bagged by PN Roa Elementary School in the 2019 National Schools Press Conference defeating all entries across the country [14].

With this result, it could be understood that the campus papers, specifically, the writers of the campus papers, still demonstrated an overall fair need for training in all the five journalistic writing areas, namely: news, editorial, feature, science and technology, and sports writing to enhance their grammatical competence further.

Furthermore, the finding was similar to the study of Wong and Hodgson [15] on journalistic skills. They concluded that the students might not have the comprehensive skills and knowledge to produce high-quality news writing. Still, such could be addressed by applying appropriate technologies in learning and teaching may provide an enhanced learning experience.

Table 2 reveals the level of discourse competence of the campus papers in journalistic writing according to content and cohesion.

	Mean	SD	Description
Content	3.59	0.09	Very Good
Cohesion	3.66	0.09	Very Good

Table 2 reveals that the campus papers demonstrated "very good" journalistic writing abilities in content and cohesion. This is, otherwise, reflective of the level of discourse

competence of the writers of the campus papers. The result reveals the overall level of discourse competence of school papers in all the five journalistic writing areas. Additionally, this result implied a fair need for training in all the areas of journalistic writing, which are news, editorial, feature, science and technology, and sports writing. The data presented by this finding on the level of need for training can be substantiated by Nordal [16], supporting that teaching of discourse should be based on the awareness of the learners' discourse competence to assure meaningful and authentic contexts.

Table 3 reveals the level of need for training in journalistic writing according to grammatical competence and discourse competence.

Indicators		Mean	Description	Interpretation
Grammatical Competence	Syntax	3.54	Very Good	Fair need for training
	Lexico-semantics	3.57	Very Good	Fair need for training
Discourse Competence	Content	3.59	Very Good	Fair need for training
	Cohesion	3.66	Very Good	Fair need for training
OVERALL MEAN		3.59	VERY GOOD	FAIR NEED FOR TRAINING

Table 3 presents the level of need for training in journalistic writing upon determining the levels of grammatical competence and discourse competence of the writers through the evaluation of journalistic articles from the campus papers. The overall mean was obtained from all four linguistic elements: syntax, lexico-semantics, content, and cohesion. The results provided valuable insights into the journalistic writing competence of the campus papers, specifically, the writers. Subsequently, it presented the result on the level of need for training in journalistic writing. As per the result obtained by evaluating the campus papers to get the levels of grammatical and discourse competencies, it was found out that there was a fair need for training in journalistic writing. This result coincides with the study of Aprillianti [17], which concluded that although writers already have sufficient grammatical and discourse competencies, some aspects needed to get more attention and still needed a lot of enhancement. Enhancements activities like training can make use of print-like self-paced modules [18] and mass media [19] being highly feasible at the time of the pandemic. In the study of Jehanzeb and Bashir [20], they concluded that training leads to substantial benefits for individuals and organizations. Finally, it is also worth mentioning that in this study, excellence would be the topmost level of the scale, and it justified the result that indeed, training in journalistic writing remains essential and relevant.

4. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The level of journalistic writing competencies of the writers of campus papers in the Division of Cagayan de Oro City in the five journalistic writing areas such as news, editorial, features, science and technology, and sports writing, was found to be "very good" concerning syntax, lexico-semantics, content, and cohesion. This could be supported by the reputation that the Division of Cagayan de Oro City holds in schools' press conferences, a campus journalism competition with regional and national levels. However, this did not mean that training that would further develop and promote campus journalism was not needed. The results that revealed the journalistic writing competencies led to the conclusion that there was a fair need for training. Training remains a vital option to bring the quality of campus papers into excellence. As already mentioned above, training has a significant impact on individuals such as the campus paper writers and organizations such as the schools' editorial staff. Moreover, it would recommend the following: enhancement of the journalistic writing competencies of the writers of school papers remained to be necessary to further strengthen all the areas of journalistic writing; teachers, supervisors, and the Division of Cagayan de Oro City can offer a compendium of activities to enhance the journalistic writing competencies of school paper writers and these enhancement activities must cater to the demands of the new normal; areas of focus of enhancement activities may address the need to further strengthen the linguistic aspects' namely syntax, lexico-semantics, content, and cohesion to yield improvement in the grammatical and discourse competencies in journalistic writing; a teaching and learning resource material such as a module with topics based on the obtained results of this study can help make the learning experience of the school paper writers more relevant and meaningful; and a self-learning module, that would allow the writers to proceed at their own pace regardless of the situation such as the pandemic can be a good option as a way to provide the needed training in journalism mainly, in a student publication.

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