BILINGUAL PORTFOLIO-BASED WRITING INSTRUCTION IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' WRITING PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

The primary focus of this study was to determine the effect of bilingual portfolio-based writing instruction to Senior High School students' skill in writing. HUMSS students involved in this study were enrolled in work immersion subject. A quasi-experimental research particularly pretest-posttest design was adopted of which technique was gleaned from Nezakatgoo (2011). The pre-test was applied to both the treatment group and control group to prove homogeneity of writing performance. Later in the study, a post-test was implemented for both groups who received writing instruction from the same teacher. The treatment group was exposed to bilingual portfolio-based writing instruction while the control group was exposed to traditional writing instruction (non-portfolio). Data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, standard deviation, Paired Sample T-test and Cohen's D. Results showed that students exposed to bilingual portfolio writing instruction had better writing performance compared to those students who received traditional writing instruction. There was a significant difference on the pretest and posttest scores of the treatment group while there was no significant difference in the test scores of control group. The findings of the study highlighted that bilingual portfolio-based instruction enhances writing skill of secondary students. Likewise, when language learners are provided with appropriate writing instruction founded on familiar language, their writing performance in English is likely developed.

INTRODUCTION

Educational efforts by the government are gleaned on their focus on calibrating the curriculum to fit in the 21st century skills of learners. One of which is the improvement of communication skill necessary to succeed in school, work and life by teaching writing competencies through student's exposure to real working environment like work immersion. This manifests that language teachers have crucial roles particularly in enhancing students' writing skills in the classroom. Since writing is the framework of communication, it enables students to compose ideas, organize their thoughts and arguments, support key points and share information that will prepare them for their future academic and professional endeavors (Domantay & Ramos, 2018). Moreover, writing ability is vital to students' academic performances since significant part of the school activities from quizzes, examinations, assignments, reports, analysis and researches are all in written form. There are also researches proving that writing skill is one of the basic requirements for better academic performance (Allen, Jacovina & McNamara, 2015) which paved way to pedagogical inquiries and investigations that further resulted to developments in teaching writing.

Though writing is critical, many language teachers find teaching writing more complicated than that of other language skills. It is difficult to develop, as it requires individuals to coordinate a number of cognitive skills and knowledge sources through the process of setting goals, solving problems, and strategically managing their memory resources (Flower & Hayes, 1980 as cited in Allen, et al. 2016). Even sometimes a native speaker of the English language may experience complication in a tricky situation and may even feel difficulty in showing a good command of writing (Johnstone, Ashbaugh, & Warfield, 2002). Language teachers in the Senior High School (SHS) are not exempted from this pedagogical challenge of teaching portfolio writing through reflections, narratives, and essays. In Baggao National High School, one of the public secondary schools in the Division of Cagayan, Philippines, classified as Extra Large with student population of approximately 2,000, a significant percentage (13%) of Grade 12 immersion learners cannot write their own reflections, essays and immersion narratives during their work immersion (BNHS-School Report Card, 2018-2020). This is believed to be attributed to writing difficulties of students specifically poor spelling, construction of thoughtless sentences, ungrammatical phrases and inaccurate or limited use of vocabulary. These students are expected to have acquired higher level of writing competency since they are about to transition to the four SHS curriculum exits namely: 1) higher level education, 2) middle level skills development, 3) entrepreneurship and 4) employment (DepEd Memo No. 169, s. 2018). These curriculum exits for SHS learners which are one of the educational reforms by the Department of Education were posited to have provided meaningful opportunities for students to acquire innovation, life skills, media and information literacy and most importantly communication skills (Cabral & Abanto, 2020). Contrastingly, in an article published in Development Research News (2020) of the state think tank Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), it was reported that SHS students still lack literacy, numeracy

and English competencies required for senior high school. PIDS further explained that teachers lamented for the SHS students' inability to correctly construct basic sentences in English. This poor writing performance of SHS learners is described by Nezakatgoo (2011) as Beginning writers, in which students usually write shorter length of written products, with hardly formed sentences and paragraphs, consisting only of bits of phrases and sentences and would often ask English counterparts for some Filipino terms during the writing process (Nezakatgoo,2011). Saavedra (2020) also found out that students have poor writing skills in English because they lack vocabulary in the target language, have difficulty in conveying and organizing ideas, no interest and motivation in writing, and with difficulty in spelling, grammar and sentence construction. Similar findings were averred in the study of Malenab-Temporal (2016) on college students' performance in logical organization, stating that competence in paragraph organization using seven modes of paragraph development have been found fair among sophomores. In other words, intermediate students would find difficulty organizing ideas in a paragraph, completing a good length of narratives or essays and much more of completing a written portfolio because of their low level of writing performance.

On the other hand, portfolios were viewed as potential means of better addressing students' individual needs (Lam, 2018) particularly on their need for writing skill improvement. With the use of portfolio, teachers can use students' experience with the environment as a writing topic, motivating ELLS to write more fluently and more effectively because they are using their personal experiences in responding to writing prompts. This supports Krashen and Brown (2007) in stating that children acquire language, both native language (L1) and second-languages (L2), by engaging with their environment, interacting with those around them, working to solve challenges and problems. Likewise, empirical studies showed that language portfolio can play a fundamental role in enhancing students' awareness of their language development; increasing students' motivation level and ownership of learning (Little, 2002,2009 cited in Abdulhamid 2020). Portfolio writing makes the language learning process more transparent, provides more opportunities for creativity, promotes critical thinking and "dialogic learning" between learners and their teachers and peers, and provide a productive learning experience by coherently integrating teaching and assessment (Fox & Frazer, 2012; Jones, 2012; Nunes, 2004). Furthermore, portfolios in language classrooms "provide a continuous record of students' language development that can be shared with others" (Genesee & Upshur, 1996 as cited in Sunseri & Sunseri, 2019) and most importantly the students themselves, as a means of encouraging their reflection on and awareness of changes in their language over time.

In relation to the potentials of portfolio writing in language development, Krashen (2004) posited that the kinds of supplementation that can have a strong impact on language development are those that help students get more comprehensible input (e.g. use of teaching resources of interest to students) or make input more comprehensible (e.g. providing background information). In other words, what will work are writing tasks that are founded on enough support such as the use of familiar language in understanding complex academic contents and instructions.

Furthermore, there are studies supportive of the idea that use of familiar language in teaching writing brought positive results in enhancing writing skills. Slavin & Cheung (2005) claimed that

involvement of the bilingual instruction provides an advantage over the English-only method. They further averred that learners in bilingual condition feel more satisfied with the teaching method, thus bilingual education programs can be highly effective for teaching English to ELLs. It is as well argued that ELLs with a sound foundation of academic language proficiency in L1 will require between three and seven years to achieve appropriate academic language proficiency in L2 (Krashen & Brown, 2007). This means that using bilingual strategy of teaching portfolio writing through the use of a language familiar to students will most likely provide opportunities to acquire proficiency in the English language.

Literature on the importance of language portfolio writing is rich (Silva, 1993; Krashen & Brown, 2007; Sunseri & Sunseri, 2019; Abdulhamid 2020). However, adaptation of a bilingual portfolio-based instruction has not been much augmented by empirical studies. Focusing on the potential advantage of bilingual instruction founded on Krashen's use of familiar language combined with the use of portfolio writing to address the writing difficulty of SHS students, this action research aimed to investigate whether a bilingual writing instruction aided with bilingual portfolio is effective in improving the writing performance of SHS students.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study, sought to answer the following questions:
1. What is the writing performance level of students in Treatment and Control Groups before and after use of the bilingual portfolio writing instruction?
2. Is there a significant difference on the Pre and Post Test Scores of the Treatment and Control groups after the writing instruction?
3. What is the effect size of bilingual portfolio writing instruction in the students' writing performance?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The process in learning the language is very complicated. As the most fundamental skill in language is writing, students must learn this skill first before reinforcing other language skills. Basically, writing skill requires a well-structured way of the presentation of thoughts in an organized and planned way (Braine & Yorozu, 1998). Additionally, there are factors like cognitive, sociological, and cultural elements that can come into play during the process of acquiring this skill. Researchers also opined that social environment of the classroom creates opportunities for English Language Learners (ELL) to engage in learning activities giving them opportunities to practice language through writing (Perez & Torres- Guzman, 2002 as cited in Montgomery, 2008). Along with this understanding, portfolios complement as a pedagogical-cum-evaluative tool employed at the classroom level for writing development.

Portfolio writing, as one of the pedagogical developments in writing is in fact related to societal trends that demand students' cognitive skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, analyzing data, and writing skills (Birgin & Baki,2007). The current societal demands greatly influenced the way language teachers adopt writing instructions and principles such as process

writing, portfolio writing, writing as a product and writing as a result of sociological and cognitive factors. In like manner, as students progress to secondary school, students experience a growing need for academic language proficiency or the formal language necessary to understand and discuss content in the classroom (Krashen & Brown 2007). For instance, the specialized subject work immersion requires Grade 12 learners to write narrative reports, reflections, essays, and portfolio (DepEd Order No. 30, s. 2017). Other subjects in the Philippine senior high school curriculum like qualitative and quantitative researches, capstone project, reading and writing, and English for Academic and Professional Purposes also require a dense of writing tasks which greatly necessitate knowledge of complex contents and acquisition of academic language proficiency (Krashen, 2006).

Anchored on Krashen's principle that 'a primary goal of bilingual education is English language development', this research tested the viability of bilingual portfolio-based writing instruction as a pedagogical intervention to beginning level of writing performance. According to Krashen (2004), when English Language learners (ELLs) understand messages, understand what people tell them, and understand what they read, they have acquired language. This is where a familiar language for students becomes a tool for understanding lesson contents. It is assumed in this study that using a language familiar to students as a medium for portfolio-based writing instruction will definitely allow ELLs to engage in writing activities and improve their writing skills. Hence, the language principle of Krashen (2004) brought the hypothesis that bilingual instruction is a practicable strategy to improve writing performance of SHS students.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This action research used quasi-experimental method particularly pretest-posttest design gleaned from the study of Nezakatgoo (2011).

Participants

Participants were homogeneous groups of Grade 12 Humanities and Social Science students who had undergone work immersion in the Local Government Unit (LGU) Office. Purposeful sampling was used in selecting the 47 HUMSS students who were grouped into Treatment and Control groups. Other SHS strands were excluded because they fair better in the pre-writing tests and were exposed to different immersion areas. Exposure to similar immersion learning environment was considered to further control this factor which may affect writing performance of students. To confirm homogeneity of participants from Treatment and Control Groups both were pre-tested before the writing instructions. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and asked to participate through written consent.

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Instruments

In gathering the needed data, the pre- writing and post-writing tests were checked and validated by master teachers in the senior high school department. During the pretest and posttest, learners were asked to write a reflective essay about the given prompts regarding work immersion.

Data Gathering Procedures

Pre-writing test was conducted to both treatment and control groups before all groups were taught by the same teacher with identical instructional methods, lesson plans, curriculum guide and writing tasks for a period of six (6) weeks immersion to an LGU office. The treatment group was exposed to bilingual portfolio-based writing instruction while the control group received traditional writing instruction. Writing instruction in treatment group employed the use of a quality assured bilingual portfolio consisting of writing prompts, reflective questions and guided writing instructions with Filipino language translations. This portfolio-based writing instruction uses the students' experiences in work immersion as scaffolds to guide students in constructing their narratives, essays and reflections which are written every week. Its unique feature is the use of two languages, English and the familiar language Filipino, as aid for students in understanding the writing tasks, activities and instructions. Also, the language portfolio consists of a writing productivity chart which is used to regularly monitor the writing progress of the immersion learners. Writing tasks were patterned from the prescribed curriculum guide (CG) of the subject work immersion wherein each learning episode focuses on certain competencies reflected in the CG. As a credible learning resource material, the bilingual language portfolio was quality assured by the expert quality assurance team in the Division of Cagayan, Philippines and its adoption by schools are widely encouraged. Post writing test was administered after the work immersion and exposure to bilingual portfolio-based writing instruction. In the control group, writing instruction is traditional non-portfolio focused on competencies and topics in the curriculum guide similarly taught in the treatment group. Immersion experiences are also utilized as writing prompts. This group was exposed to traditional writing instruction for the period of six weeks. Both groups were asked to write reflective essays on their weekly work immersion experiences. These essays were checked and given feedback by the teacher before students finalized the paper. All students completed six (6) written tasks and a post-test timed essay writing after the 6-week immersion and writing instruction.

Data Analysis

The pre and post writing tests results from both groups were recorded and analyzed using the 6-trait writing assessment criteria adapted from Nezagatkoo (2011). Their level of writing performance was evaluated through the scoring rubric with scale 1 to 6 described as Beginning, Emerging, Developing, Capable, Experienced or Exceptional. Each category has 5-point intervals as shown below:

1- Beginning level   1-5 points
2- Emerging level   6-10 points
3- Developing level   11-15 points
4- Capable level   16-20 points

5- Experienced level 21-25 points
6- Exceptional level 26-30 points

Pre and post writing exams with a total of 30 points were checked and scored by two raters for the purpose of inter-rater reliability. Simple Percent agreement test was conducted to see whether both raters scored the test results similarly or not.

The computed percent agreement of the two raters was 85% during the pretest and 92% during the posttest. These reliability test results provide sufficient evidence that the two raters agree on the writing performance scores given to each sample.

In identifying the writing performance level, frequency and percentage were used. Paired Sample T-test was used in testing the significant difference of pre and post writing tests while Independent Samples T-test for testing significant difference on group's writing performance. To measure the effect size of the bilingual portfolio-based writing instruction, Cohen's D was utilized.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After gathering the reflective essays of students from both groups, the researcher analyzed them. Table 1 shows the level of writing performance of Control and Treatment groups before the writing instructions. It can be gleaned that out of 24 students in the Control group, 12 or 50% are Emerging, 11 or 46% are Developing and 1 or 4% falls under beginning level. Likewise, in the Treatment group, out of 23 students, 13 or 57% are Emerging, 9 or 39% are Developing and 1 or 4% is under Beginning level.

Table 1:
Performance Level of Students before Bilingual Portfolio-based Writing Instruction

	Writing Performance Level	Control Group	Percentage	Treatment Group	Percentage
1	Beginning	1	4%	1	4%
2	Emerging	12	50%	13	57%
3	Developing	11	46%	9	39%
	TOTAL	**24**	**100%**	**23**	**100%**

These data mean that writing performance of students from both the Control and Treatment groups ranges from Beginning, Emerging to Developing which are the lowest levels. It also implies that most students from both Treatment and Control groups have similar level of writing performance categorized as Emerging level. Nezakatgoo (2011) describes Emerging level as having a written output with limited vocabulary, misused words, undeveloped ideas, with spelling errors and punctuation. This suggests that students from both groups really find difficulty in writing because they have only acquired limited vocabulary related to immersion. They also often

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misuse words and they cannot develop their ideas properly which typically impede them from writing a quality portfolio. Findings further proved the report of PIDS (2020) that SHS students are unable to construct correct basic sentences in English and still lack English competencies required for senior high school. Because of this, pedagogical writing intervention is necessary to address the problem.

Table 2:
Independent Sample T-Test in Pretest

	Mean	N	SD	Df	t Stat	t Crit	Sig (two-tailed)
Control Group	12.1	24	1.12	33 -0.80	1.70	0.43	
Treatment Group	11.9	23	2.12	32			

Although the writing performance level of treatment and control groups are closely at similar lower levels, inferential test was conducted to see either the mean difference between two groups is statistically significant or not. Table 2 shows that the difference between the pretest mean scores of the two groups is not statistically significant (p =0.43> 0.05; *t Stat -0.80< 1.70*). This means that both treatment and control groups have similar low writing performance before the writing instruction.

After the six weeks duration of bilingual portfolio-based writing, both groups were given post writing test of a 200-word reflective essay on their immersion experience. Using the scoring rubric adapted from the 6-trait assessment criteria of Nezakatgoo(2011), two raters independently scored the papers and students' level of writing performance was identified by simple frequency and percentage.

Table 3:
Writing Performance Level of Students after Bilingual Portfolio-based Writing Instruction

Writing Performance Level		Control Group (HUMSS 1)	Percentage	Treatment Group (HUMSS 2)	Percentage
2	Emerging	12	50%	1	4%
3	Developing	12	50%	2	9%
4	Capable	0	0%	11	48%
5	Experienced	0	0%	8	35%
6	Exceptional	0	0%	1	4%
	TOTAL	**24**	**100%**	**23**	**100%**

Table 3 showed the writing performance level of treatment and control groups after the writing instruction. Based on the table, out of 24 students in the Control Group, 12 or 50% are Emerging and also 12 or 50% are Developing. On the other hand, the writing performance level of students in the Treatment group has quite improved. Out of 23 students, 11 or 48% are now Capable, 8 or 35% are Experienced, 2 or 9% are Developing, 1 or 4% is Emerging and 1 or 4% is Exceptional.

Comparing the writing performance level of the Control and Treatment groups, the data simply disclosed that most students from Treatment group have gradually leaped from lower to higher level of writing performance. Treatment group has fewer students with Beginning and Emerging Levels compared to Control group. There were also students who have acquired experienced and exceptional level while few remained to be Emerging (4%) and Developing writers (9%).

Contrastingly, writing skill of Control Group still fall within the lower levels of Emerging and Developing with 12 out of 24 or 50% lying on the Emerging Level and another 12 out of 24 or 50% were stuck at the Developing Level. As described by Nezakatgoo (2011), developing writers present ideas randomly and repeatedly, finding difficulty in organizing their sentences while Emerging writers often misuse words, with limited vocabulary and errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling. It is important to note that in this group, non-portfolio writing was applied. These data imply that treatment group performed better than the control group in their post writing test.

Table 4:
Independent Sample T-Test in Posttest

	Mean	N	SD	Df	t Stat	t Crit (two-tailed)	Sig
Control Group	12.5	24	1.14	32	-16.96	2.04	1.51^{-17}
Treatment Group	21.5	23	2.29				

To see whether the difference on the posttest mean scores is statistically different, inferential statistics was conducted. Table 4 presents the results. The conducted Independent Sample t-test revealed that posttest mean scores of both groups have statistically significant difference ($p=1.51^{-17} < 0.05$; *T Value -16.95 > -2.04*). In this case, writing performance of treatment group is not similar to the writing performance of control group. Hence, use of Bilingual Portfolio-based writing instruction proved to be helpful in improving the writing performance of students in the Treatment group. Most of them turned out to become capable and experienced writers and no one was left as a Beginning writer. Significantly, there was one student who reached an exceptional writing level.praiseworthy

To compare the pretest and post writing performances of both groups, Paired Sample T-tests were conducted (see Table 5).

Table 5:
Test of Difference on Pretest and Posttest Mean Scores of Control and Treatment Groups

	Mean Pretest Score	Mean Posttest Score	Df	t Stat	t Crit	Sig (two-tailed)
Control Group	12.1	12.5	23	-1.89	2.067	0.07
Treatment Group	12.5	21.5	22	-14.61	2.074	8.33 $^{-13}$

Table 5 shows the result of Paired Sample T-tests indicating that the control group has a Mean Pretest score of 12.1 and Mean Post test score of 12.5 with no statistically significant difference (p=0.07 > 0.05; t Stat -1.89< t Crit 2.067). Therefore, pre and post test scores of the Control group do not differ at all. This further implies that writing scores of the control group in the pretest are similar to their posttest even after the traditional writing instruction. Hence, they remained to be as Beginning, Developing or Emerging writers.

In contrast, the mean pretest and posttest scores of treatment group are tested to be statistically significant (p= 8.33 $^{-13}$ < 0.05; t Stat -14.61> t Crit 2.074). This means that the pre and post test scores of the Treatment group differ significantly. Furthermore, the increased mean score in the post test result proved that the use of bilingual portfolio-based writing instruction is effective in improving the writing performance of students.

To further prove reliability of the findings, effect size was tested and results are shown in Table 6. Cohen's D analysis was utilized in testing whether the effect is big or trivial. Cohen's D is one of the ways of measuring effect size for a larger sample as suggested by Stephanie (2016). Swalowsky's parameter of interpreting Cohen's D indicates that a value of 0.01-0.19 has a very small effect, 0.2 – 0.49, small effect; 0.5 – 0.79, medium effect; 0.80 – 1.19 as large effect; 1.20 – 2.0 as very large effect and above 2.0 as huge effect (Sam, 2020). Since the computed Cohen's D value is 2.74, bilingual portfolio writing instruction has a Huge effect on the writing performance of treatment group.

Table 6.

Effect Size of Bilingual Portfolio-based Writing Instruction

Mean	SD	Pooled SD	Mean Diff	p	Cohen's D	Descriptor

Treatment	12.5	1.14	3.28	9	1.51^{-17}	2.74	HUGE
Group	21.5	2.29	2.74				

Sawilosky's Interpretative Scale for Cohen's D (Sam, A.,2020)

0.01- 0.19	*very small*
0.2- 0.49	*small*
0.5- 0.79	*medium*
0.80-1.19	*large*
1.20-1.99	*very large*
above 2.0	*huge.*

The computed mean difference of 9 is also huge enough to show the effect size. Other than this, the p value of 1.51^{-17} strongly signified that there exists a significant difference between the writing performance of both groups, implying a better writing performance on the part of treatment group than the control group. The data further proved that portfolio writing with the use of familiar language served as scaffolding in understanding writing instructions. The findings supported the points of Meihami and Sahragard (2018), that completing a portfolio task make learners feel confident when they want to complete a language-related task. Moreover, Glen (2019) emphasized that a Huge effect size is something that is obviously observed even with the absence of any statistical test. Thus, it is conclusive that bilingual instruction can be an effective means to facilitate student's understanding of L2 writing tasks and activities which can further enhance students' writing performance.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, this study reaffirmed that with an appropriate writing instruction, low writing performance of students can be enhanced. Portfolio writing while at immersion is also a helpful arena for language teachers to teach writing skills to Senior High School students. Bilingual portfolio-based writing intervention was proven to be effective thus, confirming that using both Filipino and English as media of instruction becomes helpful for students to comprehend the writing tasks given to them.

It is further concluded that the positive effects of portfolios on students' writing performance are due to the opportunities they afford students to become actively involved in language learning. Learners in the portfolio group were actively involved in the process of writing coupled with familiar language to understand a writing prompt based on their experience in work immersion. As Krashen (2006) pointed out, bilingual instruction and exposure to learning environment motivated the learners to learn L2 writing. As previous research has shown, learners are motivated to write portfolios because they understand the language used in every writing instruction. This brought a significant effect on learners' better writing performance. Hence it can be said that bilingual portfolio-based writing instruction is an effective pedagogical writing intervention to enhance writing skill.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the above findings and conclusion, the following are recommended:

1. Language teachers may determine what causes the low level of writing performance among senior high school students because this was not explored in the study.
2. The use of bilingual instructional strategy in teaching writing can be further explored in other SHS subjects which require a lot of writing tasks.
3. Training on use and implications of bilingual portfolio-based writing instruction can be attended by language teachers or it can be conducted by bilingual education advocates to foster and promote its adoption.
4. Though the portfolio-based writing is useful for the current educational set up brought by worldwide health crisis, future research is still encouraged to further test its applicability and effectiveness in distance teaching and learning.

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