

Technology Engagement And Writing Skill: An Analysis Among Elementary-Grade Filipino Learners

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Abstract

Technology has brought radical changes in the ways learners acquire learning and develop their skills. The use of mobile technologies, specifically laptop computers and internet use has also transformed the teaching learning process. Given that students have a high exposure to technology in the classroom, even in the early level of education, this study investigated on the effect of the learners' technology engagement to their writing skill through the use of standardized instruments. The findings reveal that respondents' writing level did not meet the passing level expected from a sixth-grader learner where this result was attributed by the teacher-respondents to the learners' engagement in technology. The teachers perceived that technology did not help the learners improve their writing skills. Thus, this study recommends for close and constant monitoring of the teachers and parents to the learners' engagement in technology must be done to ensure that technology is really helping the learners academically.

Keywords: technology, writing skills, effect, elementary-grade learners, computer,

Introduction

Technology has brought new ways of making everyone's lives easier and more convenient. Over the past years, computer technology has rapidly changed the way that knowledge is acquired from people, websites and other sources. The internet has made the information to be accessed within a blink of an eye and has become more and more integrated in the classroom. Like learners in other countries, elementary learners in the Philippines are already exposed in the use of technology like computers, cellular phones and televisions.

For the purposes of this research, technology refers to the computers and cellular phones, as well as necessary enterprise software, middleware, storage and audio-visual, that enable users to access, store, transmit, understand and manipulate information for practical purposes, relating especially to educational use in the particularly the teaching and learning of writing.

Technology is constantly changing in terms of new electronic devices and has become an integral part of global society. Over the past 200 years, 'technology has been an integral part of the educational environment' (Stewart, Schifter, & Selverian, 2010, p. 5). The classroom has adopted technologies as they have become more readily available. In the Philippines, part of the elementary curriculum particularly in the Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE) competency is the exposure of learners to the world of computers. In this subject, they are taught on the hardware and software of the computers as well as giving them the hands-on experience. That is why, to properly implement this, most of the urbanized public elementary schools in the country have their computer laboratory.

The inclusion of the technology competency in the new curriculum may be due to the fact that this generation of learners are digital natives and as such are familiar with and comfortable using technology effectively. Furthermore, digital devices such as computers and android phones are frequently positioned as the solution to making students more interested in the material they are learning in school. However, a growing body of research suggests that, while young people are comfortable with technology, and many find technology engaging, the use of digital devices does not always produce positive learning outcomes especially to the writing skills of the learners. While there is evidence to show that using technology in Math instruction may lead to certain improvements in learning outcomes, there is evidence to suggest that digital and non-digital reading and writing methods are not analogous and that non-digital reading and writing methods have benefits that digital methods do not.

Accordingly, fifty-two percent (52%) of younger children from ages 0-8 years old had access to a mobile device in 2011 and has since increased to seventy-five percent (75%) in 2013. Pre-schoolers tend to have restricted access to technologies in their school day, but access to technologies in the classroom also increases as it becomes more developmentally appropriate. The average screen time of children between the ages 8-18 years old increased to 7.6 hours by 2009, but does not indicate or consider the amount of screen time integrated into the school day.

Moreover, the report of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) validates that the use of technology in education is on the rise. It was reported that there has been exponential growth in the use of digital technologies this century. The proportion of Australian students with access to a computer at home rose from about 91 percent in 2000 to over 99 percent in 2013. Over the same period, access to the internet grew from 67 percent to 98 percent. As the ACER report notes, Australian students' school computer use was increased between 2008 and 2012. With its goal of arming students with the ICT skills for high-quality learning outcomes and successful contribution to society and the economy, the National Partnership Agreement on the Digital Education Revolution (DER) provided more than \$2 billion for purchasing computers and software for all students in years 9 to 12 (Kwok, 2016).

The above-mentioned studies show that in the recent years, technology has been rising gradually in the education sector where it wholesomely affected academic writing skills of the

learners while it may be debatable as to its effect whether it can be categorized as positive and negative effects to their skills.

Among the macro skills of the learners, writing is said to be the most researched topic because through writing learners are able to express their ideas and feelings on a particular issue that they have learned through technology-aided instructional materials. Most students tend to search information through Google or other website and they also check their spelling using other technology software application such as online dictionary, Grammarly and the like. With these, we may say that technology has perhaps increased the amount of writing students do, but on the way around, being too dependent on technology, their writing skills may also be compromise especially on the writing technicalities. For instance, instead of writing letters, quick texts are sent instead. Also, students use substandard grammar, or become overly reliant upon spelling and grammar checkers on the computer.

As stated by Kwok (2016), it is also evident that the use of ICT does not always result in greater emotional engagement or stronger cognitive engagement with learning. There is too much variation among learners and the nature of learning tasks to expect conclusions that can be applied uniformly regardless of context. Thus, these observations gave interest to the researcher to look into the effect of using technology to the writing skill in English of the Filipino elementary-learners.

This study primarily aims to investigate on the effect of using technology to the writing skill of the elementary learners. Specifically, the researcher would like to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the level of the English writing skill of the elementary learners who are engaged in technology?
2. How does technology affect the learners' writing skill as perceived by the teachers?

Methodology

The present study focuses on the writing level in English of the Filipino elementary-grade learners as well as their teachers' observations on the factors that might be attributed to the level of writing of the respondents. The researcher collected a quantitative from the 180 pupils and 9 teachers from selected public schools which were chosen through stratified sampling.

Two standardized instruments used in the study of Saavedra (2011) which underwent validation and reliability test was also used to answer the research questions. Using the series of pictures, the pupils were instructed to write a story narration as a basis of assessing their writing skill. The written story narration were then rated by the three (3) Grade Six language teachers who are not teaching from the participating schools and have more than 10 years teaching

experience. The 9 teacher-respondents also answered the 4-point likert scale survey checklist to identify the factor that greatly contribute to the writing skill of the learners.

The respondents scores were then interpreted using the assessment matrix of the Department of Education Order no. 8 series of 2015 which is shown below.

Mean/Grading Scale	Interpretation/Descriptor	Remark
90.00-100.00	Outstanding	Passed
84.50-89.99	Very Satisfactory	Passed
79.50-84.49	Satisfactory	Passed
74.50-79.49	Fair	Passed
74.49 below	Did not meet expectation	Failed

DepEd Order no.8 series of 2015

Ethical Consideration

As a preliminary to the data gathering, letters were sent to the school heads asking for their permission to allow the researcher conduct the study in their schools. As soon as the requests were granted, orientations to the respondents were done to inform them of the objectives of the study, the scope of their participation as well as on their rights and privileges. It was made emphasized to them that their identity will be kept with utmost confidentiality, their participation is also voluntary and they will be allowed to withdraw anytime they wanted. After the interpretation of the data, they will be notified of the result and another permission from the respondents was sought for the publication of the data.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Writing Level of the Respondents

Macro Skill	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Speaking Skill	67.867	2.004	Did not meet expectation

DepEd Order no. 8 s. 2015

The data revealed that the respondents' over-all writing level is 67.867 with a standard deviation of 2.004 which means that respondents "did not meet the standard level" which is expected of a Grade six pupil in the Philippines. They still lack the ability to transform their thoughts into series of words that tells story.

Synonymous results were also noted in the studies of Gustilo (2009), Gustilo and Magno (2012), and Masangya and Lozada (2009). In terms of writing problems, syntax-level errors committed by Filipino students from high school to college were discovered and manifested. The same cases were true in the East Asian context, where Bao and Sun (2010), Wang (2013) and Zheng and Park (2013) noted on their studies on the poor writing skill of the elementary and Junior High school students.

Table 2. Factors that Attribute to the Writing Skill of the Elementary-learners

Factors	Mean	Interpretation
5. Engagement in technology such as using cellular/android phones, computer and the like	3.97	Has a very high effect

3.01-4.00 = has a high effect, 2.01-3.00 = undecided, 1.01-2.00 = has a low effect, 0.00-1.00 = has no effect

Table 2 exhibits the factor that can be attributed to the writing level of the respondents. Among the factors pre-identified in the instrument used, Engagement in technology such as using cellular/android phones, computer and the like (Factor 5) was interpreted as having the mean of 3.97 which means that it has a very high effect to the writing skill of the learners as perceived by their teachers.

As reported in the International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education (2017), computer-based technology such as web-conferencing software, blogs, wikis, social networking sites (Facebook and Twitter), and digital games influences student engagement, however, additional research is needed to confirm and build on these findings. Another disadvantage involves the emergence of cyber slang as texts become too informal. Most digital tools and platforms limit students to text expression, and they may incorporate informal writing into formal settings. When this technology behaviour has been practice by learners for a long period of time, this practice will already turn into their knowledge which may later on affect their writing skills in English (Schindler, Burkholder, Morad and Marsh (2017).

That is why, in the study of Purcell et al (2013), it was emphasized to encourage students to do at least some writing by hand, because they feel students do more active thinking, synthesizing, and editing when writing by hand, and writing by hand discourages any temptation to copy and paste others' work" (p. 6). With newer technology, when doing writing tasks, learners prefer typing that doing hand-written output, thus student's fine motor skills is also negatively affected.

Conclusion

In this modern times, technology is inevitable in the life our learners. As early as elementary, they are carrying with them their cellular/android phones which they used to communicate or to write messages to their family, friend and school related people. In searching and studying their lessons too, they will just open their computers and click the information that they need. Thus, we may say that technology is part of our learners' life. Based on the data gathered from the respondents, this study concludes that the writing skills of the Filipino elementary-learners falls below the national standard level of 75%. This result was attributed to the effect of technology such as the cellular/android phones, computers and the like. Although, several studies would also attest that technology is very beneficial to academic activities such as writing activities, however, in this study, the teacher-respondents agreed that technology may have affected the writing skill of the learners in the other way.

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