

I-Step Up: An Intervention to Improve Students' English Essay Writing Through Product-Process Approach

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to investigate the effectiveness of I-StEP UP, an intervention designed to enhance students' English skills in opinion essay writing using the product-process approach. The study involved fifteen Grade 10 students who had difficulty writing essays. The intervention spanned six writing sessions with a focus on guiding students through the entire essay writing process, from pre-writing to revision. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected, including pre-intervention and post-intervention essay scores and student feedback. Statistical analyses were conducted to evaluate the impact of the intervention on students' essay writing proficiency, and interviews were conducted to gain insight into the students' experiences during the program. The results suggest a significant improvement in students' English essay writing skills following the intervention. The product-process approach appears to provide guides and strategies that helped students improve their writing. Moreover, students reported increased confidence in their writing abilities and a greater understanding of the essay writing process. These findings underscore the importance of continued support and resources to meet the needs of students in their journey to becoming proficient essay writers.

Keywords: Writing intervention, product and process approach to writing, essay writing, writing strategies, second language instruction

INTRODUCTION

The state of Filipino students' literacy, particularly in the English language, has attracted immense attention from the public recently following the appalling results of local and international assessments on students' performance, which highlighted the low achievement level of Filipino learners. Data from the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) 2019 revealed that only 1% of Grade 5 Filipino students could "write cohesive texts with detailed ideas and a good range of appropriate vocabulary." Their data further shows that almost half, or 45%, of Grade 5 learners in the Philippines were in the lowest band, which means they could write with "limited ability to present ideas." Similarly, in the study conducted by the Philippine Institute for Developmental Studies (2020), it was revealed that some senior high school students could not construct correct basic sentences in English. Filipino learners are indeed struggling in English, as affirmed by the official statement of former DepEd Secretary Leonor Briones in 2020, when she noted that the result of the National Achievement Test (NAT) shows that English is one of the learning areas where the learners "gravitate towards a low proficiency level."

Unfortunately, the disruption to education caused by COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the existing learning gap in the country. The two-year suspension of in-person learning has led to concerns about its negative effects on students' learning, which highlights the literacy problems of the students. In an attempt to address this problem, the Department of Education

(DepEd) implemented its Learning Recovery Plan, which encourages schools to provide remediation and intervention programs to students with difficulties.

Despite the government's efforts to improve students' learning, problems persist in writing. In fact, at Edilberto S. Legaspi Integrated High School, it is apparent from the students' written outputs that they have difficulty writing in English. Based on the researchers' observation of their writing performance in class, students have difficulty putting their ideas into writing, whether in sentence- or paragraph-level form. Therefore, it prompted the researcher to administer a writing test to identify who needs help in writing and which aspects of writing they have problems with.

The writing test was administered to all Grade 10 students in the researcher's class. It is a self-made writing test in which students have to write an essay describing the challenges in learning that they have encountered during the pandemic. The test results revealed the following problems in the students' written outputs:

1) The students are unfamiliar with the essay's features. The paragraphs are constructed without a main idea or supporting details. The essay did not have an introduction or a conclusion.

2) The content is evident of the students' inability to comprehend the whole task. The required content, which is answering the question regarding their opinion about the topic, was not addressed. Some students did not attempt to respond. When asked why, they said they did not know what to write.

3) There was no organization of ideas in their written output. Sentences lacked connection to each other. The use of cohesive devices was barely evident.

4) Students failed to choose the appropriate vocabulary to convey their ideas. Some words were even misspelled.

5) Major grammatical errors impeded comprehension of the text. Moreover, the majority had no concept of the usage of correct punctuation, as evident in their long paragraphs with no period to end their narrative sentences.

These writing problems are consistent with the results of previous studies conducted to determine Filipino students' challenges in writing, which can be summed up as: lack of vocabulary, difficulty in grammar, poor sentence structure (Urbano, Gumangan, Gustilo, & Capacete, 2021; Saavedra & Barredo 2020; Gagalang, 2020; Pablo & Lasaten, 2018); lack of variation and depth of ideas in the content (Atienza, 2019; Gagalang, 2020; Pablo & Lasaten, 2018); and difficulty in organizing ideas (Saavedra & Barredo 2020; Pablo & Lasaten, 2018).

Writing in English can be challenging for second-language learners. Therefore, it poses a challenge to language teachers to adapt pedagogical approaches that will suit the students' needs. Two of the most widely known approaches to teaching writing are product and process approaches. The "product-based" approach to writing places more emphasis on the mechanical elements of writing, such as emphasizing grammatical and syntactical structures and copying models. This strategy focuses mostly on the accuracy and showcase of the learner's final piece of work in its ultimate form rather than the production process" (Hasan and Ahkand, 2010, p. 81). The process-based approach, on the other hand, highlights how

the writing results from a separate process that progresses through several stages until the writing is complete" (Harmer, 2007a). The teacher assists learners with their writing first, but he or she does not place emphasis on accuracy or outcome. Instead of stressing over the final product, students give the writing process their full attention.

Considering the strengths and weaknesses of the product and process approaches to writing, the researcher deemed it necessary to apply a combination of the two approaches to teaching writing. Utilizing this dual method of teaching writing, the researcher aimed to conduct an intervention program focusing on improving the writing skills of Grade 10 students.

I-StEP UP (Improving Students' English Performance in Writing using a Product-Process Approach) is an intervention program designed to address the writing problems of Grade 10 students who have writing difficulties. Primarily, it is a special tutorial class that combines the product and process approaches to teaching writing.

To align the intervention program with the Grade 10 English curriculum, the researcher has chosen one of the learning competencies, which is using information from a news report and creating an opinion essay using such information. In their essays, the students will analyze and express their opinions about the news report they have read, indicating whether they agree or disagree with its content. The goal of this study is to determine whether the product-process approach is effective in teaching students essay writing.

Action Research Questions

This action research aims to improve the essay writing skills of Grade 10 students through the I-StEP UP Intervention Program.

Specifically, it seeks to shed light on the following questions:

1. Is there a significant difference in the pretest and posttest scores of the learners before and after participating in the I-StEP UP intervention program?
2. What are the learners' views about the implementation of the product and process approach on the essay writing performance of the Grade 10 students?

Innovation, Intervention, and Strategy

I-StEP UP is a remediation program for Grade 10 students who have writing difficulties. It aims to improve their ability to write opinion essays using a dual approach to teaching writing, namely product and process approaches. The program, spanning 8 sessions, comprises three primary phases: pre-implementation, implementation, and post-implementation.

The pre-implementation phase is the first session, which is allotted to provide orientation to the participants regarding the intervention and administration of the pretest. Six writing sessions make up the implementation phase, during which we will follow the seven stages of the combined product and process approaches. Table 1 shows the modified stages of the product-process approach from Agustiana (2016) that will be used in this study. Lastly, the post-implementation phase will be used for administering the posttest and interview regarding the perceptions of the students on the impact of the intervention on their persuasive essay writing skills.

Table 1.

Modified Stages of the Product-Process Approach

Stage	Writing Approach	Name of Procedure	Description of Procedure	Session
1	Product	Familiarization	Students are provided with sample sentences and samples of opinion essays so that they can concentrate on grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation.	1
2	Product	Controlled Practice	Students will be given exercises to practice the language used to make an opinion essay	2
3	Process	Brainstorming	In this stage, students will be working in groups. Together, they will share ideas and discuss their reactions and thoughts on major issues in the school and their opinion toward them	3
	Process	Planning/ Structuring	Using their ideas from brainstorming, the students will <u>make a plan</u> for their opinion essay stating their agreement or disagreement with the issue. Their task is to create an outline for their opinion essay.	
4	Process	Writing the first draft	Students compose the first draft of their opinion essay	4
5	Process	Peer Feedback	Drafts are exchanged, so that their classmates become the readers and evaluators of each other's works.	5
	Process	Editing	Drafts are returned and revisions are made based on peer feedback.	
6	Product and Process	Writing the final draft	A final draft is written considering the feedback they received from their peer	6
7	Process	Evaluation and teacher's feedback	Students' writings are evaluated, and the teacher-proponent provides feedback on them.	

As shown in Table 1, the first stage of the implementation phase of teaching writing using a product-process approach is familiarization. In this stage, students were provided with sample sentences and an opinion essay so that they could concentrate on language features such as grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation. The second stage is controlled practice, wherein students are given exercises to practice the language used to write an opinion essay. On the third stage, the students worked in groups to share ideas and plan for their writing. Together, they shared ideas and discussed their agreement or disagreement with issues surrounding Philippine education. Using a graphic organizer, they outlined their opinion essay. The next stage is when they started writing their first draft, and then they exchanged drafts so they could comment on and evaluate each other's works. Once their drafts were returned, they made revisions and improved their essays to make their final drafts to be submitted to the teacher-proponent for feedback and evaluation.

ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Participants/Sources of Data and Information

This study employs a mixed methods approach to action research. Action research is a type of research methodology designed for use by teachers directed at teacher and learner improvement. It entails methodical observation and data gathering that the researcher can utilize for reflection, decision-making, and the creation of more useful teaching techniques (Parsons & Brown, 2002).

This study was conducted at Edilberto S. Legaspi Integrated High School (ESLIHS). Using the purposive sampling technique, fifteen Grade 10 students who have writing difficulties and volunteered to be part of the study were selected as participants.

- Both quantitative and qualitative data are used in this research to answer the posed research questions. Firstly, the quantitative data obtained from this research comprised the students' essay writing scores in the pretest and posttest. Secondly, this study used qualitative data from interviews with the participants.

Data Gathering Methods

The study was conducted at Edilberto S. Legaspi Integrated High School. Fifteen Grade 10 students underwent the remediation program entitled I-StEP UP (Improving Students' English Performance in Writing Using a Product-Process Approach). It aims to improve their ability in the genre of essay writing using a dual approach to teaching writing, namely product and process approaches. The program divides itself into three major phases: pre-implementation, implementation, and post-implementation.

The pre-implementation phase is the first session, which is allotted to provide orientation to the participants regarding the intervention and administration of the pretest. The implementation phase spanned six writing sessions in which the seven stages of the combined product and process approaches were followed. This study used the modified stages of the product-process approach from Agustiana (2016), as shown in Table 1. Lastly, the post-implementation phase was used for administering the posttest and interviewing the participants.

Instrument/Tools

The instrument for gathering quantitative data for this study was the self-made assessment test given twice to the participants in the form of a pretest and a posttest. It is 100-point test measuring students' opinion essay writing skills in terms of content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. The students' essays were scored using Jacobs ESL composition profile (Jacobs et al., 1981). The rubric has five different rating categories for writing quality on a 100-point scale. They are content (30 points), organization (20 points), vocabulary (20 points), language use (25 points), and mechanics (5 points).

Table 2.
Jacobs et al's (1981) Analytic Scoring Profile
Jacobs et al's (1981) analytic scoring profile

Aspect	Level	Criteria
Content	30-27	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: knowledgeable, substantive, thorough development of thesis, relevant to the assigned topic.
	26-22	GOOD TO AVERAGE: some knowledge of the subject, adequate range, limited development of thesis lacks detail, mostly relevant to the topic.
	21-18	FAIR TO POOR: limited knowledge, little substances, inadequate development of the thesis
	16-13	VERY POOR: does not show knowledge of the subject, non-substantive, not pertinent.
Organization	20-18	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: fluent expression, ideas clearly stated/ supported, succinct, well organized, logical sequencing, cohesive.
	17-14	GOOD TO AVERAGE: somewhat choppy, loosely organized but main ideas stand out, limited support, logical but incomplete sequencing.
	13-10	FAIR TO POOR: non-fluent, ideas confused or disconnected lack logical sequencing and development
	9-7	VERY POOR: does not communicate, no organization, or not enough to evaluate.
Vocabulary	20-18	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: sophisticated range, effective word/ idiom choice and usage, word form mastery, appropriate register.
	17-14	GOOD TO AVERAGE: adequate range, occasional errors of word/ idiom form, choice, and usage but meaning not obscured.
	13-10	FAIR TO POOR: limited range, frequent errors of word/ idiom form, choice, usage, meaning confused or obscured
	9-7	VERY POOR: essentially translation, little knowledge of English vocabulary, idioms, word form, OR not enough to evaluate.
Language Use	25-22	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: effective complex construction, few errors in agreement, tense, number, word order/ function, articles, pronouns, preposition
	21-18	GOOD TO AVERAGE: effective but simple construction, minor problems in complex construction, several errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/ function, articles, pronouns, prepositions but meaning seldom obscured
	17-11	FAIR TO POOR: major problems in simple/complex construction, frequent errors of negation, agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions and/or fragments, run-ons, deletions, meaning confused or obscured.
	10-5	VERY POOR: virtually no mastery of sentence construction rules, dominated by errors, does not communicate, OR not

Data Analysis and Interpretation

For the analysis of quantitative data, the students' raw scores in the writing test, both in the pretest and posttest were used. The writing test raw scores were encoded and analyzed through the use of "T-test Paired Two Samples for Mean." A paired T-test statistical analysis is employed in testing the hypotheses. A paired t-test is used to compare the means of two related samples 'before and after' the treatment, also known as the pretest or posttest in our study.

The p-value determines statistical significance. The p-value gives the probability of observing the test results under the null hypothesis. The alternative hypothesis takes precedence over the null hypothesis if the P-value is less than or equal to the level of significance. If the P-value exceeds the significance level, we do not reject the null hypothesis. The null hypothesis was tested at the 0.05 (5%) level of significance, meaning that in 100 cases, there are 5 chances of having an error in the result.

For the analysis of qualitative data, interviews with the participants were transcribed and analyzed in order to draw conclusions about their views on the implementation of the product and its impact on their overall experience, including any challenges faced and potential areas for improvement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section will present the findings, discussion, interpretation, and analysis of the statistical results from a pretest-posttest study. The study involved 15 participants, and data were collected both before and after the writing intervention to investigate the impact of the intervention on the participants' essay writing scores. The pretest and posttest scores were compared, and the following findings were obtained:

Table 3.

Comparative Score Charts of Students' Essay Writing Tests

	Pretest (Mean)	Posttest (Mean)	Δ	%
Content (30%)	16.87	18.67	1.80	10.67
Organization (20)	10.53	13.73	3.20	30.38
Vocabulary (20%)	11.27	13.47	2.20	19.53
Language Use (25%)	11.47	13.00	1.53	13.37
Mechanics (5%)	2.60	3.33	0.73	28.21
Overall	52.73	62.20	9.47	17.95

As shown in Table 3, the data analysis of the pre-test and post-tests revealed that the students mostly improved in the area of organization, as the difference between the scores of the pre and post-tests is 30.38%. In terms of mechanics, the score increased by 28.21%, while the vocabulary was upgraded by 19.53%. On the other hand, language use and content improved by 13.37% and 10.67%, respectively. The overall improvement was 17.95%. This data illustrates a consistent increase in mean values across each component, indicating a notable improvement in students' essay writing.

Table 4.

Essay Writing Performance of Students Before and After the Intervention

	n	Mean	Variance	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
Pretest	15	52.73	63.07	-13.74	0.000000	Significant Difference Exists
Posttest	15	62.20	64.31		0062	

As shown in Table 4, the results of the t-test revealed that the I-StEP UP intervention had a significant effect on students' essay writing scores, wherein the p-values (both one-tail and two-tail) are lower than .05 level of significance. It means that the hypothesis clarifies that there is a significant difference in the writing scores before and after the writing intervention. This means that the instruction was quite successful in improving students' writing scores. In other words, the combination of product and process approaches used in teaching writing to remediation students has a positive impact on the students' writing.

In addition to the quantitative analysis of the writing remediation program's impact on Grade 10 students' writing proficiency, it is critical to explore the qualitative aspects of their experiences. Qualitative data, including students' responses and quotes, offer valuable insights into their perspectives, attitudes, and experiences during the intervention. These qualitative findings help us gain a more comprehensive understanding of the program's effectiveness.

The students expressed positive sentiments about their experiences in participating in the writing remediation program. They reported improvements in their writing skills and a greater sense of confidence in their abilities.

One student remarked, *"It is difficult, ma'am to write in English. Nahirapan po ako magsulat ng essay, pero sa remediation po natin, marami po akong natutunan sa pagsulat. Mas natuto po ako i-express ang ideas ko po. Feeling ko mas kaya ko na ngayon magsulat compared dati."* (Student 1) (It is difficult, ma'am to write in English. It is hard to write an essay, but through our remediation, I learned a lot. I learned to express my ideas. I feel like I can write better than before.)

"I can write essays now not like before. I learned about the samples... I know now [how] to write an opinion in an essay." (Student 3)

"I followed the steps, and when I finished up to the last stage, I thought to myself that I could do it again if I followed the steps again." (Student 4)

- Students also appreciated the individualized support they received during the program. They mentioned that the personalized feedback and one-on-one sessions with the teacher and classmates were particularly helpful.

"Yung format po ng essay when you guide us, ma'am, and give us samples and comments in writing our essay. They really help us." (Student 1)

"It helped that I worked with my classmates and [we] brainstormed ideas. They give me an idea. how to outline the essay," (Student 2)

The process approach to writing has proven strategies that have helped students in their writing. Collaboration among students and the use of graphic organizers have a positive impact on their writing (Kadmiry, 2021; Sanchez-Vega & Lopez-Pinzon, 2019).

While many students reported positive experiences, some acknowledged some challenges particularly in giving feedback to one another.

"I learned [how to write an essay] because of the step-by-step process. Mahirap po yung giving comment sa work ng classmate po namin. I understand the format, but it is difficult to explain. Bakit po mali yung part ng work ng classmate namin." (Participant 5) (I learned how to write an essay because of the step-by-step process. It was hard, though, to make comments on my classmate's work. I understand the format, but it is difficult to explain what is lacking in our classmates' work.)

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, the data analysis suggests that the writing intervention using the product and process approach had a statistically significant and positive effect on the participants' writing proficiency scores, as evidenced by the increase in the mean posttest score.

This indicates that the writing remediation program, which combined product and process approaches to teach opinion essay writing, had a positive impact on their writing skills, and understanding of the genre. The qualitative insights complement the quantitative results, providing a comprehensive picture of the program's effectiveness.

In conclusion, this research has demonstrated the significant impact of integrating both the process and product approaches in enhancing essay writing skills. The amalgamation of these two approaches proved effective in elevating all components of writing, encompassing content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics.

The results suggest that by embracing a blend of these approaches, teachers can achieve more favorable outcomes, and students can develop increased confidence in tackling writing assignments. Consequently, the researcher advocates for a holistic perspective on teaching writing, emphasizing a process that involves brainstorming, drafting, and refining to culminate in a polished final product. These findings provide valuable insights for educators seeking to enhance writing instruction and cultivate a positive and effective learning environment for students.

These findings underscore the importance of continued support and resources to sustain students' positive experiences and foster ongoing improvement in opinion essay writing. They serve as a valuable foundation for refining and tailoring future interventions to meet the evolving needs of students in their journey to becoming proficient opinion essay writers. Further research may be necessary to explore the practical implications and long-term effects of the intervention on the participants.

Regarding the findings, this study has the potential to contribute to theory and educational practice. Theoretically, this study enriches the literature on teaching writing in the Philippine ESL context since there are a few studies existing in the Philippines about the use of a combination of product and process-based approaches to teaching writing at the basic education level. Practically, English teachers and even Filipino teachers may implement the product and process-based approach combination in their writing classroom since this approach is beneficial to improving the students' writing skill. Learning materials such as modules or worksheets related to teaching writing using the blended approach of product- and process are also recommended to aid the teaching of writing.

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