

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN A COLLABORATIVE ACADEMIC WRITING TASK: A CASE OF TVL STUDENTS IN A PHILIPPINE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Collaborative academic writing has been investigated in tertiary context and still the main interest of other researchers. However, there were notable challenges (Hilman & Roy, 2019; Shafie, Anis, Nazira, Nayan, & Mahani, 2010) that students encounter in this activity. The present study utilized qualitative approach in discovering the views of Technical-Vocational-Livelihood students in a Philippine University toward collaborative academic writing task as well as the challenges they experience in this activity. It also aspired to explore the strategies they employ in coping with the challenges. Results show that although there are negative aspects on working with diverse learners, TVL students still see the advantage of working with other learners who may offer creative ideas and needed support. The challenges TVL students encounter include: (1) some members are having difficulties in expressing and generating ideas (2) different personalities of members (3) passive and uncooperative members in a group and (4) lack of communication between members. To cope with these challenges, students often take responsibility of accomplishing the task. They also seek assistance with peers outside the group and teachers.

Keywords

Academic Writing, TVL Students, Research.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The recently implemented curriculum in the Philippines, namely K12 curriculum, has added two years of education among secondary students. This reform in education features subjects that are included in the previous college curriculum. One of the many subjects in Senior High School is English for Academic and Professional Purposes which introduces some concepts in academic writing. Academic writing is defined as any writing done to fulfill a requirement of a college or university. Academic writing is also used for publications that are read by teacher and researchers or presented at conferences. A very broad definition of academic writing could include any writing assignment given in an academic setting. In the current basic education curriculum of the Philippines, this activity is already applied in senior high school since this stage is the preparation of students for college.

Based on the study of Mazo (2015), the major stressor of Information Technology students is research writing which requires knowledge and skills on academic writing. Studies reveal that students commonly find academic writing a challenging activity. Fadda (2012) found out in his study that students are having difficulties in spoken and written language and some skills in writing like outlining, word choice, and other strategies. Students often find it difficult to achieve coherence and cohesion in their writing as well as referencing and citation (Al Badi, 2015). It was revealed in the study of Pineteh (2013) that the challenges encountered by students are based from the linguistic and general literacy backgrounds and their attitudes toward academic writing. Anxiety toward writing is another factor which may be rooted from writing exams and other linguistic factors (Sulaiman, 2013).

Given these cited issues in academic writing activities from various studies, the utilization of various strategies to minimize these problems were considered by many institutions and

teachers. In tertiary context, there are instances that academic writing tasks are done with peers or with support from other students in the hope of helping the learners accomplish the task. However, there are still issues and challenges which are evident in this system. In the previous study conducted by Hillman and Roy (2019), it was found out that students are not familiar with peer collaboration and are confused with the guidelines to follow during the activity. It was also indicated that students were having difficulty dealing with members coming from diverse background and have unequal proficiency in the language.

This study sought to find out the challenges encountered in a collaborative academic writing task which focuses on secondary context in the Philippines. Specifically, the study looks into the views and experiences of Technical-Vocational-Livelihood students who focus on the acquisition of their chosen field-related skills. The study will also investigate some strategies they employ in dealing with the challenges they face. The results will enable the academic writing teachers to focus on the areas which need attention in relation to collaborative writing tasks, and prepare for enrichment program that will improve the skills of students in academic writing.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The study aims to determine the challenges faced by Technical-Vocational-Livelihood senior high school students in a particular university in Bacoor City, Cavite. Specifically, the study seek to answer the following questions:

1. What are the views of TVL students toward academic writing tasks which are done collaboratively?
2. What are the challenges faced by TVL students in a collaborative academic writing task?
3. What are the strategies they employ in coping with the challenges in a collaborative writing task?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Since there is a limited literature exists which investigate secondary students' views and experiences on a collaborative academic writing task, this study hopes to explore the phenomenon and contribute to the understanding of the topic which will be beneficial in secondary context in the Philippines. Academic writing teachers will have an understanding of the nature of collaborative task in lieu of accomplishing academic essays. Based on relevant studies, students find academic writing a challenging task that is why teachers consider various strategies to employ in class setting. Since teachers are in the full control of the activities inside the classroom, they will be able to make adjustments for the students to have an improved learning experience.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The present study focuses on the views and experiences of Grade 11 Technical-Vocational-Livelihood students toward collaborative academic writing task. Other strand students were not covered by the investigation and may require a larger scope for research. In addition, the study is limited to a particular university in Bacoor City Cavite, which may have a different way of enforcing policies or strategies inside classroom compared to other institutions.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study is a qualitative research exploratory in nature since it aims to explore the views and experiences of senior high school students toward collaborative academic writing task. Qualitative research requires non-numerical data, which means that the research uses words

rather than numbers to express the findings of the study (Baraceros, 2016). Researchers in this field are interested in understanding the thoughts, feelings and experiences and the meaning they ascribed to these experiences.

PARTICIPANTS OF THE STUDY

Grade 11 students of University of Perpetual Help Molino Campus were chosen to participate in the study, specifically those who are enrolled in Technical-Vocational-Livelihood track and

Table 1.

Themes on views of TVL students in collaborative academic writing task.

1. Views toward collaborative academic writing task	<p>Positive Views Collaborative writing task provides convenience to students Collaborative tasks enable students to share varied ideas Provides scaffolding for other learners</p> <p>Negative Views Collaborative academic writing is challenging for students Collaborative tasks may result to conflicting ideas Collaborative academic writing task may result to over-reliance to other members</p>
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currently taking English for Academic and Professional Purposes as a subject. Two groups of Home Economics students and two groups of Information Communication and Technology students were invited to participate in focus group discussion. Each focus group is composed of one representative from each group in class. The group is composed of diverse students who play different roles in a collaborative

POSITIVE VIEWS ON COLLABORATIVE ACADEMIC WRITING

Findings reveal that Home Economics (HE) students and Information Communication and Technology (ICT) students see academic writing tasks done collaboratively as advantageous for most of the students.

COLLABORATIVE WRITING TASK PROVIDES CONVENIENCE TO STUDENTS

Students of Technical-Vocational-Livelihood track consider working with group members a helpful way of accomplishing academic writing task. Collaborative efforts of students make the task easier and more convenient. ICT Student 3 views the setup as beneficial in accomplishing the writing task with ease. He described:

“Yung advantage po, mas napapadalipoyungpaggawang..kumbagasasabihinmonalang kung anoyungkailangangilagay,”

(The advantage is the task becomes easier to accomplish. You will just indicate the needed Information.) Collaboration among learners has been viewed by educators as helpful tool in assisting learners acquire knowledge and skills with the help from others. It was also viewed as a promising mode of human engagement which has become a trend in current educational setting (Laal&Ghodsi, 2012).

COLLABORATIVE TASKS ENABLE STUDENTS TO SHARE VARIED IDEAS

Students get to share their ideas to others due to the atmosphere collaborative task can provide to them. It was ideal for students who need brainstorming to generate their own idea. Since social support system is provided (Johnsons, 1989: Panitz 1999), learners tend to have a sense of self-confidence, enabling them to express their thoughts and ideas that may be beneficial to the success of the output. HE Student 12 shared the influence of having group mates in boosting one’s self confidence. She mentioned,

“dituladpagmeronggruponagkakaronkanglakasngloobkasiyungibaringgroup,nagbibigay din ng ideas”

(Unlike if there are groups, you are having confidence because other groups, also provide ideas).

PROVIDES SCAFFOLDING FOR OTHER LEARNERS

Another advantage for students of working with other learners is having the opportunity to learn from one another. ICT Student 8 emphasized this benefit during the focus group discussion. He pointed out that “it has an advantage for people who don’t have average skills to understand. This was also expressed by ICT Student 13. He mentioned,

“kunyari may isangbagaykanghindialam, silayung mag fi-fill up nun parasa’yo”

(For example there is a thing that you don’t know, they [more knowledgeable others] will fill it up for you).

NEGATIVE VIEWS ON COLLABORATIVE ACADEMIC WRITING

While there are undeniable advantages of working with peers or with classmates in writing activities, there are also negative aspects that can be viewed and experienced by learners. TVL students pointed out the other side of collaborative writing task during the focus group discussion.

COLLABORATIVE ACADEMIC WRITING IS CHALLENGING FOR STUDENTS

It was perceived by students that working with others seem to be a challenge when accomplishing academic text. This was expressed by HE Student 2 in her statement, “kinda hard, challenging”. Although having same sentiment, HE Student 5 see the setup in another way. He described, “Most of the time it is challenging for me but it is very enjoyable.

COLLABORATIVE TASKS MAY RESULT TO CONFLICTING IDEAS

Since members of a group may have diverse background and varied point of views, it is possible that collaborative activities will result to conflicting of members’ ideas. This was expressed by HE Student 4 in his response when asked of his view toward collaborative academic writing task. He explained:

“The disadvantage of it is that many people think of many ideas and some, their ideas cannot be implemented so sometimes they get angry to their members.”

COLLABORATIVE ACADEMIC WRITING TASK MAY RESULT TO OVER-RELIANCE TO OTHER MEMBERS

Learners pointed out that system of grouping them is unfair, resulting to over-reliance of others to those who are more capable of doing the task. Given the situation, others would prefer to do the task because of other members who tend to rely on them. ICT Student 11 expressed this in her statement, **“minsan unfair yungpagu-groupings yungsapagu-grupokasiminsanisalangyungmagawa”** (sometimes, the system of grouping is unfair

Table 2.

Themes on challenges encountered by TVL students in collaborative academic writing task

2. Challenges Encountered in a Collaborative Academic Writing Task	<p>Challenges that involve members of the group Some members are having difficulties in expressing and generating ideas Different personalities of members serves as a challenge Passive and uncooperative members</p>
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because sometimes only one member does the task).

| Lack of communication between members

CHALLENGES THAT INVOLVE MEMBERS OF THE GROUP

It was found out that the common challenge encountered in collaborative academic writing task involves the members of the group. The task of accomplishing academic essays becomes more challenging when members in a group do not have harmonious relationship with one another and may result to conflict or non-accomplishment of the output.

SOME MEMBERS ARE HAVING DIFFICULTIES IN EXPRESSING AND GENERATING IDEAS

Members in a group find it difficult when other members cannot produce any idea that may contribute to the accomplishment of the output. This was expressed by HE Student 4 in his

Table 3.

Themes on strategies employed in coping with the challenges in a collaborative academic writing task

3. Strategies Employed in Coping with the Challenges in a Collaborative Academic Writing Task	Strategies toward Challenges Encountered
	Taking responsibility of the tasks Getting help from teachers and peers Providing encouragement to members in accomplishing assigned task Maintaining good communication with the members of the group Using other resources that can be helpful for the activity Ensuring proper distribution of task

statement during focus group discussion. He described:

“Sometimes it’s hard when the other members, they didn’t have anything to say, you have to think of something for them to say. While other learners find it difficult to generate ideas that may contribute to the group, others cannot freely express their thoughts when working with groups. This was described by ICT Student 10 in her statement, *“at saka sir may ibanananghihinging suggestion perohaharangginnamannaman [ngiba]”*(and another thing is others try to solicit suggestion from us but others would contradict).

DIFFERENT PERSONALITIES OF MEMBERS SERVE AS A CHALLENGE

Individual differences and diverse personalities of members is seen as another challenge in collaborative academic writing task. Shafie, Anis, Nazira, Nayan, & Mahani (2010) revealed in their study that dealing with different personalities in a group serves a challenge in accomplishing academic text. HE Student 3 pointed this out in his response during the interview. He described, “personality can take so much effect and pressure to other people because they can interrupt each other. ICT Student 10 also expressed in her response:

“Parangangnangyayari, nagpapalamangansilakunganoyung mas gusto nila so parangnawawalannag harmony yunggrupotaposminsannagaaway-away pa dahilngaposa personality at opinion.”

(It seems like, they do disadvantaging of ideas that they want so the harmony in group gets lost and then sometimes they quarrel because of [different] personality and [varying] opinion)

PASSIVE AND UNCOOPERATIVE MEMBERS IN A GROUP

Unresponsive members in a group tend to be the major challenge of TVL students in collaborative academic writing task. Other members tend to rely on those active and motivated students in a group, which results to poor quality of the output or not being able to accomplish. HE Student 8 emphasized this in his response when asked about a challenge he often encounter in a collaborative writing task. He explained: *“Nahhirapanakong i-manage silatapospagsinabihankonaitogawinmong task na ‘to, gawinmong task na’to, gagawinilaperopagchineckmohindisiyayungini-expect mong outcome.”*(I am having a hard time managing them then once you instructed them to do this, to do this task, they will follow but it’s not the outcome that you expect.)

This was supported by HE Student 2 when she said in her feedback on uncooperative members. She added,

“sirkapagbinigyanmonamansila [ng task] minsanano pa petiks-petiks lang sila sakalagagawa kung kailanhulina”

(sir when we give them task to accomplish, sometimes they will not respond they will just do it when it is too late).

LACK OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN MEMBERS

Another challenge faced by learners working in a group is the struggle communicating to each other. ICT Student 1 expressed this when she was asked on a challenge she usually encounters in a collaborative task. She responded, “lack of communication” and this was agreed by the other members of the focus group discussion.

STRATEGIES TOWARD CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

Taking responsibility of the tasks

In response to passive and uncooperative members, other students who are motivated and willing to do the task often take the responsibility of accomplishing the activity. Other learners think of putting the burden of academic writing task on one’s shoulder instead of having low grades or non-compliance of the requirement. HE Student 1 experienced this with her group mates in academic writing class. She explained:

“Minsan sir iniisip konalangna individual konalang siyaginagawapero pang maramihanyung task. Yun nalangpo, ayaw konalang din po mag-isipna ay groupings pala ‘to.

(Sometimes sir I just think of accomplishing it on my own even if it should be done as a group. That’s it; I just don’t want to think that this is collaborative task).

Getting help from teachers and peers

Learners who ensure to accomplish the output do not just settle with their group members but also consider the assistance others may offer. Highly motivated learners ask help from other students who are also willing to share ideas. ICT Student 13 explained in his response that he also consults his friends from other groups. He discovered a strategy on how deal with unmotivated group mates and he added,

“kasipwedenamanakong humingitulong sadatikong kaklase”

(because I can ask help from my former classmates). Students also consult teachers and ask for clarification and additional information. HE Student 3 usually do this when he is confused on what to do in the activity. He stated

“pagmedyonaguguluhan pa kami saano, sapinapagawa sir sa activities. Medyonililinaw pa naming yung gagawin, kung gagawin ba’ tooitoyung gagawin”

(When we are still confused on what to do about the activities. We try to clarify things, if this should be done or the other one).

Providing encouragement to members in accomplishing assigned task

Another strategy that students consider in response to unmotivated students is providing encouragement to them. Motivation of learners can be rooted from different factors, but others still give a try in pushing those who lack drive in their studies. This was considered by ICT Student 9 as he tries to motivate some of his group members. He even mentioned, ***“talagang pinu-push naminsilalahat namakipag-cooperate nagumawa. Mas ini-encourage po naming silagumawa, naitoyung gawin niyo paratuma asyung grades niyo.”*** (We really push them to cooperate and do their task. We encourage them even more, that this is

what they have to do to improve their grades).

Maintaining good communication with the members of the group

Having an improved communication with each member of the group is considered as a strategy in coping with the challenges brought by collaborative writing task. This is in response to one of the challenges which is lack of communication and members sometimes having conflicting ideas. HE Student 2 even shared, “communication, ***kinakausapkahitisa-isa, adjust adjustnalangparamagawayungkailanganggawin.***”(Communication, talk to them personally, need to adjust to accomplish needed task).HE Student 8 even consider social media platforms to improve the communication that they have within their group. She shared, “***kapag may groupings po automatic gagawaagadnggctapomagcaha-chat na ‘uyanongbalaknatinggawin? anong gusto niyonggawindito? Magbigay kayo ideas***”(When there is groupings, automatically we create gc [group chat] then we wil chat each other asking ‘what’s our plan?’, ‘what do you want to do?’ Share your ideas).

Using other resources that can be helpful for the activity

To ensure the output will not be affected by inefficient members, other motivated learners also consider other resources that can be helpful in accomplishing the activity. HE Student 4 consider surfing on the Internet for additional information. He added, “***taposminsanise-search nalangnamin [saInternet] pag weekend kasibakahindimakapagtanongsa teacher***”(then sometimes we search [on the Internet] during weekend because we may not be able to ask the teacher). ICT Student 2 still consider past notes and lessons useful in understanding current lessons in academic writing. He stated, “***pwedekopo strategy yungmga last year na lessons na related po***”

Ensuring proper distribution of taskDue to the unfairness of the system of groupings as viewed by learners and over-reliance of others, they tend to ensure that tasks are delegated properly to each member. HE Student 11 shared their strategy in distribution of task. She shared:“***Opoparanghinatipotalaga, yungisaposiyapogumawang draft. Yung isapoyungumawang, siyapoyung nag input sa word. Taposakopo, akoyung nag -research.Tapos yungdalawapominemorizepotalaganila.Paranginaralpo din nila.***”(Yes it’s like we divide the tasks one member accomplished the draft. The other oneaccomplished the, accomplished encoding to [MS] word. Then I, I do the research. Then the other memorized their part. It seems that they studied their part).This was also the strategy of ICT Student 8 in ensuring the cooperation of all members. He stated, “every individual, ***bibigyankosilangtask***” (Every individual, I give them task).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that collaborative academic writing is beneficial to Technical-Vocational-Livelihood students since they gain insights from the members of the group and at the same time, provides convenience in accomplishing academic task. However, they still encounter several challenges which may affect the quality of their output. TVL students usually find it challenging to work with uncooperative members and those with conflicting personalities. Nevertheless, these students employ strategies in dealing with the challenges they encounter in order to comply with the requirement.

The nature of academic writing may be difficult for some learners and may require comprehensive discussion on the concepts. These challenges are rooted from different factors

which academic writing teachers need to understand. Nevertheless, there are promising trend in teaching in education that may assist educators in dealing with the difficulties of the learners toward specific subject or task.

Challenges in collaborative task are inevitable, as what the study has supported. In relation to accomplishing academic writing task done collaboratively, there were notable challenges TVL students encounter which may be lessen or avoided in the future. Although there are negative aspects on working with diverse students, students still see the advantage of working with people who may offer creative ideas and needed support. In addition, the study shows how flexible and resourceful the students are by considering various strategy in coping with the challenges they encounter.

RECOMMENDATION

In line with the results of the study, it would be appreciated if academic writing teachers will revisit the system of grouping the members. They may consider assigning of roles to each member of the group that can enable students to work more efficiently. This may also lessen the difficulties which students are facing in academic writing activities. They may also consider various strategies to accommodate diverse learners who may be uncomfortable working with others. Future researchers may be interested in having a quantitative approach in exploring the experiences and challenges of learners in lieu of collaborative academic writing. They may employ a particular framework that will serve as a guide in unlocking the reasons behind students' difficulties toward academic writing. One theory that they may consider as a framework is Flower and Hayes' (1980) Cognitive Theory of writing. This may assist researchers understand the underlying reasons behind the difficulties of learners in academic writing. They may look into the technicalities of students' academic writing output in secondary context. Other researchers may also be interested exploring the same phenomenon to other strands in Senior High School and discover if there are significant similarities or differences.

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