



# Journalistic Writing Competencies of AB Communication Students: Basis for Development of Training Manual in Journalism

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Received date: Oct 10, 2018; Accepted date: Oct 12, 2018; Published date: Oct 18, 2018

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Citation: Paglinawan WMC. Journalistic Writing Competencies of AB Communication Students: Basis for Development of Training Manual in Journalism. Global Media Journal 2018, 16:31.

## Abstract

Journalism is one of the most vital courses pursued by students enrolled in the AB Communication program. Hence, this research and developmental study was conducted to determine the competencies of the students in journalism particularly in the areas of editorial, feature, sports, news and headline writing; and, to develop a training manual to address the issues on students' competencies. This research is employed the Communicative Competency Framework of Canale and Swain in 1987, which brought the study into analyzing the grammatical competencies of the students, specifically in terms of lexico-semantic and syntax; and, their discourse competencies in the areas of content writing and cohesion. Consequently, findings revealed that the AB Communication students have fair ability both in terms of their grammatical and discourse competencies. For this reason, there is a high need of training students in journalistic writing. Moreover, perceptions of the students and industry partners, in terms of the journalistic needs and factors contributing to the development of journalistic competencies were investigated. Results also showed that there is need for students to develop their interest in journalism and as perceived by the industry partners, a need for a sufficient and appropriate instruction, drills, trainings and related pedagogical intervention is a necessitate among AB Communication students to surmount the challenges they encountered vis-à-vis journalistic writing.

**Keywords:** Journalistic; Journalistic competence; AB communication; Grammatical competence; Discourse competence

## Introduction

Writing is often perceived as one of the most challenging aspects of second language learning and difficulties in writing different types of texts may come from the fact that writers

have to understand the linguistic features such as pragmatic, syntax and semantics and other components of these different text types. Palmer mentioned that in journalism, just like any other forms of writing, the writers are required to construct text discourse precisely in standard language; thus, observing grammatical competencies and other aspects of text discourse such as creating cohesion and coherence in the text. Failure to perform this, writing can be a painful and anxiety producing task for many individuals. Hence, Zinsser stated that, in journalism, nothing was easy and nothing was fun – journalism is hard and lonely, and the words will seldom just flow.

In the United States, Yomiyama [1], explained that the improper use of linking words would result in global errors. This may lead to misunderstanding and even communication breakdown. In addition, excessive use of coordination made written composition tedious to read and difficult to focus on the ideas expressed. Thus, the text, whether in academic and creative writing and even journalistic writing, suffers syntactically and semantically if the logical connectors are misused, underused, overused or improperly used. These connectors are identified as sources of difficulty in second language (L2) writing. Similarly, this will be difficult in writing using the first language (L1) [2]. These are the common writing problems encountered by the students. Therefore, language teachers need to address this at present.

For graduates of mass communication programs in the Philippines, such inability threatens the very core of a profession that depends upon communications skills. This concern about students' weak writing skills, which has been echoed by many, including Licuanan, who in an article in the Philippine-Star wrote:

In journalism, they [students] need to learn the craft and art of writing. Unfortunately, most writing-across-the-curriculum programs are too hit-and-miss to inculcate a love of writing or even an attitude of appreciating the importance of writing.

In General Santos City, an educational institution like Notre Dame of Dadiangas University (NDDU), offers a four-year degree program such as AB Communication (formerly AB Mass Communication) where students are trained and developed

their skills in media and journalism. This undertaking is to shore up the institution's mission to produce competent professionals to address the needs of the local community and the global market as well. However, the competencies of the students taking the communication course in terms of journalistic writing are subdued for evaluation. In an interview conducted among Subject Matter Experts (SME) handling campus journalism subjects, they expressed that the concepts and theories in journalism had been introduced; however, this does not warrant that the students skills in content, mechanics, lexico-grammatical (vocabulary and grammar), and semantic-logical (organization) are marked satisfactory. Moreover, upon examining the grade analysis report of the AB Communication students enrolled in the journalism course, it revealed that the students have a grade point average of 2.66, interpreted as satisfactory in terms of their classroom performance. Specifically, six (6) out of fourteen (14) students have a grade from 2.25 to 1.75, interpreted as good while eight (8) students have grades ranging from 2.50 to 4.0 (failure). This implies that majority of the students enrolled in the AB Communication program have satisfactory performance and others have failing grades in journalism subject.

Furthermore, Tasarra [3] conducted a study on journalistic writing among secondary students. The study revealed that the journalistic writing competencies of journalism learners in the secondary level are more of a fair ability. Specifically, the students' new writing skill is good; and, the rest of the writing areas such as in editorial, feature and sports are fair. Furthermore, the results indicated that the journalism learners need moderate training in news writing and high need for training in feature writing, editorial writing and sports writing. Tasarra [3] also emphasized that this unsatisfactory results in the secondary level learners journalistic writing skills needs to be addressed to prepare them for tertiary education and further evaluation must be conducted to prepare learners in the professional world. In addition, Gabonera remarked that the NDDU communication students, in the evaluation rating during their job exposure in various multimedia stations, have difficulties in constructing news stories. Some of the problems mentioned in the evaluation were on the grammar, issues on newsgathering and news evaluation, and the use of appropriate and effective wordings as manifested in the written articles of the students.

With the foregoing as backdrop, the researcher anticipates that it is timely to investigate the need to enhance the students' skills in writing specifically in the area of journalism text discourse since various researches had already been conducted among high school and elementary students, and only few literature concerns journalism among tertiary learners. Moreover, in Notre Dame of Dadiangas University (NDDU), there is insufficient instructional material such as a training manual to minister to the needs of the AB Communication students specifically in the area of journalistic writing. Hence, a need to come up with a material, which primarily addresses these concerns, is an apt.

## Research Questions

This study determined the competencies NDDU AB Communication students in journalism. This study was also conducted in order to design and develop a training manual in journalism for the tertiary students to support the challenges they encounter in journalistic writing. Specifically, this study answered the following questions:

- What is the level of grammatical competencies of NDDU AB Communication students according to lexico-semantic and syntactic competencies in the areas of Editorial; Feature; Sports; Headline; and, News Writing?
- What is the level of discourse competencies of NDDU AB Communication students according to content writing and cohesion in the areas of Editorial; Feature; Sports; Headline; and, News Writing?
- What are the journalistic competencies needed to be developed as perceived by the AB Communication students; and, the Industry Partners?
- What are the factors that contribute to the development of the journalistic writing competence of the students as perceived by the AB Communication students; and, the Industry Partners?
- Based on the findings of the study, how will NDDU develop a training manual as a response to improve the journalistic writing competencies of the AB Communication students?

## Methods

The Research and Development (R&D) design was employed in the study. The R&D research design facilitates the gathering of pertinent information pertaining to the underlying conditions concerning the journalistic writing competencies of the AB Communication students. This R&D research design, as cited in the study of Tasarra [3], involves three major stages, namely:

- Stage one focuses on the gathering of data or research corpora, which was primary done through writing elicitation.
- The second stage deals with the evaluation and analysis of the collected corpora and the development of the training manual in journalism will follow.
- Last stage involves evaluation of the developed training manual. This stage includes the validation of the manual in terms of acceptability and usability.

The corpora of this research were the timed articles written by the junior AB Communication students of Notre Dame of Dadiangas University. The participants were instructed to construct articles from the identified journalistic areas such as headline and newswriting; editorial writing; feature writing; and, sports writing.

The articles written were consisted of a minimum of three-hundred (300) words on the given topics for writing elicitation. The collected corpora underwent assessment and analysis anchoring the Communicative Competence proposed by Canale and Swain in 1987. The researcher employed a writing

elicitation on the journalistic writing areas of headline and news writing; editorial writing; feature writing; and, sports writing. This writing elicitation aimed to determine the level of journalistic writing competencies of the AB Communication students.

After which, various experts in the field of journalism evaluated the articles collected through the writing elicitation. These experts were consisted of one (1) from the academe and two (2) full-pledged media practitioner.

Each of the validators is qualified in terms of their knowledge, experience and professionalism in the area of journalism. In addition, rubrics were also used to assess the journalistic writing competencies of the AB Communication students as well as to validate the training manual in terms of acceptability and usability. Moreover, the researcher, through an interview guide, gathered information from the students and industry partners pertaining to the competencies to be developed among the AB Communication students of NDDU, the factors that contribute to the development of their journalistic writing competencies in headline and news writing; editorial writing; feature writing; and, sports writing.

The quantitative part of the study includes determining the level of journalistic writing competencies of the AB Communication students. Hence, a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from one (1) "poor" to five (5) "excellent" was used. Moreover, to determine the validity of the developed training manual in journalism, in terms of acceptability and usability, the computation of the weighted mean of scores was interpreted using the 5-point Likert Scale ranging from one (1) "least extent" to five (5) "very highly extent" was used.

## Results and Discussion

### Grammatical competencies

In examining the students' grammatical competence, it was found out that in terms of the students' lexico-semantic competence, the students have a fair ability in all of the five (5) journalistic writing areas namely: editorial, feature, sports, news writing and headline writing. Moreover, the students' syntactical competence also revealed that they have a fair ability in the areas of editorial, feature, sports and headline writing. However, results showed that the students have a good ability in news writing considering their syntactical competence.

The abovementioned results imply that there is a high need of training students in all of the five (5) areas of journalism in relation to their lexico-semantic competence. Furthermore, results also showed that there is still a high need of training students in the areas of editorial, feature, sports and headline writing and a moderate need of training students in the area of news writing considering their syntactical competence.

### Discourse competencies

Moreover, in terms of examining the students discourse competencies according to content writing and cohesion in the

different areas of journalism, the data revealed that the students have fair ability in both content writing and cohesion in all of the four (4) journalistic writing areas such as editorial writing, feature writing, sports writing, and news writing. The result implies that there is a high need of training students in editorial, feature, sports and news writing, considering their competency in content writing and cohesion.

Perception of the students and industry partners on the competencies that needed to be developed

Furthermore, the perceptions of the students and the industry partners, as to determine the journalistic competencies that are needed to be developed, were also investigated in this study. Specifically, it was found out in the study that in terms of the students' perception, the following are the journalistic competencies, which are ranked according to the level of importance, that are needed to be developed.

First, there is a need for them to be equipped with varied styles in writing headlines and news, editorial, feature and sports stories appropriate.

Second is the need to develop their ability to write clear ideas, adequate details and enough evidence showing facts of the subject; to develop their ability to write sentences with varied transitions between paragraphs; and, their ability to write using correct spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitalization and indentation.

Moreover, there is a need for them to enhance their ability to use accurate, strong, specific and interesting words; ability to provide "factual" information; ability to formulate striking and interesting title/headline; ability to present related ideas with effective lead and conclusion; and, ability to write honestly and sincerely.

On the other hand, as perceived by the industry partners, the following are the journalistic writing competencies that are needed to be developed. These competencies are ranked according to the level of importance. As revealed, there is a need for the students to enhance their ability to provide "factual" information and the need for the students to be equipped with varied styles in writing headlines and news, editorial, feature and sports stories. In addition, there is a need for the students to develop their ability to write honestly and sincerely; and, to develop their ability to write sentences with varied transitions between paragraphs.

Moreover, there is a need for the students to develop their ability to write using correct spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitalization and indentation; their ability to present related ideas with effective lead and conclusion and their ability to use accurate, strong, specific and interesting words. Adding to that, the industry partners perceived that there is a need for the students to enhance their ability to write clear ideas, adequate details and enough evidence showing facts of the subject; and, to develop their ability to formulate striking and interesting title/headline.

## Factors contribute to the development of journalistic competence

Moreover, this research explored the various factors contributing to the development of journalistic competence among students. As revealed, it was found out that the students perceived that the primary factor, which contributes to the development of their competency, is their interest and attitude towards journalistic writing. This is followed by the sufficient and appropriate instruction such as meaningful activities and drills and their knowledge of the medium/language (e.g. English, Tagalog, Cebuano, etc.). Moreover, the students perceived that the consistent exposure to the different types of writing activities/exercises and their schema on the fundamentals of basic journalistic writing skills are also contributing factors to the development of their journalistic competence.

On the other hand, the industry partners perceived that the main factor contributing to the development of students' journalistic competence is the sufficient and appropriate instruction such as meaningful activities and drills the students have in school. This is followed by the students' interest and attitude in journalism then the students' schema on the fundamentals of basic journalistic writing skills. Moreover, factors such as the consistent exposure of the students to the different types of writing activities/exercises; and, their knowledge of the medium/language (e.g. English, Tagalog, Cebuano, etc.) are important factors contributing to their journalistic competencies.

## Validity of the Training Manual in Journalism

In terms of the validity of the training manual, specifically in terms of acceptability and usability, shows an overall factor average of 4.17, which is, interpreted as high extent. This implies that the training manual developed by the researcher is highly acceptable and usable. Moreover, the result showed that the manual is useful to both students and the teachers in their journalism classes.

## Conclusions

The analysis has shown the journalistic competencies of the students as well as the competencies needed and factors contributing the development of their journalistic skills. After analyzing the corpus of news articles, the researcher came up with the following conclusions:

The level of journalistic competency of the students in the four (4) journalistic areas namely editorial, feature, sports and news, in relation to grammatical and discourse competencies specifically in lexico-semantic, syntactic, content writing and cohesion was found to be fair. Moreover, the students have a fair ability in writing headlines. Therefore, it is concluded that it is indeed necessary to further enhance students' journalistic writing competence. Specifically, there a high need of training students in the different areas of journalistic writing

particularly in relation to the different competencies as cited by Canale and Swain [4-7].

In terms of the journalistic writing competencies that are needed to be developed, based on analysis, it is concluded that, as perceived by the students, the main journalistic competency that needs to be developed is the students' ability to be equipped with varied styles in writing headlines and news, editorial, feature and sports stories. On the other hand, the industry partners perceived that the primary journalistic competency that needs to be developed is the students' ability to provide "factual" information [8-10]. These competencies should be given importance by the students, the academe and the industry partners. In addition, it is also concluded that the factors contributing the development of students' journalistic competence, as perceived by the AB Communication students, is the interest and attitude of the students in journalistic writing and in journalism as whole. Moreover, as perceived by the industry partners, the main factor that contributes to the development of journalistic competence is the sufficiency and appropriateness of instruction such as meaningful activities and drills undergone by the students in school [11-13].

In order to enhance the journalistic writing competencies of the students, the training manual in journalism was developed. This training manual is intended to help guide the subject matter experts teaching journalism course in their endeavor to improve the performance of the learners particularly on some linguistic aspects such as lexico-semantic, syntactic, content and cohesion which are given emphasis based on the findings of the research conducted. In addition, the training manual's acceptability and usability were rated high extent by experts in journalism [14,15].

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