



Practices of English Language Teachers in Assessing Junior High School Students' Writing Performance

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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v6i1.1543>

APA Citation: Tabernero, k. A. R.(2024). Practices of English Language Teachers in Assessing Junior High School Students' Writing Performance. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*. 6(1).69-85. <http://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v6i1.1543>

Received:

10/01/2024

Accepted:

25/02/2024

Keywords:

practices, challenges, writing assessment, English language teachers, junior high school writing performance, professional development programs .

Abstract

As English language teachers explore existing writing assessment approaches and strategies, it is, however, inevitable to encounter challenges in the different phases of writing assessment. The challenge is not confined alone to the development of writing assessment tools but more so to the establishment of fair and reliable results for writing performance. It has been argued that the gap between norms and traditions among language schools is one root of such a challenge. One writing assessment practice may work for one setting but not another. Therefore, the present study is intended to discover the writing assessment approaches and strategies employed by junior high school English language teachers in the context and to identify the relevant challenges they encountered in utilizing such writing assessment practices. To meet the research objective, a qualitative investigation through a narrative inquiry approach was employed. The data were gathered from seven (7) English language teachers in a junior high school in Bataan, Philippines. Self-made, semi-structured interview guides were utilized. The shared narratives from the interviews served as data subjected to thematic analysis. The research investigation revealed that English language teachers generally utilize scoring rubrics and an analytical approach to assess junior high school students' writing performance. As a result, they have found challenges in assessing writing performance due to strict adherence to the components of scoring rubrics, time constraints, and the poor writing competencies of students. To address the issues, the study suggests writing assessment programs and training that promote contextualization, ICT integration, and learning autonomy. English language teachers value the importance of systematic writing assessment practices while also recognizing the roles of emerging practices that will establish not only fairness but also effectiveness that is responsive to the development of the English writing competencies of the students.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Assessing students' writing performance has been considered a vital yet crucial activity for teachers in the landscape of English language education, especially at the secondary level, where students are expected to write more complex essays. Moria et al. (2018) state the assessment should be authentic to help language teachers better facilitate teaching and learning to improve students' writing ability. Maba (2022) believes that students' writing skills should be developed continuously until a higher level is achieved. This implies that teachers should also possess a higher level of analytical and assessment skills for their students' writing

abilities, as reflected in the submitted writing outputs. On top of this are the practices, including approaches and strategies, employed by language teachers to assess their students' writing performance. While language education keeps evolving as influenced by emerging technologies and methodologies, there is a range of writing assessment approaches and strategies that teachers can leverage to respond to the demands of students in each context. Gadd and Parr (2017) emphasized that writing assessment practices would be perceived as effective if students felt involved in the process. Hence, there are rising practices that promote feedback mechanisms, contextualized assessment tools, and learner autonomy through available technological tools. Feenstra (2014) investigated writing assessment methods anchored on analytical assessment and automated essay evaluation that can help establish the validity and reliability of teachers' assessments of students' writing performance. Meanwhile, Kalay and Büyükkarcı (2020) emphasize that secondary school teachers' writing assessment preferences suggest direct instruction methods, so they must require exposure to more relevant writing assessment training. The understanding of teachers in the current writing assessment practices is of great importance to attaining language learning objectives and improving language education pedagogies in general.

As English language teachers explore existing writing assessment approaches and strategies, it is, however, inevitable to encounter challenges in the different phases of writing assessment. The challenge is not confined alone to the development of writing assessment tools but more so to the establishment of fair and reliable results for writing performance. Ghanbari (2020) argued that the gap between norms and traditions among language schools is one root of such a challenge. One writing assessment tool, such as a scoring rubric, may work for one setting but not another. Likewise, integrating emerging technologies and methodologies may not always benefit language teachers and students due to the varying levels of support received by a language school in a specific setting. Further, teachers lack knowledge and skills for assessing students' writing performance. It has been observed that they do not utilize scoring rubrics properly, and they are confused about which aspect of students' writing output should be assessed (Pujiawati, 2019). Such issues point out the lack of opportunities for teachers to further enhance their writing assessment skills through professional development programs and initiatives (Bhowmik & Kim, 2021).

Thus, it is in this light that the present study was conducted – to explore the practices of English language teachers in assessing junior high school students' English writing performance in one of the public secondary schools in the Division of Bataan. The study intended to discover the writing assessment approaches and strategies employed by teachers in the context and to identify the relevant challenges they encountered in utilizing such writing assessment practices. The findings derived from the research investigation served as input to recommend responsive writing assessment programs and training based on the perceived needs of English language teachers in a school.

1.3. Significance of the Study

The valuable insights the study may bring to language education concentrate on English language teachers' current approaches and strategies for assessing their students' writing performance. This will then reflect their practices and their perceived challenges in the phases of assessing students' writings. Hence, it is viewed that the findings of the study will be beneficial for the following:

English language teachers. The findings of the study may provide them with a comprehensive understanding of the recent writing assessment practices used in a language classroom. Hence, they can reflect on their approaches and strategies to ensure students have quality language learning experiences.

School administrators. The study results may help them recognize the usual challenges English language teachers encounter in assessing students' writing performance. The data from the study will serve as their reference to plan and implement a professional development program to update teachers' writing assessment approaches and strategies.

Curriculum developers. The authentic experiences of the English language teachers reflected in the findings may lead them to improve the language curriculum by aligning the needs of English language teachers with the language assessment programs to be implemented in schools.

Students. The improved writing assessment practices of language teachers may enhance students' writing performance. The outcome may benefit them if their teachers are aware of an efficient feedback mechanism for writing performance.

Researchers. The study is a localized investigation of the writing assessment practices of English language teachers in a secondary school. The findings of the present study may serve as a basis for future researchers who will undertake a similar area of research.

1.4. Research Problems

The study aimed to explore the practices of English language teachers in assessing junior high school students' English writing performance. The research findings would then serve as inputs for proposing language assessment programs for junior high school English teachers. The study was conducted at one (1) of the public secondary schools in SDO Bataan during the school year 2023-2024.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the approaches and strategies currently utilized by junior high school English teachers to assess students' writing performance?
2. What challenges are encountered by junior high school English teachers in the process and outcome stages of assessing students' writing performance?
3. Based on the results, what type of language assessment programs should be designed to enhance the junior high school English teachers' writing assessment ability?

1.5. Conceptual Framework

As the study intends to explore the writing assessment practices of English language teachers in a secondary school, the views of Black and William's Assessment for Learning (AfL) and Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory of Learning are considered. AfL upholds the idea that assessment is a tool used to help students improve their performance through a teacher's feedback. It deviates from the traditional notion that assessment is just about giving scores. Hence, students have felt a sense of involvement (Hopfenbeck & Stobart, 2015). Meanwhile, the Socio-Cultural Theory of Learning highlights the role of sociocultural context in language education, including the area of assessment. It is believed that meaningful human interaction is significant for language learning in general (Alkhudiry, 2022). Provided that such claims remain the trend in current language education, these may influence the practices and possible challenges of teachers in assessing their students' writing performance.

Considering the cited relevant theories, the conceptual rationale of the present study is therefore illustrated in the research paradigm shown in Figure 1.

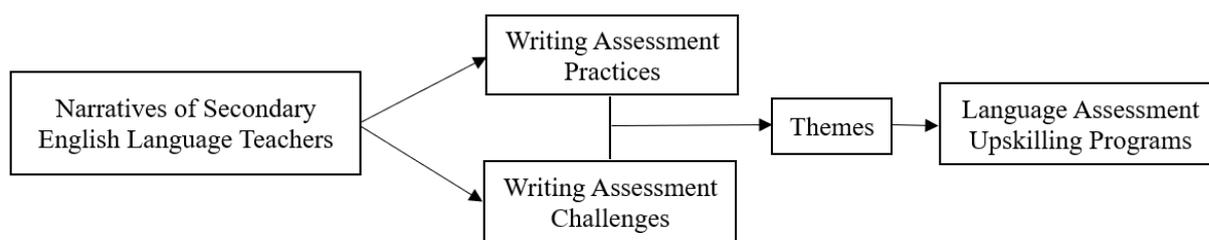


Figure 1. Research Paradigm

The research paradigm is anchored on Riessman's Narrative Analysis Model, whereas the emphasis is on the application of thematic analysis to analyze and interpret the narratives of study participants. As presented in the flow, the investigation would first require narratives as data for transcription and later be used for thematic analysis. The practices as well as the challenges would then be determined through themes. In the latter part, the generated findings would serve as a reference for a language assessment program proposal for secondary English language teachers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Writing Assessment Approaches and Strategies

The assessment of the writing performance of students is one of the vital aspects of language education, as it can identify the language proficiency of the students as well as the pedagogical competence of language teachers. As part of language education, teachers opt to employ various writing assessment approaches and strategies based on the context.

Ghalib and Al-Hattami (2015) presented and compared holistic and analytic types of evaluating EFL writings. The findings of their study revealed that, while both approaches are used for assessment, analytic scoring rubrics are more reliable in providing results, as confirmed by the teachers in an interview. Meanwhile, Ghaffar et al. (2020) introduced in their study a co-constructed type of rubric for assessing the writing skills of students. Since this scoring rubric promotes collaboration between students and teachers, increased engagement is observed, and students tend to demonstrate autonomy in improving their writing skills.

Another strategy used in assessing writing performance is formative assessment. This is done by giving constant feedback on the writing output of the students. Based on the study findings by Graham et al. (2015), such a strategy can improve the writing quality of the students; thus, it should be often used by language teachers during writing assessments. On the other hand, the emerging technology in the language education landscape also influences the area of writing assessment. Hence, language teachers may integrate technology into their strategy of assessing students' written outputs. Baker and Lastrapes (2019) cited that technology integration in writing assessments can positively affect the writing performance of language students. The availability of digital writing tools can help both teachers and learners easily assess the preciseness of a written work.

Lastly, the application of culturally responsive approaches to writing assessment has recently gained importance. Sellick (2022) emphasized the value of culture in forming writing assessment practices. The idea of contextualization is not confined alone to teaching strategies and learning material development. Now, there is a need for a localized writing assessment practice that is responsive to the nature and needs of a specific group of language learners.

Based on these cited study findings, writing assessment practices may vary, and language teachers should leverage such approaches and strategies to meet the needs and

interests of the target students. While the language education landscape keeps changing, an evolution in writing assessment practices has been noticeable. So, language teachers must be aware of these emerging assessment practices to address issues in language education.

2.2. Writing Assessment Challenges in the process and outcome phases

While assessment is pivotal in the landscape of language education, this aspect is also perceived as a complex task for language teachers to perform. One area of this language assessment deals with writing assessment. It is a regular encounter with a language teacher to assess the writing outputs submitted by the students. Thus, there are several challenges a language teacher may encounter in the process and outcome phases of writing assessment.

One that challenges language teachers in writing assessment is maintaining consistency in grading the written outputs of the students (Widiastuti, 2018). It is found in the study that language teachers do not exactly know the purposes of formative and summative assessment. Also, the assessment practices of teachers vary due to their philosophy; hence, there is difficulty in establishing consistency in the pointing system across English classes. On the other hand, the findings of the study by Court (2014) emphasized that despite the positive effect of giving feedback as a practice in writing assessments, challenges arise as such a practice is often perceived as time-consuming and cognitively exhausting. In addition, it may be detrimental to students' writing skills progress if feedback practices are not properly employed.

Another challenge in writing assessments faced by language teachers lies in the issue of the poor language skills of the students. Amalia et al. (2021) revealed in their study findings that language teachers found difficulty in assessing students' writing outputs due to poor grammatical competence, inadequate vocabulary knowledge, and demotivation in writing. It is concluded that there are contributing factors to such a writing assessment challenge, including the different linguistic backgrounds and proficiency levels of the students. Meanwhile, technology integration has been found beneficial to teachers and students to improve the teaching and learning of writing. While technology can promote writing autonomy, teachers still encounter challenges in its proper integration into language education. Yu (2020) confirmed that junior high school English teachers faced challenges in integrating technological tools into the assessment process. It has been found that there are teachers who lack technological skills.

Finally, the emerging intercultural feedback approach to writing assessment likewise poses challenges to language teachers (Rossiter & Bale, 2023). It is shown that teachers will find it difficult to contextualize their feedback unless they have been exposed to relevant assessment literacy programs.

Based on the cited study findings, language teachers have navigated emerging approaches and strategies in writing assessments. However, these pose challenges as they lack sufficient knowledge and skills to integrate these trends into writing assessments.

2.3. Recent Writing Assessment Programs for Language Teachers

The advancement of technologies and the promotion of contextualization have brought changes to the landscape of language assessment, especially in writing. For language teachers to cope with these changes, they should be given opportunities to learn through relevant writing assessment programs.

Li et al. (2023) cited in their study that initiating professional development programs helps teachers develop their formative assessment literacy. In addition, there should be sustained professional learning communities to ensure that teachers are abreast of the current

demands in language assessment. Similarly, Andersson (2015) supported the idea that professional development programs are important for language teachers. Her study showed that such programs positively affect the assessment skills of teachers. They should be exposed to training to keep them abreast of technologies and methodologies for writing assessments.

While the trend for self-assessment and peer assessment has been observed in language education, the study by Allal (2021) suggested that there should be a rollout for teacher professional development concerning formative assessment literacy for writing. On the other hand, Parr and Hawe (2017) introduced a research-practice collaboration to further improve teachers' content knowledge of writing as well as writing pedagogy. It is claimed that engagement in professional learning conversations helps language teachers improve their assessment practices. On a final note, language teachers are also encouraged to be aware of multimodal literacy assessment in addition to teaching. With the introduction of multimedia compositions as written outputs of students, language teachers should be trained to use relevant assessment tools for effective outcomes (Tan et al., 2020).

Based on the cited study findings, changes in the landscape of language assessment are inevitable; hence, professional development programs should be constantly initiated at language schools. Teachers should be consistently exposed to training relevant to emerging technologies and methodologies in language assessments.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Design

Generally, the study performed a qualitative investigation. As a research design, the qualitative type is utilized to understand a phenomenon by exploring human experience and meaning. This is done by employing an interpreting approach to the data gathered from the research participants or sources (Aspers & Corte, 2021). In the context of the present investigation, the study aimed to understand a language-testing phenomenon by exploring the practices used by English language teachers in assessing their students' writing performance.

More so, the study considered the narrative inquiry approach, which specifically explores experiences by prioritizing participants' shared narratives (Mokuria & Chhikara, 2022). As a method, this allows the study to establish an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon that occurred in a certain locale. Such a method may enable the present study to solicit qualitative data that reflect not only the writing assessment approaches and strategies but also the challenges of English language teachers in utilizing them.

3.2. Participants

The participants of the study consisted of English language teachers in one of the public junior high schools in the Division of Bataan. Since the research investigation is qualitative by nature, a purposive sampling technique is employed for the selection of teacher participants. Campbell et al. (2020) state that such a sampling technique can select information-rich participants who partly contribute to establishing the rigor of the study and the trustworthiness of the data and results.

Grade level taught and years of teaching experience were the demographic profile variables considered in the study. These could help create an equal representation of shared experiences among language teachers of varied profiles in a school. While the study sought approval and permission, the target participants of the study comprised seven (7) English-language teachers in a junior high school department during the school year 2023-2024.

3.3. Instrument

To collect the needed data from the target participants, the researcher utilized a self-made, semi-structured interview guide. Mashuri et al. (2022) state that a semi-structured interview is an appropriate tool to collect in-depth information or narrative regarding the participants' experiences. This tool is flexible and can let the researcher further explore the phenomenon under investigation.

The interview guide for this present study consisted of six (6) questions that intend to explore the approaches and strategies used in assessing writing performance as well as the challenges language teachers have experienced in the process and outcome phases of writing assessment. Also, a question to seek recommendations for actions was asked of the teacher interviewees.

Before the actual data collection, the researchers ensured that the self-made interview tool could solicit appropriate responses. Hence, expert consultation and a pilot test were conducted.

3.4.Data Analysis

The data collected from the interview was analyzed and interpreted by following the phases of transcription, member checking, coding, and thematic analysis. With the permission of the teacher participants, the recorded interview was first transcribed manually. Then the result of the transcription was presented to the participants to cross-check and confirm the preciseness of the transcribed narratives. Finally, coding and thematic analysis were performed to generate themes that correspond to the practices and challenges of participants in writing assessments. MAXQDA, a tool for qualitative data analysis, was utilized for easy scrutiny of the data.

The rigor of research findings was established by adopting Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness criteria. This would check the accuracy of research procedures based on four (4) aspects, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria are often used for qualitative research to safeguard the reliability of results derived from thematic analysis (Enworo, 2023).

3.5.Ethical Considerations

In the conduct of the study, all the target participants were fully informed of the objectives and procedures of the research undertaking before securing their sole voluntary participation. Also, their security and privacy were ensured by making their identities anonymous and all their provided data confidential. It was reiterated that the information obtained from them was used for research purposes only.

While the study aimed to contribute to the area of language assessment needed by the present teachers, the researcher selected participants without personal bias. The selected participants were also treated with care, safeguarding their welfare and rights. On a final note, the researcher ensured that the research findings were well-disseminated to raise awareness of current trends and issues in the field of language education.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the qualitative data provided by the participants in connection to their shared narratives regarding their writing assessment practices employed in the English language classes, the study results were generated as divided into three (3) parts corresponding to the research questions.

Part I

Approaches and Strategies Currently Utilized by Junior High School English Teachers to Assess Students' Writing Performance

As English language teachers at a junior high school level, the participants opted to employ writing assessment approaches and strategies that could help students improve their writing skills. Based on the transcribed data from the study interviews, the following themes were observed:

A. English language teachers generally utilize scoring rubrics to assess junior high school students' writing performance

Despite the different approaches and strategies available, English language teachers retain their preference for utilizing scoring rubrics to assess the writing performance of their students. The teacher participants affirmed their use of scoring rubrics for writing assessment.

Teacher A: I always provide rubrics to assess the output of students in writing. This will help the students get motivated with the task of coming up with quality output and will help me as a teacher as well to grade or score their output.

Teacher C: Whenever I ask my students to write something, I always inform them of the rubrics that I will use to evaluate their paper. By doing that, my students are oriented to what I am expecting from their work.

Teacher D: Scoring rubrics in assessing the students writing performance.

Teacher F: I assess students' writing performance using a scoring tool or rubrics that include different components.

Teacher G: In assessing learners' writing performance, I make use of a scoring rubric, since they are part of the graded outputs of the learners.

The teacher participants in the study shared their narratives about their use of scoring rubrics to assess the writing performance of their students. They also clearly described that their tools consist of components that give students ideas about to what extent their writing outputs would be assessed. This is supported by Qian (2018), wherein the study revealed that the EFL teachers' use of scoring rubrics helps them guide their students while engaging in a writing task.

B. English language teachers employ an analytical approach for writing assessments that heavily relies on content, organization, language use, and conventions.

English language teachers often consider an analytical approach to writing assessment since it can help them determine which specific aspects should be assessed in the writing outputs of the students. The teacher participants expressed their use of an analytic approach, however, with a variety of specified components or criteria depending on the perceived needs of their students. Among sets of criteria, the participants considered content, organization, language use, and conventions as essential aspects to observe in the students' writing outputs.

Teacher A: The rubrics or criteria I provide depend on the target competency we want to achieve. Most of the time, I include content, conventions (grammar, structure), and organization.

Teacher C: I usually include criteria such as the use of transitional devices, organization and presentation of ideas, content, and relevance of the given topic.

Teacher E: The students must know how to build up their thoughts and ideas while writing understandably, so I look for the content and structure in grading their output.

Teacher F: To evaluate the learners' writing performance, I include content, organization of ideas, language and style, convention, and/or mechanics.

Teacher G: Some of the criteria that I include in my grading rubrics are the grammar, coherence, and content of the written performance.

Despite the varied grade levels taught and differences in teaching experience, the teacher participants affirmed their use of an analytical approach to writing assessment. Based on their shared narratives, they considered the commonly used components of writing assessments, including but not limited to content, organization, language use, and conventions. These are the components they also found in the available and existing scoring rubrics. The preference of many teachers to use analytical assessment is supported by the study of Wu (2021), wherein, besides a holistic approach, teachers often utilize an analytical approach as they would like to assess language skills by specifying their expectations through distinguished weights per language skill component.

Part II

Challenges Encountered by Junior High School English Teachers in the Process and Outcome Stages of Assessing Students' Writing Performance

While English language teachers employ writing assessment approaches and strategies, it is expected that challenges may arise both in the process and outcome stages of assessment since writing has been considered a crucial task for both teachers and students. Based on the transcribed data from the study interviews, the following themes were observed:

A. English language teachers may neglect students' diverse writing styles due to strict adherence to scoring rubrics.

Although scoring rubrics help English language teachers by giving clear directions on which to assess, the specified criteria may challenge them during the actual assessment of students' writing performance. Since there are varied writing styles among students, the scoring rubrics may not favor those struggling writers. While the teacher participants utilized scoring rubrics, they expressed their sentiments on how such tools challenged them in the writing assessment process.

Teacher A: Some students do not meet the criteria, especially on the convention part. They have ideas but they find it difficult to put them into words.

Teacher C: The problem that I usually encounter is if I stick with the rubric strictly, then the score of my students will not suffice in the requirement of my subject.

Teacher D: I think there are challenges in utilizing assessment because it varies to the level of their abilities.

Teacher E: The difficulty is the gap between what to expect from what they know. For instance, as grade 9 students, supposedly they are already able to write long paragraphs

in English. The reality is that they don't even know how to write essays or even paragraphs per se.

The shared narratives of the teacher participants only reiterated issues of poor writing skills among the English language students. They found difficulty in assessing writing performance due to the mismatch between the expectations as specified in the scoring rubrics and the actual level of writing competence of target students. This same challenge is similar to the study findings by Rashid et al. (2021), which revealed that EFL teachers faced a writing assessment challenge because of their inability to provide classroom-based strategies to assist students when they have difficulty writing. Strict adherence to an analytical approach to assessment may hamper students' progress in writing performance.

B. English language teachers are tasked with spending more time assessing students' writing performance.

Unlike the objective type of assessment, writing assessment requires teachers to read, understand, and analyze students' written outputs to fully evaluate performance. Such a routine demands that English language teachers spend more time on writing assessment tasks. The teacher participants expressed their experiences of spending more time assessing students' writing.

Teacher F: One of the challenges in utilizing an assessment approach, strategy, and criteria is taking time to develop tools and to check and evaluate students' performance.

Teacher G: One of the challenges in assessing written performance is the amount of time to be given to complete the assessment. The task of reading the learners' work and scoring them is very tedious cause learners nowadays are not so good at conveying their thoughts in writing, so it is hard to understand the flow of their writing.

One of the drawbacks of utilizing scoring rubrics and an analytical approach to writing assessments is that teachers may consume time before they can fully assess the outputs of their students. The shared narratives of the participants implied their challenges in the assessment process due to the demanding task of the analytical approach and the poor response of the students to such a demand, as reflected in their writing outputs. Becker (2016) mentioned in his study that employing an analytical approach in writing assessments may be time-consuming for teachers. This suggests that teachers need to contextualize scoring rubrics to become responsive to the needs of a specific group of students.

C. English language teachers are challenged by the poor writing competence of students, as reflected in their written outputs.

Writing remains a challenging task for English language students since there are writing competencies that they should master to pass the assessment. Likewise, English language teachers are challenged when assessing students' writing performance as they have experienced how students have varied struggles based on their grade levels.

Teacher participants, who assessed the writing outputs of grades 7 and 8 students, experienced challenges with the students' grammar and syntax errors.

Teacher A: Most of the difficulties fall under the convention part such as grammar, spelling, punctuation marks, and capitalization.

Teacher B: The common errors I discovered when it comes to assessing my students' writing performance are misspelled words and the arrangement of the words when they are constructing their sentences.

Teacher C: Most of the time, my students forget to capitalize the letter or subject "I" in their sentences. They usually don't end their sentences with a proper punctuation mark as well.

On the other hand, teacher participants, who assessed written outputs in grades 9 and 10, observed struggles with students' limited vocabulary and organization issues.

Teacher E: The students usually just write whatever comes to their mind making it hard to rate since I have expectations from the content and how they write it.

Teacher F: Another challenge is some learners have difficulty expressing their thoughts and organizing their ideas especially if they have very limited background knowledge of the topic.

Teacher G: Most of the difficulties I found are their capacity to create written outputs with fluency, coherence, and vocabulary. It is a challenge because it is one of the basic skills in writing that learners must develop.

The expectations of English language teachers may vary based on the grade level to which the students belong. Based on the shared narratives of the teacher participants, it was found that teachers from grades 7 and 8 often consider the basic competencies in writing such as grammar, spelling, punctuation marks, and capitalization. Meanwhile, teachers from the higher grade level, including grades 8 and 9, often concentrate on the must-writing competencies of students, such as content, organization, and vocabulary. Regardless of these expectations among teachers from different grade levels, they found students' poor writing competence across grade levels to be a contributing factor to the challenging task of writing assessment. This is supported by Sarwat (2021), who observed that writing assessments may be quite challenging for teachers due to students' poor command over grammar and syntax and insufficient vocabulary.

D. English language teachers may poorly communicate to students the results of the writing assessment.

One important phase of writing assessment is to communicate the results of the assessment to the target students. However, English language teachers may encounter difficulties in how to efficiently execute such a phase of assessment. Teacher participants in the present study narrated that the aspect of giving feedback is deemed crucial and found difficult to perform.

One challenge is that giving feedback may demotivate students, affecting their writing performance in general.

Teacher B: The challenge for me to share the results of my students' written output will not be understood by those who can read and will ask me what my other way or strategy is to improve my students' writing skills.

Teacher D: There are quite challenges to sharing the results of assessment because we believe assessment ideally should provide strengths and weaknesses of each student.

Teacher F: Sometimes, students misinterpret assessment feedback as discouraging, especially if they are not open to criticism.

Another challenge is that giving feedback may fail its improvement tracking purposes due to a delay in communication with students.

Teacher C: It is expected that the next time they write, they will have forgotten what I have told them.

Teacher G: One challenge is feedback. As I mentioned earlier, it takes a while to assess learners' performance. There is a gap in the time of feedback. Learners are already out of focus on their work as they receive their outputs checked.

While giving feedback has been considered essential in the outcome phase of writing assessment, teacher participants expressed their challenges on how they could provide feedback for students to become motivated to further improve their writing performance. Delay in giving feedback due to time constraints was also deemed a problem for teachers, so students would not be able to address their poor writing performance in specific components. Malpractices in giving feedback may lead to demotivation and poor writing performance among students (Agbayahoun, 2016). Based on the related study, EFL students were not favored by their teachers' feedback practices in assessing their writing performance. They would look for feedback that is efficient and content-based.

Part III

Types of Language Assessment Programs Designed to Enhance Junior High School English Teachers' Writing Assessment Ability

Given that English language teachers often employ an analytical approach to writing assessment, scoring rubrics in the process stage, and feedback mechanisms in the outcome stage, they should then embrace other practices that can alleviate challenges in their writing assessment task and the English language students' writing performance. Hence, teachers should be exposed to relevant training and programs that will benefit the language education system.

A. English language teachers should be exposed to writing assessment capacity-building programs that promote contextualization, ICT integration, and emerging practices like learning autonomy

Since the analytical approach has become the trend in English language writing assessment, there are a lot of available and existing scoring rubrics that can be leveraged by language teachers. However, it is observed that such scoring rubrics may not cater to the diverse natures of English language students and their writing levels and styles. Hence, they should be trained to formulate contextualized scoring rubrics that are responsive to the needs and levels of their students.

This is supported by the teacher participants in the study. Based on their experiences, they shared their needs for contextualized scoring rubrics for writing assessment purposes.

Teacher A: We need to cater to what is needed to achieve the target competency by providing appropriate rubrics and scoring. Sometimes, we include criteria that are irrelevant to the task. Moreover, we just put numbers to each criterion without giving proper standards or descriptions for each point. I guess to be able to explain well to the students the score they got, we must describe each point with proper standards.

Teacher G: In my view, assessment tools used in evaluating the writing skills of learners should be improved and created in a way that learners can easily comprehend what is required for their work.

The recommendation for a writing assessment program that promotes contextualization is also supported by Hodges et al. (2019). Based on their study, they developed and validated

a contextualized scoring rubric titled “Writing Rubric to Inform Teacher Educators” (WRITE). This increased assessment literacy among teachers by allowing them to navigate their writing assessment knowledge and develop self-made and relevant scoring rubrics according to the nature and needs of their target students.

While teacher participants shared their difficulties in using scoring rubrics as time-consuming, they may also be introduced to a program that will help them know how to use ICT for an efficient experience of writing assessments.

One teacher-participant also supported such a need for ICT integration in writing assessments.

Teacher D: Providing more adaptable technology for example is one of the needs to improve to evaluate writing ability.

This suggestion for ICT integration in writing assessment practices is also furthered by Rababah (2019), wherein the emphasis lies on the invaluable role of ICT in writing classes in general. Meanwhile, Santos et al. (2009) mentioned a computer-assisted assessment like the “QTIrubric” that can easily generate formative feedback based on students’ writing outputs. Exposing English language teachers to such innovations through training and programs will enable them to expand their knowledge and skills in writing assessment.

Importantly, the emerging practices that encourage learning autonomy should also be observed in English language teachers’ writing assessment tasks. Based on the shared narratives, teacher participants have challenges with writing assessments due to students’ poor-quality writing outputs. Hence, writing assessment should not be viewed as a teacher’s task alone, but students should be included in the process to self-assess their writing performance progress.

Teacher participants expressed their support for embracing programs that also encourage learning autonomy.

Teacher B: I think what the teacher should improve in assessing the students’ writing output is to ask for a deep explanation of their output.

Teacher G: Self-assessment, for example, learners can evaluate themselves appropriately, and checking for teachers will be easier.

The campaign for a professional development program promoting learning autonomy in the writing assessment aspect of English language education is also affirmed in the study by Huda et al. (2020), wherein they emphasized that teachers who utilize students’ self-assessment of their writing outputs can encourage the learning autonomy necessary for students’ improvement of their writing performance. On the other hand, English language teachers should be further trained by clearly specifying assessment descriptors to guide students in the writing process. Such skills of teachers can promote learning autonomy among students, as they are assisted by the well-crafted descriptors of assessment tools (Shelton-Strong, 2018).

5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. English language teachers still value a systematic type of writing assessment practice by utilizing scoring rubrics and an analytical approach. This strongly emphasizes that fair assessment should always be established in writing performance tasks.

2. English language teachers encounter writing assessment challenges due to an imbalance between rigidity and flexibility. This highlights the balancing roles of fairness and effectiveness in writing assessments that favor teachers and students.
3. English language teachers recognize the importance of emerging writing assessment practices that are responsive to the demands of the present landscape of English language education. This realizes the need for teachers to capacitate their practices through relevant programs and training.

6. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations were hereby proposed:

1. English language teacher-researchers interested in writing assessment practices may refer to the findings of the study. This is to discern recent practices as well as challenges for teachers to come up with effective programs in enhancing their writing assessment competence.
2. Researchers may conduct further investigations employing other designs, such as quantitative or mixed methods, to unveil the potential issues of this ever-changing phenomenon.
3. Replication of the study may be done in other locales with a different set of English language teachers. A variable like educational level, either primary or tertiary, may be subject to alteration. These studies may further enrich the present type of research undertaking.
4. Future studies may develop an ESL writing assessment model that can serve as a basis for curricular and pedagogical improvements in the teaching and assessment of students' writing performance.

Acknowledgements

This study has been made possible with endless support from the school principal of the research locale, study tool validators, reviewers of the research findings, and most especially the seven (7) English language teachers in a junior high school in a Division of Bataan. More so, an appreciation for the professor who shared her expertise in the improvement of this academic work.

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