

Minimal Marking: Its Effect on Students' Composition Writing

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Abstract

The study is entitled “Minimal marking: Its Effect on Students' Composition Writing”. Minimal marking is a process that helps students recognize, diagnose, and correct their own typical errors by marking every error in the composition writing. The study attempted to answer the following objectives: 1) Determine the performance of students in the composition writing in terms of content/task fulfillment, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics; 2) Find out the significant difference on the composition writing performance of the students before and after the minimal marking activities; 3) Find out the significant difference on the performance of students in terms of sex, age, type of high school last attended and Parents educational attainment; and 4) Determine the difficulties encountered by the students in writing composition. The data were gathered through experiment and a questionnaire for the responses. Results revealed that the composition writing performance of the students before and after the minimal marking activities in the five components increased in the posttest except for mechanics. It was concluded that minimal marking is good to improve writing skills if the English teacher has thoroughly explained how it can be used.

Keywords: Minimal Marking, Composition Writing, rubric, components

I. Introduction

Like all learning problems, difficulties in writing can be devastating to a student's education and self-esteem. Students are increasingly expected to write on many different subjects. Indeed, for a student struggling with a writing problem, the writing process itself interferes with learning [1]. Students faced with such difficult odds have trouble staying motivated. Students therefore, need to be taught writing skills in a way that boosts their confidence as learners, for it provides the basis for expanding their ability to communicate their thoughts [2]. Learners should be motivated well in writing so that they could be able to express freely their own ideas. Therefore, teachers have to do something to help him in checking the papers without taking so much of his time. Minimal marking is a process that helps students recognize, diagnose, and correct their own typical errors, without overburdening the instructor and overwhelming students by marking every error in a project. It also reduces the impatience; instructors generally feel when they encounter students' errors repeatedly throughout the work [3]. This approach to error provides teachers with a highly efficient strategy to reduce errors in writing. It is efficient because students work only on their own errors. They come to recognize the kinds of errors they make and learn ways to correct them.

Furthermore, minimal marking is also a method of checking which allows for clearer standards on the part of the teacher and more involvement on the part of the students [4]. This can help the students to take responsibility for finding and correcting their own errors if they are taught proper standards of correctness. It should be used in conjunction with grading criteria that explicitly reward standard written English [5]. Once the students are ready to write free compositions on carefully chosen realistic topics, then composition writing can be a useful testing tool [6]. It provides the students with an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to organize language material, using their own words and ideas. Thus, composition can be used to provide not only high motivation for writing but also an excellent backwash effect on teaching, provided that the teacher does not anticipate at too early a stage the complex skills required for such a task.

Indeed, the individual learner needs a teacher who can help students to become successful in the near future; thus, the most important breakthrough of the teacher should be to identify the strategies fit to the need of the students [7]. Teachers must be researcher of the teaching strategies in order to facilitate learning especially in writing composition.

II. Methodology

There were twenty seven (27) first year Bachelor of Elementary Education major in Science and Health college students of Mindanao State University at Naawan, Naawan, Misamis Oriental who were involved in the study and were currently enrolled in English I(Communication Arts). The data were gathered through experiment and a questionnaire was used. The rubric was used as scoring instrument by the five English teacher- raters to evaluate the composition writing performance in the pretest and posttest of the students. The students were given five (5) different topics to develop in five (5) different sessions. The study used the pre-experimental design.

III. Results and Discussions

Table 1 presents the composition writing performance of the students on the pretest given the topic “My Most Embarrassing High School Experience” and the posttest with the topic “Most Loved Person in My Life”. The overall performance of the students’ pretest increased in the posttest. This shows that their writing performance improved after the five (5) minimal markings activities which probably would have increased greatly if the students were given more writing activities.

Table 1: Performance of the Students Before and After the Minimal Marking Activities

Components	PRETEST					POSTTEST				
	Total Score	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mastery Level	Description	Total Score	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mastery Level	Description
Content/Task Fulfillment	30	21.81	2.11	72.7	Ave. to Good	30	22.54	1.91	75.1	Ave. to Good
Organization	20	14.73	1.59	73.7	Ave. to Good	20	15.89	1.35	79.4	Ave. to Good
Vocabulary	20	13.90	1.41	69.5	Poor to Ave.	20	14.59	1.49	73.0	Ave. to Good
Language Use	25	16.28	1.82	65.1	Poor to Fair	25	17.04	2.09	68.2	Poor to Fair
Mechanics	5	3.48	0.55	69.6	Ave. to Good	5	3.22	0.41	64.4	Poor to Fair
Overall	100	70.21	6.81	70.2	Ave. to Good	100	73.28	6.67	73.3	Ave. to Good

The table shows that most of the students’ scores in the five components increased in the posttest except for mechanics which can be attributed to their attitude and feeling that the items like spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, and capitalization were not important in writing. Organization has the highest increase of score as shown on their mastery levels. This probably was due to the fact that their English teacher discussed the topic on organization thoroughly. Only content and organization have attained 75% mastery level in the post test. The researcher believes that as children progress through school, they are increasingly expected to express what they know about many different subjects through writing. The language use and mechanics components got poor to fair mastery level after the conduct of the five minimal marking activities. Table shows that the language use and mechanics have not shown improvement in the posttest. Most of the students have problems on grammar in terms of the correct usage of the verb tenses and correct spelling, punctuation, paragraphing and capitalization. This shows that the participants have not mastered the rules on subject-verb agreement, correct syntax and perhaps confusions on the appropriate use of the tenses of the verbs considering that there were twelve (12) tenses of the verbs. Moreover, the students were not given opportunity to demonstrate their ability to organize language material because of the short time spent in the conduct of the study.

Table 2 presents the summary of the performance of students on the five components in writing composition.

Table 2: Summary of Wilcoxon – Signed Ranks Test Results

Components	N = 27	Z	P- value
Content/Task Fulfillment		-1.845	.065
Organization		-3.151*	.002
Vocabulary		-2.234*	.026
Language Use		-1.843	.065
Mechanics		-2.956*	.003
Total		-2.463	.014

* $p < .05$

Using the tool Wilcoxon- Signed Ranks Test revealed that there was a significant difference on the performance of the students in terms of organization, vocabulary, and mechanics. This means that the organization and vocabulary improved after the minimal markings activities though their mechanics decreased significantly. The students can arrange ideas logically with coherence and unity not anymore jumping from one unrelated ideas to another. The transitions used between paragraphs and sentences are good and in the adequate length. The vocabulary also improved after the series of activities. They used good vocabulary properly although there were some errors in spelling like the word good luck, prefer, and it means, and others, punctuation, paragraphing, and capitalization of words which proved that there's errors in mechanics. This shows further that it should repeatedly be given time and effort by their English teacher. Minimal marking activities can still improve the performance of students in writing composition if given enough practice. Content/task fulfillment and language use were not significant as shown in the p-value of .065 respectively. The content/task fulfillment and language use did not show improvement after the five (5) minimal marking activities. This means that the thesis statement, presentation of arguments, correct grammar and correct construction of sentences in writing composition were not given importance by the students. It maybe these items were not given much effort to be developed. Good writing includes the concrete, specific detail the reader needs before he can understand exactly the idea the writer is trying to present. It needs correct choice of words to be used in the paper.

Table 3: Summary of Mann – Whitney Test Results by Sex and Age

Components N = 27	SEX		AGE	
	Z	P- value	Z	P- value
Content/Task Fulfillment	-.116	.908	-1.260	.208
Organization	-.116	.908	-.272	.786
Vocabulary	-.232	.816	-.668	.604
Language Use	-1.275	.202	-2.050*	.040
Mechanics	-1.604	.109	-.075	.940
Overall	-.077	.938	-.691	.489

* $p < .05$

Results from the Mann-Whitney Test revealed no significant differences existed between males and females in all the components. Significant differences in language use can be noted in terms of age which can be attributed to the maturity of the students. In terms of sex, the associated probabilities are greater than .05 which led to the non-rejection of the null hypothesis. This means that there is no significant difference on the composition writing performance of students in terms of this variable. In terms of age, only the language use is significant since the p-value is less than .05 which led to the rejection of the null hypothesis. For other components, the null hypothesis is not rejected. This means that age can affect the language use like correct grammar and construction of complex sentences by the students.

Table 4. Summary of Mann – Whitney Test Results by School Type and Parents’ Educational Attainment

Components N = 27	School Type		Parents’ Educ. Attainment	
	Z	P- value	Z	P- value
Content/Task Fulfillment	-.204	.838	-.798	.425
Organization	-.556	.578	-.103	.918
Vocabulary	-.380	.704	-.542	.588
Language Use	-.058	.953	-.180	.857
Mechanics	-.266	.790	-.313	.754
Overall	-.904	.366	0	1.00

*p<.05

Results from the Mann-Whitney Test showed no significant difference on the school type in several components except on content/ task fulfillment in terms of parents’ educational attainment. In terms of school type, the associated probabilities are more than .05 which led to the non-rejection of the null hypothesis. This shows that the type of school did not have bearing on students’ performance. In terms of parents’ educational attainment, only the content/task fulfillment is significant since the p-value is less than .05 which led to the rejection of the null hypothesis. For other components, the null hypothesis is not rejected. This shows that there is a significant difference in the performance of students in terms of parents’ educational attainment. The students can present ideas or arguments in writing composition when their parents are educated for they can give ideas and discuss.

Table 5: Number of Errors Counted by Student per Activity

Activity	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	5.81	2.90
2	9.19	4.46
3	10.70	5.43
4	12.78	4.98
5	15.26	6.91
Over-all	53.96	13.42

Table 5 shows the number of errors committed by students in every activity. Activity 1 composed of one paragraph composition with the topic “Luck”, activity 2 had two (2) paragraphs with the topic “My Broken Dream”, activity 3 had three (3) paragraphs with the topic “A Depressing Place”, activity 4 had four (4) paragraphs with the topic “My Study Habit” and activity 5 had five (5) paragraphs with the topic “My Terrible Vacation”. The results indicate increased errors in mechanics (which include spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, and capitalization) from activity 1-5 as shown in their respective means. This result may be caused of the increase in the number of paragraph, and as the activity progresses so with the difficulty of the topics.

Table 6a: Difficulties Encountered By the Students in Writing Composition

Indicators	Mean	Standard Deviation	Description
1. I have difficulty in getting started on writing composition	3.01	0.78	Sometimes True
2. I got easily distracted during writing tasks.	3.52	0.72	Almost True
3. I easily get tired while writing	2.78	0.89	Sometimes True
4. I have poor use of lines on the paper	3.00	0.83	Sometimes True
5. I have problems on organizing sentences	3.26	0.76	Sometimes True
6. I have uneven spacing between letters in writing words	2.89	0.89	Sometimes True
7. I have poor letter formation in organizing ideas	3.04	0.85	Sometimes True
8. I have problems on spelling omissions	2.78	0.85	Sometimes True
9. I have poor narrative sequencing of ideas	3.07	0.68	Sometimes True
10. I have poor vocabulary	3.07	0.73	Sometimes True

Table 6b. Difficulties Encountered by the Students in Writing Composition (continued)

Indicators	Mean	Standard Deviation	Description
11. I have many misspelled words in writing	2.56	0.75	Sometimes True
12. I have committed frequent errors in capitalization, punctuation, and grammar	3.04	0.76	Sometimes True
13. I used inappropriate colloquial Language	3.00	0.73	Sometimes True
14. I have difficulty in sentence Structure	3.15	0.66	Sometimes True
15. I have difficulty in word sounds, spelling, and meanings	3.15	0.86	Sometimes True
16. I have difficulty developing and organizing ideas	3.48	0.85	Sometimes True
17. I have lack of opinion or sense of audience	2.96	0.76	Sometimes True
18. I have difficulty with writing tasks that require creativity and/or critical thinking	3.37	0.88	Sometimes True
19. I can write only very short passages	3.04	0.90	Sometimes True
20. I write exceptionally slowly and with great effort	3.33	0.88	Sometimes True

Results showed that the students did not so much encounter difficulties in writing composition. This shows that the participants can write composition easily should they be given topics they really are interested and are not time- pressured. Among the difficulties encountered by students, almost all expressed that they are easily distracted during the writing tasks. This may be because they lack attention in writing composition. They are easily bored while writing which may result to poor construction of sentences.

Difficulty developing and organizing ideas, difficulty with writing task that require creativity and/or critical thinking, write exceptionally slowly and with great effort, problems on organizing sentences, difficulty in sentence structure, and difficulty in word sounds and meanings were sometimes true to them. This means that students had no difficulties in organizing ideas or difficulty in sentence constructions as they perceived.

IV. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded 1) that minimal marking is effective in improving students' writing skills given that the English teacher has thoroughly explained how it can be used. It is also good in content/task fulfillment, organization, vocabulary, and language use if conducted in a short span of time while mechanics requires a longer time to spend, that language use will be improved when students are older through the use of minimal marking.

V. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the researcher would like to recommend that the respondents who have poor to fair mastery level in language use and mechanics, the English teachers should employ a variety of exercises that will improve their grammar, sentence construction, spelling, punctuation, paragraphing and capitalization, that minimal marking be used by the English teachers to lessen the responsibility of checking but learning on the part of the students since they were the ones to identify their own errors in the sentence to improve their writing skills, that minimal marking be used by the English teachers as remedial lessons to students who need assistance in the improvement of their writing skills as well as other basic areas of communication skills such as listening, speaking, reading and study skills. The school heads should also encourage the teachers to make use of minimal marking to improve the students' performance in writing. There is a need for a training of teachers to become better facilitators in using minimal marking in order to improve learning.

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