

Stylistic Imitation Technique in Improving the Writing Skills among Grade 8 Learners

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Abstract

This study aimed to test the effectiveness of stylistic imitation technique in improving the writing skills among the Grade 8 learners. It also pursued identifying the pre and post-assessment scores of the student-respondents in terms of content, vocabulary, organization, conventions, and purpose. It also sought to determine if there is a significant difference between the pre and post scores of the Grade 8 learners. The experimental method of research is utilized in this study. The respondents were the two sections of Grade 8 learners of Mayao Parada Agricultural Integrated High School with a total of 60 respondents. Respondents were pre-assessed to evaluate their skills in writing. Then, they experienced the stylistic imitation technique, which was six times implemented in the classes. They were post-assessed at the end. Based from the findings, all the writing skills significantly improved after utilizing the stylistic imitation technique. The scores may not show a big difference between their scores, but all of them made a difference in each skill. Most of the learners from group 1 earned higher scores than the group 2. Thus, there is a significant difference between the pre and post-assessed scores of the student-respondents in terms of content, vocabulary, organization, conventions and purpose.

Keywords: stylistic imitation technique, imitation, writing skills, controlled composition

1. Introduction

Writing skills help students communicate throughout their academic careers. These enable them to clearly organize their thoughts and feelings and to convey meaning through well-constructed text (Afrin, 2016, as cited in Ulit, 2019). Writing, on the other hand, is one of the most challenging and frustrating subject to teach, especially in an English as a Second Language (ESL) program (Al-Buainain, 2007 as cited in Ulit, 2019). Because students are expected to produce written products that demonstrate their ability to organize the content, to address the appropriate audience, and to demonstrate their linguistic ability (vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, etc.), it is particularly challenging for non-native speakers.

According to the data of the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) last 2019, Filipino learners were falling behind and were not proficient enough in reading, writing and mathematics (Balinbin, 2020). Philippines ranked behind Vietnam and Malaysia that showed a low percentage in the mentioned learning domains. This study was done to ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes which is also the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal. In the writing domain, only 1% of the Grade 5 respondents got a higher level proficiency. These were learners who can write texts which shows cohesiveness, a good range of vocabulary and has detailed ideas. On the other hand, almost half of the learners assessed got low percentage which means they have limited ability in expressing themselves in writing. There are different factors that contribute to the

poor writing skills of the learners. Saavedra (2020) enumerated the possible aspects that affects this macroskill. These are lack of vocabulary in the target language, trouble in conveying and sorting out thoughts, lack of motivation and interest in the skill and difficulty in writing mechanics. Gepila (2017) argued that writing is the most challenging to instruct and learn. It should be taught and learned in the context it tends to be best instructed and learned.

In 2012, DepEd Order No. 39 s. 2012 was implemented by Department of Education which provides the *Policy Guidelines on Addressing Learning Gaps and Implementing a Reading and Writing Program in Secondary Schools Effective School Year (SY) 2012-2013*. Schools were advised to frame their programs and interventions within the guidelines as the DepEd rolled out Grade 7 of the K – 12 Basic Education Program. This is to ensure a more systematic approach to bridging learning gaps. Since students' learning gaps may vary, the interventions that may be required should be tailored to each individual's needs.

Based from the concept presented above, the researcher aimed to test stylistic imitation as a strategy to improve the writing skills of the learners. This is to determine its effectiveness in teaching learners a different way in writing. This was tested through the use of pre-test and post-test.

Theoretical Framework

Bandura's Social Learning Theory of developmental psychology emphasized that people learn by imitating or observing others through modeling influences. This theory included cognition as a way to better explain human behavior by using a person's mental abilities, like processing information, to respond to these modeling influences (Galanakis & Koutroubas, 2022). Nabavi (2012) argued that individuals develop similar behaviors by observing those around them. People assimilate and imitate other people's behavior after observing it, especially if the experiences they have with the observed behavior are positive or include rewards related to the behavior. Imitation entails actually reproducing observed motor activities. Social learning theory is focused on how children and adults work intellectually on their social encounters and how these perceptions then influence behavior and development.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of the study is to test stylistic imitation technique in improving the writing skills among Grade 8 learners.

Specifically, this study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the pre - assessed scores in writing of the student-respondents in terms of:
 - 1.1. Content;
 - 1.2. Vocabulary;
 - 1.3. Organization;
 - 1.4. Conventions; and
 - 1.5. Purpose?
2. What are the post - assessed scores in writing of the student-respondents in terms of:
 - 2.1. Content;
 - 2.2. Vocabulary;
 - 2.3. Organization;
 - 2.4. Conventions; and
 - 2.5. Purpose?
3. Is there a significant difference between the pre and post-assessed scores in writing of the student-respondents?

2. Methodology

Following the experimental research design, the following procedure was conducted. First, the letter of permission to undertake the study was created by the researcher and was approved by the thesis adviser and the Dean of the College of Education. After it was approved, the researcher secured permits from Mayao Parada Agricultural Integrated High School to conduct the study. Upon the approval of the letters, the respondents were assessed through the use of pretest. In the assessment, the output is an essay about a certain topic. The learners' written compositions was evaluated using a rubric and their writing ability was determined. The researcher utilized the six (6) lesson exemplars using the MELCs available for quarter 3. The researcher utilized the available activities for each lesson from the modules in English 8 – Quarter 3. Instead of just containing activities related to the lesson, the lesson plans also included the four steps of the stylistic imitation technique. These are freestyle, syntactic analysis, close imitation, and free imitation.

In the freestyle step, respondents were asked to write an output with a given topic. The output served as their draft, created without any constraints. They were also provided with guide questions to ensure that they included necessary information in the next steps. Next, in syntactic analysis, the researcher showed a controlled composition that has the same topic in the freestyle step. This composition is also related with the MELC used in the lesson. They analyzed the syntactic structure of the composition. The order of the grammatical elements used in each statement was discussed. In close imitation, with the controlled composition having blank parts, the respondents filled them out using the information they provided in the freestyle step. In this step, they can only put pieces of information that were appropriate for the blank parts of the controlled composition. And the last step, free imitation, which allowed the respondents to add the remaining information from their freestyle output. This allowed the learners to show more information about the subject. They were also allowed to edit some of the parts that they realized were wrong.

After employing the technique throughout the quarter, respondents were post-assessed. In the post-test, the respondents' writing skills were evaluated again to know the effectiveness of the stylistic imitation technique. The output in post-test was another essay with a different topic. Outputs were evaluated with the use of rubrics. These were graded and the scores were gathered afterwards. These were computed by the statistician and interpreted by the researcher to determine if there were changes with the writing skills of the learners.

Frequency and percentage were used as the statistical treatment in the pre-test and post-test of this study. This is to know the writing skills of the respondents before and after the implementation of stylistic imitation technique.

To identify if there is a significant difference between the pre and post assessed scores in writing of the respondents, paired t-test was utilized as a statistical treatment.

3. Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation of Data

Table 1. Pre-assessed Scores in Writing of the Student-Respondents

Score	Content		Vocabulary		Organization		Conventions		Purpose	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
4.00	2	3.3%								
3.00	25	41.7%	17	28.3%	14	23.3%	6	10.0%	25	41.7%
2.00	33	55.0%	29	48.3%	28	46.7%	21	35.0%	35	58.3%
1.00			14	23.3%	18	30.0%	33	55.0%		

Table 1 shows the pre-assessed scores in writing of the student-respondents in terms of content, vocabulary, organization, conventions and purpose. Out of the sixty respondents, only two got a perfect score in content in their pre-assessment, which means that their output showed a clear insight of the topic. These two

learners were both from Group two and only 3.3% of the overall respondents. Twenty-five respondents got 3 in content, which means that only 75% of their output was focused on the topic and they have included relevant ideas. On the other hand, thirty-three or the 55% of the respondents got 2 as their score in content, which means that only half of their output was focused on the topic and they have included few loosely related ideas.

This just shows that most of the respondents had problems in writing their content. Anderson (2017) said that majority of students will feel lack of knowledge about a particular subject in a writing activity. Raimes (1983) believed that when students complain about how difficult writing in a second language, they are not only referring to the difficulty of finding the appropriate words and using proper grammar, but also the difficulty of finding and expressing ideas in a language that is unfamiliar to them. During the implementation, learners have some ideas for the given content of the writing activity, but they had some difficulties in expressing themselves in English.

In vocabulary, no one got a score of 4. Seventeen or the 28.3% of the respondents gained a score of 3 in vocabulary, which means their choice of words were clear and precise, but some of the words were placed incorrectly and overused. The 48.3% or 29 respondents scored 2, which means their choice of words were simple and the writing lacked variety. Most of their work commonly utilized words that they are only familiar with. In the study of Alisha, Safitri and Santoso (2019), respondents also showed difficulties in writing in terms of their vocabulary. They lack in this skill because they do not have mastery of it. The words that the writers pick ought to be appropriate and have suitable meaning, however a lot of them are doubtful in picking words. Moreover, in the study of Kristy dwi pratiwi (2012), the respondents' compositions also showed a limited range, frequent error in choice of words and the meanings are unclear and confusing. Furthermore, another study of Arbab, El Sayed and Mustafa (2022) stated that vocabulary was also included in the specific difficulties experienced by the respondents. Its results show that students' vocabulary is restricted and straightforward, and they do not have sufficient vocabulary items. Only 40% of their respondents expressed their ability to use new words, while half of them depended on redundancy of words they definitely know. Only fourteen respondents obtained 1 as a score, which means that the word choice in their output were vague and they only used a limited vocabulary. Most of the learners had problems in choosing the words that they will use. There are some learners who need help in translating their Filipino sentences to English. Their English vocabulary is limited that makes it difficult for them to compose. Rohmatillah (2014) pointed out that the students had trouble determining the meaning of words and they were still unsure how to use the word in the right context.

In their ability in organization, no one also got a 4. Fourteen or 23.3% of the respondents earned 3 as their score in organization, which means that their output deviated somewhat from the central idea and did not logically follow each other. Twenty-eight respondents had 2 as their score in organization, which means that their outputs' central idea and flow were lost and lacked organization. Eighteen or the 30% of the respondents earned 1 as a score, which means that their output did not have a clear structure and the ideas were unorganized. Most of the respondents' output exhibited unorganized thoughts and ideas. Some of them needed to learn on how to arrange their words accurately to express their thoughts clearly. Pincas (1982) said that students struggle to write cohesive paragraphs due to inadequate use of cohesive devices.

There were no respondents who received a score 4 in using writing conventions. Only six or 10% of the respondents had 3 as a score, which means there were 1-3 errors evident in grammar, spelling, capitalization and punctuation. Twenty-one respondents had a score of 2, which means that their output showed 4-8 errors in grammar, spelling, capitalization and punctuation. On the other hand, thirty-three or 55% of the respondents scored 1, which means there were more than nine errors evident in their used writing conventions. The respondents made a lot of mistakes in using writing conventions especially in grammar. According to Moses and Mohamad (2019), grammar is important in writing. Students will struggle to write sentences with proper grammar because they do not know much about grammar. As stated by Fareed et al. (2016) in this study, students make errors in subject-verb agreement, pronouns, tenses, articles, prepositions, and basic sentence

structures. Moreover, the respondents showed errors in the punctuation marks they have used. Some knew how and when to utilize them, but most of them had no idea on how to use them.

In purpose, no one also got 4 as their score. Twenty-five or 41.7% of the respondents received 3 as their score, which means that their outputs' purpose were understood and defined. But, not all the points were well supported and there were few irrelevant details. However, thirty-five or 58.3% of the respondents got 2 as their score in purpose, which means that their purpose were defined, but may be difficult to comprehend. There were also only a few details included. Calderwood (2021) highlighted that the reason or motivation for writing a text is the author's purpose. Readers are able to respond to the text and match appropriate texts to specific requirements when they are aware of the author's purpose. Based from the works of the respondents, the purpose can be identified, but some of their work can be a little difficult to understand.

Budjalemba and Listyani (2020) highlighted that many students experience issues in finding appropriate theories, combining thoughts, correcting sentence structure, and having doubts in writing. Students' relatively low English language proficiency may cause these difficulties. Grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, and spelling are among the linguistic aspects that have an impact on students' writing performance.

Table 2. Post-assessed Scores in Writing of the Student-Respondents

Score	Content		Vocabulary		Organization		Conventions		Purpose	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
4.00	40	66.7%	14	23.3%	29	48.3%			28	46.7%
3.00	15	25.0%	32	53.3%	20	33.3%	29	48.3%	20	33.3%
2.00	5	8.3%	13	21.7%	9	15.0%	25	41.7%	11	18.3%
1.00			1	1.7%	2	3.3%	6	10.0%	1	1.7%

Table 2 provides the post-assessed scores in writing of the student-respondents in terms of content, vocabulary, organization, conventions and purpose. Forty or 66.7% of the respondents obtained 4 as their score in content, which means that most of their output improved and demonstrated clear insight of the topic. Fifteen respondents got 3 as their score. And only five or 8.3% of the respondents scored 2 because still only half of their work were focused on the topic and still included few loosely related ideas. Most of the respondents got a score of 4 in this standard which is the highest score. As Quintilian said, stylistic imitation can assist to bridge the structure and content effectively and develop a teaching method and enact the writing process for learners of prose composition. Stodola (2013) also believed that stylistic imitation can assist with connecting the form – content dichotomy effectively and build an instructional method and course that more effectively enact the writing process for learners.

Fourteen or 23.3% of the respondents got a score of 4 in vocabulary, which means that the respondents utilized a wide range of vocabulary, vivid words and phrases which were accurate, natural and not forced. Thirty-two learners earned 3 while thirteen obtained 2 as their score. Only one or 1.7% of the respondents scored 1 in vocabulary, which means that this one person still used vague and limited vocabulary. Jones (2009) explained that the young child's capacity to imitate the actions of others is a significant mechanism for social learning — that is, for getting new information. Through what they experienced during the implementation of stylistic imitation technique, the respondents learned new words that they can utilize in writing. Moreover, as cited in the study of Liang (2019), controlled composition not only helps students learn the American writing style, but it also helps them improve their grammar. Students will be able to increase their

English vocabulary and proficiency by working with writing with correct grammar (Bracy, 1971; Gorrell, 1981; Paulston, 1972).

In organization, twenty-nine or 48.3% of the respondents gained 4 as their score, which means relevant information were presented in a logical order and were well-structured. Twenty respondents got 3 while nine received 2 as their score. Only two or 3.3% of the respondents scored 1 in organization, which means that their output did not have a clear structure and their ideas were unorganized. According to Stephen King's book, *On Writing*, "stylistic imitation is a perfectly honorable way to get started as a writer-and impossible to avoid, really. Some sort of imitation marks each new stage of a writer's development." It will be more efficient if people are given a model and not just advice on how to write their thoughts. It doesn't stop in imitation but people can learn new strategies, new ways to write by doing what they observed from other writers. Through using the technique, the respondents learned new ways on how they can organize their words and ideas in the output.

In using conventions, there still no one who got a 4 as a score. Twenty-nine or 48.3% of the respondents got 3, which means that they made 1-3 errors in grammar, spelling, capitalization and punctuation. Twenty-five earned 2 as their score and only six obtained 1, which means they still did more than nine errors in using conventions. The respondents still showed improvement even if no one got a perfect score in the skill. Liang (2019) argued that this pedagogy can be the solution for teachers who wanted to improve the writing skills of their learners. Syntactic analysis is included in the process of stylistic imitation technique. Goyal (2021) asserted that in order to determine the logical meaning and correctness of the sentences, it must also take into account grammar rules. Syntactic analysis is also the process of examining natural language using formal grammar rules. In this step, they experienced some grammar rules and how to utilize the writing conventions properly.

Twenty-eight or 46.7% of the respondents obtained 4 as their score in purpose, which means that they presented a clear purpose and a lot of details about the topic. Twenty got 3 while eleven respondents scored 2. Only one or 1.7% of the respondents got 1 as their score, which means that there was one person who failed to define the purpose and gave few supporting details. Grell (2021) pointed out that freewriting is a composing exercise utilized by writers to create thoughts without the tightening influences of customary composing structure. This is the first step of the stylistic imitation technique. With the practice that they have undergone during the implementation, the respondents experienced freedom in sharing their thoughts through writing.

Stylistic imitation technique nurtures creativity and fosters originality in students' writing. Contrary to the belief that imitation stifles creativity, studies suggest that imitating successful writers can enhance students' creative writing skills. According to Leow and Neo (2016), stylistic imitation serves as a scaffold for students to develop their creative abilities by providing them with models that showcase the effective use of literary techniques. By immersing themselves in various styles and imitating them, students can then synthesize their experiences and produce original works that integrate different stylistic element.

Table 3. Test of Difference between Pre-assessment and Post-assessment Scores of the Respondents

	Pretest		Posttest		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	M	SD	M	SD			
Content	2.48	0.57	3.58	0.65	-12.986	59	0.000
Vocabulary	2.05	0.72	2.98	0.72	-10.184	59	0.000
Organization	1.93	0.73	3.27	0.84	-14.647	59	0.000
Conventions	1.55	0.67	2.38	0.67	-9.315	59	0.000
Purpose	2.42	0.50	3.25	0.82	-9.002	59	0.000

Table 3 exhibits the test of difference between pre-assessment and post-assessment scores of the respondents. In the pre-assessment, the overall mean of the content is 2.48, with a standard deviation of 0.57, which means 50% of the respondents' output was focused on the topic and included few loosely related ideas. On the other hand, the mean in the post-assessment became 3.58, with a standard deviation of 0.65. This indicates that there is an improvement with the ability of the respondents to write the content. In the study of Chen (2019), it was proven that the imitation writing method was effective for improving the writing quality of English majors with varying content proficiency. They were particularly qualified to support their opinions with compelling and appropriate evidence.

The mean of vocabulary in the pre-assessment is only 2.05, with a standard deviation of 0.72. However, it got higher in the post-assessment and became 2.98, with the same standard deviation. Although, there is only small difference with the two results, this still implies that the respondents also improved in vocabulary. Utilizing controlled composition in stylistic imitation technique made a difference with the scores of the respondents. Controlled composition involves manipulating sentences to construct paragraphs. Students might see themselves working on coping sentences for every subject; what they do not realize is they deal with style, vocabulary, and grammar (Bracy, 1971 as cited in Liang, 2019). Students learn grammar, vocabulary, and English proficiency through controlled composition without being aware of traditional lesson learning.

In organization, the mean of the pre-assessment is only 1.93, with a standard deviation of 0.73. The mean also increased in the post-assessment to 3.27, with a standard deviation of 0.84. This signifies that the learners developed their skills in arranging their ideas in writing. Gorrell (1987) explained that if a student is given a model essay that is within their range of ability, they are more likely to produce a similar piece of writing that is well-organized, expresses the controlling idea clearly, and uses specific details and concrete words to support the idea. In short, they produce whatever is highlighted in the model essay. Consequent imitations can be as free or as loose as the situation calls for, but typically the imitation becomes more free as the author gains confidence.

The lowest difference of scores is the ability of the respondents to use writing conventions. The convention's overall mean in the pre-assessment is only 1.55, with a standard deviation of 0.67, which is interpreted that there were many errors evident in grammar, spelling, capitalization and punctuation. It still established an improvement since in the post-assessment, the mean is 2.38, with a standard deviation of 0.67. Gorrell (1987) highlighted that exact sentence imitation is another type of imitation that works well with inexperienced writers. This method starts with a model sentence, shows and explains the structure of that sentence that structure, and then asks the student to write a sentence that imitates the model. Beginning writers learn to use unfamiliar syntactic structures and conventions of punctuation.

Purpose received 2.42 as its mean, with a standard deviation of 0.50 in the pre-assessment. However, the respondents learned on how to define the goal and how to put ideas that will support them in their write-up. In the post-assessment, the purpose's mean advanced to 3.25, with a standard deviation of 0.82. Freestyle writing is one of the steps of stylistic imitation technique. According to Gorrell (1987), Unskilled writers frequently become fluent writers through free writing, despite remaining unskilled. They can express their ideas freely and support the ideas of their compositions. Unskilled writers can learn form and structure through imitation while simultaneously developing and expressing their own ideas. Imitation can help them in figuring out how to shape their sentences, create their paragraphs, express their own voices, and perform many complicated task that the writing process involves. Imitation frees creativity rather than stifling it.

Based from the results of the pre and post-assessment of both sections, more respondents from group 1 showed higher scores than the respondents from group 2. All the writing skills significantly improved after using the stylistic imitation technique. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Stylistic imitation technique helps students develop a sense of style and tone in their writing. Through close examination of well-crafted texts, students became more attuned to the manner of language and the impact of various stylistics choices. They learn to recognize and imitate the tone, sentence structures, and rhetorical devices used by skilled writers. This process helps students refine their own writing style allowing them to

convey their ideas more effectively and persuasively. Furthermore, in the study of Liang (2019), she cited that Zamel (1976) said that the learners need some materials to help them produce correct patterns of L2 writing as they work toward mastering the English free composition. Zamel also showed that imitating different stylistic patterns can assist learners with improving and moving from total control to free composition.

Stylistic imitation is an important technique in developing students' writing skills, as supported by previous researches in the field of language. This technique involves studying and imitating the style structure and language used in exemplary text or works of literature. By analyzing and replicating these models, students gain deeper understanding of effective writing techniques and develop their own unique writing voice.

4. Summary of Findings

The following are the findings of the study:

1. Most of pre-assessment scores were quite low and showed the need of improvement. The skill that got the highest mean during the pre-assessment is the content while the lowest is the conventions.
2. The scores of the respondents during post-assessment increased after the implementation of stylistic imitation technique. The content still got the highest mean while the conventions still gained the last spot.
3. There is a significant difference between the scores of the pre and the post-assessment in writing of the student-respondents.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, this conclusion was drawn.

1. The pre and post-assessed scores of the student-respondents showed significant difference in writing in terms of content, vocabulary, organization, conventions, and purpose. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Recommendations

In light of the study's findings and conclusion, the following recommendations are hereby presented:

1. Since the study provided evidence that using stylistic imitation technique is significantly effective in improving the writing skills of the respondents, it is therefore recommended that teachers may consider utilizing this and use a controlled composition or a model in improving their learners' writing skills.
2. School heads can conduct in-depth training on the use of imitation technique in assessing the learners to enhance their skills in every subject area.
3. Future researchers may conduct further studies on stylistic imitation technique and utilize learners who are in a different or higher grade level. They can also evaluate other writing skills that may improve using the stylistic imitation technique.

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