

Utilizing the RAFT Strategy: Its Effects on the Writing Performance of Filipino ESL Learners

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Abstract

This experimental research described the effects of RAFT strategy on the writing performance of 10th graders Filipino ESL learners. Forty learners were identified as having nearly the same performance and grouped as experimental and control. The writing tasks used were taken from the actual module used by the Department of Education-Philippines in the classroom learning. Two groups were rated using a scoring rubric. The researcher used t-tests, means and standard deviations included in the Social Sciences Statistical Package (SPSS). The study revealed that the participants had more or less the same knowledge on essay writing. The post-experimental test taught through the RAFT strategy obtained a score of 91.35 percent described as *Outstanding* while the control group exposed under the conventional strategy had an 88.55, *Very Satisfactory*. Moreover, both groups have significant differences between their pretests and posttests. A statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and the control group as the p-value of .011, which is lower than the critical value of 5 percent, in persuasive and argumentative essay writing performance was found. Hence, the use of RAFT as a strategy in teaching writing is found to be effective in teaching persuasive and argumentative essay.

Keywords: *RAFT strategy; writing performance; ESL learners; English as a Second Language*

INTRODUCTION

The learning of English is taking place all over the world. It is seen as a language that helps people communicate and understand each other, whether in oral or written form. In the Philippines, English is widely used in a variety of sectors, such as education, trade and business, health, and others. Writing is one of the macro skills to be studied by a Filipino learner of English as a Second Language (ESL) or L2. Looking at the Philippine Enhanced Basic Curriculum, the tenth grader's emphasis is on writing using English as the target language. Composition, such as essay and its types, is the required writing tasks to be performed before the quarter ends.

Writing is the main skill that needs to be taught and learned by ESL learners. People can use writing as a way to communicate ideas and information. For learners, the communication of what they feel and think can be completed by writing (Kabigting, et al, 2020).

Writing by Haynes and Zacarian (2010) is a developmental phase in which substantive written communication takes place. With strong writing skills, the students can clearly communicate their messages and deliver them to the readers.

Learners have had difficulties writing essays using the target language of English. It was common among L2 learners when the researcher spoke to fellow teachers who pointed out that the typical mistakes of the learners were choice of word, limited vocabulary, spelling, grammar, punctuation and logical organization and presentation of ideas or thoughts.

As English teachers, the Filipinos lead the development of the English language skills of each learner of English as a Second Language (ESL), in particular writing in preparation for higher learning. The Academy prepares each learner to compete globally in terms of written communication using English.

It is considered to be a second language in the country and a medium for institutional education, writing public and government documents, as well as official enterprises within and outside associates. This paper demonstrates how an ESL teacher can utilize R.A.F.T strategy to guide students to write compositions using the target language. It is limited into teaching writing persuasive and argumentative essays functional texts to junior high school learners.

Tanatkun (2008) said it takes a long time for non-native learners to poster development and written performance for writing in a foreign / second language is a challenge for them. The obstacles to writing using L2 should be overcome by some classroom interventions, such as using the Role, Audience, Format and Topic (RAFT) strategy, to Filipino ESL learners. This research was conducted to assess the effects of the RAFT strategy on Filipino ESL learners' writing performance.

Research Questions

Generally, this study designed at describing the effects RAFT strategy on the writing performance of tenth grader Filipino ESL learners. The following questions were also addressed in the present study:

1. How may the pretest writing performances of the participants be described?
2. How may the posttest writing performances of the participants be described?
3. Do the pretest and posttest writing performances of the participants of both groups significantly differ?
4. Are there statistically significant differences in persuasive and argumentative essay writing performances between the mean scores of the experimental group taught writing using RAFT strategy and those of the control group taught writing using conventional strategy?

LITERATURE REVIEW

RAFTs is seen as an effective writing strategy for solving some of the learners' problems while learning how to write. RAFTs strategy as an acronym referring to the role of writer (R), audience (A), written product format (F) and written Topic + strong verbs (Ts). In every good writing assignment these key elements should be evident (Buehl, 2014).

Tompkins (2010) states that RAFT is a strategy that can help the student to understand their role as writer and how to communicate their ideas effectively so that the readers can easily understand what the writer wrote.

Alisa and Rosa (2013) explain that the RAFT strategy provides a choice for learners to consider drafting their work earlier on. First, when writing the text, they need to

consider what role they will be in. Second, they have to consider their target audience. After that they should think what their writing format is. The last, they have to think about the topic for their writing as well. In addition, they stated that this strategy gives the learners a choice to consider drafting their work earlier. First, when writing the text, they need to consider what role they will be in. Second, they have to consider their target audience. After that they should think what their writing format is. The last, they have to think about the topic for their writing as well.

This strategy enhances learners' understanding of their role as writers, their audience, their varied formats and the content they expect. This writing strategy helps learners increase their ability to think and reflect critically while synthesizing what they've learned (Sejnost & Thiese, 2010). A good writing allows students to write to an audience fluently and intentionally. Lucantoni (2002) claims that the good writer is concerned with the objective of the event and the audience, and the writer will, in turn, indicate whether a formal or informal register is necessary.

Sudarningsih & Wardana conducted a study on the use of RAFT strategy in 2011, they discovered that this could improve the 10th grade learners' writing skills. This also made the learners have positive attitudes, a high motivation for learning as well as active participation in learning to recount text writing skills through the technique.

The RAFT strategy has been modified for the teaching of persuasive text. Dealing with this, Hasfadillah stated in Buss's (2004, p.80) that the RAFT strategy is being modified for the teaching of persuasive texts. This strategy encourages learners to read and write persuasive texts effectively by asking the following questions: 1) who is the writer? 2) Who's the target audience? 3) What kind of writing is there? 4) What is the subject of the piece, and what techniques are used to persuade or convince?

In their study on RAFT strategy, Parilasanti, Suarnajaya, and Marjohan (2014) found that there was a significant difference in learner writing skills between the learners taught by RAFT strategy and conventional strategy.

Meredith and Steele (2011) said that the implementation of the RAFT strategy is relatively easy once learners understand the basic elements of writing. These are the Role, the critical element that learners need to understand is that all writing reflects perspectives or viewpoints and there is no writing; the audience, possibly one of the funniest and most challenging elements of writing; the format, as learners learn and become adept with different writing formats, puts more tools into the communication toolbox, and the topic, the selection. Teachers generally have some specific questions that are essential for learners to address. When considering topics, it is useful to think in terms of what kind of questions learners should address, the learners should consider the conceptual ways in which they can approach that essential point. This can be determined by various prompts to the topic. In addition, giving writers the opportunity to think through specific writing prompts, they may be able to pursue them in an effective manner to engage them in writing about central class issues.

Simon (2012) believes that RAFT is a writing strategy that helps learners understand their role as a writer and learn how to effectively and clearly communicate their ideas in order to make the reader understand what has been written.

Barry, Campbell and Daish (2006) pointed out a good writing is clear, straightforward and easy to understand, and it has confident beginnings and endings. In addition, the writers show involvement with the topic they write about, and are able to arouse interest in it from a reader.

Moreover, Harmer (2004) writing is used in many different forms for a wide range of purposes that it is produced. Writing skill is the learners' ability to convey their training, ideas, written according to grammar, vocabulary because everyone has their own way of thinking and it makes them have different perspectives for expressing it.

Furthermore, Wallace (2004) states that writing is the final product of several separate acts which are enormously challenging to learn at the same time. Note-taking, identification of a central idea, outline, drafting and editing are among those separable acts. As a writer, certain factors, such as audience, must be considered in writing. In fact, it means that whoever our writing to will often determine what personality and purpose our selection is. Subject is a very important thing a writer needed. The subject should be clear and concrete. The key to mastery writing skill is hard work in learning and putting into practice this skill to get the good product written.

Hughes and Schwab (2010) also believe that writing is one of the most difficult competences because it not only requires the mastery of technical aspects such as punctuation and orthography, but also the mastery of the strategy, namely design, organization and registration. There were also reasonable problems for many students in writing. As stated by Harmer (2001), in writing, we should focus on product of what writing or the writing process itself.

Also, by making them aware of the influence the topic and format can have on their audience, RAFT strategy increases the learners' sense of what it means to be a writer. The specificity and focus of writing in the strategy can therefore make the learners enjoy writing (Sejnost & Thiese, 2007, p.78).

In 2016, Umaemah, Latief, and Lrawati prove in a study that the implementation of the RAFT strategy was successful in improving the ability of the learners to write and El Sourani (2017) concluded that the RAFT strategy was more effective and outperformed the traditional method of teaching and learning the writing skills.

Richards and Renandya (2002) stress the difficulty of writing lies in how to generate and organize ideas using a suitable choice of organization of vocabulary, sentence and paragraph and translate these ideas into a readable text. Writing difficulties are not only in generating and organizing ideas, but also in turning ideas into a paragraph.

Based on the reviewed literature and studies, the use of RAFT strategy among EFL/ESL writers has been found to be helpful.

METHOD

The study employed experimental research methods. This method was appropriate to the nature of the study designed to discover the effectiveness of using RAFT strategy to improve the performance of 10th graders Filipino ESL learners in writing. Experimental research, according to Scott and Usher (2011), is about studying the causal relationship between phenomena by intervening in the natural setting and controlling the relevant variables.

Participants

The norms in selecting the sample from the population revealed the purpose of the study and acknowledged the case rich in information to be studied. In this study the total population was used using purposive sampling technique. This sampling technique involved examining the entire population (i.e. the total population) that has a specific set of features (e.g., specific attributes / traits, experience, knowledge, skills, exposure to an event, etc.) (Creswell, 2014).

The sample criterion was learners must have more or less the same performance of writing based on the given task of writing prior to treatment. Forty learners were identified as having nearly the same performance that was split into groups as for experimental and control. Both groups have been treated with the same environmental condition as lighting and ventilation of used rooms and class schedules (Kabigting, 2019).

Two groups were selected, one group was assigned as the experimental group where the RAFT strategy was used to teach persuasive writing and argumentative essays while the other group was assigned as the control where conventional teaching strategies were engaged. The researcher considered the study site to be a high school in the Division of Pampanga in the province of Pampanga, a province in Central Luzon, Philippines.

The control group used conventional teaching writing strategy while the RAFT was used for the experimental group. The researcher has served as both group teacher.

Instruments

In this research the data collection tool was a writing test. A test is any measurement technique for ability, knowhow or performance according to Richards and Schmidt (2010). The research instruments were persuasive and argumentative essay writing exercises as per the requirements of the subject at the end of a quarter. The content of the writing was interesting and required by the learners in the Philippine set-up and culture. In addition, writing exercises were in accordance to the final task given for a quarter. These writing activities were graded based on the given scoring rubric.

Procedures

The independent variable in the study was the RAFT as a strategy for teaching writing among 10th graders from a government high school in Arayat, Pampanga, in which the dependent variable was learners' writing performance in persuasive essay or text. The researcher selected respondents according to the prevailing criterion of having more or less the same level of understanding or knowledge in writing.

The writing tasks were taken from the actual module utilized inside the classroom learning which was provided by the Department of Education-Philippines. Persuasive and argumentative essays of learners both from two groups were rated following the given scoring rubric developed by Almonte et al. (2015) which has the focus on content, techniques used, development or organization, clarity of ideas, emphasis and language mechanics and conventions as criteria.

Analysis began initially during the period of data collection. The researcher informed the respondents about the study's objectives before having the treatment. They had also been asked to sign a participation agreement. The respondents were informed they would treat their writing exercises with complete confidentiality. In addition, consideration was given to ethical issues related to the respondents' culture and nature, and environmental policy.

One week was allotted in teaching persuasive writing and another week for argumentative essay including the parts and mechanics in writing. After, each discussion and prewriting activities, participants were required to write an essay based on the given topic. For experimental group, the RAFT strategy was utilized for the students to choose what would their role as participant-writers. They were also given choices to whom the composition was to be addressed. On the other hand, control group wrote their essays without specific roles and audience to be considered.

After the writing exercises, the teacher-researcher rated the compositions of each student. The researcher used t-test deviations, means, and standard deviations included in the Social Sciences Statistical Package (SPSS). Mean was used to describe the respondents' writing performance while t-testing Independent Samples was used to control the intervening variables and to measure the mean statistical differences between the groups as a result of the intervention.

He also used the following descriptors, grading scale, and remarks stated in DepEd Order 8, s to describe the respondents' written performance. 2015 entitled Classroom Assessment Guidelines for the K to 12 Basic Education Program:

<i>Descriptor</i>	<i>Grading Scale</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
Outstanding	90 – 100	Passed
Very Satisfactory	85 – 89	Passed
Satisfactory	80 – 84	Passed
Fairly Satisfactory	75 – 79	Passed
Did Not Meet Expectation	Below 75	Failed.

Writing exercises were rated with 50 points in both persuasive and argumentative essays as the highest score and 0 point as the lowest which were transmuted to 100 as the highest score and 60 as the lowest. The same grading scale used in Kabigting and Nanud (2020) study in describing Filipino senior high school learners' English performance.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. How may the pretest writing performances of the participants be described?

Table 1: *Descriptive statistics of pretest writing performances*

Groups	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Description	SD
Control group	20	78	82	80.25	Satisfactory	1.251
Experimental group	20	78	82	79.55	Fairly Satisfactory	1.099

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of pretest writing performances of the participants. Control group obtained an 80.25 percent which was described as *Satisfactory* and experimental scored 79.55 percent which was described as *Fairly Satisfactory*. Both groups got a minimum score of 78 percent and a maximum of 82. Respondents of control and experimental groups had more or less the same knowledge on essay writing tasks based on the pretest writing scores. There were lesser dispersion of scores of both groups in the pretest writing task as these groups obtained SDs of 1.251 and 1.099, respectively. This means that the chosen respondents for the groups were suitable for the treatment.

2. How may the posttest writing performances of the participants be described?

Table 2: *Descriptive statistics of posttest writing performances*

Groups	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Description	SD
Control group	20	82	96	80.25	Satisfactory	1.251
Experimental group	20	88	96	79.55	Fairly Satisfactory	1.099

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of participants' writing performances. For posttest writing performance, control group which was exposed to conventional strategy of teaching writing had an increase of 8.3 percent from its pretest score. The score of 88.55 was described as *Very Satisfactory*. The findings confirm the results of the study of Kabigting (2020) that the use of conventional teaching or traditional instruction also improved the performance of the participants.

On the other hand, posttest for experimental which was taught through RAFT strategy obtained a score of 91.35 percent which was described as *Outstanding*. This shows that respondents who were exposed to RAFT gained higher score than those who were taught using conventional strategy. Suharni, Mukhaiyar and Radjab (2010) found that RAFT strategy could improve the students' writing achievement. El Sourani (2017) concluded that the RAFT strategy was more effective and outperformed the traditional method of teaching and learning the writing skills.

3. *Do the pretest and posttest writing performances of the participants of both groups significantly differ?*

Table 3: *Pretest and posttest mean scores difference of both groups*

Variables	Groups	p-value	Description
Pretest vs. Posttest	Control	.000	Significantly Different
	Experimental	.000	Significantly Different

5% level of significance

Table 3 reveals the pretest and posttest mean scores differences of both groups. A p-value of .000 which is lower than critical value of .005 showed that the pretest and posttest writing performance of the respondents of control group significantly differs. The same results found on the writing performance of the experimental group with a p-value of .000 which was interpreted as highly significantly differ on the pretest and posttest writing performance. This entails that both groups may learn significantly whether utilizing the conventional strategy or the RAFT.

Alisa and Rosa (2013) also discovered that RAFT strategy can be chosen for the alternative strategy of teaching writing skills because this strategy encourages learners to write creatively, to think about a topic from different points of view, to a specific audience in a variety of text formats, because the writer needs to consider those aspects in order to convey the reader. Applying RAFT strategy in teaching writing is suggested to help the learners achieve better.

4. *Are there statistically significant differences in persuasive and argumentative essay writing performances between the mean scores of the experimental group taught writing using RAFT strategy and those of the control group taught writing using conventional strategy?*

Table 4: *Difference on the posttest results of the two groups*

Groups	p-value	Description
Control vs. Experimental	.011	Significantly Different

5% level of significance

Table 4 shows the difference on the posttest writing performance of the two groups. There are statistically significant differences in persuasive and argumentative essay writing performances between the mean scores of the experimental group taught writing using RAFT strategy and those of the control group taught writing using conventional strategy as the obtained p-value of .011 which is lower than the critical value of 5 percent.

The results of this study revealed similar results in 2016 regarding the study of Umaemah, Latief, and Irawati. They found that the ability of learners to write and participate in the implementation of the RAFT strategy has progressively improved. The result of writing tests for learners shows that implementing the RAFT strategy helps them increase their writing skills. RAFT strategy thus far has a positive effect on the involvement and motivation of the learners in the teaching of learning writing process. In addition, El Sourani (2017) also established that there were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and those of the control one in the post application of the writing achievement test in favor of the experimental in composition (paragraph) writing.

CONCLUSION

This study was designed to describe the effects of utilizing the strategy to improve the writing performance of the 10th graders Filipino ESL learners. It was found out that utilizing this strategy as an aid in teaching writing among students was effective and students performed better than those who were taught using the conventional teaching strategy. The RAFT strategy has encouraged a learning environment that offers opportunities to explore and examine how their role as writers can be understood. RAFT strategy has been seen as an effective writing strategy that enables learners to improve their competency in writing. There are a number of reasons why RAFT is better than conventional strategy. It is a pre-writing tool for organizing their thoughts to help learners understand their role as writers, the audience they will be addressing, the variety format and the topic of their writing (Parilasanti, Suarnajaya & Marjohan, 2014).

Hence, the use of RAFT as a strategy in teaching writing is found to be effective in improving particularly persuasive and argumentative essays in Filipino ESL writing performance. However, this study is limited in teaching persuasive and argumentative essay writing only on the effect of RAFT as a strategy. There are some other factors that can affect learners' writing performance such as age, student motivation, type of community where the learners live, gender and other types of text. Further research with different writing approach and learner characteristics is recommended for the other researchers.

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