GRADUATE STUDENTS’ PROFICIENCY LEVEL FOR AN ENHANCED SKILLS TRAINING PROGRAM

Erlinda Abletes-Cayao
Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila, (University of the City of Manila)

ABSTRACT

This descriptive-correlational study was conducted to evaluate the reading and writing proficiency level of selected graduate students who are presently enrolled in the program Master of Arts in Education majoring in Educational Administration or Educational Management in selected higher education institutions during second semester of academic year 2010-2011. The proponent made use of the following instruments to carry out the purpose of the study: reading and writing proficiency inventories, critical reading and writing tests and rubrics for evaluating composing skills of graduate students. Experts in the area of language education and communication served as validators of the instruments used and they also evaluated the writing prompt of the respondents. The focus of evaluation for reading area are identifying syntactic meaning of words, pointing out details, determining logical relationships, detecting evidences, predicting outcomes and making informed judgments. In the area of writing, the following are covered: establishing clear purpose, organizing ideas logically, demonstrating control over sentence structure and style and exhibiting mastery in mechanics. This study is anchored on the idea with that of Marzano’s proposed New Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (2001). It aimed to respond to the shortcomings of the widely used Bloom’s Taxonomy.

Keywords: reading and writing proficiency in English, graduate students

Introduction

Graduate education is the highest level of study in the Philippine Educational System. It is believed that through it, professionals were honed for continued improvement of their craft in the areas of teaching and learning, delivery of student services and management of educational programs. Moreover, it is considered also as one of the most effective means of developing capacities related to doing research that will improve educational theory and practice in the many different aspects of the educational process. As stipulated in the Commission on Higher Education Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 53 series of 2007, an individual who completes a master’s degree in education is able to demonstrate: (a) in-depth understanding of a complex and coherent body of knowledge and skills in an area of study in education, which may be applied in many types of school or other educational environments. (b) Higher order level of skill in the analysis, critical assessment, and application and communication of knowledge in the field. (c) ability to apply knowledge and skills in the field to new situations in more creative and flexible ways, and to solve complex problems in ways that involve rigorous thinking and independent work.

Aside from that, higher education system of the Philippines is considered a key player in the education and integral formation of professionally competent, service-oriented, principled, and productive citizens. Through its tri-fold function of teaching, research and extension services, it becomes a prime-mover of the nation’s socioeconomic growth and sustainable development. By tradition, the education sector is in charged with the most crucial role in shaping the leadership and future of this country. In an effort to develop the
quality human resources needed, Presidential Decree no. 6-A states that there is a need to train the nation’s manpower in the middle level skills required for national development and also to develop high level professions that will provide leadership for the nation, apply knowledge through research, and apply new knowledge for improving the quality of human life.

As a response to these national concerns, various higher education institutions designed their curricular offering to further ensure the highly qualified personnel who would administer the nation’s school. The Master of Arts in Education, major in Educational Administration or Educational Management aimed at developing professionals and competent leaders who can spearhead the operation of educational institutions in the country and at the same time work as effective agents of change in the transformation and development of this society. With this premise, the role of educational administrators is so crucial and it would require them to be proficient in areas of communication. However, an observation was pointed out by Clemeña and Acosta (2010) pertaining to the status of graduate education in the Philippines. They have mentioned that the minimal involvement of the faculty in research activities can be attributed to the lack of firm training from graduate studies that would make them consistent producers of research. Similar observation was also noted by the researcher. She, being exposed to the nature of being a research adviser and a reader, has observed that there is a pressing need to evaluate the reading and writing competencies in English of graduate students.

The main concern of this study is to evaluate the reading and writing proficiency level of selected graduate students who are presently enrolled in the program Master of Arts in Education majoring in Educational Administration or Educational Management in selected higher education institutions during second semester of academic year 2010-2011. Specifically, it aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What is the self-assessed reading proficiency level of the respondents in terms of the following:
   a. identifying syntactic meaning of words;
   b. pointing out details;
   c. determining logical relationships;
   d. detecting evidences;
   e. predicting outcomes; and
   f. making informed judgment?

2. What is the self-assessed writing proficiency level of the respondents in terms of the following:
   a. establishing clear purpose;
   b. organizing ideas logically;
   c. demonstrating control over sentence structure and style; and
   d. Exhibiting mastery in mechanics?

3. What is the reading proficiency level of the respondents based on the scores in the critical reading test in terms of the skills stated in problem 1?

4. What is the writing proficiency level of the respondents based on the experts’ assessment in terms of the skills stated in problem 2?

5. Is there a significant relationship between the respondents self-assessed reading proficiency level and their scores in the critical reading test in terms of the skills stated in problem 1?

6. Is there a significant relationship in the respondents’ self-assessed writing proficiency level and the experts’ assessment in terms of the skills stated in problem 2?

7. Is there a significant relationship between the respondent’s self-assessed reading and writing proficiency level?

8. Is there a significant relationship between the respondents’ critical reading scores and the experts’ assessment of their writing prompt?

9. What skills enhancement training program for graduate students can be proposed?

The following hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance:

Ho 1 : There is no significant relationship between the respondents’
self-assessed reading proficiency level and their scores in critical reading test in terms of skills stated in problem 1.

Ho 2: There is no significant relationship between the respondents’ self-assessed writing proficiency level and the experts’ assessment in terms of skills stated in problem 2.

Ho 3: There is no significant relationship between the respondents’ self-assessed reading and writing proficiency level.

Ho 4: There is no significant relationship between respondents’ critical reading scores and the experts’ assessment of their writing prompt.

Method

Descriptive-correlational research design was used in conducting this study. The researcher has considered institutions of higher learning where two of which is public and the other two were from private sector. The following schools were chosen to represent other schools offering master level in education major in education administration or management. The names of institutions are withheld; however, they are described in order for the reader is given a background of these institutions. Cluster sampling technique was used in this study. Cluster sampling is a frequently-used, and usually more practical, random sampling method. There were three types of instrument utilized in order to achieve the objectives of this study. The Reading Proficiency Inventory and the Writing Proficiency Inventory, the Critical Reading and Writing test and the Rubrics for Evaluating Composing Skills of Graduate Students. They were all researcher-made instruments and it underwent content validation of experts. The criteria for choosing the experts were as follow:

a. has specialized in Language Education or Communication;

b. must be in the academe for more than 10 years; and

c. at least possesses Masters’ Degree in Language Education or in Communication.

The experts’ are also the ones responsible for checking the critical writing part of the test which is called the writing prompt. There were five experts considered in this study. The idea of using an inventory is similar to that of Shagufta (2004) who made an assessment of the respondents’ usage of metacognitive strategies in reading. Another study where the idea of using an inventory was taken from Ifedeli (2005) as she examined the reading culture among tertiary institutions in Nigeria. After the content validation of experts, the instruments were tested to 20 graduate students who are not part of the actual sample of the study. After the pilot test, the Reading Habit Inventory was subjected to reliability test. The result yielded .9482 using Cronbach alpha. On the other hand, the Writing Proficiency Inventory yielded .9497 value also using the Cronbach alpha.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Verbal Interpretation</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>4.21-5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Very Satisfactory</td>
<td>3.41-4.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>2.61-3.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>1.81-2.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>1.00-1.80</td>
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</table>

The following steps were considered by the researcher prior to coming up with the Critical Reading and Writing Test:

1. Documentary Review- This initial step prompts the researcher to review thesis, dissertation, journals, references and the like in order to come up with appropriate reading and writing skills mostly needed by the graduate students.

2. Construction of Table of Specification (for Reading Test)- A necessary step in test construction is making the table of specification. This would ensure that appropriate items were made for each target skill. (see appendix)
3. Initial Draft of the Test- Writing out the actual reading and writing items guided by the table of specifications for the reading test. Consultation with the researcher’s adviser was constantly done at this point.

4. Experts’ Validation and Pilot Testing- The help of the experts were sought pertaining to the content and the instrument was pilot tested to 20 graduate students who are not included in the sample of the study.

5. Item Revision and Finalization- After the pilot test, the researcher were guided as to what items that need revisions and clarification. Finally, the instrument was ready for the actual data gathering procedure.

A rubric for evaluating graduate students composing skills was also made by the researcher. It includes four major components namely; establishing clear purpose, organizing ideas logically, demonstrating proficient control over sentence structure and style and exhibiting mastery in mechanics. It is a five-point rubric specifying appropriate skill with its corresponding point. This rubric also underwent experts’ validation as well. This was used by the experts to evaluate the writing prompt of the respondents.

The following statistical tools were used in this study:

For problems 1 and 2 which aimed at determining the self-assessed reading and writing proficiency level of the respondents, weighted mean was utilized.

For problems 3 and 4 which aimed at determining the critical reading test scores of the respondents and also the experts’ assessment of the respondents’ writing prompt, simple mean average was used.

For problems 5 up to 8, Spearman’s Rho is used to determine the relationship between respondents self-assessed reading proficiency level and their critical reading test scores; self-assessed writing proficiency level and experts’ assessment of the respondents’ writing prompt; self-assessed reading and writing proficiency level and; critical reading test scores and experts’ assessment of respondents’ writing prompt. After which, t-test is used to determine if the relationship is significant.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE OF THE STUDY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Actual Sample Gathered</th>
<th>Valid Data</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

The following are the findings of the study: (1) The respondents assessed their reading and writing proficiency level as very satisfactory. (2) The respondents critical reading test scores are fair for identifying syntactic meaning of words, pointing out details from the text and determining logical relationship. They got a satisfactory rating for the skills detecting evidences, predicting outcomes and making informed judgment. The over-all mean for the critical reading test score is 16.34 with a verbal interpretation of satisfactory. (3) The respondents writing proficiency level as rated by the experts is fair. (4) There is no significant relationship between the respondents self-assessed reading proficiency level and their scores in the critical reading test. (5) There is no significant relationship between the respondents self-assessed writing proficiency level and the experts’ assessment of their writing prompt. (6) There is a
significant relationship between the respondent’s self-assessed reading and writing proficiency level. (7) There is a significant relationship between the respondents scores in the critical reading test and the experts’ assessment of their writing prompt.

Discussion

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher proposed that a careful introspection on the part of the graduate students must be done. They must be advised particularly pertaining to their self-assessment of their reading and writing proficiency level. Since their self-assessment is not reflective of what they could actually do based on the results of the critical reading and writing tests scores, these area must be addressed carefully by their respective institutions of higher learning. Aside from that, since the reading and writing proficiency level of the respondents has not met the standards set by the CHED (Commission on Higher Education) and presumably of their respective institutions, a more in-depth look at the policy and curricular offerings is needed .The instruments crafted by the researcher may be used by other institutions in assessing the reading and writing proficiency level of their graduate students. After which, a possible remediation may be done. The proposed training enhancement program of this study may be utilized by the respective institution. Monitoring and feedback system is also recommended to the proper authorities specifically once they implemented the suggested program which is an output of this study. Institutions of higher learning must take into consideration the results of this study and they may be able to carefully plan specific actions pertaining to the reading and writing needs of their respective students. Parallel study should be conducted by other researchers possibly exploring on the reading-writing connection across levels.

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