



UNLEASHING LITERARY PROWESS: THE WRITING COMPETENCE OF SPECIAL PROGRAM IN JOURNALISM (SPJ) LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the writing competence of students enrolled in the Special Program in Journalism (SPJ) at Jacinto P. Elpa National High School, focusing specifically on their demographic profile, levels of journalistic writing competence, and the relationship between these variables. Recognizing that foundational skills in journalism are crucial for clear, ethical, and impactful communication, the study sought to provide empirical data on the actual writing proficiency of SPJ students. Using a quantitative-descriptive correlation research design, the researchers gathered data from 75 students selected through stratified random sampling. Instruments included a validated survey questionnaire and a written proficiency test. Findings revealed that students were generally "Somewhat Competent" in key areas such as linguistic cognitive, strategic discourse, and socio-linguistic competence. Notably, students scored highest in awareness of the Journalist's Creed, reflecting stronger ethical understanding. However, technical competence emerged as a relative weakness. Statistical analysis indicated that certain demographic variables – particularly socioeconomic status and prior journalism experience – had significant correlations with multiple aspects of writing performance. These results highlight the need for differentiated instruction and targeted resource allocation to support skill development in underperforming areas. The study provides valuable insights for educators and curriculum developers seeking to align instruction with the unique profiles and needs of SPJ learners.

KEYWORDS: *Writing Competence, SPJ Students, Journalism Education, Demographic Profile, Journalistic Skills, Quantitative Research*

INTRODUCTION

The ability to write effectively remains the cornerstone of journalism, requiring mastery beyond grammatical precision to include clarity, ethical awareness, and strategic communication. Despite the implementation of specialized curricula such as the Special Program in Journalism (SPJ) in the Philippines, concerns persist regarding the actual writing competence of enrolled students. This study investigates the journalistic writing abilities of SPJ students at Jacinto P. Elpa National High School, specifically addressing their demographic profile, competence level, and how these two factors are correlated.

Prior research suggests that demographic characteristics—such as age, socioeconomic background, and parental education—play a significant role in shaping students' academic performance. Flores and Santiago (2022) emphasized that students in SPJ tracks often struggle to integrate journalistic ethics and standards, indicating underlying demographic and contextual challenges. Babiano et al. (2024) also pointed out disparities in access to resources, which may disadvantage students from low-income households, thereby affecting their writing development.

In terms of writing proficiency, Salvador (2024) and Saavedra and Barredo (2020) found that many students, even at the tertiary level, still demonstrate only "adequate" or "developing" competence in key areas such as grammar, organization, and content development. These findings are echoed by De Los Santos and Grana (2024), who reported similar challenges among SPJ graduates, underscoring the need for targeted instruction.

Furthermore, the significant influence of journalism-specific experience on students' writing skills has been highlighted by Nepomuceno and Mangindra (2025), reinforcing the importance of early exposure to journalistic practices. This study, therefore, seeks to provide empirical evidence on how demographic factors relate to writing competence in order to guide instructional improvements and resource allocation within the SPJ curriculum.

OBJECTIVES

This study aims to:

1. Describe the demographic profile of SPJ students.
2. Determine the level of journalistic writing competence among these students.



3. Examine the relationship between students' demographic profiles and their writing competence.

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative-descriptive correlation research design was employed. The study utilized a validated survey and writing proficiency test administered to 75 SPJ students. The data collected were statistically analyzed using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation.

Sampling Design

Stratified Random Sampling was used to ensure representation from each SPJ grade level (7–10). Of the total 89 SPJ students, 75 were selected proportionally from each grade.

Statistical Design

Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean) were used for demographic profiling and competence levels. Pearson's *r* tested the correlation between demographic variables and writing competence.

Geographical Area

The research was conducted at Jacinto P. Elpa National High School in Tandag City, Surigao del Sur, Philippines.

RESULTS

The results of the study revealed that the majority of SPJ students were aged 13–14 (56%), predominantly female (68%), and from households earning less than ₱10,000 monthly (50%). Most students (89%) had prior journalism experience through school-based press conferences. In terms of writing competence, learners were generally rated as "Somewhat Competent" across all evaluated areas, with the highest proficiency found in Standards and Awareness of the Journalist's Creed (mean = 3.44), indicating a strong grasp of journalistic ethics, while the lowest was observed in Technical Competence (mean = 3.00), reflecting challenges in format, grammar, and structural execution. Statistical analysis showed

a significant correlation between students' socioeconomic background and their writing competence in five of seven assessed areas, suggesting that economic conditions influenced access to resources and opportunities. Similarly, journalism-specific experience showed a strong positive correlation with key writing competencies, especially linguistic cognitive and strategic discourse skills, highlighting the impact of practical exposure on student performance.

SUGGESTIONS

To enhance the writing competence of SPJ students, it is recommended to provide equitable access to essential learning resources such as journalism textbooks, speech laboratories, and digital tools that support technical skill development. Additionally, schools should increase opportunities for hands-on journalistic experiences, especially in underrepresented categories like photojournalism and headline writing, to broaden students' exposure and practical understanding. Strengthening foundational writing instruction and targeted technical training is also crucial to help learners progress beyond the "Somewhat Competent" level, ensuring they acquire the comprehensive skills needed to meet professional journalistic standards.

CONCLUSION

While SPJ students at Jacinto P. Elpa National High School show promising levels of ethical understanding in journalism, their technical and linguistic competencies require further support. Background factors, particularly prior journalistic experience, and socioeconomic status, significantly impact writing performance.

Area for Further Research (Optional)

Future studies may examine longitudinal improvements post-intervention and assess writing competence in digital journalism formats.

FIGURES, TABLES AND REFERENCES

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Age	Age Bracket	Frequency	Percentage
	12	9	12%
13	21	28%	
14	21	28%	
15	20	27%	
16 above	4	5%	
TOTAL		75	100%
Sex	Category	Frequency	Percentage
	Male	20	27%
Female	51	68%	
Non-Binary	4	5%	
TOTAL		75	100%
Grade Level	Level	Frequency	Percentage
	G7	18	24%
G8	17	23%	
G9	24	32%	
G10	16	21%	



TOTAL		75	100%
School Graduated From	School	Frequency	Percentage
	SSES	2	3%
	TCES	6	8%
	TES	10	13%
	TPES	26	35%
	Others	31	41%
TOTAL		75	100%
Socio-Economic Background	Source	Frequency	Percentage
	Self-Employed	27	36%
	Private Employee	5	7%
	Others	43	57%
TOTAL		75	100%
Family Income	Amount	Frequency	Percentage
	Less Than P4,999	19	25%
	P5,000-P9,999	19	25%
	P10,000-P14,999	2	3%
	P15,000-P19,999	9	12%
	P20,000-ABOVE	26	35%
TOTAL		75	100%
Parental Education background	Level	Frequency	Percentage
	Elem Level	1	1%
	Hs Level	7	9%
	Hs Grad	15	20%
	College Level	9	12%
	College Grad	39	52%
	Others	4	5%
TOTAL		75	100%
Journalism Specific Background	Background	Frequency	Percentage
	SBPC	67	89%
	DSPC	4	5%
	RSPC	3	4%
	NSPC	1	1%
TOTAL		75	100%
Medium	Category	Frequency	Percentage
	ENGLISH	40	51%
	FILIPINO	35	44%
TOTAL		75	100%
Contest Category	Category	Frequency	Percentage
	News Writing	5	7%
	Feature Writing	14	19%
	Editorial Writing	11	15%
	Sports Writing	4	5%
	Copyreading	10	13%
	Headline Writing	1	1%
	Editorial Cartooning	8	11%
	Photojournalism	1	1%
Others	21	28%	
TOTAL		75	100%
Learning Environment	Environment	Frequency	Percentage
	Availability Of Speech Lab	4	5%
	Availability Of Journalism Textbook	8	11%
	Access To Local Journalism Org	6	8%
	Access To News/Media Outlets	7	9%
	Access To Teacher's Technical Support	50	67%
TOTAL		75	100%



The Special Program in Journalism (SPJ) has a diverse demographic, with most students in their early teens. However, socio-economic disparities, such as low monthly income and informal jobs, limit access to essential learning tools. Despite

technical support from teachers, only a small fraction have access to structured resources. Addressing these disparities is crucial for developing writing proficiency and preparing students for future journalistic demands.

Table 2. Level of Journalistic Writing Competence of SPJ Students of SPJ Learners

Summary on the Level of Journalistic Writing Competence of SPJ Students of SPJ Learners			
Indicators	Mean	Adjectival Rating	Interpretation
Linguistic Cognitive Competence	3.14	Neutral	Somewhat Competent
Strategic Discourse Competence	3.12	Neutral	Somewhat Competent
Socio-Linguistic Competence	3.03	Neutral	Somewhat Competent
Pragmatics Competence	3.29	Neutral	Somewhat Competent
Standards & Awareness of Journalist's Creed Competence	3.44	Agree	Competent
Technical Competence	3.00	Neutral	Somewhat Competent
Affective Competence	3.34	Neutral	Somewhat Competent
Over-all Mean	3.19	Neutral	Somewhat Competent

The study reveals that while SPJ learners possess a foundational grasp of journalistic writing, their skills are still developing. The highest-scoring competence, Standards & Awareness of Journalist's Creed, is not addressed by the provided studies, as they mainly focus on linguistic and technical aspects of writing rather than ethical awareness. The lowest-scoring area, Technical Competence, is supported by both local and foreign

research. The "Somewhat Competent" levels in Linguistic Cognitive Competence, Strategic Discourse Competence, and Socio-Linguistic Competence are also supported by the literature. These issues are systemic and persist from secondary to tertiary education, suggesting that there is a need for intensified development in practical, technical, and nuanced linguistic aspects of writing.

Table 3. Relationship Between the Demographic Profile and Level of Writing Competence of SPJ Learners

Variables Tested	Computed r	P-value	Decision	Conclusion	
Linguistic Cognitive	Age	0.014	0.903	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Sex	0.124	0.289	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Grade Level	0.046	0.696	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Socio	0.304	0.009	Reject Ho	Significant
	Parents Background	0.192	0.100	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Journalism Background	0.375	0.001	Reject Ho	Significant
Strategic Discourse	Age	0.137	0.241	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Sex	0.048	0.685	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Grade Level	0.065	0.582	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Socio	0.301	0.010	Reject Ho	Significant
	Parents Background	0.058	0.622	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Journalism Background	0.282	0.014	Reject Ho	Significant
Socio-Linguistic	Age	0.001	0.996	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Sex	0.134	0.253	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Grade Level	0.030	0.797	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Socio	0.170	0.150	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Parents Background	0.171	0.143	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Journalism Background	0.286	0.013	Reject Ho	Significant
Pragmatics	Age	0.056	0.635	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Sex	0.151	0.194	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Grade Level	0.023	0.844	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Socio	0.159	0.179	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Parents Background	0.163	0.162	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant



	Journalism Background	0.142	0.225	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
Standards & Awareness of Journalist's Creed	Age	0.030	0.800	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Sex	0.175	0.133	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Grade Level	0.054	0.647	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Socio	0.342	0.003	Reject Ho	Significant
	Parents Background	0.199	0.087	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Journalism Background	0.215	0.065	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
Technical	Age	0.028	0.810	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Sex	0.033	0.776	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Grade Level	0.019	0.872	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Socio	0.255	0.029	Reject Ho	Significant
	Parents Background	0.028	0.814	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Journalism Background	0.261	0.024	Reject Ho	Significant
Affective	Age	0.025	0.831	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Sex	0.063	0.589	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Grade Level	0.035	0.767	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Socio	0.274	0.019	Reject Ho	Significant
	Parents Background	0.102	0.382	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Journalism Background	0.275	0.017	Reject Ho	Significant

The study reveals a complex relationship between a student's demographic profile and their journalistic writing proficiency. Journalistic Specific Background is the most significant variable, with hands-on experience from School-Based Press Conferences crucial for developing diverse skills. Socioeconomic background positively correlates with various aspects of journalistic writing competence. Age, sex, and grade level are non-correlating variables, suggesting experiential learning is more important than demographic classifications.

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