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Corresponding author
E-mail: byong3@hanmail.net

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The Effect of MILITARY Academy's Writing Course for Military Cadets' Writing Proficiency

Jung Byong-sam^{1*}

Korea Army Academy at Yeongchoen, Yeongcheon, Republic of Korea

Choi Jae-ho²

Korea Army Academy at Yeongchoen, Yeongcheon, Republic of Korea

Jun Young-gon³

Korea Army Academy at Yeongchoen, Yeongcheon, Republic of Korea

Abstract

This study examined the effects of a military academy's writing education program on the cadets' development of short- and long-term writing performance with topics of military document. It intends to prove whether intensive writing course participants demonstrate higher grades at the end of a semester compared to non-participants. As academic writing is one of the most important objectives of college education, many universities and colleges offer short- and long-term writing courses for their students. Some of the courses are required, not optional, then the students need to participate in the intensive or developmental course to fulfill the writing assignments. Military officers have to write a daily report, drill & training plan, personnel management report, and many other military documents in their daily routine. They, for their duties, need more than intermediate level of writing proficiency for their long-term career development. Most of the military academies, therefore, offer writing courses in their regular curriculum to satisfy the cadets' educational need. Korea Army Academy at Yeong-choen (KAAY) educates and trains cadets as commissioned officers for Republic Korea Army (ROKA) who are fully equipped with competencies as commanding officers and staffs. Military cadets of KAAY, however, are not provided with writing courses in their regular curriculum although they need more than intermediate-level writing proficiency. For the purpose of this study, 23 participants of the writing program were employed as treatment group and another 23 non-participants were employed as control group. Two research questions guided the study: First, do the military cadets who participate in a military academy's intensive writing course differ from non-participants in regard to writing test score? Second, is there a difference between cumulative grade point average for participants of the intensive writing course and non-participants? The independent variable of the study was defined as participation in the extra-curricular writing course. Participants were those cadets who fully completed the writing course for two months. Non-participants were those cadets who tested into the pretest writing assignment of military resume of less than 3 pages while participants and the non-participants were assigned posttest of writing a document of inauguration remark as a platoon leader. The first dependent variable was the grade of the diagnostic test on both treatment and control groups and the second dependent variable was the grade of the posttest. A t test was conducted to compare the mean pretest writing scores of both treatment and control groups. No significant difference was found between treatment group ($M = 61.31$, $SD = 10.53$) and control group ($M = 62.07$, $SD = 9.86$), $t(df=62) = -1.03$, $p = .46$. The results of the t test proved the equivalence of the both groups in the regard of writing proficiency. A covariance test of posttest score of writing was conducted to investigate whether a significant difference existed between the mean writing grades of posttest showed a significant difference. The treatment group ($M = 73.85$, $SD = 12.08$) demonstrated a higher mean writing grade on post-test(inauguration remark) than the control group ($M = 65.29$, $SD = 11.04$), $F(1, 54) = 2.23$, $p = .03$ with the covariate of pretest score.

[Keywords] *Military Cadets, Writing Education Program, Writing Proficiency, Analysis of Variance, Program Evaluation*

1. Introduction

This study examined the effects of a military academy's writing education program on the cadets' development of short- and long-term writing performance. It intends to prove whether intensive writing course participants demonstrate higher grades at the end of a semester compared to non-participants. As academic writing is one of the most important objectives of college education, many universities and colleges offer short- and long-term writing courses for their students[1]. Some of the courses are required, not optional, then the students need to participate in the intensive or developmental course to fulfill the writing assignments.

Military officers have to write a daily report, drill & training plan, personnel management report, and many other military documents in their daily routines. They, for their duties, need more than intermediate level of writing proficiency for their long-term career development. Most of the military academies, therefore, offer writing courses in their regular curriculum to satisfy the cadets' educational need. Korea Army Academy at Yeongchoen (KAAY) educates and trains cadets as commissioned officers for Republic Korea Army (ROKA) who are fully equipped with competencies as commanding officers and staffs. Military cadets of KAAY, however, are not provided with writing courses in their regular curriculum although they need more than intermediate-level writing proficiency.

The researchers of this study, therefore, offered an intensive and developmental writing course for the military cadets of KAAY for two months and tried to investigate the effect of the writing education program. Some remedial and developmental writing courses, as a supplemental class, have been offered intermittently in extra-curricular activities for the cadets at KAAY academic board. The educational effect, however, never been scientifically investigated for almost two decades. This study, therefore, has enough value and

necessity to be conducted for curriculum development and evaluation for KAAY and other military academies.

Jones suggested a guideline for contemporary competencies of college graduates for their current and future career development. He pointed out that writing skill along with speech and active listening is one of the core competencies for a future leader who is capable of personal and massive communication[2]. Writing proficiency is one of the most important competencies of the college graduates, however, it takes students much time to promote. Colleges and universities, recently, have been emphasizing the importance of academic writing to their students and require them to make a writing portfolio[3]. Compared to the emphasis, however, appropriate educational programs for writing has been insufficient because of shortage of budget or qualified faculty.

Educators of military academies, therefore, need to consider offering specially-designed writing course for military cadets who do not have much free time to invest. Lea and Street[4] insisted that there are institutional pressures on academics about the academic writing and those pressures cause conflict between learners and institutions. To solve the problem, researchers[5] of literacy developed a program on academic writing for faculty members and staffs that combined practical strategies for productive writing; rhetorics, structures and styles, and grammar. General components of the writing program, in detail, are (a) helping the writers find topics, (b) developing a focus for the writing, and (c) promoting incremental writing a term coined from discussion in the program referring to writing as a series of short essays[6]. Typical two-month-long writing program is composed of 10 steps like below[7]: 1. Getting started: free writing and generative writing → 2. Personal writing goal: targeting a journal → 3. Developing an outline → 4. Detailed outline: themes and sub-themes → 5. Draft abstract

→ 6. Regular writing → 7. Draft introduction (with feedback) → 8. Write review of literature (with feedback) → 9. Write drafts of all sections (with feedback) → 10. Feedback from journals and resubmitting.

The process was initiated with a start-up meeting, introducing the educational & developmental writing approach and allowing considerable time for discussion of personal writing goals. The most important purpose of the meeting was to establish balance between internal and external motivation. It is important that participants should develop personal motivation for their writing projects; fulfilling the writing requirements might not be sufficient motivation in itself. Further meetings are to be held at what have emerged as key points in the 2-month process: the second meeting, shortly after the rest, maintains momentum and enabled further goal definition; the third, halfway through, provides a supportive stocktaking and forward-planning turning point; and the final meeting, at the end of 2 months, assesses progress of writing projects and the impact of the program on writing practices. For the four meetings, cadets discuss the agendas and personally modify the topics into their own writing projects. Writing education is a time-consuming process that the allocated time is influenced by participants' involvement and effort.

In order to modify the program to its context within a military academy and to enable the research, new elements were introduced. That is, researchers encourage the cadets to focus on the military communication in writing and the official documents having characteristics of conciseness, defectiveness, and secrecy. The institution administrators add internal regulations of the document-production that the cadets have to exercise to implement in order to abide in the military professionalism.

The program was co-managed by a visiting instructor in the role of 'writing expert' and the internal instructors in the role of the 'interim supporter'— helping to maintain motivation by asking questions, showing interest and offering help so that regular writing should keep in participants' agendas. A peer-

writer helping system, the aim of which was to encourage participants to meet in pairs, was implemented titled "study buddy". The study buddies as a couple meet every Wednesday regularly to evaluate their progress, share strategies and to read and give feedback on the working writing drafts. The third new element in the program, developed with the group members, was the introduction of a monitoring process. The monitoring form set the agenda for study peer meetings, encouraged setting of writing deadlines and interim goals, and possibly stimulated motivation and momentum. In addition, it provided a tracking device, giving interim as well as external measures of writers' progress. This helped the internal instructors and cadets to identify difficulties.

That is, participants fill in monitoring forms as a reflective journal completing at every study peer meeting. These forms were developed for three reasons. The first was to give structure to the meetings and the second was to record the writing which participants had done since previous meeting, including details of the amount of time, number of words and sections completed. In this way, progress, however small it seemed, became visible. Finally, the third reason for the monitoring form was to set writing subgoals, including themes and subthemes for the writing project. These subgoals could be matched against recorded progress on the successive monitoring form. Participants could then see whether their subgoals had been met. Generally, they had been exceeded, rarely were subgoals unachieved, but frequently participants were concerned that they had not 'done enough', even though their targets had been met.

This may be an expression of the high expectations they held for themselves. Indeed, researchers observed that participants often set writing targets that were too ambitious. This may be an indication of lack of realistic goal-setting skills for writing or of lack of draft. Monitoring forms helped writers to break the writing into a series of smaller tasks. Beginning writers evaluate this approach make writing more manageable, giving satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment when each task is completed. The forms frequently

demonstrated that writers were working incrementally. As an essential part of the developmental process, meetings of the writing program were designed to allow time for discussion; recurring topics were writing habits, successes, failures, problems, feelings and anxieties. The group facilitators took notes to record participants' ongoing contributions to this dialogue. Their recorded summaries made it possible to track individuals as they engaged with the writing process. Early in the program, for example, writers spoke often about barriers to writing, in particular, lack of time due to high teaching loads, frequent interruptions and marking. Another theme was the lack of motivation and/or difficulty to contact the editor.

As the program progressed, however, conversations gradually become more positive and focus on solutions or strategies for meeting personal goals. For example, after two meetings, cadets began to find solutions to the lack of time for writing, such as 'making' time to write in the library and study room. This indicates a willingness and ability to use brief periods of time for productive writing. Increasing self-awareness of personal writing processes seemed to be stimulated by the opportunity to share personal thoughts, and explicitly to articulate how they engaged in the writing process. Once stated publicly, it seemed easier for individuals to develop further their own strategies for writing. In addition, the 'others are in the same boat' phenomenon was often mentioned and seemed to prove reassuring for writers.

Another theme in program meetings was the increase in motivation, often linked to an increase in confidence to engage with editors, to ask for advice and editorial comments from peers and to submit papers to the instructors—all activities which were reported on the monitoring forms. Many participants reported increase in motivation, and enthusiasm, for writing. Participants' evaluations of the education program repeatedly combined different elements of the writing process; it is difficult in these reports to separate increased motivation from the renewed creativity and enthusiasm that accompanies it.

Again, a complex picture of the writing process emerges. For the purpose of this study, 23 participants of the writing program were employed as treatment group and another 23 non-participants were employed as control group. Two research questions guided the study.

1. Do the military cadets who participate in a military academy's intensive writing course differ from non-participants in regard to writing test score?

2. Is there a difference between cumulative grade point average for participants of the intensive writing course and non-participants?

2. Method

2.1. Research design

This study used a quasi-experimental research design of static comparison control group, which is characterized by the facts that (1) there was no deliberate manipulation of the independent variables by the researchers, (2) there is a control group that has an equivalent qualities but not the product of randomized sampling [8], and (3) the study involved a secondary analysis of data that were available from the cadets' record database at the academic board where the study was conducted. This design allowed the researchers to investigate the potential relationships between participation in a military academy's intensive writing course and short- and long-term academic performance using a non-experimental comparison design. The literature suggests that military cadets need writing skill for their military career as staff officers and instructors. Based on this research, this study follows a sample of cadets with at least one year of experience beyond initial enrollment at a military academy located in south-east Korea.

2.2. Description of the setting

The research site was a public military academy located in the southeast Korea. The academy offers bachelor's degree and military officer's career programs that lead to im-

mediate commissioning, and to undergraduate programs. The experimental group consisted of 23 cadets taking an extracurricular activity from September 1, 2016 to December 18, 2016 focusing on Korean language proficiency. The writing program offered consisted with 4 weeks of initial writing rubrics and 4 weeks of writing practice with instructor's man-to-man guidance. The instructor assigned one writing topic to the cadets and they wrote a manuscript, and edited until to the end of each session up to the instructor's grade. As the military academy is a predominantly male institution that 97% of the Corps of Cadet are male military cadets. That gender population might have influence on the cadets' writing style. Cadets who belonged to the extra-curricular course of Korean Language were eligible for the writing education program.

2.3. Description of the development writing course

The writing course is a non-credit special course that was offered to the cadets who were taking the extra-curricular Korean Language Club. It offered 4-hours per a week for two months from April 2016 to May. Each course, the instructor present a writing topic related to military official document like daily drill plan, inauguration remark, military resume, and service plan, etc.

The instructor taught the cadets overall organization of the writing topic, method to add details of the central sentence, and to revise the writing document. Cadets taking the course submitted the writing assignment to the instructor and received the feedback on the assignment to improve their writing skills. The overall design of the writing course involves four major segments: (a) essay writing, (b) sentence structure, (c) grammar and word usage, and (d) punctuation, diction, and spelling. The writing course was designed to prepare cadets for the college-level Korea course and assist them in developing the communication skills for military work of commanding and staff coordination. They will need both on a personal level and in their chosen military brand fields.

2.4. Description of variables

The independent variable of the study was defined as participation in the extra-curricular writing course. Participants were those cadets who fully completed the writing course for two months. Non-participants were those cadets who tested into the pretest writing assignment of military resume of less than 3 pages while participants and the non-participants were assigned posttest of writing a document of inauguration remark as a platoon leader. The first dependent variable was the grade of the diagnostic test on both treatment and control groups and the second dependent variable was the grade of the post-test.

2.5. Data analysis

All data were initially subjected to the appropriate descriptive analyses (central tendency and dispersion) based on the type of data the variable represented. To test for significant differences between the dependent variables based on participation and nonparticipation in the developmental writing class, covariance analyses were used. The pretest grade was used as a covariate while the post-test grade was compared between the treatment and control group. Those variables which were continuous and appropriate for the covariance test included writing test score and cumulative grade point average.

3. Results

3.1. Pretest score

A t test was conducted to compare the mean pretest writing scores of both treatment and control groups. No significant difference was found between treatment group ($M = 61.31, SD = 10.53$) and control group ($M = 62.07, SD = 9.86$), $t(df=62) = -1.03, p = .46$. The results of the t test proved the equivalence of the both groups in the regard of writing proficiency.

3.2. Degree-completion intent

A chi-square test to investigate the relationship of degree-certificate intent to partic-

ipation in the writing course showed no significant association $\chi^2_{(1, n=56)} = .57, p = .45$. The result of the chi-square test demonstrated that there was no systematic relationship between the participation of the writing program and the involvement in the military institution.

3.3. Cumulative grade point average

The t test conducted to determine whether a significant difference existed between the mean cumulative grade point average of the treatment group and control group. The treatment group ($M = 3.11, SD = 1.42$) had a slightly higher cumulative grade point average than the control group ($M = 3.08, SD = 1.38$). A t test was conducted to determine whether a significant difference existed between the mean cumulative grade point average between the two groups and the result showed no significant difference, $t_{(df=54)} = -.90, p = .41$ at the end of the semester. This result showed that there was no pre-existing difference in cognitive ability between the two groups.

3.4. Posttest score of writing grade

A covariance test of posttest score of writing was conducted to investigate whether a significant difference existed between the mean writing grades of posttest showed a significant difference. The treatment group ($M = 73.85, SD = 12.08$) demonstrated a higher mean writing grade on posttest (inauguration remark) than the control group ($M = 65.29, SD = 11.04$), $F_{(1, 54)} = 2.23, p = .03$ with the covariate of pretest score.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

4.1. General discussion

The educational writing course for military cadets participants showed significant effect on their improvement of writing proficiency regardless of degree-completion intent and grade point average. This finding does support previous findings by Roueche and Roueche[9] that a educational writing program would improve the college-level learners' writing skill. Military cadets especially,

have to write daily report, drill& training plan briefing, and personnel management report, etc after they serve as commissioned officers. Those duties require them to demonstrate enough writing skill.

This finding of significant difference in the posttest supports McCabe and Day's claim that the intensive writing education are helpful in many ways in the higher education learners' cognitive development[10]. A significant relationship was found between initial participation in the developmental writing course and cumulative grade point average. The participants in the writing education program had a significantly higher writing skill and efficacy in the literacy. These data support a component of the findings by Boylan[11] that students who participate in developmental education earn higher grades in comparison to their nonparticipating peers. Boylan and Bonham[12] and Smith[13] also found a significant positive relationship between participation in a educational writing course and grades in college-level composition courses. They found that most of the students who completed educational writing succeeded in college-level writing requirements. Hodges[14] found that students who completed the educational writing programs in language course were successful in subsequent regular college-level courses, although their grades were not significantly higher than those of their "regular" student counterparts.

The findings from the present study are congruent with previous research discussed in this section that includes college students and all academic areas of developmental education. Additionally, the present study has provided evidence to suggest that military academy cadets also receive benefits from an education writing course. Finally, the present study expands this body of literature as it has focused on one specific population (military academy cadets) and on one specific component of developmental education programs (writing).

This finding supports the National Association of Developmental Education's position, as well as the claim by Roueche and Roueche[15], that writing course must be

provided before students' successful completion of requirements. For those students who took the writing program showed significantly higher efficacy in comprehension and composition than those who never enrolled in the developmental writing course. This finding suggests that the developmental writing course during the academic semester of the military academy is beneficial to the cadets.

4.2. Relationship to theory

The results of this study confirm a positive relationship between participation in an educational writing course and short- and long-term academic performance in the regard that the educational writing participants earned higher writing grades and cumulative grade point averages than did nonparticipants. The educational writing course is designed for the cadets who are concentrated in Korean language proficiency and critical higher-level thinking. As the learners gain knowledge in writing and begin to absorb the writing skill, they move from the developmental writing course to college-level work, which parallels the more complex composition. As the cadets move to the higher levels of thought, they should also be moving closer to their academic goals. Perry [16] advocates the understanding of "students in motion" rather than entrapping them in achievement label. Student development is a dynamic process, and Perry recognizes that as students go through this process, the way they think, their self-concept, and the lens through which they view the world change. Educators, therefore, should encourage the learners to make continuous efforts to improve their academic capability like reading, technical writing, and critical thinking.

4.3. Implications and recommendations for policy and practice

This study examined the relationships between participation in a military academy's educational writing course and military cadets' short-term writing proficiency. This study's findings lead to several implications for practice for military academy's administration, advisors, and faculty members. Alt-

hough this study was conducted at one institution, the implications for practice and policy may be helpful to other military institutions that are trying to find ways to improve short- and long-term academic performance. Since the study was conducted at one institution, the results may or may not apply generally, depending upon the similarities of the institutions and their population. Both the demographics of the cadets and the content and instructional delivery of the educational writing course would need to be taken into consideration [17].

First of all, placement into educational writing coursework needs to occur during the initial semester because the effect of the writing education would apply to other regular classes for long-term effect. This study suggests that military institution students benefit from institutional-level benefit for the cadets participating in the educational writing program during the college-level coursework. This study confirmed the conclusions of Roueche and Roueche: Students need to complete developmental writing courses before being allowed to enroll in college-level courses.

Military academy's advisors could utilize this information regarding the effectiveness of required and optional coursework as they advise in cadets' course selection. Perhaps this study will aid with the advisement in convincing the students that the course is worth their investment of money and time. The later participants, who took the developmental writing course after their first semester, showed significantly lower mean cumulative grade point averages, yet they persisted for more semesters than did students who never engaged in the course. However, it should also be recognized that some differences might not be due just to the course. A study such as this has limitations that include not being able to control all extraneous variables [18].

Based on the findings of this study, military academy administrators need to implement policies and procedures to ensure that cadets are eligible to take educational writing course during their academic coursework. Additionally, advisors should be directed not to allow

cadets to make the choice of enrollment or nonenrollment on their own, but rather they should follow the policies and procedures that are in place for making this decision. The cadets who take the course during their initial semester are making higher grades cumulatively. Procedures and policies that best prepare cadets for their courses need to be supported by faculty from across the military academy. That is, cadets need to be properly placed and not set up for academic failure[19].

This study examined the results of the relationships between participation in a military academy's education writing course and short- and long-term academic performance at a rural public military academy. Although useful information was uncovered by this research, the findings also led to more unanswered questions. As interest in military education expands and increases, so do the numbers of cadet requiring remediation in the area of academic writing. This study investigated supplementary educational writing within a military academy as one specific intervention recommended to improve the performance of these cadets. The findings from this study support that military academies need to continue to plan and implement interventions related to educational writing. This type of intervention does work in helping cadets meet short-term academic goals in the educational setting.

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Lead Author
Jung Byong-sam / Korea Army Academy at Yeongcheon Professor
 B.A. Korea Army Academy at Yeongchoen
 M.A. Yonsei University
 Ph.D. University of Virginia

Research field
 - Factors Affecting the Korea Army Soldier's Perception of Combat Readiness: Multi-Level Analysis, International Journal of Military Affairs, 1(1) (2016).
 - Effects of Multiculturalism Education for Korean Military Cadets, International Journal of Terrorism & National Security, 1(2) (2016).

Major career
 - 2010~present. Korea Army Academy at Yeongchoen, Professor.
 - 2016~present. International Society for Military Affairs, Editor in Administrator.

Co-author
Choi Jae-ho / Korea Army Academy at Yeongcheon Professor
 B.A. Daegu University
 M.A. Kyungpook National University
 Ph.D. Kyungpook National University

Research field
 - The Effect of Military Academy's Writing Course for Military Cadets' Writing Proficiency, International Journal of Military Affairs, 2(1) (2017).

Major career
 - 2010~present. Korea Army Academy at Yeongchoen, Professor.
 - 2017~present. International Society for Military Affairs, Member.

Co-author
Jun Young-gon / Korea Army Academy at Yeongcheon Lecturer
 B.A. Kyungpook National University
 M.A. Kyungpook National University
 Ph.D. Kyungpook National University

Research field
 - The Effect of Military Academy's Writing Course for Military Cadets' Writing Proficiency, International Journal of Military Affairs, 2(1) (2017).

Major career
 - 2010~present. Department of Education, Korea Army Academy at Yeongchoen, Lecturer.
 - 2017~present. International Society for Military Affairs, Member.