

The Efficacy of the University-level Remedial Writing Program

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Abstract

Remedial writing is a course for post-secondary students lacking skills necessary to perform college-level work at the level required by the institution. This is an experimental study that sought to find whether university-level remedial writing program is effective in enhancing the academic success of the students. It also sought to find which student's gender predict student achievement in writing skills. This study employed the pretest–posttest research design. One intact summer class comprising 36 post-secondary students from public and private schools who were failed from the College Admission Test are the subject of the study. All sessions were held three hours daily from Sunday to Thursday for five weeks. The sessions were a sort of seminar-write shop with the students; it's a learner-centered activity. The instrument was a researcher-made and was subjected to validity and reliability analyses. Necessary revisions on the instruments were done to ensure that they were valid and reliable. All instruments were administered as pretest and posttest. A non-parametric statistical test particularly the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was used to test the difference in the pretest and posttest result of the remedial writing program. The test of significance conducted revealed that students exposed in the remedial writing program performed significantly better after the remediation proper. The t-test was also used to determine that gender predicts student achievement from writing skills. Results showed that female students performed better than the male counterparts in the remedial writing program. It is highly recommended that University-level remedial writing program should be conducted to underprepared students for college entry.

Key words: Remedial writing program, university-level

1. Introduction

Writing well is not just an option for young people—it is a necessity. Along with reading comprehension, writing skill is a predictor of academic success and a basic requirement for participation in civic life and in the global economy. (Graham et al, 2007).

Inadequate academic preparation is no longer a barrier to college access. Remedial or developmental courses can help bridge this gap. The University serves as a catalyst to prepare the underprepared students to the level of skill competency expected of new college freshmen using experimented variety of ameliorative strategies developing abilities and remedial programs, (Calucag, 2012).

Many educational institutions and traditional camps offer creative writing camps for children across the United States, particularly during the summer months, like, Lekha School of Creative Writing, Interlochen Center, Butler University, Douglas College Summer Camps, Vancouver Summer Camps, Florida Summer Camps and University of Hawaii.

Postsecondary **remedial education** (also known as postsecondary remediation, developmental education, basic skills education, compensatory education, preparatory education, or academic upgrading) is composed primarily of sequences of increasingly advanced courses designed to bring underprepared students to the level of skill competency expected of new entrants to postsecondary education. Remedial courses were defined as courses in reading, writing, and mathematics for college students lacking skills necessary to perform college-level work at the level required by the institution. This type of education is especially prominent in North America. Estimates suggest that as many as 41% of all new college freshmen in the United States enroll in remedial coursework during their postsecondary pursuits, (Wikipedia, 2012)

The fact remains that remedial education has been part of higher education in United States since early colonial days, (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000),. Dating back to the 17th century, Harvard College provided tutors in Greek and Latin for those underprepared students who did not want to study for the ministry. The middle of the 18th century saw the establishment of land-grant colleges, which instituted preparatory programs or departments for students below average in reading, writing, and arithmetic skills (Payne & Lyman, 1998 as cited by Merisotis & Phipps). In 1849, the first remedial education programs in reading, writing, and arithmetic were offered at the University of Wisconsin (Breneman & Haarlow, 1998 as cited by Merisotis & Phipps). By the end of the 19th century, when only 238,000 students were enrolled in all of higher education, more than 40% of first-year college students participated in precollegiate programs (Ignash, 1997 as cited by Merisotis & Phipps).

The discussion of remedial education evokes the image of courses in reading, writing, and mathematics whose content is below “college-level. The term “college-level” suggests that agreed-upon standards exist, or at least

enjoy a consensus by educators. A reasonable assumption would be that the academic community has identified specific knowledge and skills that are required of students to be successful in a college or university. Conversely, if students do not possess the specified knowledge and skills, remedial education is needed for academic success, (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000).

The components of a successful remedial/developmental education program include an effective organizational structure, mandatory assessment and diagnostic testing, required orientation, a variety of instructional approaches, integrated learning assistance, structured advising and career/education planning, an effective monitoring system, well prepared faculty, and an effective evaluation system.

While remedial programs are common in the United States, they are less common in Europe. Nevertheless, several European higher education institutes have started to offer remedial education programs as well. One of the reasons why European universities are starting to develop remedial courses is the different situation in the two continents. In the United States, a common assumption is that remediation attracts underprepared students of low socio-economic status. Inadequate academic preparation is no longer a barrier to college access. In contrast, in Europe a large part of the transitional problems are caused by differences among national secondary educational programs which are determined on a national level. Therefore these students are hindered to effectively start a bachelor. Remedial or developmental courses can help to bridge this gap, (Wikipedia, 2012).

One way of measuring the effectiveness of a developmental/remedial program is to investigate whether the enrolled students actually complete the remedial courses successfully. Several researches found that underprepared students who completed remedial coursework achieve greater academic success than underprepared students who didn't complete remedial coursework or students who started college academically prepared.

Kozeracki (2002) distinguishes seven commonly cited elements that are associated with student success in developmental programmes:

- Orientation, assessment, and placement are mandatory for new students
- Clearly specified goals and objectives are established for courses and programmes
- The adult learning theory is applied in the design and delivery of the courses
- The courses are highly structured
- The programmes is centralized or highly coordinated
- Counseling, tutoring, and supplemental instruction components are included
- The social and emotional development of the students is taken into consideration

Other research suggests that "bridge" programs that integrate basic skills and remedial education with higher-level content or technical training can produce substantially better results than traditional remedial programs.

It goes without saying that the underprepared student is a kind of pariah in American higher education, and some of the reasons are obvious: since most of us believe that the excellence of our departments and of our institutions depends on enrolling the very best-prepared students that we can, to admit underprepared students would pose a real threat to our excellence.

Our University-level remedial writing program assisted 35 students in improving their writing skills by one step as demonstrated by standardized writing test administered after participating in the summer program for 5 weeks.

2. Methodology

This is an experimental study that sought to find whether university-level remedial writing program is effective in enhancing the academic success of the students. It also sought to find which student's gender predicts student achievement in writing skills. This study employed the pretest–posttest research design. One intact summer class comprising 36 post-secondary students from public and private schools who failed from the College Admission Test are the subject of the study. All sessions were held three hours daily from Sunday to Thursday for five weeks. The sessions were a sort of seminar-write shop with the students; it's a learner-centered activity.

The discussions of each session started with reading and comprehension. Getting the gist and the main ideas and finding the supporting details of the given passages were the primary concerns in every session. Meanings of the identified and unfamiliar words were learned using the context clues. Passages read were analyzed, synthesized and personalized. Responding to questions using the ideas presented in the passages was also part of the exercises and the activities inside the classroom. Words learned were used in the sentences provided. The uses of simple tenses of verbs were reviewed together with the prepositions and comparison of adjectives. Making and describing graphs and charts became one very interesting lesson and activity on the part of the students. Applying all the previously learned lessons on each session, the students learned to plan, write, revise and edit paragraphs making them ready and prepared to their new world in the college education.

The instrument was a researcher-made and was subjected to validity and reliability analyses. Necessary revisions on the instruments were done to ensure that they were valid and reliable. All instruments were administered as

pretest and posttest. A non-parametric statistical test particularly the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was used to test the difference in the pretest and posttest result of the remedial writing program. The t-test was also used to determine that gender predicts student achievement from writing skills.

3. Results and discussion

Table 1. Difference of Mean Score in Remedial Writing categorized by Sex

Sex	N	Mean	Mean Difference	Sig. (2-tailed)	Interpretation
Performance in Male	23	30.3043			
Remedial Writing Female	12	34.5000	-4.1957	.033*	Significant

Table 1 presents the difference of the posttest mean scores in remedial writing categorized by sex. When male and female students are compared on their performance in remedial writing, results of the t-test show that significant difference is observed ($p\text{-value} = .033$). This is proven by the yielded p-values which are noted to be lesser than .05. This means that male and female students differ in their performance in remedial writing. Furthermore, female students performed better than the male counterparts.

Table 2. Mean Score Comparison between the Pre-test and Post-test

Dependent Measure	Mean Rank	Computed Z-value ^a	p-value
(Performance in Remedial Writing) Pre-test vs Post-test	18	-5.163	0.000*

^a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

A non-parametric statistical test particularly the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test was used to test the mean score comparison between the pretest and posttest. The table shows the test of significance conducted and compared the mean ranks of the scores of the students in remedial writing program.

The test of significance conducted and which compared the mean ranks of the scores of the students in remedial writing program, as shown in Table 2, yielded p-values which was lesser than $\alpha = .05$ (two tailed). It clearly shows that there was a significant difference between mean rank scores of the pretest and posttest after the experiment proper.

Hence the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the performance of the students in the pretest and posttest is rejected. The test of significance conducted revealed that students exposed in the remedial writing program performed significantly better after the remediation proper.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

This experimental study strongly indicates that female students performed better in the remedial writing program. The study clearly shows that there was a significant difference between mean rank scores of the pretest and posttest after the experiment proper. The test of significance conducted revealed that students exposed in the remedial writing program performed significantly better after the remediation proper. It is recommended that University-level remedial writing program should be conducted to underprepared students for college entry.

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