

Pupils' Journalistic Writing Skills: Basis for a Proposed Skill Enhancement Program

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Date Submitted:

March 19, 2026

Date Accepted:

June 20, 2026

Date Published:

August 12, 2026

DOI:

10.5281/zenodo.21899144

ABSTRACT

This study assessed the journalistic writing skills of pupils at Santiago North Central School–Integrated SPED Center and used the findings as the basis for a proposed skill enhancement program. The study employed the descriptive-correlational approach stated in the thesis and gathered teacher assessments from 50 purposively selected respondents composed of school paper advisers, journalism coaches, and English and Filipino teachers involved in campus journalism. A structured questionnaire adapted from an existing student-journalism writing instrument was used, while mean scores were applied to the quantitative responses and thematic analysis guided the development of the proposed intervention. Pupils demonstrated an excellent reported category mean in news writing ($M = 3.26$) and good performance in feature writing ($M = 3.15$) and editorial writing ($M = 3.10$).

Their journalistic writing strengths were generally rated competent ($M = 3.19$), with effective use of quotations and attributions and organization of facts emerging as notable strengths. Writing difficulties were rated challenging ($M = 3.33$), particularly in identifying distinctive story angles, balancing creativity with factual accuracy, developing compelling leads, and organizing information coherently. School support was generally rated positively ($M = 3.27$), especially through workshops and collaborative activities. Based on these findings, Project INKSPIRE was proposed as a sustained school-based intervention emphasizing writing practice, reading and research, digital journalism, ethics, authentic publication experiences, and performance-based monitoring. The findings indicate that continued coaching, structured practice, and institutional support are important for strengthening pupils' journalistic writing competence and preparing them for responsible campus journalism.

Keywords: *campus journalism, journalistic writing, news writing, feature writing, editorial writing, skill enhancement program*

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a central literacy skill through which learners organize information, communicate ideas, and demonstrate understanding. In journalism, writing requires more than grammatical correctness because student writers must select facts, establish relevance, structure information, maintain accuracy, and communicate clearly for a public audience. Contemporary journalism also operates in an environment shaped by rapid information circulation, digital platforms, and misinformation, making clarity, verification, ethical judgment, and media literacy increasingly important. Harcup (2020) identifies accuracy, clarity, and responsible practice as core elements of journalism, while Kovach and Rosenstiel (2021) emphasize verification, truthfulness, fairness, independence, and accountability. These competencies are especially relevant in school journalism, where pupils are learning both the mechanics of writing and the responsibilities associated with communicating information to others.

Journalism education provides authentic opportunities for learners to apply writing skills in news, feature, and editorial forms. Such tasks require pupils to gather and organize information, develop leads and headlines,

use appropriate language and tone, support claims with evidence, and revise written work. Kim et al. (2021) showed that writing instruction can improve primary-grade writing outcomes, while Solkin (2022) noted that contemporary journalism education increasingly integrates practical writing, digital production, audience engagement, and experiential learning. The educational value of journalism therefore extends beyond preparing articles for a school paper; it also supports critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and responsible participation in an information-rich society. UNESCO (2023) similarly situates media and information literacy as an important competence for evaluating and producing information responsibly.

In the Philippine basic education context, campus journalism is supported by Republic Act No. 7079, the Campus Journalism Act, and by Department of Education initiatives that develop young writers and encourage responsible school publications. The Special Program in Journalism and school-based journalism activities provide structured opportunities for learners to strengthen writing and communication skills through contests, publications, coaching, and related experiences. At Santiago North Central School–Integrated SPED Center in Santiago City, campus journalism has been an established area of school participation. However, the source manuscript identified a need to reassess pupils' writing competence following the school's recent performance in higher-level press conference competitions. The concern was not the absence of basic journalistic knowledge, but the need to identify specific areas of strength and difficulty that could guide a more systematic enhancement program.

Accordingly, the study assessed pupils' journalistic writing skills in news writing, feature writing, and editorial writing; identified strengths and weaknesses in their writing practices; examined the school support provided for campus journalism; and used the findings to develop a proposed skill enhancement program. The study addresses a practical school-level gap by linking assessment results directly to a structured intervention rather than treating journalism performance as a single contest outcome. Its contribution lies in providing an evidence-based basis for targeted coaching, repeated writing practice, ethical journalism activities, publication experiences, and school support mechanisms that can strengthen young writers over time.

Literature Review

Campus Journalism and Journalistic Writing Competence

Journalistic writing requires a combination of linguistic competence, information judgment, and genre awareness. Briggs (2021) explains that contemporary reporting demands concise writing, accurate information handling, and the ability to communicate across digital platforms. Harcup (2021) likewise presents journalism as a field governed by specialized concepts, conventions, and practices that shape how information is selected and presented. For school journalists, these conventions become concrete through repeated tasks such as headline construction, lead writing, quotation and attribution, organization of facts, and revision. Such practice helps pupils move from general classroom writing toward writing that is purposeful, audience-aware, and accountable to evidence.

Journalism education also develops dispositions that support responsible communication. Pavlik et al. (2020) argue that journalism education should integrate ethical reasoning, media literacy, global perspectives, and critical thinking with technical competence. Zelizer (2021) similarly stresses the continuing social significance of journalism, particularly in contexts where citizens depend on reliable information. These perspectives support the educational use of campus journalism as a structured environment in which learners practice factual writing, critical evaluation, and public communication while receiving feedback from teachers, advisers, and peers.

News, Feature, and Editorial Writing

The three writing forms examined in the study demand related but distinct competencies. News writing emphasizes factual accuracy, relevance, clear leads, the 5Ws and 1H, appropriate attribution, and logical organization, commonly through the inverted-pyramid structure. Feature writing allows greater descriptive development and creativity but still requires coherence, an engaging introduction, appropriate tone, and disciplined use of language. Editorial writing requires the writer to state and sustain a position, support claims

with evidence or logical reasoning, and use persuasive yet formal language. These genre differences explain why pupils may perform strongly in one component while still needing targeted support in another.

Writing quality in these genres is strengthened through explicit instruction and repeated practice. Kim et al. (2021) found that writing instruction produces differential but meaningful gains depending on instructional focus, while Wao et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of sound assessment practices in journalism programs. In the school setting, performance-based tasks and clear rubrics can therefore help advisers identify whether a pupil's difficulty lies in information selection, organization, language mechanics, persuasive reasoning, style, or revision. This diagnostic approach is particularly useful when designing skill-enhancement activities that respond to actual weaknesses rather than applying the same training to all journalistic forms.

Digital Journalism, Media Literacy, and Ethics

Digital transformation has expanded the competencies expected of young journalists. Kirchhoff (2022) notes that journalism education must respond to changing media environments, while Jaakkola (2022) highlights the educational role of journalists and journalistic practices in developing media understanding. Digital production can increase opportunities for publication and audience engagement, but it also intensifies the need for verification, source evaluation, and ethical judgment. Broersma (2020) and Franklin (2021) underscore continuing concerns about truth, speed, and credibility in modern journalism, suggesting that technical facility with platforms should not displace core standards of accuracy and responsible reporting.

Media and information literacy provides a useful foundation for this responsibility. UNESCO (2021) emphasizes the importance of recognizing misinformation and strengthening verification practices in journalism education, while UNESCO (2023) calls for educators and learners to develop competencies for accessing, evaluating, creating, and communicating information. Ward (2021) similarly frames journalism ethics as an evolving field that must respond to changing technologies and public expectations. For campus journalists, digital skills and ethical practice are therefore best developed together through fact-checking exercises, responsible use of sources, reflection on the effects of language, and guided publication experiences.

School Support, Coaching, and Experiential Learning

Writing development is influenced not only by individual ability but also by the learning environment surrounding the writer. Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020) emphasize motivation, self-beliefs, feedback, and social processes in learning, all of which are relevant to student journalists who improve through practice and coaching. Larrondo-Ureta et al. (2021) show that journalism learning extends beyond the conventional classroom through applied and collaborative activities. School journalism programs can operationalize these principles through writing workshops, newsroom simulations, peer review, mentoring, competition preparation, publication work, and opportunities to reflect on completed articles.

Institutional capacity also shapes the continuity and quality of journalism education. Crawford et al. (2020) emphasize the role of professional development in media and communication education, while Morris and Yeoman (2023) identify journalism educators as important actors in news-literacy development. Access to resources, sufficient production time, adviser expertise, constructive feedback, and recognition of pupil work can sustain participation and provide conditions for skill growth. The literature therefore supports a school-based enhancement model that combines individual writing practice with structured coaching, appropriate resources, collaborative learning, ethical guidance, and authentic publication experiences.

Conceptual Framework

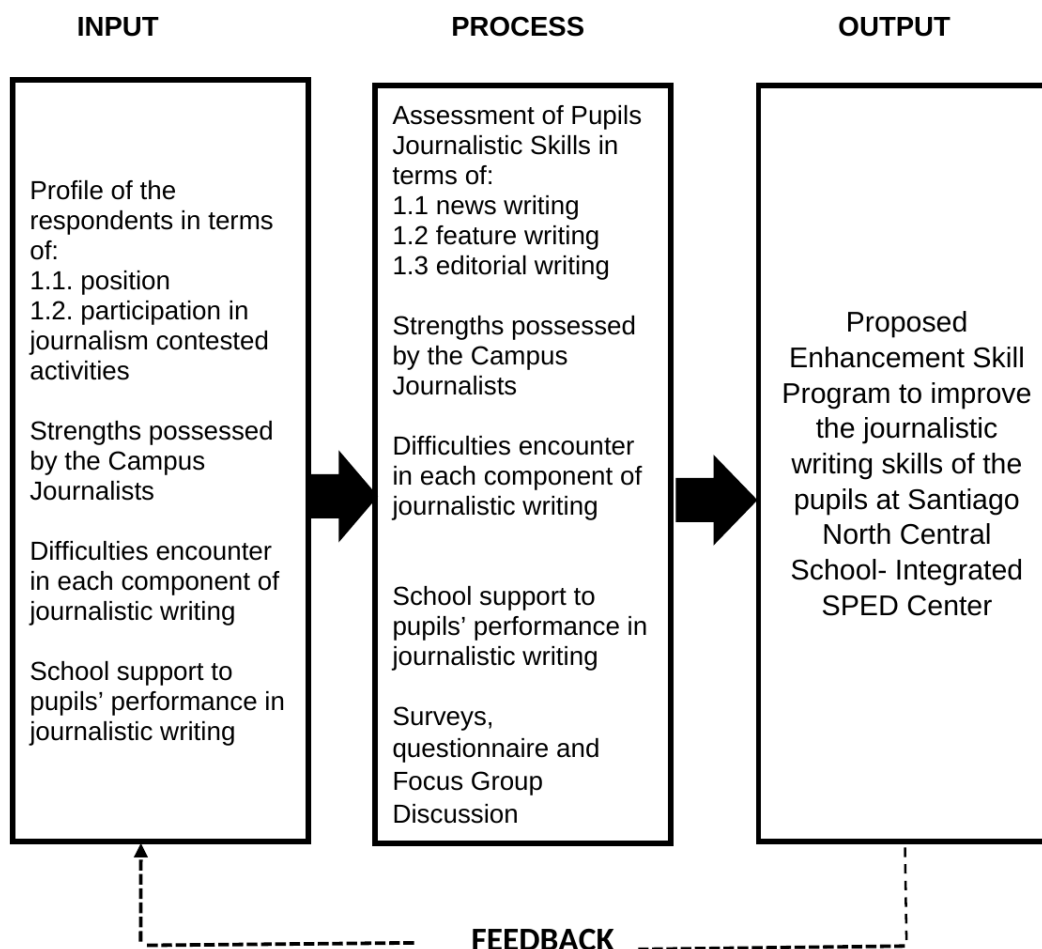


Figure 1. *The paradigm of the study.*

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed the descriptive-correlational approach stated in the thesis. The design was used to describe teacher assessments of pupils' journalistic writing skills, their observed strengths and weaknesses, and the school support provided for campus journalism. The quantitative component summarized respondents' ratings using mean scores, while qualitative thematic analysis was used to interpret information relevant to the proposed skill enhancement program. The study was nonexperimental and did not manipulate the learning conditions of pupils.

Research Locale

The study was conducted during School Year 2025–2026 at Santiago North Central School–Integrated SPED Center, City Road, Calao West, Santiago City. The school is a large public elementary institution that has

participated in journalism-related activities and press conferences. The study was undertaken in this setting because campus journalism was an established school activity and the institution sought a more systematic basis for strengthening pupils' performance in journalistic writing.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The respondent group consisted of school personnel directly involved in journalism coaching, mentoring, or language instruction. The source manuscript's population-and-sample subsection reports 50 respondents, selected purposively because of their relevant roles and first-hand experience with campus journalists. These included school paper advisers, journalism coaches, and English and Filipino teachers from Grades 4–6. Purposive sampling ensured that the assessments were provided by respondents with direct knowledge of pupils' writing performance and the school's journalism activities.

Research Instrument

The primary instrument was a structured survey questionnaire adapted, with slight modification, from the instrument used in Apple Keith M. Tanang's study on the writing skills of student journalists. The questionnaire assessed four areas: pupils' performance in news, feature, and editorial writing; strengths in journalistic writing practices; common weaknesses or challenges; and school support for the development of campus journalists. The instrument used four-point response scales whose mean ranges were interpreted according to the descriptors specified in the thesis. Qualitative information was also considered in developing the proposed intervention through thematic analysis.

Data Gathering Procedure

Before data collection, the researcher secured permission from the Schools Division Superintendent of Santiago City, the school principal of Santiago North Central School–Integrated SPED Center, and the school research focal person. The structured questionnaires were then administered to the selected teacher respondents. Completed responses were gathered and organized for analysis, after which the results were used as the empirical basis for identifying priority skill areas and designing the proposed journalism enhancement program.

Data Analysis

Mean scores were used to determine the reported level of pupils' journalistic writing skills in news, feature, and editorial writing, as well as the ratings for writing strengths, writing challenges, and school support. For the performance domains, the thesis used the following ranges: 3.25–4.00, Excellent; 2.50–3.24, Good; 1.75–2.49, Fair; and 1.00–1.74, Poor. Related four-point interpretive scales were used for the strengths, challenges, and school-support items. Thematic analysis was applied to qualitative information used to formulate the skill enhancement program. Interpretive labels in the results tables below follow the labels reported in the source manuscript.

Ethical Consideration

The researcher informed the school head, research committee, parents, and pupils regarding the conduct of the study and secured informed consent from respondents before participation. Participants were informed of the study purpose, expected procedures, potential benefits, and duration. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed that they could withdraw at any time. Permissions from relevant school authorities and the research focal person were secured, and the study emphasized confidentiality and appropriate handling of collected information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pupils' Journalistic Writing Skills

Table 1. *Summary of Pupils' Journalistic Writing Skills*

Writing Domain	Mean	Reported Interpretation
News writing	3.26	Excellent
Feature writing	3.15	Good
Editorial writing	3.10	Good

News writing obtained the highest category mean ($M = 3.26$). Pupils were particularly strong in including the 5Ws and 1H ($M = 3.50$), organizing ideas using the inverted-pyramid structure ($M = 3.32$), and presenting accurate and complete facts ($M = 3.30$). Lower ratings were observed for clear and accurate headline construction ($M = 3.10$) and presenting the most important information in the lead ($M = 3.08$). These results indicate that pupils understood the core informational requirements of news stories, while headline and lead writing remained suitable targets for further practice. The pattern is consistent with the importance placed on structure, accuracy, and audience-oriented communication in journalism practice (Briggs, 2021; Harcup, 2020).

Feature writing was rated Good ($M = 3.15$). The strongest indicator was the ability to capture the reader's attention ($M = 3.40$), followed by vivid and expressive language ($M = 3.28$) and engaging introductions ($M = 3.24$). Comparatively lower ratings were reported for developing ideas with descriptive details ($M = 2.98$) and using an appropriate feature-writing tone ($M = 2.94$). Editorial writing was likewise rated Good ($M = 3.10$), with grammar, spelling, and punctuation receiving the strongest rating ($M = 3.30$), while clearly explained and convincing arguments received the lowest ($M = 2.86$). The findings show that pupils possessed functional genre knowledge but needed deeper development of elaboration, tone, argumentation, and persuasive reasoning. Such targeted diagnosis is consistent with the value of focused writing instruction and assessment discussed by Kim et al. (2021) and Wao et al. (2020).

Strengths in Journalistic Writing Practices

Table 2. *Selected Strengths of Campus Journalists*

Indicator	Mean	Interpretation
Effective use of quotations and attributions	3.58	Very Competent
Organization of facts and details	3.50	Very Competent
Grammar and language use	3.28	Competent
Writing effectively within the given time	3.28	Competent
Adapting style to different article types	2.94	Competent
Editing and revising work	2.88	Competent
Overall	3.19	Competent

The overall strength rating was Competent ($M = 3.19$). The strongest areas were effective use of quotations and attributions ($M = 3.58$) and organization of facts and details ($M = 3.50$). These competencies are important because attribution strengthens credibility and organized information supports clarity and reader comprehension. Pupils were also rated competent in grammar and language use and in writing within the allotted time. In contrast, editing and revising ($M = 2.88$) and adapting writing style to different journalistic forms ($M = 2.94$) were the lowest-rated strengths. This suggests that pupils were more confident in constructing an initial article than in refining it or adjusting stylistic choices across genres. Journalism education literature similarly emphasizes iterative production, feedback, and genre-sensitive practice rather than one-time writing performance (Larrondo-Ureta et al., 2021; Solkin, 2022).

Challenges Encountered by Campus Journalists

Table 3. *Selected Challenges in Journalistic Writing*

Challenge	Mean	Reported Interpretation
Identifying a unique and interesting story angle	3.56	Very Challenging
Balancing creativity with factual accuracy	3.46	Challenging
Constructing compelling story leads	3.34	Challenging
Organizing facts and details coherently	3.34	Challenging
Grammar and language use	3.28	Challenging
Transitioning between paragraphs	3.28	Challenging
Overall	3.33	Challenging

The overall challenge rating was reported as Challenging ($M = 3.33$). The most pronounced difficulty was identifying a distinctive and interesting story angle ($M = 3.56$), followed by balancing creativity with factual accuracy ($M = 3.46$). Difficulties in compelling lead construction and coherent organization of facts both obtained $M = 3.34$. These results show that the main weaknesses were not limited to grammar; they also involved editorial judgment, originality, structure, and the ability to make writing engaging without compromising factual integrity. This is particularly important in contemporary journalism, where speed and audience appeal must remain subordinate to accuracy, verification, and responsible representation (Broersma, 2020; Franklin, 2021; Ward, 2021).

School Support for Campus Journalism

Table 4. *Selected School Support for Campus Journalists*

School-Support Indicator	Mean	Reported Interpretation
Monthly journalism workshops	3.46	Agree
Brainstorming and peer-review collaboration	3.44	Agree
Journalism resources/media center	3.36	Agree
Recognition of journalism achievements	3.36	Agree
Mentorship from teachers/professionals	3.32	Agree
Regular meetings on current events and ethics	3.02	Agree
Sufficient time/schedule for paper production	3.04	Agree
Overall	3.27	Agree

School support received an overall mean of 3.27 and was reported positively. Monthly workshops ($M = 3.46$) and collaborative brainstorming and peer review ($M = 3.44$) were the strongest support mechanisms, followed by access to journalism resources, recognition of pupil achievements, and mentorship. Comparatively lower ratings were reported for regular meetings on current events and ethics ($M = 3.02$) and sufficient time and scheduling for school-paper production ($M = 3.04$). The findings indicate that the school already had important structures for journalism development but could strengthen the regularity, scheduling, and ethical-discussion components of the program. This aligns with literature emphasizing professional guidance, applied learning, and institutional support in journalism education (Crawford et al., 2020; Morris & Yeoman, 2023).

Proposed Skill Enhancement Program: Project INKSPIRE

Based on the identified strengths, weaknesses, and school-support conditions, the thesis proposed Project INKSPIRE—Innovative Nurturing of Knowledge and Skills for Press Innovation, Integrity-driven, Responsible, and Ethical Journalism. The intervention was designed as a sustained school-year program rather than a single pre-competition activity. It integrates foundational writing practice, reading and current-events work, digital production, ethical journalism, authentic publication tasks, and performance-based monitoring. The structure reflects the experiential and iterative character of journalism learning and the need to combine writing competence with media literacy and ethical responsibility (Jaakkola, 2022; UNESCO, 2021, 2023).

Table 5. *Core Components of Project INKSPIRE*

Program Component	Primary Focus	Illustrative Activities	Schedule
Project WRITE	Grammar, vocabulary, news writing, headlines, and leads	Writing drills, error correction, newspaper reading, news analysis	Monthly
Reading, Research, and Digital Journalism	Reading comprehension, current events, research, and digital production	News reading, current-events activities, Canva/Publisher exploration	Throughout the year
Project INTEGRITY	Objectivity, fairness, verification, and ethical reporting	Ethics seminar, mock press conference, fact-checking exercises	Dec. 7–18, 2026
Young Journalists at Work	Authentic reporting and publication experience	School-paper production, event coverage, interviews, photojournalism	Mar. 24–30, 2027
Performance Monitoring and Recognition	Progress assessment and sustained engagement	Portfolios, rubric assessment, feedback, reflection, Gawad Batang Mamamahayag	End of school year

Project INKSPIRE directly responds to the study’s lower-rated areas. Writing drills and guided instruction address lead construction, organization, grammar, and genre adaptation; reading and news-analysis activities support vocabulary, idea generation, and awareness of current issues; ethics and fact-checking activities respond to challenges involving objectivity and factual accuracy; and authentic publication activities provide opportunities to apply skills under realistic conditions. Performance portfolios, rubric-based assessment, feedback sessions, and recognition activities create a continuous improvement cycle consistent with motivation and feedback principles described by Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020).

CONCLUSION

The study showed that the campus journalists of Santiago North Central School–Integrated SPED Center possessed an established foundation in journalistic writing but continued to need systematic enhancement in selected areas. News writing received the strongest overall rating, while feature and editorial writing were rated good and showed specific needs in descriptive development, tone, persuasive argumentation, and convincing explanation. Pupils were competent in organizing facts and using quotations and attributions, yet editing, revision, genre adaptation, story-angle development, lead construction, coherent organization, and the balance between creativity and factual accuracy remained important areas for improvement.

The school already provided meaningful support through workshops, mentorship, resources, collaboration, recognition, and publication opportunities, although regular discussions of current events and ethics and sufficient production time could be further strengthened. Taken together, the findings support the development of Project INKSPIRE as a sustained, targeted intervention that combines writing practice, reading and research, digital journalism, ethical reporting, authentic publication experiences, and performance monitoring. The study contributes a school-based framework for connecting diagnostic assessment with a practical program intended to improve the quality and responsibility of pupils’ journalistic writing.

Recommendation

1. Santiago North Central School–Integrated SPED Center should sustain regular journalism workshops that address news, feature, and editorial writing, with particular emphasis on leads, story angles, descriptive development, persuasive argumentation, revision, and genre adaptation.
2. Journalism advisers and language teachers should provide continuous coaching, individualized feedback, structured peer review, and repeated performance tasks so that pupils can refine articles after initial drafting rather than treating writing as a one-step activity.

3. Pupils should be encouraged to read credible newspapers, magazines, and digital news sources regularly to expand vocabulary, strengthen awareness of current issues, and observe professional models of journalistic structure and style.
4. The school should strengthen regular discussions on current events, verification, media ethics, and responsible use of digital platforms and should allocate adequate time, equipment, and working space for school-paper production.
5. Project INKSPIRE should be implemented with periodic portfolio and rubric-based monitoring so that advisers can document improvement and adjust activities according to emerging skill needs.
6. Future studies may use larger or more diverse samples, mixed-methods approaches, direct assessment of pupils' actual written outputs, and longitudinal evaluation of Project INKSPIRE to determine whether gains are sustained over time.

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