International Journal of Research Studies in Education
2026 Volume 15 Number 23, 49-57



Improving formal letter writing performance through rubric-based constructive written feedback

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ISSN: 2243-7703
Online ISSN: 2243-7711

OPEN ACCESS

Received: 23 September 2026 **Revised**: 6 November 2026 **Accepted**: 9 November 2026
Available Online: 10 November 2026 **DOI**: 10.5861/ijrse.2026.26319

Abstract

This study determined the effectiveness of competency-aligned rubric-based constructive written feedback in improving the letter-writing performance of Grade 7 students in a public secondary school. Specifically, it examined the students' level of performance before and after the implementation of the intervention, determined whether a significant difference existed between the pretest and posttest results, and explored the students' experiences in using the rubric. This study employed a quantitative method and engaged in a pretest-posttest design. A teacher-made analytic rubric aligned with the Grade 7 fourth-quarter English competencies was used to assess students' letter-writing performance. The empirical findings revealed that the students' pretest performance was at the developing level, while the posttest performance reached the excellent level. The paired-samples t-test indicated a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The student perception questionnaire yielded an overall mean of 3.44, interpreted as strongly agree, indicating generally positive perceptions of the rubric-based constructive written feedback. The study concludes that students demonstrated significantly higher letter-writing performance following the implementation of the competency-aligned rubric-based constructive written feedback. Based on these findings, the Rubric-Guided Writing Enhancement Program (RGWEP) was proposed to strengthen students' letter-writing competencies through the consistent use of competency-aligned rubric-based constructive written feedback.

Keywords: rubric-based constructive written feedback, analytic rubric, letter writing, formative assessment, English teaching

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1. Introduction

Writing is one of the most essential language skills that learners must develop to communicate ideas clearly, express thoughts effectively, and participate meaningfully in academic and real-world contexts. Among the various forms of writing taught in English language instruction, letter writing remains an important competency because it develops learners' ability to communicate purposefully using appropriate organization, language, tone, and conventions. Beyond meeting classroom requirements, composing effective letters prepares students for authentic communication in educational, professional, and civic settings. Consequently, helping learners develop competence in letter writing remains an important responsibility of English teachers.

Despite its importance, many students still struggle to produce well-written letters. Common challenges include organizing ideas logically, expressing thoughts coherently, using appropriate language, observing grammatical conventions, and maintaining the correct format and tone required for formal correspondence. These difficulties often result in written outputs that do not fully demonstrate the competencies expected by the curriculum. While writing instruction provides practice opportunities, students' improvement largely depends on the quality of feedback they receive during the writing process. Feedback is widely recognized as one of the most influential factors in improving student learning. Effective feedback helps learners recognize their strengths, identify specific areas for improvement, and revise their work based on clear expectations. In writing instruction, feedback becomes particularly important because it supports students throughout the recursive process of planning, drafting, revising, editing, and refining their compositions. Research consistently shows that feedback improves students' writing performance when it is timely, specific, constructive, and focused on helping learners improve rather than merely identifying errors (Scherer et al., 2024).

Among the various approaches to providing feedback, rubric-based constructive written feedback has gained increasing attention because it combines assessment with formative learning. Unlike traditional teacher-written comments that may vary in detail and interpretation, analytic rubrics provide explicit performance criteria and clearly defined descriptors that communicate expectations to learners. By making assessment standards transparent, rubrics encourage students to evaluate their own work, recognize performance gaps, and make meaningful revisions based on objective criteria. Consequently, rubric-based feedback not only promotes consistency in assessment but also develops students' capacity for self-assessment and independent learning.

International studies have demonstrated the positive effects of rubric-guided formative assessment and written corrective feedback on students' writing performance (Fleckenstein et al., 2023). Research has shown that rubric-based feedback enhances learners' understanding of writing expectations, improves organization, content development, language accuracy, and mechanics, and promotes greater engagement in the revision process. Likewise, structured feedback systems have been linked to improved academic achievement because they provide learners with clear, actionable guidance throughout the writing process (Galinte, 2026). These findings suggest that rubric-based feedback has considerable potential to improve students' writing performance when implemented systematically.

Within the Philippine educational context, formative assessment and constructive feedback are strongly emphasized by the Department of Education as integral components of effective teaching and learning. Under the Grade 7 English fourth-quarter competencies, learners are expected to analyze the features and purposes of formal correspondence, compose a letter of request, revise written outputs for coherence and cohesion, apply appropriate language conventions, and observe ethical communication. These competencies require students not only to understand the structure of formal letters but also to demonstrate proficiency in producing written outputs that

meet established academic standards. A competency-aligned analytic rubric provides a practical way to translate these curriculum expectations into observable, measurable performance indicators while guiding students throughout the writing process.

However, implementing effective written feedback remains a challenge in many public secondary schools. English teachers often handle large class sizes, multiple teaching preparations, and numerous written outputs that require assessment. Under these conditions, providing detailed and individualized written comments to every learner may not always be feasible. As a result, feedback may become delayed, generalized, or insufficient to support meaningful revision. A competency-based analytic rubric offers a practical alternative by enabling teachers to provide consistent, timely, and criterion-referenced feedback while encouraging students to assume greater responsibility for evaluating and improving their own work.

Although previous studies have shown the positive influence of feedback on writing development, several gaps remain in the literature. Many investigations have examined writing as a general language skill and have focused primarily on students' perceptions of feedback rather than on measurable improvements in specific writing competencies. Likewise, relatively few studies have examined the effectiveness of competency-aligned rubric-based constructive written feedback in improving formal letter writing among Grade 7 learners in Philippine public secondary schools (Cabigao, 2021). Consequently, there remains limited localized empirical evidence to guide English teachers in implementing rubric-based formative assessment that is directly aligned with the Grade 7 English curriculum.

Hence, this study sought to determine the effectiveness of rubric-based constructive written feedback in improving the letter-writing performance of Grade 7 students in a public secondary school. Specifically, the study examined students' letter-writing performance before and after implementing a competency-based, teacher-made analytic rubric and explored their perceptions and experiences of its use as a formative feedback tool. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on formative assessment and writing instruction by providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of rubric-based constructive written feedback in improving letter-writing performance. Furthermore, the results may help English teachers, curriculum developers, and school administrators strengthen classroom assessment practices and enhance the development of students' writing competencies consistent with the goals of the Grade 7 English curriculum.

2. Methods

This study employed a quantitative method and engaged in a pretest-posttest design to assess the effectiveness of competency-aligned rubric-based constructive written feedback in improving the formal letter writing performance of Grade 7 students during the school year 2025-2026. Fifty (50) Grade 7 students from Don Vicente Rama Memorial National High School in Cebu City participated, selected through purposive sampling to ensure alignment with the research objectives. Data collection utilized a teacher-made analytic rubric, a letter-writing test for the pretest and posttest, and a student perception questionnaire. Grounded in Grade 7 English competencies (EN7TRAN-IV-1 to EN7TRAN-IV-9) and relevant literature, the analytic rubric assessed six key criteria: Content and Purpose, Organization and Structure, Language Use, Mechanics and Grammar, Coherence & Cohesion, and Ethics and Appropriateness. The pretest and posttest, designed to be parallel in content and difficulty, required students to compose a formal letter of request.

A panel of English education experts validated all instruments, and their feedback refined clarity and relevance. For reliability, three trained raters, including the researcher and two licensed English teachers, scored the written outputs after orientation and calibration sessions. The intervention consisted of guided letter-writing activities, using the rubric as the primary formative feedback tool. Students self-assessed and revised their work based on rubric descriptors, fostering reflection and improvement. Post-intervention, student letters were reassessed using the same rubric and scoring protocol, and a perception questionnaire was administered to gauge students' views on the clarity and effectiveness of rubric-based feedback.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the data gathered on the effectiveness of rubric-based constructive written feedback in improving the letter writing performance of Grade 7 students based on the fourth-quarter English competencies. The data are presented in accordance with the research questions of the study.

Table 1

Students' pretest performance in letter writing

Criteria	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Content and Purpose	2.10	0.93	Developing
Organization and Structure	1.95	0.94	Developing
Language Use	1.88	0.95	Developing
Mechanics and Grammar	1.80	0.98	Developing
Coherence and Cohesion	1.92	0.94	Developing
Ethics and Appropriateness	2.05	0.92	Developing
Overall Mean	1.95	0.94	Developing

Legend: *4:00-3:25 (Excellent), 3:24-2:50 (Proficient), 2:49-1:75 (Developing), 1.74-1:00 (Beginning)*

Table 1 presents students' letter-writing performance during the pretest, evaluated using six assessment criteria from the teacher-developed analytic rubric. The overall mean score of 1.95 (SD = 0.94) indicates Developing-level performance before the rubric-based constructive written feedback intervention. On average, students partially met the expected letter-writing competencies but required further improvement across the assessed writing dimensions. Among the six criteria, Content and Purpose received the highest mean score (M = 2.10, SD = 0.93), followed by Ethics and Appropriateness (M = 2.05, SD = 0.92). These results indicate that students demonstrated greater ability to identify the letter's purpose and follow appropriate communication practices. However, both criteria remained within the Developing level, demonstrating the need for further improvement to consistently meet the expected standards. In contrast, Mechanics and Grammar received the lowest mean score (M = 1.80, SD = 0.98), followed by Language Use (M = 1.88, SD = 0.95) and Coherence and Cohesion (M = 1.92, SD = 0.94). These findings indicate that students experienced greater difficulty with language conventions, grammatical accuracy, and cohesive organization in letter writing.

This result aligns with Martinez (2025), who identified similar challenges in Filipino Grade 9 students' essay writing, particularly in grammar, structure, and idea organization, although that study focused on essays rather than formal letters. Martinez also noted positive developments in students' confidence and understanding. The standard deviations, ranging from 0.92 to 0.98, indicate moderate variation in performance across the six criteria, suggesting that while some students outperformed others, overall performance remained within the Developing category. These pretest results establish a baseline for students' letter-writing performance before the intervention. The overall Developing level underscores that participants had not yet consistently demonstrated the competencies expected in formal letter writing, thereby justifying the implementation of competency-aligned, rubric-based constructive written feedback to support improvement in the assessed dimensions.

Table 2

Students' posttest performance in letter writing

Criteria	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Content and Purpose	3.56	0.61	Excellent
Organization and Structure	3.34	0.78	Excellent
Language Use	3.26	0.79	Excellent
Mechanics and Grammar	3.18	0.81	Proficient
Coherence and Cohesion	3.30	0.76	Excellent
Ethics and Appropriateness	3.48	0.61	Excellent
Overall Mean	3.35	0.73	Excellent

Table 2 presents students' letter-writing performance on the posttest after implementing competency-aligned, rubric-based constructive written feedback. The overall mean score of 3.35 (SD = 0.73) demonstrates that students

attained a Proficient to Excellent level of performance according to the teacher-made analytic rubric. This outcome indicates that, after the intervention, students generally achieved a high level of attainment across the assessed dimensions of letter writing. Among the six assessment criteria, Content and Purpose received the highest mean score (M = 3.56, SD = 0.61), followed by Ethics and Appropriateness (M = 3.48, SD = 0.61), Organization and Structure (M = 3.34, SD = 0.78), Coherence and Cohesion (M = 3.30, SD = 0.76), and Language Use (M = 3.26, SD = 0.79), all of which were interpreted as Excellent. These results show that students generally performed strongly in communicating the purpose of their letters, organizing ideas logically, maintaining coherence, using appropriate language, and adhering to ethical communication practices. Mechanics and Grammar received the lowest mean score (M = 3.18, SD = 0.81), although this remained within the Proficient level. This result indicates that, while students generally demonstrated satisfactory control of grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling, this criterion was more challenging than the other assessed dimensions. However, the mean score still reflects an acceptable level of proficiency in applying language conventions in written outputs. The standard deviations, which ranged from 0.61 to 0.81, indicate a relatively consistent pattern of performance among students across the six assessment criteria. Lower variability in several criteria suggests that students' performances were generally clustered around the mean, reflecting a uniform level of achievement following the intervention.

The posttest findings indicate that, at the conclusion of the intervention, students demonstrated Proficient to Excellent performance across the competencies assessed by the analytic rubric. These descriptive results provide evidence of students' achievement levels after implementing rubric-based constructive written feedback. A similar positive outcome was reported by Decoro and Acoba (2024) in a Philippine Grade 12 project, where the use of a writing rubric as part of a broader writing intervention led to improvement, particularly in grammar and organization. However, because that intervention included multiple components, the effect of rubric-based feedback alone could not be isolated. The results revealed a positive impact of the intervention on participants' writing proficiency. The inferential analysis in the next section will determine whether this observed difference from the pretest represents a statistically significant improvement. Furthermore, the results align with the Process Writing Approach, which views writing as a recursive process in which revision and refinement contribute to the development of higher-quality written outputs.

Table 3

Test of difference between pretest and posttest scores

Variable	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Pretest	1.95	0.94	1.40	20.00	0.001	Reject Ho	Significant Difference
Posttest	3.35	0.73					

Table 3 presents the results of the paired-samples t-test assessing whether a statistically significant difference existed between students' pretest and posttest letter-writing performance. The analysis produced a t-value of 20.00 and a p-value of 0.001, which is below the 0.05 significance threshold. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant difference between pretest and posttest performance was rejected. The results show that students' letter-writing performance on the posttest (M = 3.35, SD = 0.73) was significantly higher than on the pretest (M = 1.95, SD = 0.94). These findings provide strong statistical evidence that students' performance improved significantly after implementing competency-aligned, rubric-based constructive written feedback. The increase in mean scores from pretest to posttest suggests that the observed improvement in students' letter-writing performance is attributable to the intervention. Although the descriptive results in previous tables indicated higher performance after the intervention, the paired-samples t-test confirms that this difference is statistically significant and not due to random variation within the sample.

These findings add to the expanding body of evidence supporting rubric-based feedback in writing instruction. A controlled study by Hasan (2022) demonstrated that Saudi high-school students who received rubric-based feedback attained higher writing scores than those taught through traditional methods. Additionally, research involving Iranian EFL learners has shown the benefits of genre-based instruction for letter quality and the

effectiveness of direct written feedback during job-application-letter instruction. These results emphasize the efficacy of rubric-based feedback in enhancing writing skills across varied educational contexts. Because writing is widely considered the most challenging language skill for students, this evidence underscores the importance of targeted feedback and instructional strategies to support student writing development.

Table 4

Students' experiences in using rubric-based constructive written feedback in letter writing

Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
The rubric helped me understand the requirements for writing a good letter.	3.58	0.70	Strongly Agree
I found the feedback given using the rubric to be clear and easy to understand.	3.46	0.65	Strongly Agree
The rubric guided me to improve my organization of ideas in the letter.	3.38	0.64	Strongly Agree
Using the rubric helped me improve my language use, tone, and grammar.	3.38	0.64	Strongly Agree
The rubric made me more confident in writing letters.	3.46	0.65	Strongly Agree
I found it easy to follow the rubric when revising my letter.	3.40	0.64	Strongly Agree
Overall Mean	3.44	0.65	Strongly Agree

Legend: *4:00-3:25 (Strongly Agree), 3:24-2:50 (Agree), 2:49-1:75 (Disagree), 1.74-1:00 (Strongly Disagree)*

Table 4 summarizes students' experiences with competency-aligned, rubric-based constructive written feedback during the letter-writing intervention. The overall mean score of 3.44 (SD = 0.65), interpreted as Strongly Agree, demonstrates that participants generally reported highly positive experiences using the rubric throughout the writing and revision process. Of the six indicators, "The rubric helped me understand the requirements for writing a good letter" received the highest mean score (M = 3.58, SD = 0.70), suggesting that students found the rubric particularly effective in clarifying expectations for letter writing. In contrast, the indicators "The rubric guided me to improve my organization of ideas in the letter" and "Using the rubric helped me improve my language use, tone, and grammar" received the lowest mean scores (M = 3.38, SD = 0.64). Despite being the lowest, these scores were still interpreted as Strongly Agree, indicating that students continued to view the rubric as beneficial for these aspects of their writing. The relatively low standard deviations, ranging from 0.64 to 0.70, indicate that students' responses were generally consistent across all indicators. This consistency suggests that participants shared similar positive perceptions regarding the rubric's usefulness during the intervention. Overall, the findings suggest that students perceived the rubric as a valuable instructional resource that clarified letter-writing expectations, supported revision, and enhanced their confidence in completing writing tasks. These results represent students' positive experiences with competency-aligned, rubric-based constructive written feedback, rather than providing direct evidence of improvements in writing performance.

This result is further supported by Agbayani and Sy (2022), whose qualitative study with Philippine Grade 12 students found that learners generally viewed indirect written corrective feedback positively, although they sometimes interpreted teachers' markings differently. Their findings underscore the importance of making feedback criteria explicit and verifying students' understanding, which aligns with the present results showing the value of clear, rubric-based feedback in supporting students' writing development.

4. Discussions

The findings of this study demonstrate that competency-aligned rubric-based constructive written feedback significantly enhances students' letter-writing performance. This improvement was observed across multiple dimensions, including content and purpose, organization and structure, language use, mechanics and grammar, coherence and cohesion, and ethics and appropriateness. The overall mean score for the posttest indicated a substantial increase from the developing level to an excellent level of proficiency. These results align with previous research that emphasizes the importance of formative assessment and constructive feedback in fostering writing development.

Impact on Letter-Writing Competencies - The study revealed that students' letter-writing performance improved significantly after implementing rubric-based constructive written feedback, as evidenced by the paired-samples t-test results (t-value = 20.00; $p < .05$). This finding supports the notion that clear and structured feedback

is crucial for improving specific writing competencies. Prior studies have shown similar outcomes in various educational contexts, indicating the universal applicability of rubric-based feedback. For instance, Hasan (2022) found that Saudi high-school students who received rubric-based feedback achieved higher writing scores compared to those taught through traditional methods. Similarly, Fleckenstein et al. (2023) demonstrated positive effects of automated feedback systems on student performance in writing tasks. These studies underscore the efficacy of using rubrics for formative assessment and constructive feedback.

Student Perceptions - Students' perceptions regarding the use of rubric-based constructive written feedback were generally positive, as indicated by their responses to the perception questionnaire. The overall mean score of 3.44 (SD = .65), interpreted as "Strongly Agree," suggests that students found the rubric helpful in understanding letter-writing requirements and guiding revisions. This aligns with Agbayani and Sy's (2022) qualitative study, which reported positive student experiences with indirect corrective feedback. The consistent responses across various indicators suggest that the rubric provided a clear framework for self-assessment, revision, and improvement. Students perceived the rubric as beneficial in clarifying expectations and enhancing their confidence in writing tasks. This reinforces the importance of explicit criteria in formative assessment practices (Scherer et al., 2024).

Challenges and Limitations - Despite these positive outcomes, there were initial challenges reported by some students regarding understanding specific rubric criteria and interpreting feedback effectively. These difficulties highlight the need for teacher guidance and ongoing practice to ensure that students can fully benefit from rubrics. Moreover, the study's sample size (N = 50) and focus on a single public secondary school may limit generalizability to broader contexts. Future research should involve larger, more diverse samples to strengthen the evidence base and explore long-term impacts of rubric-based feedback on writing development and self-efficacy.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Several key conclusions can be drawn from the study's findings. Initially, Grade 7 students showed a developing level of letter-writing performance, indicating a need to further develop essential writing competencies. After implementing competency-aligned, rubric-based constructive written feedback, students' performance improved significantly, reaching excellent levels, as confirmed by the paired-samples t-test. This statistically significant improvement demonstrates the intervention's effectiveness in enhancing students' writing proficiency. Additionally, students indicated that the rubric clarified expectations, guided their revisions, and increased their confidence in writing tasks. Although some participants initially struggled to understand specific rubric criteria and acknowledged that effective revision required additional effort, their perspectives became more positive with teacher guidance and practice. These findings underscore the importance of explicit feedback, teacher support, and sustained rubric use in developing writing skills.

In light of these conclusions, several recommendations are offered to maximize the benefits of rubric-based feedback. English teachers may integrate competency-aligned analytic rubrics into letter-writing and other writing activities to clarify performance standards and systematically guide student revision. School administrators are encouraged to support this approach by providing professional development focused on rubric creation and effective feedback strategies. Future research is recommended to employ larger, more diverse samples and experimental designs to strengthen the evidence base and examine long-term impacts on writing development and self-efficacy. Consistent use of competency-aligned rubric-based feedback, combined with orientation, guided practice, and opportunities for revision, can substantially enhance students' writing competencies and support effective formative assessment in English classrooms.

The findings yield several important implications for the following stakeholders:

- School Administrators. The findings may help school administrators make data-driven decisions in improving instructional supervision and monitoring the effective use of rubric-based feedback practices to enhance students' academic performance in English.

- Teachers. The results may help English teachers understand the importance of using rubric-based constructive written feedback in evaluating students' written outputs, particularly in tasks such as composing letters and revising texts for coherence and cohesion, thereby improving students' learning outcomes.

- Students. Students may benefit from clearer performance criteria and structured written comments that guide them in improving their writing skills, enabling them to better identify the purpose of their writing, compose effective letters of request, and revise their work for coherence and cohesion.

Practical Educational Implications

The findings from this study highlight several practical implications that can enhance the letter-writing abilities of Grade 7 students, particularly in public secondary schools. For practitioners and teachers, integrating competency-aligned analytic rubrics into their instructional practices is crucial. These tools provide clear performance criteria and guide student revisions effectively. Additionally, school administrators should offer professional development opportunities focused on creating and using rubrics, as well as strategies for providing constructive feedback. This ensures that teachers are equipped with the necessary skills to implement these tools successfully.

- Teachers need to offer ongoing support throughout the revision process by engaging students in regular self-assessment based on the rubric. This fosters a deeper understanding of writing expectations and leads to improved performance over time. Implementing both formative and summative assessments using rubrics provides a comprehensive evaluation of student progress, ensuring that students receive continuous feedback while also being assessed on their final products.

- For students, providing clear rubrics and criteria upfront helps them understand the specific requirements for writing formal letters, reducing anxiety and confusion during assignments. Encouraging active self-assessment based on the rubric fosters a sense of responsibility for their own learning. Regular reflection on performance gaps and areas for improvement leads to more targeted revisions. Consistent, constructive feedback provided through rubrics builds students' confidence in writing formal letters, empowering them to make informed improvements.

- For schools, ensuring that letter-writing activities are aligned with curriculum objectives at all grade levels is crucial. Regular assessment using rubrics helps track students' progress and identify areas needing further support. Allocating resources for teacher training on the effective use of rubrics can lead to more consistent application across classrooms. This training should focus on creating rubrics aligned with specific competencies and strategies for providing meaningful feedback. Establishing a system to monitor the quality of written feedback provided by teachers ensures that all students receive constructive comments that promote their learning and development.

Significance of Findings

The study's findings hold significant implications for practitioners, teachers, students, and schools. For practitioners and teachers, using competency-aligned rubrics clarifies expectations, guides revisions, and improves the overall quality of letter-writing assignments. For students, rubric-based feedback helps them understand performance criteria clearly, engage in self-assessment, and build confidence in their writing abilities. For schools, implementing rubrics across classrooms leads to more consistent assessment practices and better tracking of student progress, supporting data-driven decision-making for curriculum improvement.

AI Declaration Statement - The authors acknowledge utilizing the AI language tool (Grammarly) during manuscript preparation for language refinement, structural editing, and drafting select sections. All intellectual content, data collection, analysis, interpretation of results, and conclusions are the sole responsibility of the authors. AI assistance was restricted to improving clarity and readability and did not affect the originality, integrity, or academic responsibility of the research. The

authors retain full accountability for the accuracy and validity of all published content.

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