

Short Paper

Pre-Service Teachers' Errors in Technical Writing: Implications for English Language Teaching in the Philippines

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Abstract

This study employed a qualitative-descriptive research design to identify writing errors among 41 third-year English pre-service teachers in the Technical Writing course at one of the state universities in Pampanga, Philippines. The participants are Kapampangan and Tagalog speakers who use English as their second language and are enrolled in the Technical Writing course. The 123-page learner corpus was collected in their Technical Writing class, including letters, emails, reports, and academic essays. This study is anchored on "*Interlanguage (IL) theory*" by Larry Selinker and followed the error analysis which consists of data collection, error identification, error classification, and error explanation, as outlined by Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005). The writing errors were classified using Corder's linguistic levels, including graphological, lexico-semantic, and grammatical levels. Findings revealed that the grammatical level has the highest percentage of errors compared to the graphological and lexico-semantics levels. At the grammatical level, verb form, verb tense, and subject-verb agreement were prominent errors found at this level. Meanwhile, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and word choice errors were found under graphological and lexico-semantics errors. Moreover, emphasis on grammatical instruction, corrective feedback, and application of corpus linguistic approach in language teaching were implications drawn in this study. Therefore, this paper recommends designing intervention programs and instructional materials that target students' crucial grammatical areas. Teachers are encouraged to employ different teaching strategies and provide timely feedback to students. Curriculum developers must review the program's courses and should give emphasis on grammar courses.



Keywords – technical writing, error analysis, writing errors, English language teaching, English pre-service teacher

INTRODUCTION

Among all the macro skills in English, language learners found writing to be the most difficult due to the intricacies of its aspects, such as phonology, morphology, semantics, and syntax (Fareed *et al.*, 2016; Rao, 2017; Dhanya *et al.*, 2019). Mastering this skill is crucial to every English pre-service teacher as it will assist them in different writing forms while in the English language program.

In the Philippines, the Bachelor of Secondary Education primary in English curriculum presents the program outcomes where students are expected to acquire a broad language knowledge and proficiency in written communication. One of the program's foundational courses is the "*Technical Writing*" course. In this course, English pre-service teachers are expected to analyze technical writing papers such as scientific papers and demonstrate adeptness in written communication by crafting and editing technical reports using English, which is a global language.

Technical Writing courses for English pre-service teachers must be considered essential, especially in "*English Language Teaching*" (ELT). Within the program, students usually write lesson plans, research reports, letters, and academic essays, which require technical writing skills. However, students' technical writing difficulties were identified by the students, such as limited knowledge of English grammar, committing errors in different areas such as grammar (Singh *et al.*, 2017), vocabulary (Bulqiyah *et al.*, 2021), and mechanics (Al-Oudat, 2017).

Consequently, teachers must use methods that address students' errors. Identifying and analyzing errors is essential in determining the students' difficulties and why such "errors" are committed (Ozkayran & Yilmaz, 2020) because committing "errors" is normal, especially in language learning (Imaniar, 2018; Phuket & Othman, 2015). According to Ferris (2011, as cited in Pohan, 2017), errors, which are morphological, syntactic, and lexical forms, do not conform to the rules or language of native speakers. Additionally, errors consist of different types: (a) According to Richards (1974, as cited in Wu & Garza, 2014), overgeneralization is one of the types of errors in language that the learner makes due to their exposure to the language; this means that a learner lacks knowledge during language learning this is known as the "*intralingual errors*." On the other hand, negative transfer is experienced by the learner when he learns another language. This means learners use the same rules in the first language as the target language, known as "*interlingual errors*."

For this reason, studies by Khan and Khan (2016), Andrian (2015), and Ananda *et al.* (2014) have employed "*error analysis*" (EA) to investigate students' errors. EA is a method for identifying, classifying, and interpreting the forms that deviate from the

usual ones made by a learner (Karim, 2018). In second language acquisition, EA is a crucial method for analyzing and identifying students' errors, especially in English language learning (Fitria, 2018). Moreover, Corder (1981, as cited in Amiri & Puteh, 2017) explains the importance of EA as an essential method. First, teachers can assess the students' level of learning. Second, researchers can explore how language is structured and learned. Lastly, students can identify and understand their errors, which can help them improve their language proficiency.

In the Philippine context, English is taught as a second language. Thus, students found language learning more challenging (Sarsua, 2021). As such, this paper explored and investigated English pre-service teachers' writing errors in their Technical Writing course. Furthermore, this paper drew implications to English language teaching (ELT) that informed language educators and curriculum developers to revisit teaching strategies and curriculum courses.

RELATED LITERATURE

Several researchers have studied and investigated students' writing errors related to the error types and causes and the effectiveness of applied interventions. These studies are helpful as they inform educators about students' writing challenges and how to minimize such errors.

Sahagun and Daing (2020) conducted a study that found that capitalization, punctuation, and subject-verb agreement were prominent errors committed by students. They also incorporated intervention in their study and found that punctuation and capitalization improved except in verb tenses. These findings confirm those of Singh et al. (2017), who found that verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, and complex sentence constructions were the topmost errors among grammatical errors. Additionally, the study emphasized that students will continue to commit these errors until their tertiary if their teachers do not assist them in using different strategies to minimize these errors.

Similarly, Dichoso's study (2021) evaluated the students' grammatical errors in literary compositions. Common errors included subject and verb disagreement, missing punctuation, and word-level errors such as articles, spelling, and prepositions. These errors were attributed to the student's first language (L1), carelessness, and limited knowledge of grammar. These findings align with the study of Alghazo and Alshraideh (2020), who examined students' errors related to verb tenses, articles, and word order. Correspondingly, Anh (2022) evaluated the students' academic writing and found that errors were prominent in articles, prepositions, and plural/singular forms. Additionally, Quibol-Catabay (2016) found that students committed punctuation, verb tense, and sentence construction errors and stressed the need to address these errors to improve writing the students.

Sarasua (2021) identified frequent errors in the students' essay compositions, such as subject and verb agreement, verb tense, and prepositions, and these errors

were also attributed to the students' first language, carelessness, and mastery of the target language (TL). Moreover, this study emphasized the importance of corrective feedback, which aligns with Sahagun and Daing's (2020) recommendation to use intervention to minimize students' writing errors.

These studies show the relevant errors committed by the students in writing. However, they also indicate gaps in the literature on the classification of errors based on the linguistic levels and their implications for language teaching. Studies mentioned above showed the different errors and gave little attention to analyzing the errors based on graphological, lexico-semantic, and grammatical levels. Moreover, this study identified and classified the errors the English pre-service teachers committed in Technical writing using the Corder's linguistic levels. Through the analysis using these linguistic levels, the study's findings may contribute to designing teaching interventions and help to minimize the students' errors and improve their writing ability.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is anchored on "*Interlanguage (IL) theory*" by Larry Selinker. He posited that "IL" is a different language a learner develops when learning a second language. This language comprises rules different from the first language (L1) and the second language (L2). Additionally, "IL" serves as a bridge between the "L1" and "L2," especially when a learner is not proficient in the target language. As a result, the IL rules are influenced by the L1 and applied in L2, resulting in a negative language transfer. Within this theory's framework, this study explored the students' writing errors in the Technical Writing course.

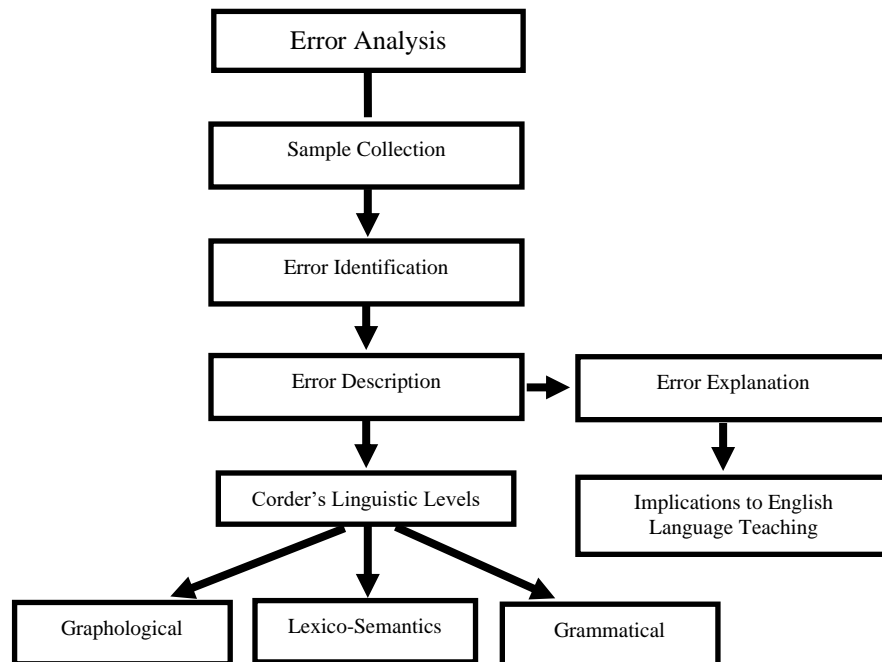


Figure 1. Conceptual Paradigm

Furthermore, this paper used and followed the error analysis framework outlined by Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) for the data analysis. Additionally, errors were categorized based on Corder's linguistic levels, specifically "*graphological*," "*lexico-semantic*," and "*grammatical*." After identifying the errors, implications for English language teaching were drawn.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Generally, this paper aimed to explore the writing errors of English pre-service teachers in Technical Writing during the academic year 2023-2024. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the committed errors of the English Pre-Service Teachers in Technical Writing in terms of Corder's linguistics levels:
 - 1.1. Graphological
 - 1.2. Lexico-Semantic
 - 1.3. Grammatical
2. Based on the study's findings, what implications can be drawn from English language teaching?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This paper uses a qualitative-descriptive research design, which is suitable for this study because it comprises "*naturalistic data*." This means that the goal is to study the natural context of teaching and learning without manipulating the variables (Nassaji, 2015). As such, the researcher collected and analyzed all the Technical Writing outputs written by the participants in class.

Participants and Learner Corpus

The study consisted of 41 third-year English pre-service teachers from the same state university and program in Pampanga, Philippines, in the academic year 2023-2024. This paper ensured that the participants were selected purposively and followed the criteria for choosing the participants. The participants must enroll in the Technical Writing course. In addition, the participants must be "*Kapampangan*" and "*Tagalog*" speakers who use English as their second language. Additionally, the 123-page learner corpus was collected in their Technical Writing class, including letters, emails, reports, and academic essays.

Research Instrument

This paper utilized the technical writing course outputs of the pre-service teachers in this paper. The Corder's linguistic levels, namely, "*graphological level*," "*lexico-semantic level*," and "*grammatical level*," were adopted in this study. Two inter-coders were also involved in developing the codes and validating the errors for this paper. Moreover, the chosen inter-coders were language teachers knowledgeable in error analysis.

Data Collection and Analysis

The "*error analysis*" procedure outlined by Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) was followed during the study. The researcher sought permission from the supervising teacher to collect all the needed outputs from the Technical Writing course. Subsequently, the researcher used Microsoft Word to transcribe one hundred twenty-three (123) written outputs, including students' letters, emails, reports, and academic essays.

The transcription process of this study took one (1) month to complete. The researcher and the two (2) inter-coders created the codes in relation to the participants' identified errors. Afterward, the errors were classified into Corder's linguistic level, namely, graphological, lexico-semantics, and grammatical. Then, codes were assigned to the participants' errors, i.e., *Graphological Errors (GPE)*, under this error, it consists of (3) sub-codes: Capitalization (*GPC*), Spelling (*GPS*), and Punctuation (*GPP*). Next is the Lexico-Semantics Errors (*LSE*), under this error, it consists of three (3) sub-codes: Word Choice (*LSW*), Conjunction (*LSC*), and Preposition (*LSP*). Lastly, the Grammatical Errors (*GEE*), which consists of nine (9) sub-codes: Comma Splice (*GEC*), Run-On Sentence (*GER*), Fragment (*GES*), Subject-Verb Agreement (*GEA*), Pronoun (*GEP*), Adverb (*GEA*), Verb Tense (*GEV*), Verb Form (*GEV*), and Article (*GEA*). Then, an explanation of the errors followed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A total of 515 errors were found in the participants' technical writing outputs. Table 1 shows that the "*grammatical level*" (51.46%) emerged as the highest error percentage in the corpus. This was followed by "*graphological errors*" (27.18%) and "*lexico-semantic level*" (21.36%), respectively. This implies that half of the errors made by participants were related to "grammar" and "syntax."

Table 2 shows a prominent occurrence of graphological errors in the participants' outputs, consisting of 27.18%. "*Punctuation errors*" (14.76%) ranked first as the most committed error under this category, followed by "*capitalization errors*" (8.54%) and "*spelling errors*" (3.88%), respectively. These findings indicate that capitalization, spelling, and punctuation errors contribute to the majority of graphological errors. This means that participants have an insufficient knowledge of the writing conventions and

inattention to proofreading. Participants may also tend to use informal abbreviations in electronic communication, such as chats or SMS, where proper capitalization, spelling, and punctuation are generally ignored. Aligned with the study of Adegbenro (2022), which found that capitalization, spelling, and punctuation were some errors of students at the graphological level.

Table 1. Technical Writing Errors

Graphological Codes	Errors	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
GPE	<i>Graphological Errors</i>	140	27.18	2
LSE	<i>Lexico-Semantics Errors</i>	110	21.36	3
GEE	<i>Grammatical Errors</i>	265	51.46	1
		515	100.00	

Table 2. Graphological Errors

Graphological Codes	Errors	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
GPC	<i>Capitalization</i>	44	8.54	5
GPS	<i>Spelling</i>	20	3.88	10
GPP	<i>Punctuation</i>	76	14.76	1
		140	27.18	

Moreover, there is a need to improve this writing area where explicit instruction is necessary. Further studies might look at how electronic communication influences the student's skill in these areas of writing and outline ways to mitigate this.

Table 2.1. Sample Errors and Corrections

Type of Error	Error Sample	Error Correction
Capitalization	"...teaching a variety of english classes to students of all ages."	"...teaching a variety of English classes to students of all ages."
Spelling	"...helps the longetevity , rate, and effectiveness of the said projects, mitigating the risk of downfall in the environment."	"...helps the longevity , rate, and effectiveness of the said projects, mitigating the risk of downfall in the environment."
Punctuation	"In conclusion if we just support and think of a project..."	"In conclusion , if we just support and think of a project..."

Table 2.1 shows the graphological errors and their corresponding corrections. The capitalization error involved the improper use of lowercase for the term "english," which was corrected to "English" to follow proper grammatical conventions. Similarly, the spelling error was identified in the term "longetevity," which was corrected to "longevity."

Additionally, a “punctuation error” was observed in the sentence, "In conclusion if we just support and think of a project..." The correction involved inserting a comma after "conclusion" to improve the sentence structure and coherence.

Table 3. Lexico-Semantic Errors

Lexico-Semantics Codes	Errors	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
LSW	Word Choice	65	12.62	3
LSC	Conjunction	10	1.94	12.5
LSP	Preposition	35	6.80	7.5
		110	21.36	

Table 3 reveals a significant presence attributed to the lexico-semantic error of 21.36%. “Word choice errors” (12.62%) emerged as the most frequent, followed by “preposition errors” (6.80%) and “conjunction errors” (1.94%). These findings suggest that issues related to word choice, prepositions, and conjunctions contribute to the lexico-semantic errors observed in the analysed data. It suggests that lexical errors may arise due to the participants' limited usage of academic or technical terms or the participants' unfamiliarity with the term applicable in the specific context. Errors occur mainly in using prepositions due to the first language interference and the fact that prepositions differ from other languages. Meanwhile, the low frequency of conjunction errors shows that participants may have a basic understanding of connecting ideas. This corroborates Hunahunan's (2018) findings that errors in word choice and prepositions were the students' most problematic errors.

Table 3.1. Sample Errors and Corrections

Type of Error	Error Sample	Error Correction
Word Choice	"I am also good at computers and printing devices."	"I am also skilled in using computers and printing devices."
Conjunction	"I am interested in attending the seminar yet I have a scheduling conflict"	"I am interested in attending the seminar, but I have a scheduling conflict."
Preposition	"I am writing this letter to ask for your permission to conduct a seminar focusing on cyberbullying happening in December 18, 2023."	"I am writing this letter to ask for your permission to conduct a seminar focusing on cyberbullying happening on December 18, 2023."

Table 3.1 shows the lexico-semantic errors and their corresponding corrections. The first consists of a word choice error, where "I am also good at computers and printing devices" was corrected to "I am also skilled in using computers and printing devices." A conjunction error in the second example, "I am interested in attending the seminar yet I have a scheduling conflict," was refined by changing it to "I am interested in attending the

seminar, but I have a scheduling conflict." Lastly, a preposition error was addressed in the fourth example, "I am writing this letter to ask for your permission to conduct a seminar focusing on cyberbullying happening in December 18, 2023," which was corrected to "I am writing this letter to ask for your permission to conduct a seminar focusing on cyberbullying happening on December 18, 2023."

Table 4. Grammatical Errors

Graphological Codes	Errors	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
GEC	Comma Splice	23	4.47	9
GER	Run-On Sentence	15	2.91	11
GES	Fragment	9	1.75	14.5
GEA	Subject-Verb Agreement	57	11.07	4
GEP	Pronoun	10	1.94	12.5
GEA	Adverb	9	1.75	14.5
GEV	Verb Tense	39	7.57	6
GEV	Verb Form	68	13.20	2
GEA	Article	35	6.80	7.5
		265	51.46	

Table 4 shows 265 grammatical errors with 51.46%, half of the total percentage. The most frequent errors include "verb form" (13.20%), "subject-verb agreement" (11.07%), "comma splice" (4.47%), and "verb tense" (7.57%). Other errors were "article" (6.80%), "run-on sentence" (2.91%), "adverb" (1.75%), "fragment" (1.75%), and "pronoun" (1.94%). These errors are extremely common and reflect the participants' acquisition issue in the basic grammatical structures. Verb form and tense errors can be caused by failure to apply the rules properly and the confusion between regular and irregular forms. Meanwhile, subject-verb agreement may result from interference from the first language. Additionally, the comma splices and run-on sentences point to problems in their knowledge of sentence boundaries and punctuation. Moreover, this supports the findings of Manik and Purba (2017) that students need help to acquire grammatical rules.

Table 4.1 presents the lexico-semantic errors and their corresponding corrections. The first sentence consists of a comma splice, "I am confident that I can manage a class well, I have the patience that a teacher must have." This was corrected by changing the comma with a semicolon, "I am confident that I can manage a class well; I have the patience that a teacher must have." The second sentence is run-on, "Education is the foundation of knowledge the effectiveness of K-12 education in the Philippines helps the students to practice." To address this, a period was introduced to create two coherent sentences, "Education is the foundation of knowledge. The effectiveness of K-12 education in the Philippines helps the students to practice."

Table 4.1 Sample Errors and Corrections

Type of Error	Error Sample	Error Correction
Comma Splice	"I am confident that I can manage a class well , I have the patience that a teacher must have."	"I am confident that I can manage a class well ; I have the patience that a teacher must have."
Run-On Sentence	"Education is the foundation of knowledge the effectiveness of K-12 education in the Philippines helps the students to practice."	"Education is the foundation of knowledge. The effectiveness of K-12 education in the Philippines helps the students to practice."
Sentence Fragment	" Other than being a teacher for school. "	Other than being a teacher for the school , I also gave extra classes to some students who sought help from me."
Subject-Verb Agreement	"LGBTQ+ rights is essential for fostering inclusive society."	"LGBTQ+ rights are essential for fostering inclusive society."
Pronoun	" Me and the BSED English III would like to conduct an English symposium on writing."	"The BSED English III and I would like to conduct an English symposium on writing."
Adverb	"I patiently will wait for your response to my email..."	"I will patiently wait for your response to my email..."
Verb Tense	"...and this what have helped me grow personally and even academically."	"...and this what has helped me grow personally and even academically."
Verb Form	"Mental health awareness should be address and raised in every school."	"Mental health awareness should be addressed and raised in every school."
Article	"...and the only way to protect them is to have a laws about LGBTQ rights."	"...and the only way to protect them is to have laws about LGBTQ rights."

A sentence fragment was identified in the third example, "Other than being a teacher for school." This was corrected by expanding the fragment into a complete sentence, "Other than being a teacher for the school, I also gave extra classes to some students who sought help from me." Also, a subject-verb agreement was addressed in the fourth sample, "LGBTQ+ rights is essential for fostering inclusive society." The correction consists of adjusting the verb to agree with the plural subject, "LGBTQ+ rights are essential for fostering an inclusive society."

This is followed by the pronoun error, which involves incorrectly using the pronoun "Me" as the subject. The correction replaces "Me" with the subjective pronoun "I" to follow proper grammatical conventions. The sentence was refined to "The BSED English III and I would like to conduct an English symposium on writing." This correction ensures that the pronoun functions correctly as the sentence's subject. The sixth example

illustrated an adverb placement error, *"I patiently will wait for your response to my email..."* The changes involved repositioning the adverb for grammatical accuracy, *"I will patiently wait for your response to my email."*

In the seventh sample error, a verb tense inconsistency was detected, *"...and this what have helped me grow personally and even academically."* The correction presents changing "has" to "have" to maintain proper tense: *"...and this what has helped me grow personally and even academically."* The eighth sentence shows a verb form error: *"Mental health awareness should be address and raised in every school."* The correction involved changing "be address" to "be addressed", *"Mental health awareness should be addressed and raised in every school."*

Lastly, an article error was identified in the ninth example: *"...and the only way to protect them is to have a laws about LGBTQ rights."* The correction consists of removing the indefinite article "a" before "laws" to refine the sentence's structure, *"...and the only way to protect them is to have laws about LGBTQ rights."*

IMPLICATION TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Since half of the errors were related to grammatical errors, English language teachers should prioritize and emphasize grammatical instructions. English pre-service teachers should be given interventions that target common grammatical issues such as verb forms, subject-verb agreement, comma splices, verb tenses, articles, run-on sentences, adverbs, fragments, and pronouns. Additionally, students committed significant errors in word choice and other errors such as prepositions, redundancy, and conjunctions.

Students' writing outputs should be given corrective feedback to minimize their identified errors. This can aid them in understanding and correcting their committed errors. Additionally, English language teachers should integrate the corpus linguistics approach into their teaching practices to identify language patterns and errors. Furthermore, students should receive exercises focusing on correct grammar structures and lexico-semantic accuracy, including speaking drills and interactive task courses to allow regular practice.

Policymakers may draw on these findings to craft language Education policies that emphasize technical writing ability. Teacher training programs may incorporate techniques for correcting errors and improving instructors' abilities effectively. Moreover, future researchers may assess whether some interventions will help improve technical writing skills.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study showed a high percentage of errors at the grammatical level, particularly in the verb form, subject-verb agreement, and verb tenses. Within the lexico-semantic level, word choice errors were frequent, and students struggled to choose appropriate words. Although errors at the graphological level were not frequent, they were still noticeable. These findings contribute significantly to English Language Teaching (ELT), as they pinpoint specific areas of difficulty where students need guidance in grammar and vocabulary. Further studies could also be conducted on how corpus linguistics can be used to improve the curriculum development for English Language Teaching.

Therefore, this paper recommends designing intervention programs and instructional materials that target students' crucial grammatical areas. Teachers are encouraged to employ different teaching strategies and provide timely feedback to students. Additionally, teachers must incorporate a corpus linguistics approach in their teaching practice, where students identify and address their writing errors. Furthermore, curriculum developers must review the program's courses and should give emphasis on grammar courses. However, many of these suggestions can be applied practically in class settings. Teachers may need to modify strategies based on student needs and the time needed. In curriculum construction, existing curricula must be assessed, an increased focus on teaching grammar must be placed, and practical considerations about the hours or time dedicated to teaching must be incorporated.

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DECLARATIONS

Conflict of Interest

The author confirms that there are no conflicts of interest.

Informed Consent

The author declares that permission to collect the data was obtained, and prior to the study's completion, participants provided informed consent.

Ethics Approval

The researcher collected written outputs with the permission of the English language instructor. Then, the researcher observed privacy measures, with the personal information of the participants reflected in the written outputs. In analyzing the data, two (2) inter-coders were involved in creating codes to ensure that the data analysis process was reliable.

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