

Research Article



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Investigating structural challenges in paragraphing in essays of student-teachers: A case of Mount Mary College of Education, Ghana

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Abstract

Paragraphing has posed challenges to several writers. Some of these challenges include failure to state the topic sentence, poor development of the topic sentence and wrong use of cohesive devices. The study focussed on unearthing the paragraphing challenges in the essays of the student-teachers with Mount Mary College of Education as the case study. The study employed quantitative approach to collect data from student-teachers and tutors. This comprised of 757 students in level 100 and 200. Written texts and interviews were used as research instruments. The Essay Analytical Framework (EAF) of Owusu (2012) was used for the analyses. The findings showed that most of the student-teachers encountered myriads of challenges in paragraphing the introductory, the body and the concluding paragraphs. Constructing the topic sentences and elucidating them with supporting sentences posed challenges to some of the students. Furthermore, the study found out that most of the student-teachers had problems with achieving unity, coherence and completeness in their paragraphs.

Keywords: cohesive devices, introductory paragraph, paragraphing, supporting sentences, student-teacher

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Introduction

Njoku (1977) defines a paragraph as the major means by which an essay is divided. It develops one main idea by using facts that are related to that key idea. This same idea of a paragraph being part of an essay discussing one central idea is just similar to that of Scott and Denny's (1909) definition. They define a paragraph as a component of discourse which expatiates on a single idea. To them, a paragraph is made up of a group of sentences or a series of sentences closely related to one another expressing a single thought. The emphasis of the above definition is on the fact that a paragraph discusses a single core idea. It is in developing this single idea that a collection of related sentences is employed to aid in elaborating on this sole major idea. The way paragraphing is done depends on how the writer feels and as such it is an art. Paragraphing is just like an inner voice speaking to the author. A paragraph has to do with the way a writer feels rather than any method that needs to be studied consciously (Palmer, 2002). Palmer (2002) is of the view that paragraphing is an art which a writer is endowed with and therefore there is no need endeavouring to study it. He equates paragraphing to practicing an art which cannot be deliberately studied. If this assertion that there is no need to study paragraphing is tenable, then, of course nobody would bother about the issue of paragraphing or even paragraphs, let alone venture researching into it.

Paragraphing could be said to have two essential parts: The first is the physically perceptible or the visual part and the second is the content portion. The visual aspect involves indentation, leaving a line or space to differentiate one paragraph from the other. Indentation involves moving some space from the visible vertical line at the left, if there is a marked margin on the writing paper. Where there is no visible vertical margin, it must be imagined by the writer to enable the indentation to be done. The second visual indication of paragraphing is totally leaving full lines in-between the groups of sentences called paragraphs; that is, if the writing page is ruled with lines. On the other hand, if the writing page has no ruled lines, spaces must be consciously left wider as compared to those that are in-between the writings in order to differentiate one paragraph from the other. The content part is the second part of paragraphing. This has to do with stating the topic sentence that is the theme for discussion and illustrating it with major supporting, minor supporting and concluding sentences. In addition, employing the correct cohesive devices is equally paramount to ensure good quality paragraphs are written.

Rustipa (2013) carried out a study to determine whether paragraph development was an issue with English as a Foreign Language learners of Indonesia. The task of the researcher was to find out the weaknesses or strengths relating to developing complete paragraphs. That is, whether they would be capable of structuring paragraphs and completely developing ideas. The researcher collected data from the third semester students of Stikubank University (UNISBANK) Semarang, Indonesia. 30 students were given 45 minutes to express their opinions in writing about reality show(s) on TV. Among the instructions were that the students should not consult their dictionaries, the internet nor have discussions with their friends to help the researcher obtain an accurate data about their performance. In a bid to find out the completeness of the paragraphs, an examination of the relatedness of the supporting sentences to the topic sentence was carried out by numbering the topic sentences and the supporting sentences. The analysis was based on single paragraphs referred to by the researcher as "stand-alone paragraphs" which were expected to have topic sentences, supporting sentences and concluding sentences. The findings revealed that 63%, that is 19 paragraphs studied, used what the researcher termed as complete paragraph structure which means they had topic sentences, supporting sentences and concluding sentences forming the internal structure of the paragraphs; In contrast, 37% being the 11 remaining out of the 30 paragraphs studied only employed the topic sentences and the supporting sentences but

glaringly left out the concluding sentences. Concerning complete ideas development, it was deduced that students who were studied had problems with paragraph development as well. Only 10 paragraphs constituting 33% of the students studied were able to write complete paragraphs. A greater chunk which is 20 paragraphs forming 67% of the paragraphs were not developed completely. Rustipa (2016) remarked that he was displeased because paragraphs used for the research were written by students who were pursuing English as their major. The qualitative approach was employed to analyse data. That is, the researcher mainly described and explained the data collected. The conclusion drawn was that if only 33% of the students could write complete paragraphs then teachers must pay critical attention to teaching paragraph structure and development. The researcher equally recommended reading since it is a contributory factor to good paragraphing. A similar research was conducted by Rass (2015) of the English Department of the Arab Institute for Education. His study focused on the challenges Palestinian Arab students from Israel studying to major in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) encounter in developing well-written paragraphs in English. According to the study, data was collected for over fourteen years; in effect 205 write-ups were sampled to discover the problem.

For this investigation, participants mainly first year B.Ed. students of English as a Foreign Language mostly women aged between 19 and 21 were used. The constructive analysis approach was used to analyse the data. Rass cited Byram, (2000); Gass and Selinker, (2008), Howatt and Widdowson, (2004) who by implication inferred that since errors in two languages come to play here it was the best approach to use. A number of participants' sentences were enumerated making the investigative piece lengthy. Findings included inappropriate topic sentences, supporting details and conclusion. It was also noted that the students transferred the Arabic style of writing indirectly into English. Consequently, their topic sentences were not glaring; they did not provide examples and reasons to support their topic sentences either. There were also problems with the use of types of sentences like simple, compound and complex. Implications which were in the form of recommendations included the following: Arab students must be taught to acquire the stylistics of English. They must be made aware of the fact that the Arabic style of writing is different from that of the English style (Rass, 2015). The researcher further noted that teachers must provide opportunity to students to practice and put in a lot of effort to help address the problem.

Umunakwe and Pitse (2017) at the University of Botswana researched on the topic: "What is in the Essay? An Investigation of the Introductory Paragraph of Students" Academic Essays. The focus of their study was to find out whether the introduction contains all the necessary elements of an essay. The process approach theory of academic writing was what they used. They used 100 first year students' essays randomly sampled from a sample size of 227 essays. The essays were taken from a core second semester course titled "Writing in English" (ENG 131). The study showed that students had problems structuring the introductory paragraph of an essay. One of the recommendations was that students should find time with the pre-writing stage to construct a good thesis statement to serve as a signpost and aid them to develop good topic sentences and supporting sentences in writings the entire essay. They made it clear in their works that the introductory part of their writing differs from one genre to the other, however, writing it well provides a good foundation for writing the entire essay. Two main findings which were constraints detected were related to participants' difficulty in writing the thesis statement and writing a plan of the entire essay overview. According to them 70% of the students had problems writing the thesis statement, 25% were able to write while 5% did not develop the thesis statement well. They recommended that lecturers must guide students to develop process writing step by step. Also, poor students must be identified and given additional help. In addition, students must also

be encouraged to read novels to build their vocabulary to enable them to write well.

Literature Review

Challenges in paragraphing

Paragraphing poses challenges to several writers. Some of these paragraphing challenges writers face are failure to state the topic sentence, poor development of the topic sentence and wrong use of cohesive devices. Each of these challenges has been discussed in the lines that follow.

Absence of a topic sentence

The topic sentence according to Oshima and Hogue (2006) is the most crucial sentence in a paragraph because it briefly indicates what is to be discussed in a paragraph. The topic sentence serves as a guide and directs the writer as to what to add to the paragraph and what to exclude. Consequently, the absence of the topic sentence could make it difficult to determine the scope of a write-up. Rass (2015) noted in the findings of a research that in most cases, first year students in the Arab Institute for Education find it difficult from the onset to write a general statement that includes a topic sentence and comment on it as expected in English. On the contrary, they transfer the Arabic style of writing which is being indirect, very impersonal and at times emotional to writing the paragraph in English. In effect, they end up not writing a topic sentence.

Lack of knowledge in developing supporting sentences

It is extremely difficult for most students to obtain sufficient and relevant information on paragraphing (Gonye, et al. 2012; Kalikokha, 2008). Students find it very challenging to get information on paragraphing because of the heckling over what is right or wrong paragraphing. So, although the information is there, lack of agreement among scholars as to what is correct or wrong paragraphing puts a lot of students off. For example, the idea that paragraphing should not be learned presupposes that it can be done anyhow, which is misleading. The second part of the problem has to do with outdated books. Most books are archaic and as such do not help the course of students. Haider (2012) confirms this assertion by arguing that outdated textbooks neither promote the essentials of writing skill nor provide any prospects, as a result, they fail to inspire audience.

Wrong use of cohesive devices in paragraphing

The third problem that has been found with students' paragraphs and essays is the wrong use of cohesive devices. As reported by Darweesh and Kadhim (2016), most students have a problem with paragraphing in the area of the wrong use of cohesive devices. These students are usually unable to use the right cohesive devices to foster cohesive ties in their essays. Also, Lai (2008) reports that students have teething problems with the development of their ideas in essays through the effective use of conjunctive cohesive devices such as furthermore, nevertheless, by contrast, on the contrary, hence, therefore, and because.

Muhammed (2015), also conducted a research to identify and examine the challenges that Kurdish English as a Foreign Language learners experience when writing paragraphs. The writer used random sampling procedure to select 40 participants out of 200 from the Department of English for the research. The 40 respondents wrote a paragraph on a daily life subject. They were not limited in time. The researcher's focus was on paragraph structure and development challenges not punctuation, spelling or grammar. The findings included the following: A number of respondents did not follow the format of

topic sentences supporting and concluding sentences. Muhammed (2015) attributed the cause to the influence of Kurdish, the mother tongue. Other findings included irrelevance of controlling ideas, mixing different ideas in one paragraph, redundancy and repetition and lack of description of ideas. The reasons for the defects in paragraph writing outlined included lack of knowledge, cultural influence and inability to think critically. The researcher remarked that all the respondents face more than one challenge at the same time and recommended that teachers and lecturers take into consideration the findings of the paper and design their teaching and learning resources accordingly.

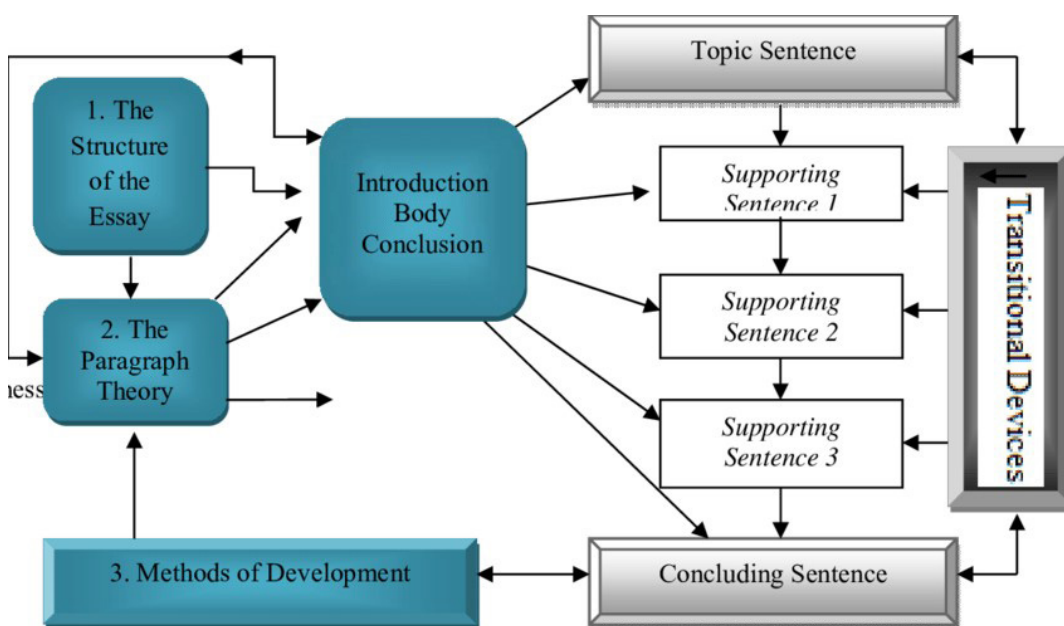
Edward Owusu's Essay Analytical Framework (2012)

The theory that is of concern to the current study is Owusu's Essay Analytical Framework. This serves as the main theory on which the research is founded. According to Owusu (2012), in analysing paragraphs, three important issues need to be considered.

These are the structure of the paragraph, paragraph theory and methods of development.

This framework is shown diagrammatically below:

Figure 1: Shows the Essay Analytical Framework of Owusu's (2012)



The controlling factors

The theory suggests that for an essay to be well developed, there needs to be two sets of controlling factors. The first set of factors are the elements of the paragraph such as unity, coherence and completeness while the second set of factors are parameters such as the generally accepted structure of the essay, the prescriptions of the paragraph theory and the standard methods of paragraph development (Owusu, 2012). In term of the elements of the paragraph, Owusu (2012) suggests that paragraph unity is considered in ensuring that the various sentences in the paragraph are linked to a single idea. Also, there is a consideration of paragraph coherence to facilitate a symbiotic relationship between the grammatical structures of the paragraph and makes the interpretation of the idea expressed in the paragraph smooth (Warriner, 1982). Finally, there is a consideration of paragraph completeness to ensure that the idea in a paragraph has been thoroughly exhausted. In terms of the second set of factors, Owusu (2012) explains that the structure of an essay, the nature of the various paragraphs within it as determined by

the paragraph theory and the various methods of development of the paragraphs are important factors that determine the form of the essay in terms of introduction, body and conclusion.

Methodology

Research approach

According to Heigham and Croker (2009), the focus of qualitative research is on the participants; how participants experience and interact with a phenomenon at a given point in time and in a particular context. The study in question is aimed at unearthing the challenges in paragraphing in the essays of student-teachers in Mount Mary College of Education. The researcher's attention was mainly on the student-teachers in this institution and the peculiar issue is tagged 'challenges' that they encountered in paragraphing so far as their essays were concerned. Therefore, the qualitative approach was an appropriate aid for the study since it deals with a specific group of people with a unique issue to be investigated.

Research design

The major purpose of the research was to find out the paragraphing challenges student-teachers of Mount Mary College of Education encounter while writing essays, accordingly, the intention was to critically examine texts written by student-teachers as a means of studying the structural challenges they face in paragraphing in the process of writing essays, so the case study is the most appropriate design.

Population

Scheaffer et al. (2006) define population as gathering elements that we intend to make inferences from. This definition bears semblance with that of Banerjee and Chaudhury (2010) who state that population is the total group about which some information is vital to be determined. B.Ed. Students of Mount Mary College of Education constituted the population of the study. There were 161 males and 237 females in level 100 making a total of 398 students in level 100. In Level 200, there were 149 males and 210 females totalling 359 students in Level 200. The total number of students in Level 100 and 200 were 398 students plus 359 making a total of 757. There were 158 males in Level 300 and 151 females in level 300. So, the total number of student-teachers at Mount Mary College of Education including those pursuing diploma would be 1066 if the Level 300 students who were about to complete were added. The academic staff was made up of 46 males, 12 females making a total of 58 tutors. The non-teaching staff was made up of 25 males and 19 females making a total of 44. According to Bartlett et al. (2001) and Creswell (2003), those who are participants in the general population must have in common at least a particular characteristic of interest. In this study, the B.Ed. student-teachers of Mount Mary College of Education were being investigated for having challenges in paragraphing which was peculiar to them as student-teachers.

Instruments

Research instruments are tools that are used to collect data. In this study written texts and interviews have been used.

Written texts

According to Latif (2009) when collecting data to determine the writing skills of students, it must be organized and done well so that whatever data is collected will be the correct representation of the

specific writing capability that the researcher intends assessing. The question given to the students was for them to “discuss two importance of the internet” which is a familiar topic. Although they wrote under specific instructions like not referring to books, the internet or sharing ideas, they were not intimidated and as such were made to write under a conducive environment to enable them give off their best. This is in line with the recommendation of Latif (2009) that if the topic for assessment is too difficult, the outcome will not precisely reflect the real level of students because they will be struggling, thinking very hard about the question instead of expressing their views.

Interviews

Two distinct types of interviews were used in the collection of data for the study. These were unstructured interviews and focus group interview.

Results and Discussions

What structural challenges do student-teachers have with paragraphing?

The data on the challenges student-teachers encounter in writing their paragraphs have been looked at. These challenges were looked at in terms of the difficulties they had in structuring their paragraphs such as the omission of features, splitting of features that needed to have been merged, merging features that needed to have been divided and numbering or itemising their paragraphs. Beyond these, there were also problems with the quality of the paragraphs as they lacked unity, coherence and completeness. All these categories of errors had impact on the form and meaning of the essays they wrote. These challenges have been looked at in the ensuing paragraphs under specified headings.

Challenges with paragraph structure

The first type of challenges that the student-teachers had with paragraphing was in the area of paragraph structure. Most of the paragraphs did not have features that should have been added, others had separated features which should have been merged. Some others had merged features which should have been merged while some other paragraphs had deficiencies in the sense that they were numbered.

Omission of features

The first category of structural errors that were recorded in the essays of the students-teachers was that certain features of the paragraph were absent. These features were whole paragraphs such as the introductory, body and the concluding paragraphs or sections of paragraphs, mainly the topic sentence. In terms of introductory paragraphs, the analysis showed that a number of the participants, did not write introductions to their essays at all, that is 40 participants which is 25% of the total number of 160 did not have any form of introduction. Some of such participants stated the topic sentences and discussed them one after the other without writing any introduction. An example of this situation is shown in the extract below:

Extract 1

The internet helps us get adequate information: Through the internet we are able to surf to get important information. Example is we can surf to look out for ideas or even learn which can help the individual gain [sic] knowledge or clarification about certain things on Google [sic] which are done by the internet.

It creates jobs: Through the help of the internet people are able to write articles and publish them on line. Bloggers are able to work by writing and bringing out stories from different sources [sic] into the social media thus they have been employed. Also [sic] through the internet people are to sell out [sic] their products online. The products are delivered [sic] to people who purchased them by delivery men. Thus, through the internet the delivery men have got [sic] jobs.

It helps in communication: Through the internet people are able to communicate with their family [sic] and friends through video calls although may be out of the country. Thus, it has improved [sic] our communication system in Ghana and the world at large.

A careful look at Extract 1 shows that the student-teacher wrote an essay that presented three importance of the Internet. Each of this importance can be found in a separate paragraph and has some good attempts at expatiating on it. One major thing that is lacking in this essay (Extract 1), however, is the introduction. The student-teacher failed to write any initial paragraph that would introduce the subject under discussion, provide some form of background, thesis statement and scope to the entire write-up. In such an instance, readers are left wondering whether the piece forms a composite whole and what it really seeks to achieve generally. These therefore have great impact on the meaning of such essays (in spite of the fact that each paragraph considered separately makes some meaning). These findings are in line with Davis, Stewart and Bullock (2013) that the introduction of an essay presents the context, the thesis statement and the organization of the essay. This means there is a general statement which indicates the context of the topic, a thesis statement which is the writer's assertion or claim and indicates how the writer intends organizing the essay. Apart from the above, there were also essays that did not have any conclusions. In those essays, the student-teachers clearly explained certain benefits of the use of the internet with or without an introduction. After, they had explained the importance in the body paragraphs, they failed to add any conclusions. This situation is also illustrated in Extract 1 above.

Separating of features

Another problem that was identified in the essays that were analysed was that the student-teachers divided certain features that they should have written together. One of these features was the introductory paragraph. Some student-teachers decided to divide the introduction into two. For example, one part of the introduction took the form of a definition of the internet while the other attempted to list the points that were going to be explained in the main body paragraph. The phenomenon was a challenge for some student-teachers. The task was a short essay and therefore dividing the introduction alone into two was not needed (Kissel, 2020). The following extract illustrates this situation.

Extract 2

The internet is the connection between various networks [sic]. It is a wireless connection [sic] that allows individuals around the world to interact with one another.

The existence of the internet has brought a lot of benefits to humans and the universe at large. For one to access the internet, there are some basic requirements needed. These are

a compute, a laptop a modem, a mobile phone and a sim card which will provide an internet access. The sim card can be acquired from a service provider. Once these requirements are acquired, the individual can get access to the internet, not forgetting the inclusion of an internet browser such as

Mozilla, Firefox, [sic] Opera Mini, Safari [sic] and Google and Chrome just to mention a few.

The extract above is an example of an introduction to a short essay divided into two which is a challenge. Ideally, the above should all have been just one paragraph. Each aspect of the above is just a different component of an introduction which should have been put together. Separating it into two is a challenge. This is because as argued by Kissel (2020), when writing a short essay which has less than ten paragraphs, writers should only have one-paragraph introductions. In the current study the task for participants was a short essay. They were asked to write an essay within 40 minutes. The task required that they discussed two importance of the internet. The concept of a paragraph structure elaborated by Reeves and Leventhal (2012), Emerson (2005) and the idea of unity by Strunk and White (2000) confirm the assertion that the task for participants is a short essay and as such requires only one-paragraph introduction.

The text below is also an example of dividing the introductory paragraph into two with a unique feature. In this particular case, there is no obvious indentation but a wide space which can contain a lot of words has been consciously left which is a sign of a paragraph:

Extract 3

The internet is a computer network consisting of a worldwide network of computer networks that use the TCP/ IP networks protocols to facilitate [sic] data transmission and exchange.

The internet is of more useful [sic] to the world of network nowadays [sic]. The following are some of the advantages of the internet...

The introduction of this short essay has been divided into two. The first part describes the internet and the second announces how the writer intends progressing with the essay. For the sake of unity and coherence as noted by Christensen (1966) dividing the introduction into two is unnecessary because the two ideas are related so far as the composition of the introduction of the task for the participants is concerned.

Merging of features

One more challenge that was recorded in the analysis of the student-teachers' essays was the merging of features which should have been separated. This problem was in direct contrast to the problem of dividing features presented in the data above. The introduction of a piece of writing is expected to be on its own. The introduction, among others, announces in broad terms what the entire writing is about. So far as the task given to the participants is concerned, the internet could be defined as some of the participants have rightly done. Then, the scope of the writing could be announced. This assertion was corroborated by Davis et al (2013). When this is done, a reader then knows that although the write-up is about the internet, this particular one is centred on the importance of the internet. Then, follows the

third part of the introduction which is intended to tell the reader how the writer anticipates proceeding with the writing. By doing all these, a reader can comprehend a piece of writing because the layout has been properly spelt out. All the above is just to point to the fact that the introduction is an entity on its own and should not be combined with a point the writer intended explaining in the body paragraph. The topic sentence as defined by the chunk of the literature consulted, is the nucleus of a paragraph. As stated early on by Njoku (1977), Scott and Denny (1909) and Zemach and Rumisek (2003), a paragraph contains a single idea which is explained by the supporting sentences. The topic sentence and the supporting sentences come together to form a paragraph. The deduction from the above arguments is that the introduction is a separate entity. Similarly, the topic sentence and the supporting sentences together form another unit that is the body. So, the above two entities should not be merged. The following extract is an example of combining the introduction and a topic sentence as paragraph one.

Extract 4

The internet is a global connection of two or more computers. There are so many importance of internet. Since the discovery of the internet, things have been easier and faster for both individuals and their environments. To start with, the internet has promoted good communication.

The above quotation is a challenge in paragraphing. The introduction could have been, “The internet is a global connection of two or more computers [sic] things have been easier and faster for both individuals and their environment.” This could have been followed with the scope of the topic as well as how the writing is going to be structured to constitute the introductory paragraph. Subsequently, the following: “To start with [sic] promotes good communication” which is the topic sentence could be brought to begin the body paragraph but this was not done. Instead, it was combined with the introduction which is a challenge. This is an excerpt from ES 2 with the same phenomenon of adding the topic sentence to the introductory sentence:

Extract 5

Internet refers to global network that connects the computers across the globe used as a medium of sharing information. For instance, people receive information about other people on the net...

In the above extract, the introduction is the “Internet refers to a global network that connects the computers across the globe used as a medium of sharing information.” This is a description of the internet which is the introduction. The second sentence “For instance people receive information about other people on the net.” is an importance of the internet which could have been structured as the topic sentence and as such should not have been combined with the introduction. Indenting the first line or spacing demonstrates that there is a paragraph. Each of them is used to demarcate a “belt” so using the two at the same time is an error (Butterick, 2016). The challenge uncovered in this direction is threefold: Firstly, mixing both indentation and leaving a line or spacing as paragraphing is a challenge for some Mount Mary College of Education students. In paragraphing, the writer either decides to indent or leave a line, not both indenting and leaving a line. The second is that if indentation is employed, there should be a way of executing it in writing such that the spaces left are relatively the same or almost the same. It is not

practical in the course of writing to use a tape measure or a ruler to measure the extent of indentation, the ideal is for the writer to use the eyes. In some cases, in the same writing, there are marked differences in the indentations. For example, some indentations are about one centimetre wide while others are about five centimetres wide. This is a challenge. The final challenge is the number of lines left if the writer decides to leave lines in-between the paragraphs must be even. It is inappropriate for a writer to leave two lines at some instances and in others leave one line or three lines in the same essay to indicate paragraphing. This inconsistency is unacceptable in paragraphing and therefore a challenge. Butterick, (2016) agrees with the above assertion, that is, using either indentation or spacing when paragraphing and not both. The Extract 6 below is an example:

Extract 6

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The internet is very important because it is the, [sic] limitless space where people have access to much infinite amounts of information. The internet is where a big amount of knowledge comes from. Humans are curious creatures who tend to become hungry for new knowledge to feed on.

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Communication of course, the first thing that comes to mind when you think about internet is communication. If you thought of something else, then please do not voice out, we are trying to keep it.

Internet allows [sic] people to communicate with each other across the world. You no longer need to send a letter and wait for weeks or months for a reply because of the internet. It is a matter of milliseconds you can get connected with whomever you want.

The above extract, Extract 6, is an essay of a participant. First of all, the dotted lines represent lines that have been left by the participant to mark paragraphing. However, the first line left to show the paragraph is only one. In the second paragraph instead of leaving one line as well to ensure uniformity, the participant left two lines. The other challenge is that apart from leaving lines to exhibit paragraphing, indentation has also been used in the same essay which is out of place. Also, the first four paragraphs have been indented but the last one, has a full line left. Paragraphing has tenets. Indentation or spacing are different ways of paragraphing. It is not appropriate to combine the two because they serve the same purpose. According to Butterick (2016) indentation of the first line and leaving space to indicate paragraph perform the same function so it is an error to combine the two. However, in this particular essay, a line has been left before the final paragraph, paragraph five.

Numbering of points

The last structural challenge that was identified with the paragraphs of the student-teachers was the problem of numbering paragraphs. Some participants just listed points as if they were taking notes during a lecture. This was unexpected because writing an essay entails stating the points as well as explaining them but not just listing. In such cases, no explanations were given. Each point was stated on a separate

line, and that was all. Extract 7 below is an example:

Extract 7

Internet is a global computer network providing a variety of information and communication. It is a facility consisting of interconnected networks using standardized communication protocols. Importance of internet:

- *It provides us with a large amount of knowledge in a sense that we acquire knowledge on internet*
- *It is a source of information and communication.*
- *It also increases accessibility of education.*
- *It is a way of innovative learning. In other words, it helps us improve on our learning by having access to new things.*
- *It is a source of information and communication. By the help of the internet, we get information about things that are happening in the world.*

The participant wrote the introduction before writing a heading. Thereafter, the topic sentences were stated as points which were not explained. According to Christensen (1966) a paragraph cannot be written without any possible addition. Besides these, a few participants used either the cardinal or the roman numerals to number the topic sentences stated. A short essay which demands that the participant discusses two importance of the internet is not supposed to be numbered. An example of this kind of numbering is shown in the extract below:

Extract 8

1. *Easier communication: We can communicate with our friends in an easier way. Also, this in a very short time and in a better way by using internet which is Email, Skype or any social media tool.*
2. *Provides better Education: As the internet is connected to many computers. A host or server concept is there on which an amount of data is used to obtain information.*
3. *Real time updates: The real time updates facility of the internet is a feature that is very helpful for people, through the real time updates people can know a lot of things, those which are currently happening many thousands of miles*

The above essay has been numbered which is a major challenge. Emerson (2005) discussed the use of connectives between and within paragraphs as a way of demonstrating unity and not numbering.

Challenges with paragraph quality

Besides the problems that were recorded in the area of the structure of the paragraphs, there were also problems with the quality of the paragraphs that were written. The quality of the paragraphs was examined in terms of the unity of the ideas in the paragraphs, the coherence of the ideas expressed and the completeness in the information shared in them. The issues of unity, coherence and completeness were part of the tenets of the EAF by Owusu (2012).

Lack of paragraph unity

The first problem that was identified in the examination of paragraph quality was the problem of lack of paragraph unity. These had impacts on the message that those paragraphs conveyed. The following extracts are examples of the lack of unity in specific paragraphs in the essays of the students.

Extract 9

Lastly, it is used for economic purposes. People use the net for advertisement of their goods for people far and near to purchase. This makes import and export of goods as business which people end a living from. People also go to the internet to look for information for their problems and motivational quotes and this takes away depression and fear. These make people not to share their personal problems but rather use the internet to solve their problems.

Extract 10

Internet is important because it gives students the access to do research. The new curriculum expects students to do a lot of research. It helps the students to discover information to help them in their learning. Teachers also give assignment to students and ask them to send it through their e-mails.

Extract 11

Furthermore, the internet provides a degree of security for human beings. Through technology, internet helps to address the security issues of a country, an individual or a company. Internet again is helping to enhance the education of scholars as they are able to get much more important information on internet.

Extracts 9, 10 and 11 are all indicative of the fact that the student-teachers had problems with paragraph unity. In Extract 9, the student-teacher used the second and the third sentences which are both supporting sentences to explain how the internet is used to facilitate e-commerce and how that further impacts positively on the living conditions of people. However, in the third and fourth sentences, the student-teacher deviates completely from the focus of the thesis statement to explain how the internet is used to search for information on the personal problems they have and the steps they need to take in solving such problems. Also, in Extract 10, the student-teacher, in an attempt to develop a paragraph on how the internet promotes research among students goes off track to touch on two other issues. This actions affect the unity of the paragraph. The issues are that the student-teacher talks about how the internet helps to convey information and how teachers use the internet as a medium to receive completed assignments from their students. Similarly, in Extract 11, the student-teacher attempts a discussion on the ways in which the internet promotes human security in the first supporting sentence but sharply moves away from that focus in the second supporting sentence to explain how the internet facilitates access to information. The above instances are examples which prove the fact that some student-teachers in Mount Mary College of Education have the challenge of keeping to the focus of the themes of their topic sentences. The task of the participants is to write a composition discussing two importance of the internet; so, the above statement is imprecise, incomprehensible and as such irrelevant to the topic participants wrote on.

Lack of paragraph coherence

Another major area that the student-teachers had a challenge was in achieving coherence in their essays. This lack of coherence resulted from the failure to use appropriate cohesive devices to link the various sentences in their paragraphs or to link the various paragraphs in their essays. The extracts below illustrate the problem of the lack of coherence in the student-teachers' essays.

Extract 12

For E-learning: The Internet helps students as well as many people in research. Students access the Internet to learn, same also use it to do homework and send it their teachers through E-mail. But many misuse the Internet and also abuse it in a bad way. You can use the Internet to watch and listen to news all over the world. And you can use the net to know things that are going on in and around the world.

Extract 13

Lastly, internet helps us to browse, chat, and saves money: Through the internet we get access to many people through chatting. Apps like Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, Yahoo etc. help us to engage with friends we do not even know. We get access to our relatives who are not in the country with us by chatting them. Had it not been the internet it would have been difficult for us to spend money on credit to call our relatives and friends outside the country. You can buy GHC1 credit and activate it for a bundle. And with this, you can browse and chat with different people.

Extracts 12 and 13 illustrate that the student-teachers' essays lacked paragraph coherence. In Extract 12 for instance, the pronoun *you* in the penultimate and ultimate sentences has no reference to any specific noun in the earlier portions in the paragraph. Also, in Extract 13, the student-teacher failed to use the necessary transitional devices to foster cohesive ties among the various sentences in the paragraph. After talking about how the internet helps in communicating and keeping close ties with family members, the sentence "We get access to our relatives who are not in the country with us by chatting them" should have begun with a transitional device such as *also* to indicate that another group of relatives with whom ties could be fostered online were about to be mentioned. However, this was not done. Also, the next sentence, "Had it not been the internet it would have been difficult for us to spend money on credit to call our relatives and friends outside the country" did not begin with any transition just as in the case of "You can buy GHC1 credit and activate it for bundle." These defects make it difficult for the reader to follow the writer's line of thought and defeats the purpose for which the paragraph was written which is to drum home the fact that in many ways, the internet helps in communication.

Lack of paragraph completeness

A number of participants at Mount Mary College of Education are able to state topic sentences but some are unable to adequately develop the topic sentences stated. This makes it difficult for the reader to understand the write-up.

Extract 14

Another advantage of the internet is that, it helps us to know what is happening in the world.

With the help of the internet, we are able to discover what is happening outside the country though news.

Extract 15

The internet is a place where we get information from. It is also a place where people learn from others.

Extract 16

The internet also helps us know current issues and what is going on in the world right now. Ongoing issues are mostly seen on the internet. Information on the climatic conditions are mostly seen with the help of the internet.

As can be seen in Extracts 14, 15 and 16, there were paragraphs the student-teachers wrote that lacked paragraph completeness. In all the three paragraphs cited in the extracts above, the student-teachers failed to add important details to the discussions or explanations they were providing. In Extract 14, the student-teacher only re-emphasised or restated the topic sentences without touching on exactly what people get to know through the use of the internet and how they get to know it. Again, Extract 15 mentions in the topic sentence the internet provides an avenue for people to acquire information. The next sentence, a supporting sentence, which is supposed to highlight the kind of information, the way the internet helps in acquiring such information and how beneficial acquiring the information is, rather goes on to show that people also get to learn from others on the internet. Finally, in Extract 16, just like in Extract 14, the writer reiterates what is in the topic sentence without giving the necessary details by which the topic sentence “The internet also helps us know current issues and what is going on in the world right now” would be understood. All these prove the fact that the student-teachers lack the expertise in providing adequate explanations to the problems that they raise in the topic sentences in their paragraphs. Some of them are therefore deficient in writing paragraphs of good quality in terms of paragraph completeness.

Conclusion

It can be concluded from the findings of the study that the student teachers faced a myriad of difficulties in their quest to paragraph essays. These challenges have been divided into two, some relating to structure and others relating to quality. The difficulties ranged from omitting, splitting and merging of features to numbering and listing points. Omission of features took the form of conscious or unconscious deletion of the introductory and concluding paragraph. Splitting features resulted in the division of the introduction into segments. The opposite of the above was merging features. The introduction was merged with the topic sentences which resulted in combining the introductory paragraph with the first topic sentence. Combining two or more different topic sentences or listing several points one after the other without expatiating on them. The merging extended to the way of paragraphing where indentation which is a unique style of paragraphing is wrongly combined with spacing or leaving a line. The other component of the paragraphing difficulty had to do with the quality of the paragraphs. These included unity, coherence and completeness. Paragraph unity was a problem as there were instances where some student teachers deviated from the topic sentence. There were issues with coherence as where inter paragraph devices were not employed to link the various paragraphs to ensure coherence. There were equally problems

with intraparagraph cohesion where pronouns were used that were not referring to specific nouns used earlier. The challenge of paragraph completeness equally existed where detailed explanations were not used to expatiate on given topic sentences. The said challenges were inherent in their essays and as such negatively affect their writings.

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