Structure and segmentation in paragraphing: A case study of Mount Mary College of Education, Ghana

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Abstract

This study examined how Mount Mary College of Education students write paragraphs in their essays. A total of 160 student-teachers forming 21.14% of a target population of 757 were used for the research. These student-teachers were made to write expository essays which served as the main data collection instrument besides tutor interviews and focus group interviews for the student-teachers. The Essay Analytical Framework (EAF) of Owusu (2012) was used for the analyses. The findings of the study showed that although most of the student-teachers had clearly defined ways in which they structure their paragraphs they encountered myriads of challenges in paragraphing the introductory, the body and the concluding paragraphs. Parents, guardians and the government as a whole will reap the benefits of this research. Parents would be informed about the curriculum that their children are imbibing as well as the kind of learning resources to acquire for them. The government would equally be equipped with the necessary information about how to initiate, plan, and supervise implementation of policies in relation to education, specifically writing.

Keywords: essays, paragraph, student-teacher, sentence structure, writing skills

Public Interest Statement

One of the main goals of teaching English Language is to develop the writing skills of students apart from teaching listening, speaking and reading skills (Rao, 2019). This is partly because according to Defazio, Jones, Tenant and Hook (2010), lucid writing is an effective way of communicating a writer's ideas, opinions and intentions at all levels of students' academic experience. In teaching writing too, paragraphing is one main area of focus because paragraph writing is regarded as an essential element in the writing process (El-Rufai & Salim, 2015). Limone (2012) points out that in order to write good essays, students need to write good paragraphs since good paragraphs are essential ingredients that cannot be abandoned in writing good essays no matter the alternative technique the writer decides to use.

Introduction

Writing is a very essential means of communication in English. As such, it plays an important role in students' communication and in their academic endeavours. Indeed, apart from speaking and reading, writing is indispensable in the academic pursuits of students. This is because writing largely boosts their academic achievements. To this end, Mukulu et al. (2006) state that writing is considered the most important skill that students, require in order to enhance their personal development and academic success. Writing is used by students and other literate users of English Language in the process of teaching, learning and performing functions that are related to their diverse fields. Adams and Keene (2000) rightly confirm the above assertion by stating that learning to master writing skills can help students deal successfully with their academic demands and perform effectively in their disciplines and professional contexts. Meyers (2006) and Harmer (2007) equally corroborate the role that writing plays by stating that it is very essential particularly in the area of English for Academic Purposes since it is used to communicate and express the ideas of the learners. Crucial experiences of writers are inadvertently revealed usually through what they write. All the above testimonies about writing attest to the fact that writing is an essential skill which when acquired does not only enrich the students' ability to communicate effectively but also contributes to students' capability to chalk higher academic laurels. Student-teachers of Mount Mary College of Education write extensively. The majority of them are language students offering French and English; French and Ghanaian Language or English and Ghanaian Language. The other subjects such as Social Studies, Religious and Moral Education, and Music and Dance are not strictly language courses. However, there is a compulsory course in English that every student, regardless of the programme being pursued, is compelled to study. This is a means of training them to become competent in English

Language which is a major medium of instruction in institutions in Ghana. This is why the study is interested in delving into the challenges these student-teachers face in paragraphing in essays, which is a crucial aspect of writing. There cannot be paragraphing if there is no writing hence the need to state the merits of writing which are equally attributable to appropriate paragraphing. Coe (1988) in defining paragraphing states that paragraphing should be viewed as a type of macro punctuation mark that directs readers in clarifying a written material. Inferring from Coe's (1988) definition, which accidentally is a merit of paragraphing, paragraphing a piece of writing can be likened to punctuating a sentence. Just as punctuation helps the reader to better appreciate a text, paragraphing equally aids the reader to get insight into a text. Another inference is that paragraphing helps the reader to arrange the ideas expressed in an order that aids comprehension just as punctuation does. Punctuating a text in a particular way can affect the interpretation of that text just as paragraphing can equally alter the meaning of a text. For example, placing a topic sentence and its explanation, that is, the body paragraph, before an introductory paragraph can confuse the reader and as such affect the interpretation of a text. Paragraphing is what is basically used to organize a piece of writing.

Zinsser (2006) defines paragraphing as very essential in writing but has some elusive characteristics. Paragraphing gives direction to the reader regarding how ideas have been grouped. Paragraphing can be delicate, notwithstanding that, it is essential in writing and shows how the work is organized. On structuring a paragraph, Graham and Perin (2007) claim that an essay can be said to be properly written when its main target is treating the subject under discussion. Also, an essay is described as well-organized when the reader understands how the ideas in the write-up have been put together. A properly written essay also contains supporting ideas that are developed through the use of examples, appropriate vocabulary and follows the conventions of standard written English Language such as correct spelling, capitalization and sentence structure. All these details being brought out by Graham and Perin (2007) are stressing one thing which is planning. Paragraphing indicates that planning has been properly done. The logical implication is that if paragraphing demonstrates that a writer has planned or organized a piece of writing well then it should possess certain characteristics. Muhammed (2015) states that a paragraph should basically have three aspects, which are: topic sentence, supporting sentence and a concluding sentence. So, it is expected that whatever is referred to as a paragraph should have the three parts mentioned above.

Literature Review

The structure of a paragraph

According to Owusu (2012, p. 56) "in paragraphing, structure refers to composition of sentences into paragraphs." Structuring a paragraph therefore basically connotes organization which is essential in writing. Lack of proper organization makes comprehension of a text extremely difficult. The importance of organization in academic writing has been emphasized by Schleppegrell (2004) who stresses that writing organised texts is an essential characteristic of academic writing. Although Schleppegrell mentions the essence of organizing academic writing, organization is not only limited to academic writing. It is vital in all kinds of writings.

Emerson (2005, p. 1) indicates that the principles below should direct the way paragraphs are written:

Every paragraph should contain a single developed idea.
The key idea of the paragraph should be stated in the opening sentence of the paragraph.
Use a variety of methods to develop your topic sentences.
Finally, use connectives between and within paragraphs to unify your writing.

Emerson's principles stress the importance of stating the topic sentence as the opening sentence which would contain the key idea. Subsequently, different methods and connectives should be used to discuss the topic sentence in a paragraph. These principles are to serve as guidelines to aid structure a text. According to Rosenwasser and Jill (2009), long paragraphs are frightening as they may look like mountains which could easily get both the writer and the reader lost. According to them, when writers write too many things in one paragraph at a time that paragraph usually loses its focus. Such a paragraph does not relate with the controlling theme of the entire essay. When writing a paragraph, whenever you sense yourself that you are stating a point which appears to be deviating from the issue being discussed, it is an indication that there should be a new paragraph. When you change over to a different point you must use a paragraph as a means of transforming your thoughts, dividing the paragraph into its most logical parts (Rosenwasser & Jill, 2009).

The academic setting must be impartial and provide a level playing ground where intellectuals must be free to write the way they want. Stringent rules are not right. Reeves and Leventhal (2012, p. 2) endeavour to demonstrate this in the following:

An ideal paragraph has the following structure:

A topic sentence setting the scene for the reader.

Text developing the idea with pros and cons and mentioning any other important aspect of the argument in the paragraph. Text concluding the paragraph and heralding the content of the next paragraph.

Reeves and Leventhal (2012) further state that the content of the paragraph does not go beyond the points indicated above. The above statement is too harsh. Apparently, it is making a rule which contravenes their own statement that the academic environment should be liberated from rules. The statement is misleading because every genre definitely has a way it must he approached. Geda (2018), while reviewing the book, "Understanding the Paragraph," argues that in teaching paragraphs, instructors must be aware of how the genre of essay influences what must be written. The notion that one particular kind of paragraphing style should be convenient to cater for all categories of writing is tantamount to creating confusion. As a result, it is not all write-ups that must be paragraphed in the same way. The argument here is that although all essays are not paragraphed in the same way, when an issue is discussed and ended before bringing on board a related issue, a paragraph must be created.

The deductions from all the above principles, citations and explanations point to a central idea of this investigation. The first implication is that a paragraph must contain a topic sentence. The second inference is that the topic sentence must be illustrated with sentences which would aid in explaining it. The third deduction is that there should be a sentence to demonstrate that the paragraph has ended and another paragraph is going to be created. Finally, there should be synchrony among the paragraphs created. All the above are in line with the core of the research which is investigating the structural and segmentation in paragraphing in the essays of student-teacher.

Essential elements in paragraphing structure

The deductions made from the concept of paragraphing and paragraphs point to the paragraph discussing a single idea. This assertion is confirmed by the structure of paragraph as explained by Reeves and Leventhal (2012) and Emerson (2005). The structure of a paragraph, in brief, is how to structure the introductory, the body and the concluding paragraphs. Apart from the above about the structure of a paragraph, there are also the issues of unity, order, coherence and completeness which must be considered in paragraphing.

Unity – There should be a topic sentence which presents the theme of the paragraph and serves as the core around which all other sentences must evolve. All the sentences efficiently relate back to the topic sentence (Strunk & White, 2000). Each

sentence must relate to the theme. Only one topic must be discussed at a time in a paragraph. The other associated sentences must consistently relate to the topic sentence alternatively referred to as the theme, the key or the main sentence. The central issue is that there should not be any digression so far as the major issue raised by the topic sentence and being explicated by the supporting sentences is concerned.

Coherence – The use of the appropriate transitional words to connect one sentence to the other as well as consistency in the use of tenses are the factors necessary to ensure coherence. The employment of good transitional devices within the paragraph aids in coherence. (Strunk & White, 2000). Coherence also implies sticking together. A coherent paragraph should first and foremost have all the parts of the paragraph connected. In effect, the supporting sentences should all be linked to the topic sentence; and secondly the paragraphs must be logical to the reader (Reid, 2000). Rustipa (2013) also states that one of the main ingredients of coherence is that paragraphs should be properly and fully developed. Full development means the essential sentences that are required to sufficiently expound the topic sentence are used in the explanations and illustrations.

Completeness – Completeness means that there is sufficient information adequately developed to justify the topic sentence. There should be an appropriate topic sentence, supporting sentences and a concluding sentence which address the topic. As Reid (2000) posits, when a paragraph has the necessary supporting sentences, that is, the major supporting and minor supporting sentences as well as concluding sentences that fully explain the topic sentence, then that paragraph can be said to be complete. Completeness is relative simply because what one reader sees as complete, another may see as incomplete. The issue of relativity could be addressed if the question or topic is limited in scope, providing specific number of points to be written.

Methodology

The research is a case study. According to Creswell (2003, p. 15), in a case study, "the researcher explores in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals". The study is focused on an activity of student-teachers of Mount Mary College of Education which is their paragraph writing skills. The study therefore intends investigating the personal experiences of the student-teachers in writing; as such, considering this writing activity, the choice of a case study is in line with the explanation that Creswell provides. The target population that the researcher selected the sample size from was 757 students in level 100 and 200. Those in Level 300 during the 2018/2019 academic year, although they were students because they had not written their final examination at the time of data collection, had to be excluded. That was

because they had been attached to schools outside the school environment where they were observing and doing their final teaching practice. They would only come back to the school and write their final papers. 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.

Data analyses procedure

The data collected during the current study were analysed using content and thematic analyses. Each procedure was used distinctly for the different types of data collected. These procedures are explained in the following lines.

Content analysis

The first data analysis technique that the researcher used was content analysis. According to Krippendorf (2004), this is a data analysis technique in which researchers examine texts, images and symbolic matter so as to arrive at valid inferences concerning a given set of data. The researcher coded the various essays that the student-teachers had written in terms of the levels of the student-teachers who wrote them (L100 or L200) and the later (ES 1, ES2). Therefore, each essay had a code such as ES 1, L 100 or ES 35, L200. After the coding, the researcher critically read through each of the essays first and foremost to identify whether they had the introductory, body and concluding paragraphs. The researcher read the essays the second time looking critically at the ways in which the introductory, the body and the concluding paragraphs of each essay were written. A special attention was paid to the body paragraphs and how they had been developed in terms of their topic sentences, the supporting sentences and the concluding sentences.

The researcher used the following checklist adapted from Umunnakwe and Pitse (2017) for the analysis: For the Introduction, the symbol (√) means well written or exists in essay. Issues like whether there is a visible paragraph, the topic of the essay is placed in context and whether there is a background or a thesis statement were looked out for. Others such as definition or explanation of the topic, an introduction that is related to the topic in any way or whether the reader's attention is captured in any way by using a quotation or an anecdote were the focus of the researcher. The symbol (Ø) meaning not well written, not enough or wrongly framed was also used. If none of the expected points was found in the introduction then, the symbol (Ø) was used. The checklist used for the body (Bo) includes the following: The sign (√) meaning well written or exists in the essay is used when there is a clear topic sentence, well explained. The symbol (Ø) is used in the body if the topic sentence is not well-explained and (X) means not available. The topic sentence (TS) must be unambiguous for (√) sign to be used. The sign (Ø) is used when the topic sentence is ambiguous and (X) is used if it is not available. The supporting sentence or sentences (SS) should be related to the topic sentence for the sign (√) to be used. Unclear SS attracts this (Ø) mark. The symbol (X) means the SS is not available. Finally, for the concluding (Con) paragraph, things that were looked out for were a summary of the points raised, suggestions, recommendations or statements that showed that the essay had ended.

Thematic analysis

Apart from content analysis, the researcher used thematic analysis in examining the data collected. The researcher repeatedly listened to and manually transcribed the tutors' interviews which had been audio recorded. He then did the same for the recordings done during the student-teachers' focus group interview. After the transcriptions, the researcher carefully read through the various scripts looking out for themes that explained the findings for research question.

Results and Discussions
How do student-teachers at Mount Mary College of Education structure their essays

The data on students' structural issues have been looked at first. That is, how the student-teachers write introductory, body and concluding paragraphs of their essays. This is followed by the details of the analysis in subsequent pages. The introductory paragraph has been studied first followed by the body paragraph and finally the concluding paragraph.

Students' data on structural issues – How student-teachers write introduction, body and conclusions of essays

The following data is the summary of how the introduction, the body and the concluding paragraphs were written by the student-teachers. According to the Essay Analytical Framework (EAF) of Owusu (2012), one of the structural issues is related to how the introduction, the body and the concluding paragraphs of an essay are written. These structural issues have been summarized in table 1 below.

Table 1 – Summary of structural issues – How student-teachers write introduction, body and conclusions of essays

	Well written (√)	Not well written (Ø)	Not available (X)	Total
Introduction (In)	86 53.75%	34 21.25%	40 25%	160 100%
Body (Bo)	150 93.75%	8 5%	2 1.25%	160 100%
Conclusion (Con)	66 41.25%	16 10%	78 48.75	160 100%

As can be seen from Table one above, out of 160 texts, 86 texts (53.75%) of the introductory texts were well-written, 34 texts (21.25%) were not well-written while 40 texts (25%) were not written at all. Concerning the body paragraph, 150 texts (93. 75%) were framed well. 8 texts (5%) were not written well while 2 texts (1.25%) did not have the body paragraph at all. For the concluding paragraph only 66 texts (41.25%) were good concluding paragraphs. 16 texts (10%) were not well written.78 texts (48.75%) had no concluding paragraphs at all.

The introductory paragraph

Concerning the introductory paragraph as show in Table 1 above, a total of 160 texts of participants were analysed. Out of these texts, 86 texts forming 53.75% of the introductory texts were well-written or exist in the text, 34 texts forming 21.25% were not well-written or were not well- framed while 40 text, that is, 25% were missing or were not written at all. An introduction is said to be well-written when the topic is placed in context through, for instance, describing or explaining the central term or providing a background information about the topic. A good introduction states the purpose, the thesis statement and the organisation of the essay. An introduction is

tagged as not well written when none of the above is done or there is no connection between the topic and what was written (Kurniawan, 2012). The implication of the results of the study showed that at least half of the student-teachers wrote introductory paragraphs. In most of these paragraphs, the student-teachers took one or more of the following steps: they introduced the topic by stating, defining or describing it and providing the thesis statement. The extracts below illustrate these steps. Note that the extracts were quoted verbatim without correcting the errors in them.

Extract 1

The internet can be defined as a worldwide or global interconnection of computer networks which helps [sic] to share and receive information. The internet has become something that is used by almost every individual across the globe. It has so many importance and setbacks but I would like to write about just a few.

Extract 2

Internet is the global interconnection of world [sic]. In the sense that the internet requires a source of connectivity before we can assess it. The internet is used by almost everybody these days due to its importance and uses. Some of the importance of the internet are as follows:

From the extracts above, it is evident that most of the student-teachers followed definite steps in developing their introductory paragraphs. Both extracts show an introduction of the topic. In *Extract 1*, the student-teacher attempted a definition of the internet by stating that "the internet can be defined as a worldwide or global interconnection of computer networks which helps [sic] to share and receive information." Similarly, Extract 2 gives a brief description of the topic by indicating that the "internet is the global interconnection of world." In the sense that the internet requires a source of connectivity before we can assess it." Also, in each of the extracts, there is an indication of the thesis statement. In Extract 1, the student-teacher states that "it [the internet] has so many importance and setbacks but I would like to write about just a few," while in Extract 2, the student-teacher specifies that "the internet is used by almost everybody these days due to its importance and uses." These descriptions represent the general patterns that were found in most of the essays in which the student-teachers wrote introductions. Kurniawan (2012) points out that in writing paragraphs, authors may take a combination of two or more of the steps by introducing the topic, indicating how the topic is going to be developed and providing the thesis statement.

The divergence here however is that none of the introductions written by the student-teachers had clear cut indication or outline of how the topic was going to be developed. This may be indicative of the fact that the students are inexperienced in the art of writing the introduction as two of the students complained during the interview section that they did not actually know what goes into the introductory section. This is because it takes experienced students or writers to employ diverse approaches in the writing of all paragraphs, the introductory paragraph is not an exception.

Besides the above findings that give details of how the student-teachers wrote the introductory paragraphs, there were findings regarding the number of introductory paragraphs that were written as well as how well written or otherwise they were. In all, there were 86 out of 160 essays representing 53.75% that had well-written introductory paragraphs. Therefore, introductory paragraphs such as those presented in Extracts 1 and 2, were adjudged as well written. However, there were 34 essays in which the introductory paragraphs were not well written. The introductory paragraphs were adjudged so because they did not contain the features like the background, the thesis statement or were not related to the topic under discussion as expected. Rather, they had other irrelevant information. Examples of these introductory paragraphs have been stated in the following lines.

Extract 3

I am a student of Mount Mary Senior High School and offering social studies and R.M.E as a course. The following are some of the importance of the internet.

As can be seen in Extract 3, the student-teacher has two sentences in the introductory paragraph. The first sentence basically gives a description of the student in terms of the student's school (Mount Mary Senior High School) and course (social studies and R.M.E). An obvious serious error is "…Senior High School" instead of "…College of Education." The second sentence is then used to present the topic sentence (The following are some of the importance of the internet). The first sentence is irrelevant to the discussion on the importance of the internet leaving only the second sentence to be a useful part of the introductory paragraph. Such an introductory paragraph is regarded as not well written. Again, there were 40 essays representing 25% that did not have any introductory paragraph at all.

It can be seen in the extract below that the student-teacher discusses the importance of the internet by indicating first that "It makes research easier and faster." The second point is "It helps in advertisement" and the third point is "It is good for

record keeping." The above three points have been explained in distinct paragraphs in the essay which is good. What is lacking is that there is no introductory paragraph that seeks to introduce the concept under discussion, show the direction of the essay and state its thesis. An example of such an essay is shown in Extract 4 below:

Extract 4

<u>*Two importance of the internet*</u>

Firstly, it makes research easier and faster. With the help of the internet one can have access to any information needed. The internet gives the source of information you want to find and any information you need, it gives different options from which you can select the one which suits your peculiar interest. Through the internet we can have access to information which is very old, that is, you can find information about Aristotle and Isaac Newton through the internet. Within a second, information can be retrieved from the internet.

Also, it helps in advertisement. People sell their goods through the internet. For example, Jumia is a company that use the internet. This company does its advertisements using the internet. People shop on the net and their goods are delivered to them at home which helps the company to make profit and grow faster. This is important because people may not know the place where the company is located but through the internet they can have access to what they want to buy in the comfort of their homes.

Lastly, it is good for record keeping. When you keep your records on the net they do not get spoilt or burnt unlike books which can easily get burnt or destroyed. The internet can never leave the system. If you keep your documents on the net you can easily get access to them whenever you want to.

Statistics on how student-teachers write topic sentences and supporting sentences
The second variable in the Essay Analyses Framework is what Owusu (2012) refers to as the paragraph theory. This aspect has to do with topic sentences and supporting sentences. The table below is divided into two: The topic sentence (Table 2a) and the corresponding supporting sentences (Table 2b).

Table 2a – *Statistics* on how student-teachers write topic sentences

Topic Sentence (TS)	Well written (√)	Not well written (Ø)	Not available (X)
TS1	92	64	24
TS2	98	56	36
TS3	32	18	14
TS4	12	8	0
TS5	6	2	0
TOTAL	240	148	24
	58.25%	35.92%	5.8%
GRAND TOTAL		412 (100%)	

From Table 2a, it can be seen that there are a total of 240 topic sentences constituting 58.25% of the total number topic sentences which were well written out of 412. 148 topic sentences forming 35.92% were not well-written while 24 topic sentences forming 5.8% were missing; meaning, there were explanations without obvious topic sentences.

Table 2b – *Statistics* on how student-teachers write supporting sentences

Supporting Sentences (SS)	Well written (√)	Not well Written (Ø)	Missing (X)
SS1	78	64	18
SS2	76	64	20
SS3	20	28	16
SS4	10	6	6
SS5	0	4	2
TOTAL	184	166	62
	44.66%	40.29%	15%
GRAND TOTAL		412 (100%)	

Juxtaposed to the topic sentences analysed on table 2a are the supporting sentences on Table 2b. Out of a total expected 412 (100%) topic sentences, 184 which is 44.66% were well developed. 166 supporting sentences forming 40.29% of the 412(100%) were not

well written. 62 topic sentences, forming 15% were also not available, implying the topic sentences were written but there were no corresponding related supporting sentences. Constructing supporting sentences was therefore a challenge for 40.29% of participants while 15% did not write the supporting sentence at all.

The body paragraph

Apart from the introductory paragraphs, there were body paragraphs in the essays that the student-teachers wrote. These body paragraphs followed immediately after the introductory paragraphs. Each essay had an average of two body paragraphs usually connected through the use of transitional devices. These body paragraphs sought to further explain the thesis statement mentioned in the introductory paragraphs. The extracts below show examples of body paragraphs that were written by the student-teachers.

> *Extract 5*
>
> *The Internet helps in easy communication. The Internet is one of the most used access tool [sic] that has helped millions of people [sic] in*
> *easy communication [sic], thus you can live in Ghana and communicate with a family member in abroad [sic], it very fast and convenient [sic]*
> *Secondly, the Internet has helped [sic] in education, this [sic] because students learn through the internet. An example is when a student is given an assignment he or she can search from the internet and do it very well. Students, through the Internet can learn many things like the meaning of words, sentence and many more, even teachers learn [sic] how to teach from the internet through the new curriculum.*

> *Extract 6*
>
> *The Internet is very important in education because with the help of it, students are able to do their own research and come out with their own ideas to improve upon learning process. Infract because of the introduction of the new curriculum in the educational system, student are trained directly to find out information on their own so that they are not spoon fed by what the teachers will give them.*
> *Moreover, it has helped improve E-learning (electronic learning) and E-business (Business online). Because of the Internet, people are able to learn at their own pace anywhere at all they find themselves, for example distance learning.*

Business transactions also take place among individuals no matter where they find themselves.

Extracts 5 and *6* above show that the student-teachers wrote body paragraphs in their essays which advanced the position of the thesis that the internet is important. In each essay, the body paragraphs gave different arguments to prove the fact that the use of the internet comes with benefits to man. As can be found in *Extract 5*, there are two body paragraphs, the first showing that the internet enhances communication and the second showing that the internet promotes education. Each of these prove the fact that the internet is important. Similarly, in *Extract 6* the first body paragraph touches on the benefits of the internet in the area of education while the second combines the importance of the internet in promoting online education and online business. The two extracts are by far a representation of the general patterns that were found in most of the essays the students-teachers wrote.

The above shows that despite the few lapses with the body paragraphs, these paragraphs played a significant role in developing the thesis statement with the fact that the internet is important to mankind. These findings are in line with Kirzner and Mandell (2017) who indicates that the actual development and support of the thesis statement is done in the body paragraph and offers a place for its discussion through the topic sentence and supporting sentences. Also, the student-teachers linked the various paragraphs with transitional devices such as secondly (in Extract 5), moreover (in Extract 6), furthermore, additionally, also, finally and another. These helped to knit the various ideas shared in the paragraphs together in achieving the objective of buttressing the point made in the thesis statement of the essay.

Furthermore, unlike the introductory paragraph, the body paragraph of most of the essays were well written. In all, 150 of the 160 body paragraphs constituting 93.75% were well written with 8 of them constituting 5% not well written and 2 constituting 1.25% of the essays did not have body paragraphs at all. These show that the student-teachers do not have much challenges with structuring their body paragraphs like they do with structuring the introductory paragraphs of their essays.

Again, the body paragraphs had topic sentences, supporting sentences and concluding sentences. In terms of positioning, the topic sentences they wrote were located at the beginning of their paragraphs as illustrated in the four paragraphs in Extracts 5 and 6. It was expected that there would be variety in terms of the positioning of the topic sentences where some would be at the beginning, others at the middle and others at the end. However, almost all the topic sentences were positioned at the beginning of the paragraphs. Once again, this indicates the lack of variety which points

to a limitation in the knowledge base of the student-teachers regarding paragraphing. This shortfall also goes to buttress the concern of the students interviewed that, "Some teachers do not take the teaching of paragraphing seriously."

The concluding paragraphs
The third structural challenge with the texts analysed had to do with writing the concluding paragraph. 66 texts of participants being 41.25% had conclusions. 16 texts that is 10% had challenges writing the concluding paragraph. 78 texts (48.75%) did not have concluding paragraphs at all. Apart from the introductory and body paragraphs, there were concluding paragraphs. These concluding paragraphs were the last paragraphs that were written and were relatively shorter in terms of length as compared to the introductory and body paragraphs. The extracts that follow are examples of some of the concluding paragraphs that the student-teachers wrote.

> *Extract 7*
> *To draw the curtains down, the above points expplain the importance of the Internet.*

> *Extract 8*
> *In conclusion, the internet has helped the system for easier information and has helped our education system in knowledge acquisition.*

> *Extract 9*
> *To conclude, I can say the internet has helped in so many ways. This has helped to improved and changed a lot of lives.*

Extracts 7, 8 and 9 above show that the essays had concluding paragraphs which were developed using different styles. In Extract 7, the student-teacher re-emphasised the theme of the thesis statement as a way of summarising the essay by stating that the points raised in the body paragraph of the essay show that the internet is important. Similarly, Extract 8 is a summary of the main points in the essay but this time round, the specific points that the body paragraph had developed were mentioned with the explanation that the internet has improved access to information and expedited the knowledge acquisition process. In the final extract, Extract 9, the student-teacher follows a similar style by stating that "To conclude with, I can say the internet has helped in so many ways." However, in the last sentence of Extract 9, the student-teacher decides to blend the summary of two points by stating that "This has helped to improve and

change a lot of lives." These findings validate the arguments of Sherlock (2016) that the concluding paragraphs of essays may be written by summarising or externalising. In summarising, the writer either paraphrases the thesis or summarises the main points in the essay. In externalising, the writer concludes by transiting to an external but relevant issue about the topic, an issue that may have been mentioned in the main essay but not adequately developed because it is not the focus of the essay. Externalising was not seen in any of the essays analysed. A third approach to summarising which was mentioned by Sherlock was however not used in any of the essays that were analysed. This was the editorial approach in which the writer offers a personal commentary on the topic using an anecdote, a personal position, an interpretation or a concern. Just like in the case of the introductory paragraphs, this deficiency may have resulted from the fact that the knowledge of the student-teachers about the approaches that are used in writing concluding paragraphs is limited to some extent.

In addition, as compared to the introductory and body paragraphs, the concluding paragraph was the paragraph that was worst written. Only 66 student-teachers representing 41.25% were able to write good concluding paragraphs. For the remaining essays, 78 representing 48.75% did not have any form of concluding paragraphs at all and 16 of them representing 10% were not well written. A concluding paragraph which is not well written has not got any of the elements spelt out by Sherlock (2016).

Conclusion

It can be concluded from the findings of the study that student teachers of Mount Mary College of Education construct the introductory, body and concluding paragraphs in unique ways. Concerning the introductory paragraph, the student teachers employed varied styles in handling it. Student-teachers resort to defining, explaining or providing the thesis statement. Any of these means or a combination of them were used by the student-teachers when constructing the introductory paragraph. The body paragraph was used to illustrate the thesis statement mentioned in the introductory paragraph and transitional devices were also used. Some of the topic sentences were ambiguous while some illustrative sentences did not tally with the topic sentence raised. The concluding paragraphs were relatively shorter as compared to the introductory and body paragraphs written.

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