

Empowering Educators in Academic Writing: An International Community Engagement Initiative on Systematic Literature Reviews

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates an international community development initiative titled "Literature Review Workshop," conducted through a strategic partnership between IPMI International Business School (Indonesia) and UST Angelicum College (Manila, Philippines). The initiative aimed to enhance the research competencies and pedagogical capacities of 42 educators in Manila. Operating within 21st-century educational demands, secondary and higher education teachers face the critical task of mentoring students in academic writing while advancing their own postgraduate credentials. The workshop utilized instructional scaffolding alongside hands-on digital training to instruct participants in referencing tools, synthesis matrices, and conceptual structuring via the "Funnel Approach". Evaluation indicated substantial improvements in participant competency, marked by high engagement and an immediate ability to discern research gaps. Discrepancies in baseline research knowledge were mitigated using personalized, one-on-one instructional consultations. This cross-border intervention provides a practical, scalable model for international academic institutions to drive continuous professional development (CPD) in emerging academic landscapes.

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INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In modern educational ecosystems, continuous professional development (CPD) serves as a cornerstone for maintaining instructional quality and fostering institutional excellence (Putri et al., 2025). Within the 21st-century framework, educators are increasingly expected to act not merely as conduits of foundational knowledge, but as active participants in academic inquiry and pedagogical innovation (Towards an Integrated Professional Development Model, n.d.). For high school and pre-university educators in Manila, Philippines, mastering academic writing has evolved into a dual-layered professional necessity. First, it equips them with the research acumen necessary to secure advanced postgraduate qualifications (Master's and Doctoral degrees). Second, it strengthens their pedagogical capacity to mentor students as they navigate introductory research courses.

At the core of any empirical or theoretical inquiry lies the compilation of a literature review (Shah et al., 2018). Far from being a peripheral introductory chapter, a rigorous literature review maps historical trajectories, uncovers hidden theoretical frameworks, and contextualizes contemporary research problems (Shah et al., 2018). For emerging scholars, a systematic literature review (SLR) offers a structured path to handle extensive scientific data and build early domain expertise (Pantic & Hamilton, 2024). However, academic writing is highly complex, demanding strong logical sequence, elaborate reasoning, and rigorous synthesis (Pantic & Hamilton, 2024). Consequently, developing the skill to design a clear literature review remains one of the most prominent hurdles for educators globally (Popova et al., 2018).

Situation Analysis and Partner Challenges

A preliminary assessment of the targeted educational community in Manila revealed systemic challenges in pedagogical practice and instructional execution. While educators frequently assigned literature-based papers, a significant conceptual gap persisted regarding what constitutes a rigorous review. Instead of analyzing and blending sources into a coherent narrative, teachers and students frequently

resorted to compiling disconnected descriptive summaries of past publications. This approach misses the core purpose of a literature review: establishing an intellectual dialogue between sources to justify a novel research trajectory (Shah et al., 2018).

Specifically, three primary problem areas were identified within the partner institution, UST Angelicum College:

1. **Instructional Limitations in Synthesis:** Educators faced difficulties teaching the functional difference between descriptive bibliographical summaries and integrated thematic synthesis.
2. **Technological Gaps in Reference Management:** There was a lack of structured familiarity with digital reference managers (e.g., Mendeley), hindering teachers from showing students how to organize academic references systematically.
3. **Absence of Structural Tools:** Teachers lacked practical instruments, such as a synthesis matrix, to help students map out literature, categorize themes, and explicitly pinpoint research gaps.

Objectives of the Engagement

To address these issues, IPMI International Business School launched an international community development project. The project was structured around three core objectives:

- To deepen educators' theoretical understanding of the structural layout and analytical purpose of literature reviews in international research.
- To supply practical, actionable classroom strategies to help teachers instruct students on information synthesis and paraphrasing.
- To introduce accessible pedagogical frameworks—including the synthesis matrix and digital reference management applications—to streamline the drafting process.

METHODOLOGY

The international community engagement program used a collaborative, capacity-building workshop model designed for 42 selected educators across various institutions in Manila, Philippines. The initiative was executed through a coordinated operational timeline divided into distinct operational phases.

Preparation Phase

The preparation phase took place over a one-week period. This phase focused on building the international partnership between IPMI International Business School and UST Angelicum College. While IPMI provided the academic

leadership and instructional content, UST Angelicum College managed the local infrastructure, coordinated logistics, and handled participant recruitment. To ensure zero financial burden on the participating educators or the sending institution, the host institution fully subsidized all operational components (including seminar space, digital equipment, and technical support).

Implementation and Instructional Design

The core program was delivered on April 17, 2026, using a scaffolded, interactive instructional approach. The delivery method combined theoretical concepts with immediate, hands-on practice:

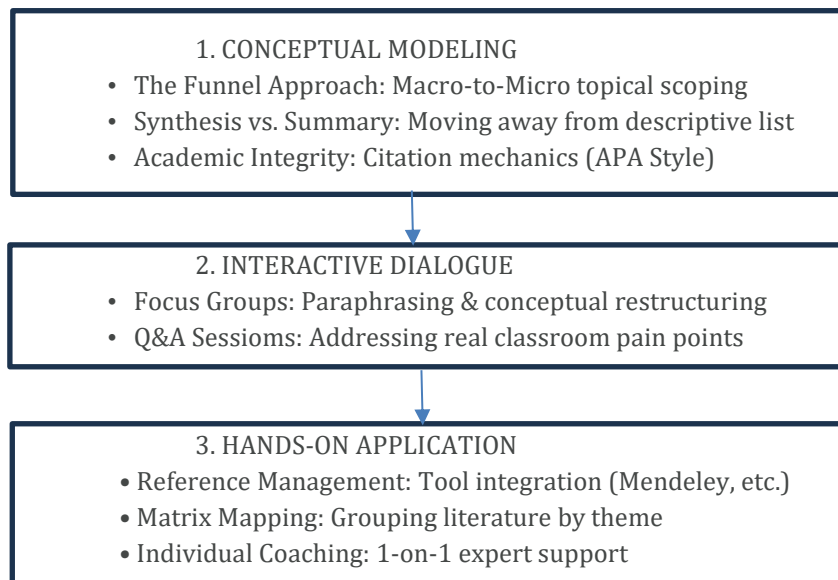


Figure 1. Delivery Method

1. **Conceptual Modeling:** Interactive lectures broke down the mechanics of the "Funnel Approach" (scoping literature from broad fields down to specific research questions) and distinguished synthesis from summary. It also highlighted academic integrity and the rules of international citation styles (APA Style) to prevent plagiarism.
2. **Interactive Dialogue:** Focus group discussions (*urun rembug*) allowed participants to critique excerpted texts, practice paraphrasing, and discuss how to

structure literature reviews to form a coherent argument.

3. **Hands-on Application and Tool Integration:** Educators practiced using digital tools like Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Mendeley. They also worked with a synthesis matrix to organize literature themes and map out research gaps.

To handle varying levels of baseline research experience among participants, the program included personalized, one-on-one consultation

sessions during the practical exercises. This allowed instructors to provide targeted guidance to educators needing extra support.

Post-Activity Monitoring Phase

Following the in-person workshop, the engagement transitioned into a continuous monitoring phase. This phase was supported through both online and offline channels, allowing participants to consult with the project team as they integrated these writing methods into their own research and classroom instruction.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Participant Evaluation and Competency Gains

The workshop achieved its primary goals, showing a clear improvement in the educators' research competencies. During the interactive exercises and subsequent Q&A sessions, participants demonstrated a strong grasp of how to use literature as a diagnostic tool to uncover research gaps. Rather than looking at literature as static text, educators learned to view past studies as part of an ongoing conversation where new papers can carve out fresh niches (Shah et al., 2018).

The workshop's focus on the distinction between *Synthesis* and *Summary* proved to be a key turning point. Participants noted that learning to use a structured synthesis matrix helped demystify the process of grouping multiple studies by theme. This approach directly addresses common writing challenges where authors struggle to connect concepts and maintain a clear, logical sequence (Leite et al., 2019; Pantic & Hamilton, 2024). Furthermore, introducing reference management software helped reduce the mechanical stress of formatting citations, allowing educators to focus on the intellectual work of analysis and synthesis.

Addressing Educational Diversity through Scaffolding

A major challenge identified during the workshop was the wide variation in participants' initial research experience. While some educators were already enrolled in postgraduate programs, others had minimal exposure to systematic literature mapping.

Left unaddressed, single-session professional

workshops often fail because they do not accommodate these differences in baseline skills (Popova et al., 2018). This project countered that issue by embedding a one-on-one coaching layer into the workshop. Providing real-time, individualized feedback during the matrix-mapping exercises helped bridge this knowledge gap. This experience underscores the importance of combining broad lectures with personalized mentoring in teacher professional development programs (Putri et al., 2025).

Institutional Outcomes and Sustainable Outputs

The partnership generated several concrete academic resources and pathways designed to sustain these skills over time:

- **Curriculum Materials:** The instructional content was compiled into a specialized *Literature Review Module* to serve as a long-term reference for the teachers and their institutions.
- **Publication Pathways:** To encourage immediate application, participants received journal templates and were invited to submit their papers to peer-reviewed outlets, such as the *Journal for Sustainable Community Development (JSCD)* and the *IPMI International Journal of Business Studies (IJBS)*.

Professional Networking: Educators were given access to broader academic networks, including the annual CEO Conference organized by IPMI, helping connect secondary education teachers with wider corporate and academic circles.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This international community development initiative successfully strengthened the academic writing and research capacities of 42 educators in Manila, Philippines. By addressing the root issues behind poor literature mapping—specifically the tendency to summarize rather than synthesize—the workshop equipped participants with the practical skills needed to identify clear research gaps. Combining conceptual models like the "Funnel Approach" with practical tools like

reference managers and synthesis matrices gave educators a clear framework for both their own scholarship and their classroom teaching. Ultimately, the success of this project demonstrates how cross-border academic collaborations can deliver effective, low-cost, and highly impactful professional development for educators in growing academic communities.

Recommendations

Based on the outcomes and insights from this engagement, the following actions are recommended:

1. **Institutionalize Structural Mapping Tools:** Schools should formally integrate synthesis matrices and digital reference

software into their introductory research curricula to establish strong academic writing habits early on.

2. **Transition to Continuous Mentorship:** Future educational outreach projects should move away from isolated, one-time workshops and instead adopt long-term, modular mentoring structures that track teachers' progress over an entire academic term.
3. **Expand Collaborative Cross-Border Research:** Institutional partners should leverage these training initiatives to launch joint cross-border research projects, allowing educators to co-author papers and apply their skills directly to international publications

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