

Improving Literature Analysis Skills in a Grade 11 English Classroom

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Abstract

Eleventh-grade English students have a history of struggling with interpreting literature on standardized assessments. This study examines students' ability to compare multiple texts to determine theme, analyze the author's choices in creating the story, and define words in context. All of these concepts were taken from nationally aligned Common Core standards for literacy. The chosen research population was one class of 37 English 11 standard students in a suburban high school. The chosen key concepts were assessed through quarterly benchmarks. International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program rubrics were used to determine how these standards were met in the students' analytical writing assignments. In addition to this, small activity-based formative assessments were used to analyze the students' weaknesses in grasping each concept individually. By presenting engaging extracurricular material with a higher readability, students were able to analyze and interpret literature based on these standards. This falls in alliance with the chosen school's improvement plan which is to increase the rigor of students' reading materials. The selected population of students responded well to the change in instructional strategy and exceeded the target results by scoring higher on these standards on their second quarter benchmark.

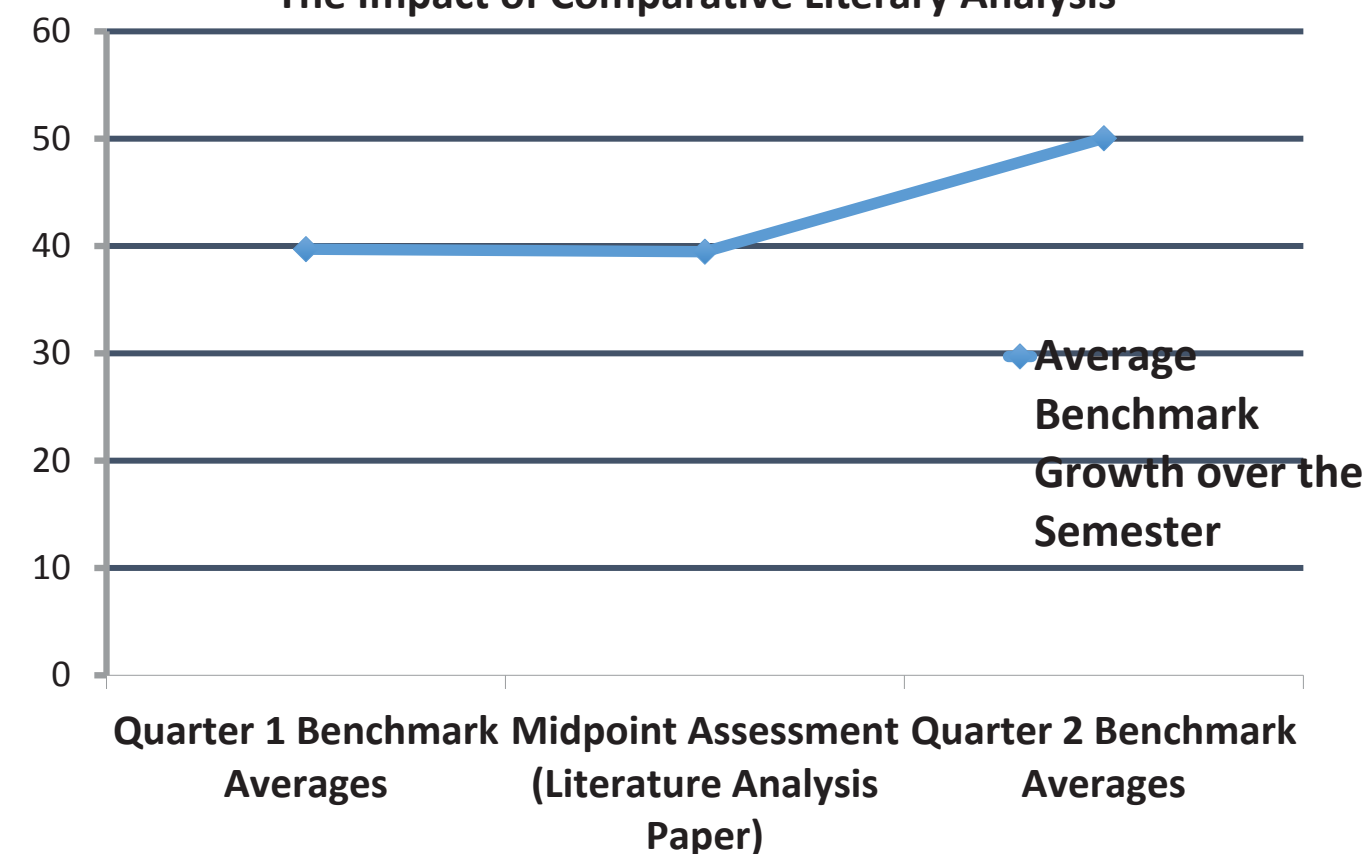
Introduction

The student population under analysis specifically struggled with Common Core Standards CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2-12.4, all which address the analysis of literature. Specifically, these standards deal with analyzing the author's purpose, comparing multiple text to determine theme, and learning the definition of vocabulary in context. Students generally performed up to standard on the end of first quarter benchmark with the exception these three standards. In order to improve student performance on these standards the use of project-based/inquiry-based learning, student reflection and self-assessment based on the MYP approaches to learning skills (metacognition), writing to learn, kinesthetic classroom activities, authentic assessments, tiered assignments, scaffolding of assignments, AVID strategies: WICOR, and differentiated instruction strategies. Based on the interpretation of pre-assessment data, 60% (21 out of the 36) of the students selected for each individual target group should improve their Second Quarter Benchmark scores by 5 percentage points or more.

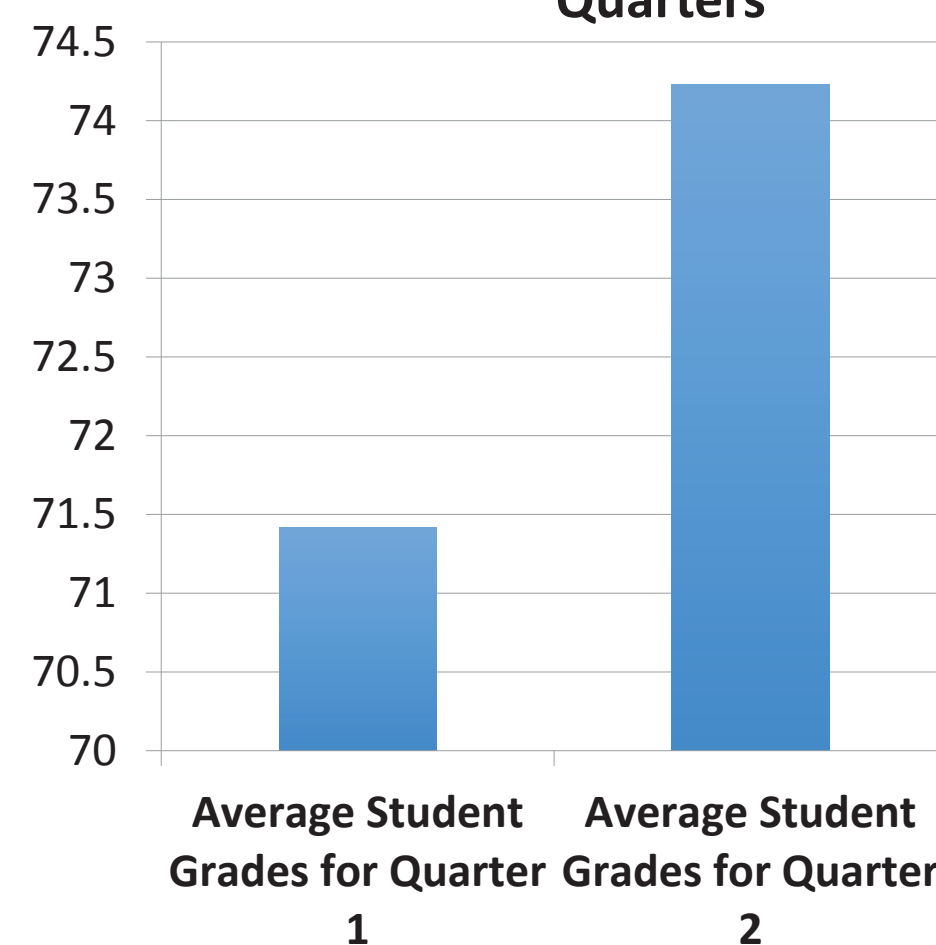
Methods

In order to focus on the three problematic standards for students student proficiency was measured by using the selected students' 1st and 2nd quarter benchmark exams and an analytical essay comparing and contrasting two different characters in *The Crucible*. In this essay, students must have used quotes from the text to back up their analysis. The impact of this analytical paper process is represented in the first graph below. To help students determine the definition of vocabulary in context, close annotated readings along with teacher-guided interpretations were incorporated often into *The Crucible* unit. Plickers, a kinesthetic QR code assessment method, helped to gather formative assessment data about student vocabulary acquisition for words selected from one of their reading passages. Students were also frequently required to compare their current reading with texts learned previously in the semester. Lastly, the Nearpod online lesson software was used to encourage student motivation and the prompt receipt of student work.

The Impact of Comparative Literary Analysis



Students' Semester Grades over Two Quarters



Results

The student growth goal was reached based on the data collected by the quarterly benchmark. A literary analysis paper for the play *The Crucible* was implemented at the midway point between the first and second benchmark. By focusing on the use of quotations and the comparison and contrast of the play's characters, the students were better prepared for interpreting authorial purpose on their benchmark questions and the essay. In addition to this, verbally asking for student at the close of each class to turn in their work and to implement digital software that requires students to submit responses had a direct positive correlation with improving the students' semester grades. Introducing students to non-fictional historical documents to supplement their fictional writings has also helped students to find themes across texts which has also positively influenced the students' benchmark score in the area of analysis.

Conclusion

The core concepts that were the focus of this study were mostly addressed through directly addressing these concepts during their analytical assignments such as annotated readings and writing an analysis paper. Student motivation to complete their work is very important. Chunking and regularly collecting student work greatly improves student grades. Chunking longer assignments like analytical papers also allows for "teachable moments" which can be directly guided toward the core concept competencies.

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