

EFL Student's Writing Skills: Challenges and Remedies

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Abstract: Among the four English skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), writing is commonly known as the most difficult but the least liked skill although it plays a crucial role in language production. At the University of Economics and Business Administration – Thai Nguyen University (TUEBA), Writing is one of the compulsory subjects in the English curriculum for the high-quality training program to promote students' English commands for their academic training and future career development. Actually, there are numerous factors influencing EFL student's learning processes that shape the learning results. The purposes of this study are to look into the challenges the students encounter when learning to write English, and identify factors hindering their writing skills. Especially, this research focuses on obtaining flexible and proper recommendations for improving student's writing skills. The research was carried out through survey questionnaires with TUEBA's freshmen of the high-quality training program and the error analysis of their writing samples. The findings showed the major problems in student's writing are the lack of vocabulary, the limited knowledge of grammar and the insufficiency of writing skills. These challenges are affected by various factors as the materials, the teaching methods and the students themselves. The study suggests remedial measures such as raising student's awareness and motivation, developing writing materials, improving the English curriculum and boosting teaching methods with the application of technology in managing student's work and giving correction and feedback.

Keywords: Improving, English writing skill, high-quality training program, Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration.

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I. Introduction

In the globalization trend that is taking place worldwide, English still occupies the dominant position as the most commonly used language in international transactions. Therefore, for many years, English is considered a compulsory subject in the training program of almost all educational institutions in Vietnam to target future graduates meeting the increasing demand for quality human resources for the country.

Based on the need of highly qualified human resources to serve the international integration, Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration - Thai Nguyen University (TUEBA) has implemented high-quality training programs in Business Administration, Economics, Accounting, Finance - Banking. The high-quality training program provides a much better training program than the standard one in terms of English competence; capacity of information technology application; ability to lead, chair and work in a team; adaptability to the working environment. The training objectives of the high quality training program is to train qualified human resources with professional skills, being capable of using fluent English and able to work in the international environment, to meet the increasing demand for human resources for development of the northern mountainous region in particular and the country in general during the global integration. On graduation, students need to achieve English language proficiency equivalent to IELTS 5.5 and be able to use English fluently. This shows that English plays a crucial role in determining the qualification of the graduates.

On that basis, the English curriculum is built as a compulsory part and applied to all the first-year students attending this program. The English curriculum is conducted in the first year of the program including supplementary modules covering vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, general English and practice modules such as Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing; of which, some modules utilize blended teaching method with the combination of traditional teaching methods and online instruction through supportive software. This allows students to have flexible learning time while facilitating the faculty in managing the learning process and the student's academic performance. Besides, the English preparatory program is designed to include project-based learning and extra-curricular activities associated with academic subjects. Students are expected to gain knowledge, develop their English skills and always have the opportunity to practice the

knowledge they have learned in real-life situations. This enables students to develop their creativity, develop teamwork skills, and maintain a positive motivation for the subject.

Learning and using English fluently is not a simple thing. Moreover, among the four basic English skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, writing is considered the most difficult skill for learners due to many

objective and subjective reasons. Therefore, students, especially non-major ones, often make mistakes in the process of writing all kinds of English documents. Trying to overcome these difficulties takes a lot of time when students do not have enough awareness of the importance of improving their writing skills. Consequently, students often lose their motivation or get discouraged during writing lessons, which partly affects their learning results. There have been no studies about this topic have ever done at TUEBA; thus, this study was carried out to examine the student's challenges in the writing course, find out the sources of reasons and propose remedies to help them overcome the obstacles and improve their writing skills.

II. Literature Review

Writing skill

Writing skills are an important part of the communication process through which people can express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions in writing. The concept of "Writing" has been interested in by many scientists. Nunan (2003) defines: "Writing is both a physical and mental act. At the most basic level, writing is the physical act of committing words or ideas to some medium. On the other hand, writing is the mental work of inventing ideas, thinking about how to express them, and organizing them into statements and paragraphs that will be clear to a reader." Harmer (1998) put another definition of writing as "a process that is, the stages the writer undergoes to write something in its final form. This process has four main elements which are planning, drafting, editing and final draft". In this light of thought, Richard and Schmidt (2002) supported that "Writing is viewed as a result of complex processes of planning, drafting, reviewing and revising." Researchers have recently added the social aspect to their notions of writing. Accordingly, Shokrpour & Fallahzadeh (2007) suggested that writing is not only a cognitive activity but also a complex social action. It is the reflection of the writer's expertise through communication skills. It is hard to learn and develop writing skills, especially in learning to write English as a second language.

Before the years 1960, the writing skills of a foreign language often did not attract much attention; however, in recent decades it has been more noticeable and considered an important skill of communication and fundamental content in the process of learning a language. Emphasizing the importance of writing skills, Harmer (1998) stated: "the reasons for teaching writing to students of English as a foreign language include reinforcement, language development, learning style, and most importantly, writing as a skill in its own right." It is popular that writing skills are often the least favorite skills of students and the success in improving writing skills depends on the success of the other language skills. However, writing skills cannot be neglected since it is an important skill in daily life as well as academic activities. Once students are good at writing correctly and logically, they will know how to use appropriate language and style in their study and work in the future (Dwivedi, 2015). Especially, in the current period of modern technology development, the exchange of information is largely done on the keyboard, making it essential for people to be able to communicate coherently and effectively in writing (Griffiths, 2016).

EFL student's difficulties in writing

As a natural rule in the process of formation, learning, and development of any language, writing is always the last learned skill compared to the three remaining skills of listening, speaking, and reading. However, writing is considered as the most difficult skill for learners. In English learning as a foreign language, there is no exception. Learners often have difficulties in writing their texts even in their language. For English writing, those difficulties seem much bigger. This issue has been a widely discussed topic of linguists and foreign language researchers in the world.

As compared to speaking, according to Hedge (1988), a writing activity often requires many factors such as a good ability to develop ideas and information, high level of accuracy to help readers avoid misunderstandings, the use of diversified grammatical structures, syntax, and vocabulary. All of these help to create a particular writing style in accordance with the writing theme and target readers. Also, Nunan (1989) indicated that writing is the most complex and difficult-to-learn skill for those who learn English as a foreign language because "writing is an extremely complex, cognitive activity for all which the writer is required to demonstrate control of a number of variables simultaneously". This means that, at the sentence level, the writer must consider many factors such as content, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, and spelling. At a higher level, the writer needs to have the ability to integrate information into coherent paragraphs and texts. In addition, the course of writing skills should be very time-critical and requires the writer to practice a lot. Along with this perspective, Hedge (2000) concluded: "all the time spent in communicative activities, adults devote

45% of their energies to listening, 30% to speaking, 16% to reading, and 9% to writing.” That is the reason why the majority of students feel stressed and stuck in trying to convey their message when writing articles.

According to Fareed (2016), cited from Jacobs & L (1981) and Hall (1988), ‘A text of an ineffective ESL writer must be cohesive, logical, clearly structured, interesting and properly organized with a wide range of vocabulary and mastery of conventions in mechanics’. Thus, learners often face many difficulties in developing effective writing skills. In terms of grammar, understanding and applying the English grammatical rules is not easy for them because verbs are usually formed differently to have subject-verb agreement according to the tenses. Besides, it is hard for them to learn how to use articles, prepositions, pronouns, and connecting devices appropriately. Syntactically, learners often find writing the correct sentence structure challenging because, in English syntax, there are so many different types of sentence structures with strict requirements on the use of conjunctions and dependent/subordinate clauses. In terms of vocabulary, learners need to have a large enough vocabulary range to be able to use them flexibly for each writing topic in order to perform the task well. However, they often have difficulty in choosing the appropriate vocabulary in context. In terms of skills, writing requires learners to organize and develop ideas logically, which is also a big challenge for them. Although they own a broad range of vocabulary and grammar knowledge, they cannot complete the task well due to the inefficient organization of the writing papers. At TUEBA these problems seem very common, bringing about the burden for both lecturers and students.

Factors influencing EFL student's writing skills

The ability to write does not come naturally but requires regular study and practice. This means that, in order to develop writing skills, learners need to spend time practicing writing and reading a lot of documents. The process of learning to write English as a foreign language is often affected by factors such as lack of motivation, limited reading activities and the influence of the mother tongue.

Many studies have shown that in all learning activities, motivation is always considered necessary to make success. In this view, Harmer (2006a) points out that "People involved in language teaching often say that students who want to learn will succeed whatever circumstances in which they study. They succeed despite using methods which experts consider unsatisfactory. In the phase of such a phenomenon, it seems reasonable to suggest that the motivation that students bring to class is the biggest simple factor affecting their success." It shows that motivation is one of the simple factors but has a great influence on the success of learners. When there is good motivation for learning, learners will achieve their learning goals easily and find writing activities more interesting and meaningful. Harmer (2006a) also noted that there are many factors that reduce the motivation of the learners to write. Firstly, it is the fear of failure or rejection that is a common feeling among learners when they are afraid of not achieving the goals or fear of making mistakes. Secondly, they often write in a mood of uncertainty about what they write, do not dare to show others their articles and try to hide their weaknesses. This may result in an unexpected or incomplete result. In such situations, the teacher's role is extremely important in encouraging learners to try by creating various and comfortable writing activities with familiar or appealing topics. Hence, learners will realize that writing practice is to hone their skills, not just to test and evaluate. This is very important in creating a positive motivation for the learners because the excessive and prolonged anxiety may lead to negative attitudes to the subject.

Reading is a very useful tool in helping learners improve their writing ability because the reading process helps learners gain access to content written by others. Research results of Harmer (2006b) on comparing the results of a reading-focus class with a writing-focus class showed that the reading one made faster progress through written tests. This indicates that reading and writing are two separate activities, in which reading is considered passive skills and writing is a production skill, but in fact, these two have a complementary relationship with each other. In this same view, Eisterhold (1997) asserted “better writers tend to be better readers, better writers read more than poorer writers, and finally better readers tend to produce more syntactically nature writing than poorer reader”. In writing lessons, reading is often applied and regarded as a warm-up activity for writing because by reading samples, students will be able to visualize the basic structure of the writing later. Many studies have shown that the more people read, the more they will have access to the new language to better understand vocabulary structure, idioms, sentence structure, idea organization, and weaknesses. In other words, reading is a prerequisite for writing and plays an important role in developing learners' writing skills. Therefore, it can be affirmed that one of the reasons why foreign language learners have difficulty writing is the limitation of practicing reading or not having the habit of extensive reading.

It is commonly known that the mother tongue is also one of the factors affecting learners in the process of learning a foreign language in general and learning writing skills in particular. Although teachers always emphasize the need to think and write in English as much as possible, the learners often have the habit of thinking in their mother tongue then translating word by word into English. This makes the article lengthy, incoherent causing misunderstanding or ambiguity. Friedlander (1997) indicated that writers often apply both good and bad writing skills from their native languages to the target languages. The problem is that even when

the learners can write very well in their native language, this does not mean they will be able to write well in another foreign language and vice versa.

In the context of teaching English as a foreign language at universities in Vietnam, a lot of activities have been implemented to improve students' motivation and writing skills. However, these activities are still not effective enough to motivate learners for this skill (Nguyen, 2011). Students face a variety of challenges in writing due to the lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge. It can be concluded that writing appears the most problematic to the students. This could be explained by the low quality of English language teaching in general and writing teaching in particular. "Causes of the low quality in teaching writing, especially in teaching argumentative essays, should be examined in light of current approaches to teaching English writing, the roles of teachers and learners in EFL writing classes, the impact of Vietnamese culture and testing and assessment on learners' EFL writing." (Trinh, 2014)

III. Methodology

The study employed a mixed approach that combines the use of a questionnaire with the sample size of 22 students enrolled in the high-quality training class K14 at TUEBA and the teaching observation diary during the whole course.

Research questions

The research was conducted to answer the following research questions:

- (i) What difficulties do students have in writing English?
- (ii) What causes these difficulties?
- (iii) What are the recommendations for overcoming difficulties and improve student's English writing skills?

Data collection instruments

The study employed both secondary and primary data sources.

The secondary data included documents, books, newspapers related to teaching English writing skills, information about TUEBA's high-quality training program, and diagnostic test results of the first semester for students of high-quality training class K14.

The primary data collection was carried out through survey questionnaires with the sample size of 22 students and 3 lecturers and the analysis of student's writing mistakes and lecturer's observation to examine student's attitudes and motivation during writing lessons. The questionnaires were constructed with 12 questions divided into 3 main categories as student's views and attitudes on writing course; student's difficulties in writing and the causes; and student's expectations. A pre-survey was conducted with 10 students for questions consolidation.

The survey data after being computerized was analyzed by descriptive statistics and comparative methods. The teaching observation records were synthesized and analyzed in accordance with the analysis criteria and the research questions.

Participants

All of the 22 participants of the survey studied English before entering university, of which 86% began to learn English in Grade 3 and have been learning English for 10 years. 73% of students in the class are female and most of them live in urban areas where they have favorable conditions for English learning. Especially, there are 4 students in the class (18%) studied in Group D (targeted to Maths, Literature, and English for the National University Entrance Exams) at their high school and entered the university with the scores of these subjects.

The 3 faculty members who come from the English Division are experienced in teaching writing skills to high-quality training class of the university. They have also participated in writing skills preparation courses for exams like IELTS, PET, FCE and VSTEP 3 levels.

IV. Findings and discussion

Lecturer's work and obstacles

The study context belongs to the Writing course 1 of the English preparatory program, of which the main course book is *Real Writing 1* by Grammar Palmer published by Cambridge University Press. Accordingly, the course content is designed in two main thematic groups: social - tourism and work-study with practical writing activities in everyday life as well as learning and working environment such as writing formal and informal correspondences, presentations, description, storytelling, review, summary, etc.

In addition to the textbook, faculty members regularly develop reference materials from appropriate resources to both diversify learning content and create excitement for students. Thus, the learning content is

flexible, aiming to meet the requirements of knowledge and skills for the academic learning period as well as in everyday situations.

Despite all the efforts, the lecturers encountered various obstacles during the teaching process. It is recognized that the textbook contents are somehow not attractive enough to involve learners. Also, the limitations of student's vocabulary and grammar make it time-consuming for the lecturers to explain the usage of vocabulary and grammar structures, thereby affecting the time available for instructing and practicing writing skills. Although writing skills often require students to spend a certain amount of time exploring ideas, their self-awareness is not sufficient, along with the nature of "inactive" writing class, students are more likely to develop feelings of depression and do not complete the writing assignment. Besides, the student's teamwork ability is limited, so the activity of group writing and peer review cannot be as effective as expected. For all of these drawbacks, the teaching work seems to be much more challenging for the lecturers.

Student's common mistakes in writing

The results of the entry test for the Writing 1 course show that the student's writing skills are not as expected. The test was designed in the format of Question 56 of Reading and Writing paper in the Cambridge A2 KEY exam and carried out in the first lesson of Writing 1 course in the first semester of the 2017 -2018 school year. Accordingly, students were required to write a response email to a friend to answer 3 questions of the sender. Of the total 22 students, 04 (18%) of them were unable to complete the email, 16 (73%) students fulfilled the requirements in terms of content, purposes and word limit. However, among the papers considered to be the right ones, students made a lot of errors as analyzed in Table 1.

Table No 1: Common mistakes in writing

Items	Mistakes	Percentage (%)
Format	Right	23
	Wrong	59
Vocabulary	Word choice	64
	Spelling	32
Grammar	Verb tense	77
	S-V agreement	64
	Article/ Preposition	45
	Singular/ plural nouns	55
Syntax		64
Punctuation		45

Table 1 shows that only 23% of students understand the structure of an email, although the requirements are clear and email is a quite common type of everyday communications.

In terms of vocabulary, 32% of students have spelling mistakes. In particular, most students choose the wrong words for the context. They wrote "*I lost your bag yesterday*" instead of "*I lost my bag yesterday.*"; "*It is very importance to me*" instead of "*It is very important to me*".

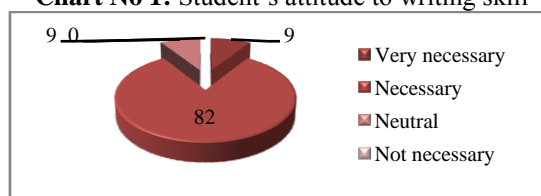
In terms of grammar, about two-thirds of students make the mistakes of using the wrong verb tense and there is no subject-verb agreement. Half of the students have errors in the use of prepositions, articles, and nouns. They wrote "*I last see it at playground on the table*" instead of "*I last saw it at the playground on the table*", "*It's new, red school bag*" instead of "*It's a new, red school bag*", "*There are a notebook, a book, and some pen*" instead of "*There is a notebook, a book, and some pens*".

Besides, more than half of the students make mistakes in sentence structure, such as lack of part of speech, wrong sentence structure and 45% of them use wrong punctuation. They wrote "*Let's me know*" instead of "*Let me know*"; "*Thank you for asked me about my school bag*" instead of "*Thank you for asking me about my school bag*"; "*I can't remember where did I last see it*" instead of "*I can't remember where I last saw it.*".

It is clearly seen that the students lack basic knowledge of vocabulary and grammar though it has been a long time since they started learning English. Even when they can meet the minimum requirements of the test, the ideas are presented messily. Sometimes it is just the arrangement of discrete words to form a sentence using word-by-word translation regardless of vocabulary and grammatical rules.

Student's attitude to writing skill

Chart No 1: Student's attitude to writing skill



When being asked about the importance of writing skills, most students (82%) said that this subject was necessary. 9% of students take the subject very seriously and consider it a very necessary subject. Another 9% of students consider writing as a normal course of study in the curriculum.

Student's writing habits

The student's different perspectives on learning writing skills and the role of writing skills shape their different habits in writing practice. Although right from the first lessons, the lecturers give very specific instructions on writing steps, only 23% of students always try to follow the instructions. Approximately 70% of students have a habit of writing without outlining, proofreading and editing the article after the first writing. Only 27% of students attempt to write more compound and complex sentences than short simple ones. It is worth mentioning that over 80% of students do not actively practice writing more at home unless requested by the instructor. Moreover, it can be shown from the observation that the majority of students often think or write in Vietnamese, then translate word by word into English or use the automatic translation application to translate then copy the original translation without checking the content. Some of them are too lazy to write and copy from their classmate's work or the Internet.

Table No 2: Student's writing habit

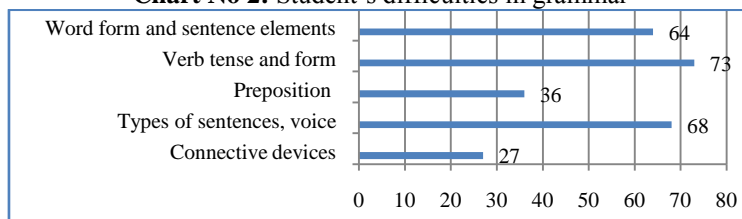
Habits	Percentage (%)
Write on request	82
Practice writing on one's own	18
Copy from templates	23
Think in own language then translate word by word	77
Not revise and edit	64
Not care about vocabulary and grammar rules	23
Not make an outline	77
Try to use more types of sentences	27
Follow writing steps	23

Student's difficulties in writing

A complete piece of writing incorporates the elements of linguistic knowledge, language skills and even the writer's insights into the relevant field. In fact, students encountered a lot of difficulties in writing to meet the criteria of a good writing piece.

In terms of grammar

Chart No 2: Student's difficulties in grammar



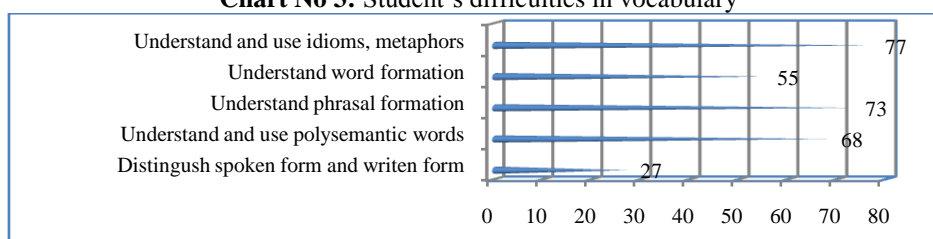
Although all students have been learning English for about 10 years and mostly come from urban areas and they have more favorable conditions in learning foreign languages, grammar remains a great obstacle for them to meet the writing requirements.

Analysis of chart No 2 shows that 73% of students have difficulty in understanding and correctly using verb tenses and forms. It is a great challenge for more than 60% to understand the usage of the word form, sentence elements, and sentence types. Approximately 30% of them find it difficult to use connecting devices and prepositional structure. With such grammatical weaknesses, students' writing is often unappreciated even if the student has written in the correct form and style.

From observation and through assessment of student writing, lecturers asserted that students often made grammatically systematic errors. A 5-6 sentence paragraph can have errors about tenses, verb structure, adjectives and prepositions in every single sentence. Sometimes students do not even understand why they wrote wrongly and cannot detect grammatical errors in other people's writing in cross-review activity.

In terms of vocabulary

Chart No 3: Student's difficulties in vocabulary

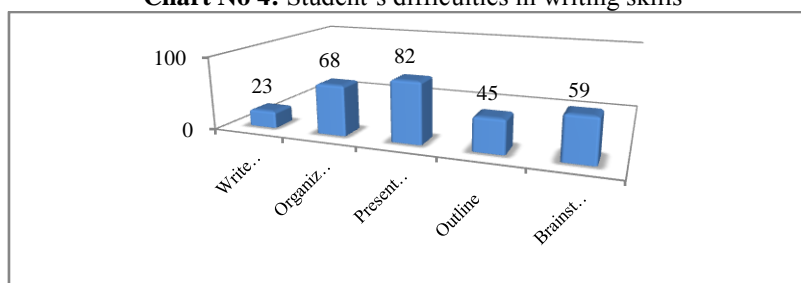


Vocabulary restraint has made it difficult for students to express their ideas and thoughts as required by the writing task, making writing assignments stressful and time-consuming for them.

Chart No 3 shows that about two-thirds of the students have difficulty in understanding the structure and using correct phrases, idioms, metaphor phrases. Meanwhile, this is an important factor determining the strengths of the writer's ability and qualifications. Finding the proper meaning of polysemantic words in context and understanding the rules of word-formation are also among the biggest obstacles for over half of the students. At the same time, 27% of students are confused when differentiating words in spoken communication from the written one. Actually, some students admitted that they understood what they had to do but they didn't know how to express in English.

In terms of writing skills

Chart No 4: Student's difficulties in writing skills



In addition to the grammatical and vocabulary challenges, the students encounter a lot of difficulties in developing strategies and techniques in writing practice.

From chart No 4, 82% of students find it hard to convey their thoughts, indicating that students with good grammar and vocabulary range may not be able to successfully complete the writing task. Synthesizing information and organizing ideas are considered important skills when learning writing skills but are a major obstacle to 68% of students answering the questionnaire. Brainstorming ideas is also a big challenge for 59% of students, which leads to the fact that students often do not complete the task on time. This becomes more complicated when students are asked to write formal correspondence or academic texts.

The causes

Table No 3: Causes of difficulties

Causes	Percentage (%)
Inappropriate learning method	18
Lack of ideas	55
Lack of vocabulary	82
Lack of grammar knowledge	73
Lack of motivation	77
The influence of mother tongue	55
Boring course books	64
Rigorous requirements	23
Inappropriate teaching method	14

The causes of the effects on students' writing skills are based on nine factors in two aspects of subjectivity and objectivity. In terms of subjectivity, 77% of students find it difficult to learn writing skills due to the lack of motivation. Knowing that writing is necessary to improve English language ability, students still do not recognize the role of this skill in future careers, leading to depression and demotivation in the subject. This is well in line with Tran (2007), which identifies many Vietnamese students as more interested in learning speaking, reading and listening skills than writing and frightened with writing skills. Writing lessons is likely to be more stressful with homework after each lesson. Moreover, subjective reasons can be easily discerned from the limitations of both grammar and vocabulary knowledge of about 80% of students. This restriction causes students to encounter many difficulties and often make mistakes in writing, making them feel lack of confidence in the subject. Especially, 55% of students said that they were influenced by the mother tongue writing styles, which made the development of English writing skills much more difficult. This is understandable because students sometimes have difficulties even in writing in their mother tongue. Another problem is that although the Writing module is developed and taught in parallel with the modules in Listening, Speaking, Reading and other supplementary ones, 55% of the students themselves find their writing ineffective because they do not have enough ideas for the task. A small group of 18% of students find themselves lack appropriate learning methods so the results are not satisfactory. The observation diary shows that the limitation of student's social and cultural knowledge related to the writing topic is also one of the reasons making it hard for them to fulfill the requirements.

In terms of objectivity, analysis of the data in Table No 3 shows that 64% of students said the course content was not attractive enough, which is one of the main factors influencing the learning process. This means that the course content does not really meet the student's needs and expectations. Most of the students highly appreciated the lecturer on their good teaching methods and enthusiasm. However, 23% of students marked the lecturers made too high demands for the writing task making it hard for them to complete the task effectively. At the same time, 14% of students thought teaching methods were not appropriate enough. Apart from that, the lecturers realized that a fundamental reason why teaching and learning to write sometimes encountered difficulties was due to not consulting learners before designing the curriculum. Although the coursebook chosen is an international one, in fact, before deciding to choose, the lecturers have never experienced using it but only refer to comments and assessments from different sources in different usage contexts. As a result, many problems arose from the coursebook, which made students feel somewhat lacking in motivation or difficulty. In addition, the failure to conduct a placement test results in unequal levels of knowledge and competency in the same class. Looking at it from a deeper perspective, the consequences of high school English curriculum can also be a cause of influence on students' writing skills at the university level. This is consistent with the research results of Tran (2007) when studying the learning motivation of Vietnamese students in English writing classes. Accordingly, for a long time, teaching grammar and sentence structure have been considered as the core in English writing skills lessons in Vietnam, which makes students misunderstand the real nature of learning to write. Thus, when students go to university, they may be awkward at every writing lesson and feel bewildered and motivated.

V. Recommendations for improving student's writing skills

For the students

First and foremost, it is important to raise students' awareness of the importance of English writing skills and the writing module in the preparatory English program as writing is an important tool for users to communicate in a variety of ways. When English users can write well, they will be able to speak well and promote reading ability more effectively. Besides, mastering writing skills will help learners improve their ability to use vocabulary and grammar, thereby developing their own language skills (Nguyen, 2015).

In addition to that, the need for effective vocabulary and grammar learning is also emphasized since vocabulary and grammar are closely associated with writing. Vocabulary plays an important role to help students use a foreign language while mastering grammar rules helps students communicate ideas, feelings, and thoughts accurately and effectively whether in the form of verbal or written communication. A good range of grammatical rules can be the keys to help students recognize the mistakes and improve the writing quality.

Extend reading activities in English are also the subject to be suggested. It is clear that reading and writing always have close and complementary relationships. Therefore, in order to develop effective writing skills, students need to expand their reading comprehension activities. By reading comprehension of documents, texts or newspapers in English, students will be able to both improve their vocabulary and grammar knowledge and learn more ways to express their ideas. At the same time, through reading, students' knowledge about related fields is also expanded, since then, students will not spend much time brainstorming, seeking ideas for the writing task (Eisterhold, 1997).

For the lecturers

Application of information technology in teaching writing skills

It cannot be denied that the role of effective lecturers is of great importance. The application of information technology in teaching writing skills is becoming increasingly popular in the age of fierce information technology development, which suggests that merely traditional teaching methods of writing skills are no longer appropriate. Teaching writing skills is rather than teaching structures and the lecturers no longer spend too much time editing students' writing in class and giving feedback. Therefore, one of the optimal solutions to help teachers reduce the workload in managing students' learning process while motivating students to enthusiastically participate in learning is the adoption of blended learning and teaching method through MOODLE learning management system. MOODLE (short for Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) is a free and open-source online learning software developed in 1999 by Martin Dougiamas. According to Suvorov (2010), although MOODLE is not specifically designed for foreign language teaching, the system provides a variety of tools for teaching and learning foreign languages, especially for writing skills. Through MOODLE, things seem to be easier for the students to post their writing assignments anytime and anywhere they can and for the lecturers to control students' learning activities and progress. According to Cao (2015), the application of MOODLE-based online teaching to writing skills will play an important role in improving students' writing skills. Compared to traditional teaching methods, the combined learning method not only helps increase the imagination and efficiency of the subject but also gives students the opportunity to study outside the classroom.

Diversification of teaching and learning activities

In order to improve the effectiveness of writing classes and get the student more involved, it is necessary for the lecturers to flexibly implement various activities in accordance with the content of the program but do not make the lessons restrained and boring. A number of typical activities are recommended as follows:

Free-writing: With freelance writing, students can feel confident enough to write and promote their creativity and imagination. This activity can be done within 5-10 minutes at the beginning of the lesson as a warm-up.

Vocabulary and Structure sharing: This can serve as a pre-writing activity when students can discuss, introduce and share words, phrases and sentence structures in line with the topic of the writing task. This kind of activity helps students find it easier to brainstorm and save a lot of time preparing for writing assignments.

Group Writing: this activity is said to have positive effects on individual's writing skills. According to Pham (2016), the method of organizing group writing is much more effective than individual writing method. At the same time, the teaching and correction of writing in a large class can also be greatly reduced for teachers. By writing in a group, the student's writing quality and fluency can be significantly improved.

Peer-review: this activity enables students to review and give feedback to each other on the completion of the writing task. This activity is considered to have a great influence on the development of student's writing skills. According to Kasper (1998), when evaluating each other's posts, students will be able to recognize and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the writing pieces and thereby gradually become aware of reasonable rules. At the same time, through this activity, students can identify the mistakes themselves make and thus help them avoid them and gradually improve their writing fluency. For the best results, lecturers need specific instructions and good control of activity during lessons.

Utilization of portfolio assessment

A portfolio is the collection of students' writing practices that can be arranged selectively and purposefully. Through this, teachers can assess students' writing ability and his/her progress. According to Popham (1994), portfolio assessment is a method of continuous assessment that helps systematically collect information about students' academic results over a certain period. This is considered to be a very common evaluation method that combines teaching with evaluation. Hence, it helps students learn more actively and know their abilities more. This method also provides an opportunity to connect teachers and students and overcomes the limitations of the traditional assessment.

For curriculum design and material development

In order to achieve the course objectives, it needs to develop a curriculum with the balance of time and knowledge among the four English skill modules as listening, speaking, reading and writing. In addition to the coursebook, it is advisable for the lecturers to select and develop materials in accordance with the requirements of the course for the sake of the learner's motivation and improvement. Besides, it is important to do need analysis before designing the writing syllabus.

VI. Conclusion

Writing skill is one of the four basic and indispensable skills in the process of learning and using English. Writing is often considered the most difficult and boring skill but this is still an important skill students need to grasp.

The research results show that the writing skills of high-quality training students are very limited and under expectations. Students themselves have no sense of self-awareness and initiative in the subject. During the course of writing, students face many difficulties in vocabulary, grammar, syntax and are unable to apply flexible writing strategies effectively. The cause of the difficulties comes from the subjective side of the students themselves and objectivity due to the elements of learning content, teaching methods, teachers' requirements and the influence of the mother tongue.

From analyzing the student's common writing mistakes, their difficulties in practicing writing and the causes, the research proposes solutions to improve the English writing skills of the students. Also, it helps enhance the effectiveness of the teaching and learning of writing skills in the English curriculum for the high-quality training program at Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration. The three main groups of solutions are proposed including (i) solutions for students to raise awareness of the role of writing and the importance of writing skills for their own learning and work in the future, (ii) solutions for the lecturers to improve teaching methods and diversify learning activities to attract students to study and improve writing skills; and (iii) solutions for the curriculum and teaching materials.

Limitations of the study

Within the scope of this study, the researcher only focuses on examining the difficulties of the students in high-quality training class K14 in learning English writing skills at TUEBA. Due to the small class size, the size of the research is limited. As a result, the research results may not be sufficient to represent students of high-quality training classes throughout the university.

Recommendations for further study

In this study, the research came up with solutions to help quality training students overcome difficulties and improve writing skills based on personal teaching experiences and practical teaching for these kinds of classes. Although the English preparatory program for high-quality training classes is much different from the English general program for standard classes, the nature of teaching methods and learning skills of writing in the two programs are quite similar. Therefore, it is proposed that future studies may expand the scope of the study to improve the quality of foreign language teaching throughout the university. At the same time, researches can focus on analyzing and clarifying the effectiveness of applying the proposed solution groups from this study in order to improve the curriculum of English writing skills for students and synchronously applied to achieve the highest efficiency.

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