



DIFFICULTIES IN WRITING AN ESSAY OF ENGLISH-MAJORED SOPHOMORES AT TAY DO UNIVERSITY, IN VIETNAM

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Abstract:

Writing is an important skill in English that helps people express thoughts, emotion and viewpoint to readers. However, students face some difficulties when writing. Hence, the survey research presents the process of the study about “*Difficulties in writing an essay of English-majored sophomores at Tay Do University, in Viet Nam*”. It was conducted to find out some difficulties in learning writing (from 200 to 250 - word essay) of 102 the sophomores from Bachelor of English 10 at Tay Do University. Questionnaire, paper interview and essay samples were the instruments of the study. The results showed that sophomores had many problems in writing such as vocabulary, grammar structures, ideas arrangement, background knowledge, and others. Basing on the results, some solutions would be suggested to help students to get a good writing skill.

Keywords: writing essay, difficulty, English majored sophomores, university

Abstract:

Viết là một kỹ năng quan trọng trong tiếng Anh giúp người viết thể hiện suy nghĩ, cảm xúc và quan điểm với người đọc. Tuy nhiên, sinh viên thường gặp một số khó khăn khi viết. Do đó, nghiên cứu “*Khó khăn khi viết bài luận của sinh viên năm thứ hai chuyên ngành Ngôn Ngữ Anh tại Trường Đại học Tây Đô, Việt Nam*” được thực hiện nhằm tìm ra một số khó khăn khi học môn viết (bài luận từ 200 đến 250 từ) của 102 sinh viên Cử nhân Tiếng Anh năm thứ hai, khóa 10 của Trường Đại học Tây Đô. Công cụ nghiên cứu gồm bảng câu hỏi, phỏng vấn trên giấy và phân tích bài luận. Kết quả cho thấy sinh viên năm thứ hai gặp nhiều vấn đề về viết như từ vựng, cấu trúc ngữ pháp, sắp xếp ý tưởng, kiến thức nền tảng và những vấn đề khác. Dựa trên kết quả đạt được, một số giải pháp sẽ được đề xuất để giúp sinh viên có được kỹ năng viết tốt hơn.

Keywords: viết bài luận văn, khó khăn, sinh viên năm hai chuyên Anh ngữ, đại học

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1. Introduction

This chapter describes the rationale, the significance, and the organization of the research.

1.1 Rationale

In the trend of globalization today, English communication is very important. There are several factors that make the English language essential to communicate. First of all, it is the most common foreign language. It is not only as the foreign language, but also as the second language around the world. Actually, English is the most commonly used language among foreign language speakers. Throughout the world, when people from different nationalities want to communicate, they commonly use English. That is the reason why people call English the language of communication. English connects people from all over the world.

Vietnamese have also recognized the importance of learning English. Actually, English is a new door to help people integrate. In modern life, English has been playing a main role in many sectors. It is also considered the universal language for business and tourism. People have the option to apply for jobs requiring English. Besides, using English is an effective tool to promote social, economic development as well as improve cultural exchange between Vietnamese and other nations in the world. If learning English well, people can enjoy and learn a lot of knowledge. Furthermore, English also plays an important role in education. If students have good English, there will be the best way to improve life. Therefore, English has been a compulsory language in all colleges, universities, and vocational schools.

However, English is not an easy skill to learn for many students. When learning English, writing is the important skill which needs to be developed. Writing helps to express thoughts, viewpoint and feelings to readers. As *"Writing is one of the important skill because writing is a tool to express idea and record the important documents"* Rogers (2005) stated. In other word, writing is the ability to put pen and paper to express ideas through symbols. This way, representations on paper will have meaning and content that could be communicated to other people by the writers. In addition, writing is an alternative skill that people communicate besides speaking.

Indeed, writing is the most difficult language skill. From the previous study, English majored at Tay Do University still faced difficulties because of many reasons. Firstly, students could not express their ideas in writing because they did not have enough vocabulary to show what they were thinking. Secondly, grammar was a big trouble. They usually made grammatical errors. They had many perfect ideas and good motions to write; however, they wondered, they did not know how to organize their ideas. Moreover, they lacked background knowledge of fields when they faced a new topic. To get more details about these difficulties, the survey *"Difficulties in writing an essay of English-majored sophomores at Tay Do University, in Vietnam"* was carried. The study performed on the purpose of finding out difficulties of second year students when learning essay writing. Moreover, from the results of the study, some appropriate

solutions were suggested to help students overcome their difficulties and learn writing better.

1.2 The significance

The finding of this study will redound to the benefit of society considering that writing plays an important role in many fields today. Thus, to solve the difficulties, students must realize the causes, so recognizing obstacles in writing is necessary to help students master a good writing skill. In other words, students can apply the recommended approach derived from the results of the study to write better. This study was undertaken with the purpose of dealing with the research question:

- What are difficulties in writing an essay of English-majored sophomores at Tay Do University?

1.3 The organization

This research is presented in five chapters including:

Chapter One is the introduction of the study which states the rationale, the significance as well as the organization of the research.

Chapter Two includes the definitions and the importance of writing. The next part in this chapter gives definitions and types of the essay. The last part indicates the difficulties of sophomores in writing.

Chapter Three focuses on the research methodology which consists of design, participants, and instruments.

Chapter Four is the results and discussion.

Chapter Five includes conclusions, implications, and recommendation.

2. Literature review

This chapter presents the definition of writing and its importance, definition of essay writing and types of essays. It also mentions the difficulties in the process of writing.

2.1 Terms of definitions

2.1.1 Definition of writing

Writing skill is an important part of communication. It is the process of communicating messages by marking to make page, which needs the form of letters and words, and joins these together to make words, and sentences. Writing skill is one of language skills that are very necessary to be mastered in learning English. Petty and Jensen (1980) defined that, *“Writing refers to the mental and physical act of forming letters and words, but it is much more than that; it is putting words into sentences, and paragraphs, spelling words correctly, and observing conventions in written forms and more.”* In fact, skill in writing is an acquired art, which is learnt from practice and experience. There has been a great deal of variation in the literature in the way in which the term writing has been used. According to Brown (2001), *“Written products are often the result of thinking, drafting, and revising procedures that*

require specialized skills, that not every speaker develops naturally.”, and he also drew conclusions, *“Students should learn how to generate and organize ideas coherently, how to revise text for clearer meaning, and how to edit text for appropriate grammar.”* Writing is a comprehension ability involving grammar, vocabulary, conception, rhetoric, and other parts of the language. Thus, good writing requires learners to have many skills such as how to express ideas, organize them in a coherent way or choose the right words.

The term of writing has been defined in many different ways, but all have some points in common. It is easy to find that writing is a form of communication that allows learners to express feelings, thoughts, and ideas. Indeed, Richards and Renandya (2002) said that, *“Written language is complex at the clause level.”* Writing includes many components such as content, organization, originality, style, fluency, accuracy, or using appropriate rhetorical. It is a form of problem-solving which involves such process as generating ideas, discovering a voice to write, planning, goal setting, monitoring and evaluating what is going to be written, and searching with language to express exact meanings. It is the ability to put pen and paper to express ideas through symbols. This way, representations on paper will have meaning and content that can be communicated to other people by the writers.

In short, writing is the process of using symbols to communicate thoughts and ideas in a readable form by written using vocabulary, grammar structure and idea arrangement.

2.1.2 The importance of writing skill

Writing has a crucial role because most contexts of life (school, the workplace and the community) require writing skill. Writing is the ability to compose text effectively for various purposes. Writing is a tool for communicating and learning that allows writers to collect, and widely circulate detailed information. Writing provides a means of expressing oneself and persuading others. It is also a basic skill used both in school and throughout life. People might be called upon to write a report, plan or strategy at work and of course, a well written curriculum vitae or résumé with no spelling or grammatical mistakes are essential to get a good job.

Especially, in teaching and learning any languages, writing is still the most important. Writing is an indispensable skill, so learners have to concern as it is not an easy skill. Graham and Perin (2007) said that *“In the school setting, writing plays two distinct but complementary roles. First, it is a skill that draws on the use of strategies (such as planning, evaluating, and revising text) to accomplish goals, such as writing report or expressing an opinion with the support of evidence. Second, it is a means of extending and deepening students’ knowledge; it acts as a tool for leaning subject matter.”* Actually, an effective writing is related to many things such as understanding the topic, choosing vocabulary, using appropriate grammar and organizing ideas. Writing helps students to improve the vocabulary and the grammatical structures that they have been taught in class. As writers have to remember words and determine what they write. Writing helps people to express thinking. They learn how to make a logical argument or persuade others through writing.

Furthermore, English is also linking many countries in several areas such as business, economic, tourism and culture. Nowadays, there are many countries that invest to Vietnam. Therefore, writing skill is more and more necessary. Everyone knows that most reputable companies, and corporations require candidates proficient in English communication skills in life and work. The fluent English not only helps them firmly into the corporations, the leading international companies but also gives them opportunities for advancement in the competitive working environment. From these reasons, students can realize clearly about the role of writing skill in learning English.

2.1.3 Definition of essay writing

Wikipedia defined, *“An essay is, generally, a piece of writing that gives the author’s own argument - but the definition is vague, overlapping with those of an article, a pamphlet, and a short story. Essays have traditionally been sub-classified as formal and informal”*. Regardless of whatever types of essays, the organization has three main parts: introduction, body, and conclusion.

The introduction is usually one paragraph that introduces the topic to be discussed and the central idea or the thesis statement of the essay. The introductory paragraph usually ends with the thesis statement, which is one sentence that sums up the main point about its topic.

The second part, the body, includes several developmental paragraphs, which develops various aspects of the topic and the central idea. The body of the essay is the part between the introduction and the conclusion. It is the longest and most important part of the essay, because its purpose is to provide support for the thesis statement. This support can come in the form of examples, facts or statistics, short narratives about the personal experience of the author, or simply more details explaining. Usually, the body of an essay contains at least three paragraphs and often more. Each paragraph discusses one idea that supports the thesis statement.

The conclusion part concludes the thought developed. The concluding paragraph should begin with a repeat of the thesis statement (main idea) of the essay but with slightly different words from the original thesis statement in the introduction. The main purpose of the concluding paragraph is to sum up the major ideas by reviewing the important points that have been made and by reminding the readers the main point of the essay.

2.1.4 Types of essays

The different types of essays consist of narration, description, exposition and argumentation. Among them, expository and argumentative ones are usually required in academic writing at Tay Do University.

Firstly, narration is telling a story from a certain viewpoint; and there is usually a reason for telling. All narrative essays have characters, setting, climax, and most importantly, a plot. The plot is the focus of the story and usually revealed chronologically; there are sometimes flash forwards and flash backs. In writing a narrative essay,

remember to; include sensory and emotional details, so the readers can experience the story, not just read about it; the story supports the points that are making, and make reference to those in the first sentence, and are written in the first or third person.

Secondly, descriptive essay provides a verbal picture or account of a person, place, or thing. The essay gives details that enable the readers to imagine the item described. For example, if writers are describing roses, they can explain: Where they come from; what they look like; what colors they are.

Thirdly, expository essays can compare, explore and discuss problems, or tell a story. It gives information about various topics to the readers. In writing an exposition, the text needs to be concise and easy to understand; gives different views on a subject or report on a situation or event, and explain something that may be difficult to understand.

Lastly, a persuasive essay is also known as an argumentative essay. The goal of the persuasive essay is to convince the readers to accept the writer's point of view or recommendation. The writer must build a case using facts as well as examples, expert opinion, and sound reasoning. The writer should present all sides of the argument, but must be able to communicate clearly and without equivocating the reason why a certain position is correct.

2.2 Difficulties of writing skill

When people cannot speak directly, they can thank to writing to share words. Among the four language skills, writing is very a difficult part for students. In fact, students may be good at speaking, listening or reading, but writing is a difficult challenge. The English-majored sophomores face many problems in the process of writing. The essay is not good because of lack of vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. Moreover, students struggle to express the ideas to write down or the way how to organize it. These are the main reasons why students have troubles in learning English writing.

It needs to have many factors to get a good writing including knowledge of vocabulary, grammar structure, background knowledge and idea arrangement. The students have to master these if they want to have a good writing.

2.2.1 Vocabulary

Richards and Renandya (2002) stated that, *"Vocabulary is a core component of language proficiency and provides much of the basis for how well learners listen, speak, read and write. Without an extensive vocabulary... learners often achieve less than their potential and may be discouraged from making use of language."* In addition, Thornbury (2002) said, *"Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed"*. Vocabulary is the important aspect of writing because it is a basic component of the successful writing. It is also an essential part of language learning. Students can express their ideas logically and clearly if they have large vocabulary, know the meaning and understand how to use it. Also *"Vocabulary is regarded as free standing item of language that has meaning."* McCathy (1990). Thus, the knowledge meaning of a word is not easy. More precisely, a word is the minimum meaningful unit of language which allows to differentiate the

separate meanings contained. In fact, lacking a large vocabulary is one of the most difficult things students face. Lack of vocabulary makes them difficult when demonstrating a topic. This is the reason why students cannot express what they want to write. Before writing, they have to search the topic, and find new words to express their thought in written text.

In addition, the choice of words is very important. Students have to know the way how to choose appropriate words in contexts. Actually, writing requires learners to use right in each different case. One word may have many meanings in situations mentioned. Thus, learners need to have rich vocabulary. If they know more words they will write better. The choice of words makes the sentence a beautiful one. On many occasions, the wrong words cause the sentences awkward ones. Therefore, vocabulary seems to be the main cause that makes students be confused to express thought in writing.

Besides, students have to keep in mind collocation. It is two or more words that often go together, like "hard work" or "make a mistake". Using collocation in writing makes language more natural and easy to understand, instead of saying "You need to sleep more." we can say "You need to take a rest." It makes English writing sound wonderful and creative. It is a good way to express ideas more attractively. However, collocations are very difficult to remember. Firstly, there are many new words; they cannot remember the collocation. In addition, they are afraid of using collocations because of hidden meaning. They do not know exactly the meaning of the collocations; and the way that words go together. Students have no clear about rules and no specific regulations to follow. Collocation has many problems that make students feel confused when using it in writing.

In many cases students usually misunderstand the real meaning words. Thus, the sentences are changed the meaning. It is homograph - a word which has the same written form as another word, but has a different meaning and grammatical function. For example, the word "bear" is a verb that means support or carry but is a noun that means animal. This causes mistake in vocabulary when writing.

Vocabulary is the key to understand what is heard and read; and to communicate successfully with other people. Students should prepare large words to write better.

2.2.2 Grammar structure

All languages have grammar, and each language has its own grammar. Grammar has been identified in different ways on the linguistic theory. Besides vocabulary, grammar structure is an important element affecting writing skill. As the purpose of good grammar is to ensure the paper is written correctly. William (2005) stated, "*Grammar is a study of the structure of the language and describes the way of putting words together to make meaningful sentences.*" Grammar is the way a language manipulates and combines words or bits of words to form longer units meaning. Grammar is very important in writing skill. As Harmer (2001), the grammar of language can be defined as the description of rules through words that can be formed and that can change the meaning; in addition to the

possible ways of the construction into sentences. Thanks to grammar, learners can express ideas in writing skill.

Tenses are tools to express time in language, that are the important part in grammar. There are three main tenses: past, present and future tense. It is necessary to determine various aspects in terms of English verbs, such as, the state of being, continuing action or completed action. On the hand, the correct use of tenses helps writing to be clearly and effectively and allows readers to comprehend accurately what have been written using tenses. Being weak grammar poses a great challenge to language, especially while writing. In other word, if students do not have grammar structure knowledge, they could change the meaning of the writing. Students usually change the function of a word; then the sentences change or the readers cannot understand. Thus, if students want to have a good writing, they have to understand how to use appropriate tenses in the paragraph. For example, if they want to describe one action in the present, they use the past tense to write, it changes the meaning.

Moreover, part of speech is a grammar structure that students are mistaken; it is noun, pronouns, adjective, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, verbs and interjection. If students do not know the functions and rules of part of speech, they cannot determine to put on the different categories correctly; the sentences change meaning. Therefore, this is a common mistake of students in the process of writing.

Lastly, when we communicate, we usually stress to help listeners understand what we say; writing is also. We have to use the punctuations in writing to make sentences clear. It is very important in expressing meaning for the readers. The punctuation marks such as, commas and quotation mark. However, if students do not use many punctuation marks, the readers do not understand what they read or unclear because it is complication.

Indeed, students should pay attention to grammar. They should practice with a simple sentence to obtain an effective writing skill.

2.2.3 Idea arrangement

Idea arrangement is also a problem for students learning English as a foreign language. The ideas are the main messages that support and develop the topic. If students have no idea or do not understand the main message they want to express; they get it out. Besides, developing points and ordering information in a certain way can help keeping the readers centered on the focus of the essay.

The students cannot arrange their ideas logical in paragraph or essay. They often lack main ideas and topic sentence. Furthermore, they often make mistake when they write many sentences which are redundant and unnecessary. They can write a long essay, but those ideas are not related together.

Indeed, in the process of writing, learners not only improve the rules of writing but also organize the ideas. The ideas are the main of an essay. If students use correct grammar or have enough vocabulary, they make good essays.

2.2.4 Background knowledge

According to Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000), “All learning involves transfer from previous experiences. Even initial learning involves transfer that is based on previous experiences and prior knowledge”. Background knowledge is an essential component in writing that helps students understand a situation or problem or make sense of new ideas and experiences. To have a good writing, students have to pay attention to vocabulary and grammar, but also ideas. Background knowledge is essential to understand a situation or problem. In other word, the information is knowledge acquired through study or experience or instruction. Actually, background knowledge is very important in writing skill. If students want to have a good essay, they need to have rich knowledge of fields. With poor background knowledge, the writers cannot build good ideas. They feel nervous when they face a new or hard topic as they do not have experiences around their life. For example, the essay requires students to talk about person’s creativity in many fields such as writer, artist, filmmaker and business. Therefore, students need to have information when facing with a new topic. If not, writers cannot write anything. Background knowledge includes both a writer’s real world experiences and information, which are the reason why English-majored do not have many experiences in social life, feeling difficulty in writing process.

2.2.5 Other difficulties

Besides above difficulties in writing, students sometimes make mistake with other problems. First, students often use acronyms in their writing. It makes the essay unclear, and the readers cannot understand what writers want to express. Second, students often make wrong orthography. They confuse the words. Thirdly, if having a poor memory and easily forgot vocabulary and background knowledge they learnt, they could not express ideas. Finally, students rarely spend time practicing writing at home as they have no passion with writing. They know large vocabulary or information of many fields, but they cannot write well if they have no practicing.

To sum up, if learners have a strong passion in writing and try to overcome the difficulties, they become a good writer. Vietnamese have the proverb, “*No hard work just fear of failure.*” Success comes to those who persevere to overcome the challenge.

3. Research methodology

This chapter presents the design, participant, and instrument of the research.

3.1 Design

The survey research was conducted to answer the research question mentioned in chapter one. It was performed at Tay Do University in Viet Nam. Participants were the main factor. There were 102 English-majored sophomores who were delivered questionnaire to collect the information about the difficulties in writing. After collecting the information from the questionnaire, ten students were chosen to complete the

interview questions on the purpose of making the research more specific and objective. Also 31 essay samples were analyzed to prove the difficulties. This survey was the combination of quantitative and qualitative.

3.2 Participant

The participants were 102 of English-majored sophomores course 10 at Tay Do University. The ages range from 20 to 23. They all speak Vietnamese as their mother tongue and English is considered as the foreign language. Most of them have been learning English for 10 years and a few had 11, 12 or 13 years of learning. However, they get difficulty in English writing. In generally, their writings are from average to good.

All sophomores just learned how to write sentences and a paragraph. The paragraphs were not over 150 words. They were divided into groups from two to three members and wrote the sentences related to the given topic in class. The teacher corrected errors for groups. After that, students must complete the paragraph. The curriculum was the student's book: Pavlik C., & Segal M. K. (2007). *Interaction 2 Writing*. McGraw Hill. There were chapters such as, Overview of an essay, Global Connections, Language and Communication, etc.

Now, students are learning the way to write an essay composition. It is cause and effect, argumentative essays. The length of essay is about 250 words. The curriculum was the student's book: Blass L. and Pike-Baby M. (2007). *Mosaic 1 Writing*, Silver Editor. McGraw Hill. There are many chapters such as, Money, Heath, Leisure, Immigration and so on. They learn how to present an essay, look for and develop ideas, and write a standard outline. Then they finish the essay. The next semester, they will learn how to write letters and analyze a charts.

3.3 Instrument

Questionnaire, paper interview and essay samples were the instruments. These were extremely helpful in collecting essential information from the students. Questionnaire was used to figure out the problems in learning writing; it was absolutely reliable. Along with the questionnaire, paper interview and essay samples were other helpful tools to get more specific details. By answering the questions on the interview, and analyzing the mistakes in the essay samples, the students can recognize difficulties in writing and find ways to write better.

3.3.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was significant; without it the study could not be fulfilled. It was based on literature; research aims and research question. The questionnaire was delivered to 102 participants. It consisted of two parts with 10 questions and 22 statements, and it is split into the following groups:

Table 1: The gist of questionnaire

Question/Statement	Summary of the content of the question group
a. Question 1 to 5	Students' background
b. Question 6 to 10	Difficulties in writing
c. Statement 11 to 32	Factors affecting difficulties in writing

3.3.2 Interview

The paper interview is considered as an effective way to collect specific information from the sophomores such as ideas, thoughts directly and easily. After finishing questionnaires, 10 students (four boys and six girls) in total 102 students were randomly chosen to fulfill the interview questions. The interview consisted of 5 questions that concentrated on the two main points. The first two questions were asked about students' attitude on writing skill. As for the rest, students were asked to figure out difficulties they faced as well as some solutions suggested. They could be free to share the ideas. The interview was used on the purpose of knowing more about students in learning writing.

3.3.3 Essay sample

31 essay samples were used as an instrument and the evidence to prove the difficulties of students in the process writing. They were assignments corrected by the teacher.

4. Result and discussion

This chapter presents the results collected from the questionnaire, the interview and essay samples. The figures show difficulties in writing of English-majored sophomores through statistical evidence.

4.1 Result

This part shows the findings of the questionnaire, the samples and the interview. The results were analyzed after collecting all important data and information from 102 English-majored sophomores. There are two groups of the results: the results of the questionnaire and essay samples, and the interview.

4.1.1 Results of the questionnaire and essay samples

The finding of the questionnaire was split into two basic items including the students' background and students' difficulties in writing skill.

4.1.1.1. Students' background

To assess somewhat about the students' abilities as well as the knowledge, the survey about the time they learned writing was carried out. Actually, the time students learned writing determine their knowledge. Therefore, investigating students' English learning years is necessary. In question 1, "How long have you studied English?" there were 71% of the students have learnt English for 10 years. Almost they studied from grade 6 until

entering the university. Otherwise, the students studied English for 13 years only 3.9%. Through the years in learning English, almost the students have learnt English for 10 years. They can be able to assess their English knowledge as well as writing.

In question 2, “What do you think about the importance of English writing skill?” students recognized the importance of English as well as English writing. There were three-fourths of the total students that was the highest percentage, 86.3% of them thought that writing was important. According to the data of the results, students still focus on writing skill. It seems that the awareness of students about writing is good, but learning writing is not easy.

In question 3, “What do you think about learning writing skill?”. There were 47.1% of the participants who thought that writing was very difficult. It means that writing is a difficult skill in English. Let’s have a look at the table below.

Table 2: The ideas of writing

Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Strongly disagree
11. Writing is a form of communication that allows learners to express the feelings, thoughts and ideas.	29.4%	70.6%	0%	0%	0%
12. Writing is not easy, so you have faced difficulties when learning.	35.3%	62.7%	2%	0%	0%

As for statement 11, “Writing is a form of communication that allows learners to express the feelings, thoughts and ideas.”, students strongly agreed with 29.4% and 70.6% of them agreed. Especially, in statement 12, “Writing is not easy, so you have faced difficulties when learning writing.” the percentage of students strongly agree was 35.3% and agreed with 62.7%. This shows that most of the life contexts (schools, workplaces, and communities) need English writing skills, but learning writing is not easy.

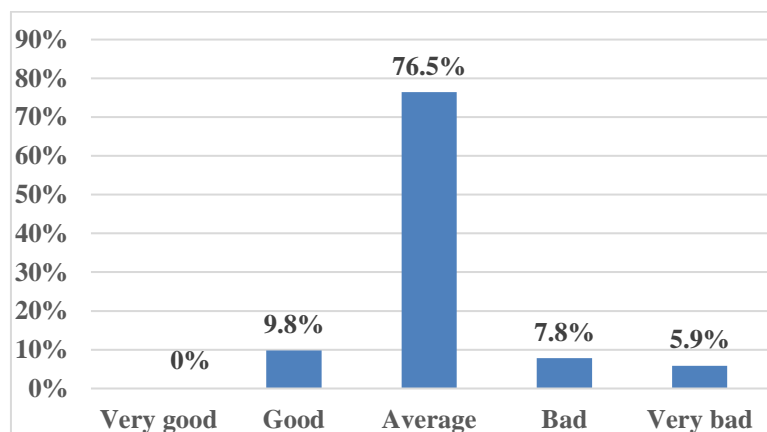


Figure 1: Students’ self-evaluation on English writing ability

The evidence is in question 4, “How is your writing skill?” The column “good” was 9.8% and 76.5% of students assessed their writing ability as average. It was the

highest percentage. Moreover, 7.8% of the sophomores admitted that their writing level was bad and only 5.9% of them said that they were very bad. In general, the percentage of average was high.

Actually, students made mistakes in the essay writing. Hence, when students assessed writing skill, no one was confident that their ability was very good. In generally, students themselves were very truthful about the abilities. It means that students' writing abilities are not good, the average and bad are high. It also shows that writing is a skill that takes a lot of practicing time to improve.

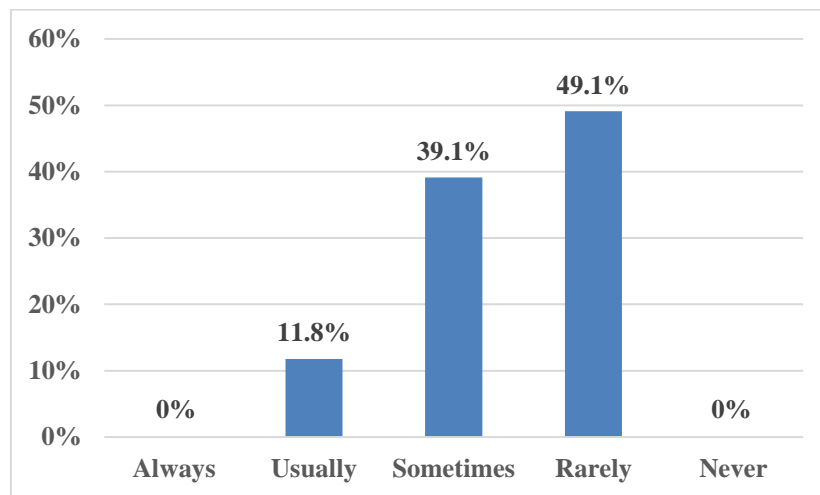


Figure 2: Students' practicing time

Question 5 related to assessing the student's writing ability that being asked about the time spent on practicing at home, "How often do you spend on practicing writing at home?" Figure 2 showed that there was no one (0%) who always spent their time practicing writing. Unfortunately, sometimes students still practiced; the percentage was 39.2%. Moreover, there was 11.8% of them who usually practiced writing at home. On the other hand, the rate of the sophomores who rarely practiced writing was up 49%.

The time for students to practice is little. This is the main reason why students faced many difficulties. To have a good writing, they are not only overcome difficulties but also try to practice writing regularly. It is a good method for students to recognize their mistakes. Students should usually write and thank to their teacher or group to correct it. They should write many times; they would learn from experience.

4.1.1.2 The common difficulties of learning English writing

As can be seen from the Figure 3, students who said that they faced difficult in vocabulary with 21.5% percentage. Moreover, the highest percentage 45.1% of them who claimed that grammar was difficult. It means grammar is the main difficult. Besides, 11.7% of the participants chose ideas arrangement. 15.6% of the students admitted that they were bad in background knowledge. From the difficulties above, the students had other difficulties with 6.1%.

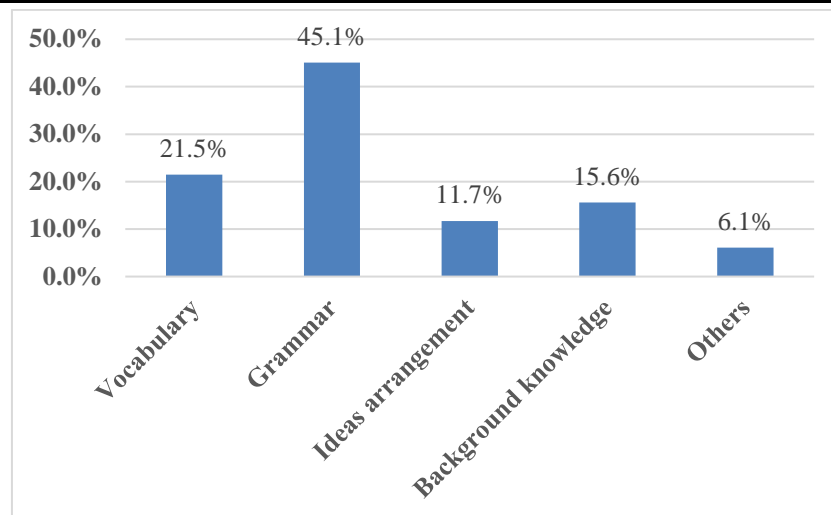


Figure 3: The common difficulties in learning English writing

In generally, the rate of difficulties was equally divided, only grammar was high percentage. It means that students always made mistakes in grammar more than the others. It was very difficult for students to write well, students still faced with many difficulties in writing as vocabulary, grammar structures, ideas arrangement, background knowledge and others. Therefore, they have to look for mistakes and have good methods to learn writing better.

Indeed, through 31 essay examples selected randomly in English-majored sophomores with the topic *"Today's lesson, how to start a successful business. Read and write an essay on what made Park Soo Wong success."*. The statistic above was accurate. Move to the next part to get the detail difficulties.

a. Vocabulary

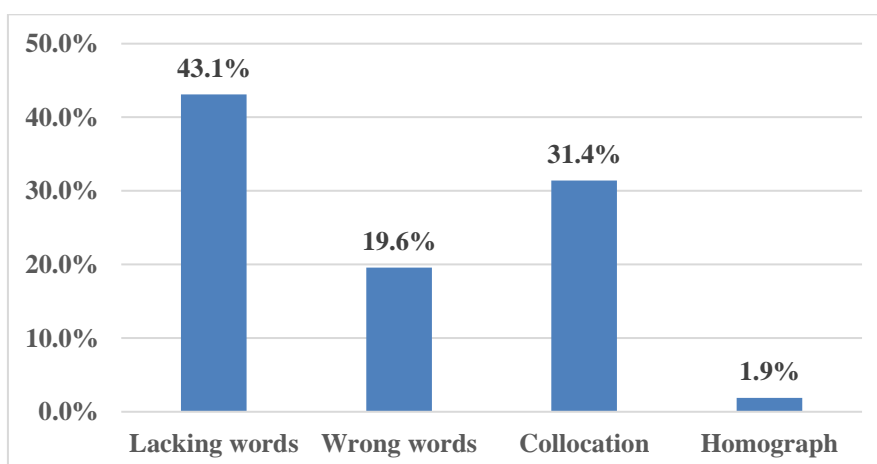


Figure 4: Difficulties in vocabulary

In Figure 3, vocabulary accounted for 21.5% of the difficulties in writing. Vocabulary is the most important that it is also a basic component of the successful of writing. Actually, if students have large vocabulary, it will be an advantage for them to

have a well written essay. However, there are some difficulties that learners faced. Specific difficulties were lacking words, word choices, and collocation. Figure 4 showed that the students lacked words were 43.1%, it was the highest percentage. Besides, about 19.6% of the total participants chose wrong words and 31.4% of remaining sophomores admitted that they made mistakes about collocation and 1.9% for homograph. Let's see Table 3 below:

Table 3: Difficulties in vocabulary

Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Strongly disagree
13. Lacking of vocabulary makes you not express your ideas logically and clearly.	27.5%	49%	23.5%	0%	0%
14. You do not know how to choose appropriate words in contexts.	19.6%	25.5%	51%	3.9%	0%
15. You cannot remember collocation because there are many ones.	23.5%	37.2%	27.5%	11.8%	0%
16. You are afraid of using collocation because of hidden meaning.	21.6%	45%	23.6%	9.8%	0%
17. You do not know exactly what the collocation means and the way words go together.	17.6%	72.6%	9.8%	0%	0%
18. You misunderstand the real meaning in usage homograph, so it changes meaning the sentence.	23.5%	52.9%	15.7%	7.9%	0%

When being asked specifically about the difficulty that students faced in vocabulary. Almost students thought that the difficulties were lacking words, wrong words, collocation and homograph. They did not base on the writing actual, they just thought that was right. Hence, Figure 4 showed that the students lacked words was up 43.1% percentage of them, it was the highest percentage. Besides, students agreed statement 13, "Lacking of vocabulary makes you not express your ideas logically and clearly." with 49% and 27.5% strongly agreed.

In Figure 4 only with 19.6% of the total 100% students who thought they used wrong words. Furthermore, students agreed statement 14, "You do not know how to choose appropriate words in contexts." about 25.5% and 19.6% strongly agreed. No idea had about 51%.

Moreover, in Figure 4, the percentage made up 31.4% of the participants who thought that collocations were very hard in vocabulary. They agreed statement 15, "You cannot remember collocation because there are many collocations." with the high percentage, 23.5% and 37.2% strongly agreed and agreed.

In fact, the statistic above was not right. It was just students' thinking, in Figure 4, they admitted that they faced difficulty in wrong words, 19.6%. In fact, about 25/31 (80.6%) of essay samples which were wrong words. They always mistakenly chose words. For example, in the essay sample, a student wrote "Besides, we can see that he likes

creative, learning innovation research to explore new things. Look what he created can see that he is very intelligent and has a wide knowledge about some fields of technology and research manufacturing". This sentence usually used words "can see that". Another sample, "He believed that he had a winning product, and his program was so easy for everybody to use it even though "my seven-year-old son can do it" said Park. He believed in himself in what he did, on his innovation products and he succeeded." a student wrote. In the second sentence, "I was confident what I did." Using one word "believed" twice and this was not good in contexts. It was long or not a beautiful one.

Moreover, as for collocation with statement 16, "You are afraid of using collocation because of hidden meaning." and statement 17, "You do not know exactly what the collocation means and the way words go together." the rate of strongly agree and agree were high 66.6% and 90,2%. For example, when students learned "effort", they had to study "make an effort". Therefore, they learned not only one word but also its collocation. Using collocation makes the sentence become active.

Besides, in Figure 4, homograph difficulty is only 1.9%, but in statement 18, "You misunderstand the real meaning in usage homograph, so it changes meaning the sentence." 23.5% of the participants strongly agreed and 52.9% of them agreed.

In short, the learners usually thought that they were mistaken by lacking words, collocation, wrong words and homograph in vocabulary. However, they mostly used wrong words. They also still made mistakes because of lacking words and collocation.

b. Grammar structures

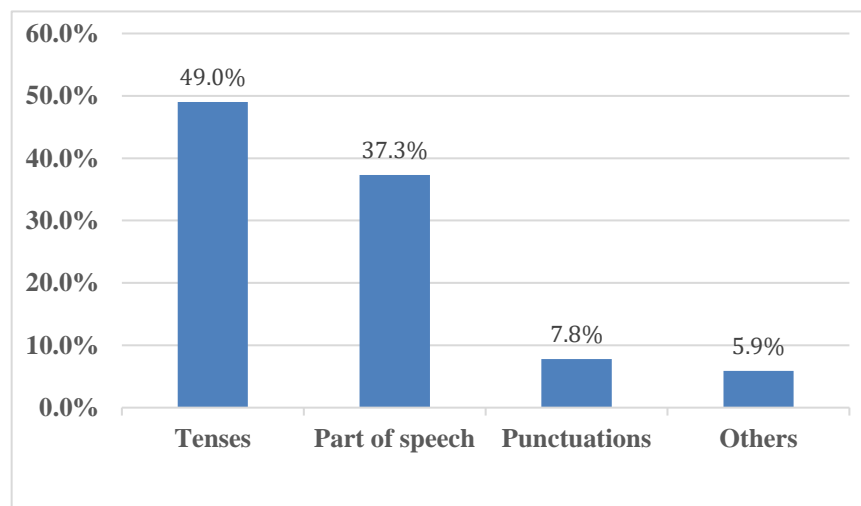


Figure 5: Difficulties in grammar

Another point was grammar structures, the participants recognized grammar has a huge impact on writing skill. Indeed, in Figure 3, grammar difficulty rated up to 45.1%. Weak grammar was a great challenge for students to learn a language. Especially, grammar structures are considered as an important factor in writing. It means as the

description of rules through words that can be formed and can change the meaning, in addition to the possible ways of their construction into sentences.

Figure 5 showed that, there were 49% of sophomores made mistakes with the tenses, 37.3% of them had difficulty with part of speech. Furthermore, students who faced difficulty in the punctuations and others were 7.8% and 5.9%. Let's see Table 4 below.

Table 4: Difficulties in grammar

Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Strongly disagree
19. You usually make grammatical errors in your writing such as tenses, part of speeches and punctuations.	25.5%	58.9%	13.7%	1.9%	0%
20. You do not know how to use tense appropriately in sentence.	25.5%	50.9%	13.7%	9.9%	0%
21. You make mistake in functions and rules of part of speeches in grammar structure.	13.7%	64.7%	13.7%	7.9%	0%
22. You do not know how to use correct punctuation marks.	23.5%	15.7%	52.9%	7.9%	0%

Table 4 showed the common mistakes in grammar structures. Actually, the research carried out about the tenses, part of speech, the punctuations and others. In Figure 5, the sophomores always made mistakes with the tenses, it made up 49%. In the detail, about 84.4% of the participants strongly agreed and agreed with statement 19, "You usually make grammatical errors in your writing such as tenses, part of speeches and punctuations." Besides, there was 76.4% of students who agreed and strongly agreed with statement 20, "You do not know how to use tense appropriately in sentence."

In the detail, all 31 the essay examples were collected, they always had troubles with tenses. For example, in the body part, a student wrote, "*However, he persevered, not give up. He spends two years trying to convince his wife and family, find the investor for his project*". This sentence must be used the past tense but the student used present tense. It was completely wrong; "gave" instead of "give", "spent" for "spends" and "found" instead of "find". It happened, so the students must use the past tense. In two sentences, there were three mistakes about tenses. Moreover, "*He always dreamed and try to make the dreams despite experiencing many difficulties*" a student wrote. The sentence was also mistaken about tenses.

The next difficulty in grammar was part of speech. It was very popular error. Figure 5 showed, 37.3% of participants who had difficulties in part of speech and the statement 21, "You make mistake in functions and rules of part of speeches in grammar structure." was made up 64.7% of them who agreed. In fact, 14/31 essay samples were wrong about part of speech. As it can be seen in the conclusion, a student wrote, "*That is perseverance, never give up, brave realize dreams and ideas, adventurous and no afraid of failure.*". This sentence was seriously wrong about the different categories. While word "perseverance" was noun, "give up" was verb, "brave" was adjective and "ideas" was

noun. Other samples, in the conclusion part, students often wrote the sentence without subject. *“In addition to, be always learning cultivate knowledge, expand understanding. On the way to success don’t have foot prints of lazy person or not try”*. Therefore, the students determined the incorrect function of the word.

In Figure 5, the participants thought that they rarely made mistake in the punctuations, only with 7.8% percentage. If students do not use many punctuation marks, the readers will not understand what they read because it is complication. Therefore, students agreed with statement 22, *“You do not know how to use correct punctuation marks.”* with 15.7% and strongly agreed with 23.5%. Besides the difficulties above, about 5.8% of students faced with other difficulties in grammar.

To sum up, the actual data from the essay examples were exactly the same as the statistics of Figure 5 and Table 4. Actually, participant’s information was appropriate to their experience.

c. Idea arrangement

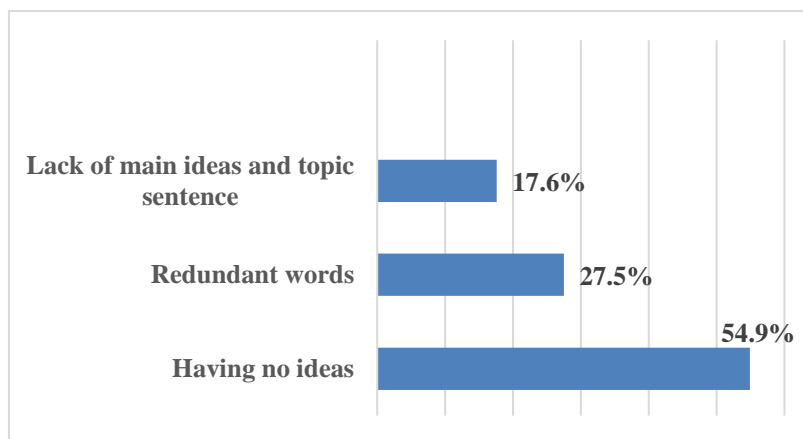


Figure 6: Difficulties in idea arrangement

In Figure 3, the ideas arrangement difficulty was 11.7%. While writing does not just focus on grammar correctly, vocabulary is plentiful and relevant; it also concerns the text arrangement and expansion of ideas. Thus, ideas arrangement is also the important factor for students. Let’s see the table below:

Table 5: Difficulties in ideas arrangement

Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Strongly disagree
23. You often lack the topic and main idea sentence in writing an essay.	15.7%	73.5%	3.9%	6.9%	0%
24. You often make mistakes when writing many sentences, which are redundant and unnecessary.	23.5%	70.6%	0%	5.9%	0%
25. You do not have enough information about the topic.	29.3%	49.1%	9.8%	11.8%	0%

Indeed, in the findings of the Figure 6, the first difficulty in ideas arrangement was lack of the main ideas and topic sentence with 17.6%. In Table 5, 73.5% of students agreed with statement 23, "You often lack the topic and main idea sentence in writing an essay."

Moreover, they often made mistake when writing many sentences which were redundant and unnecessary in the essay. They wrote a long essay, but those ideas were not related together. In detail, Figure 6 showed that, 27.5% of participants who used redundant words. About 70.6% of them agreed and 23.5% strongly agreed with statement 24, "You often make mistakes when writing a lot sentences which are redundant and unnecessary in the essay."

In Figure 6, the last difficulty, having no ideas in the process writing was up 54.9%. As for statement 25, "You do not have enough information about topic." About 78.4% of students strongly agreed and agreed. It limits the writing if students do not have enough ideas.

Especially, in the essay samples, there were 20/31 students who used redundant words. For example, a student wrote "*You have dream, have unique ideas.*", a student used word "have" two times in one sentence. Besides, the essay was not logic and clearly when a student wrote, "*Certainly, so that created the jet aircraft and combat helicopter and software program he could fail many times. However, he persevered, not give up. He spends two years trying to convince his wife and family, find the investor for his project*". The word "certainly" opposite with "however" so the meaning of the sentence was not clearly. Moreover, in the conclusion, "*That is perseverance, never give up, brave realize dreams and ideas, ad venturous and no afraid of failure, confidence and creativity. In addition to, be always learning cultivate knowledge, expand understanding.*" There were many ideas not mentioned in the body of the essay. It meant that students had no ideas and the sentences were redundant and unnecessary. The student did not have the topic and main ideas sentence to express, so they had to write ideas from the book, example: "*Park Soo Wong is typical of new type of entrepreneur. The 35-year-old engineer enrolled at the High Tech Venture Center after quitting the government's Agency for Defense Development, where he designed jet aircraft and combat helicopters. Park has developed a software program that figures out in minutes the most efficient way for automated cutting machines or leather.*"

Thus, the ideas arrangement is the key concept being expressed or examined. The topic sentence is generally at the beginning of the opening paragraph and give one summary sentence for the main point. In the process writing, the students should pay attention to the main ideas and topic sentence. If not, the essay will be redundancy and out of topic. Great ideas arrangement helps readers understand the ideas and central focus on the essay. Ideas arrangement is still difficult with the sophomores in their writing.

c. Background knowledge

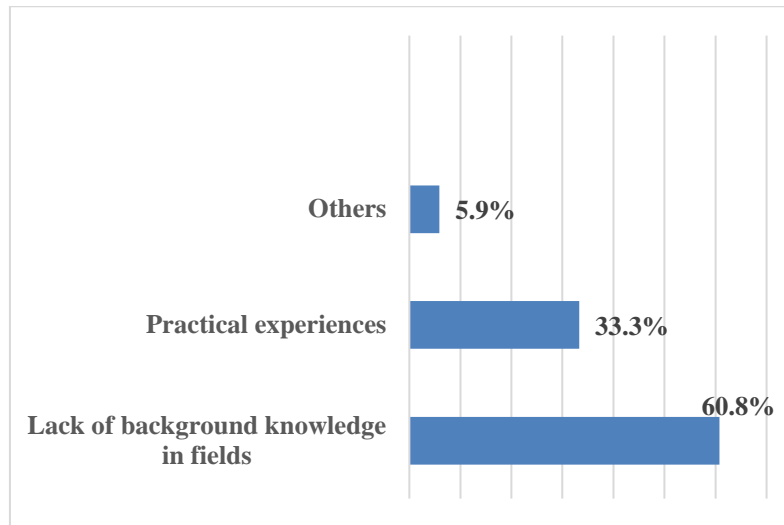


Figure 7: Difficulties in background knowledge

Besides vocabulary, grammar structures and ideas arrangement; background knowledge is also an element that students face. In Figure 3, background knowledge difficulty accounted 15.6%. In Figure 7, the difficulties in background knowledge included lack of background knowledge in fields, practical experiences and others. Move to the table below to get more details.

Table 6: Difficulties in background knowledge

Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Strongly disagree
26. You do not have enough experiences in life.	9.9%	62.7%	19.6%	3.9%	3.9%
27. You do not have enough knowledge of fields.	25.5%	64.8%	7.8%	1.9%	0%
28. You lack background knowledge so you cannot build ideas.	27.5%	56.8%	11.8%	3.9%	0%

Look at Figure 7, investigating the difficulties in background knowledge. Students had no practical experiences with 33.3%. Additionally, 62.7% of the participants agreed with statement 26, “You do not have enough experiences in life.” In writing, along with having large vocabulary, knowledge grammar and good ideas arrangement, students need to have practical experiences as it helps them learn and apply more knowledge around the life to writing. It was the main reason that students lacked background knowledge in fields with 60.8% in Figure 3. Actually, they agreed statement 27, “You do not have enough knowledge of fields.” and statement 28, “You lack background knowledge so you cannot build ideas.” with the highest percentage. It was three-four of the total choosing strongly agree and agree.

In fact, students lacked background knowledge in fields. They did not have experience around their life. They could learn many value things to expand their knowledge from the experience. When students wrote a cultural comparison between Korea and Vietnam. They only found information from the pages as they had no background knowledge about Korea. Those were just theories, no real experience, so the essay would be inaccurate. Furthermore, in the essay sample, students wrote about Park Soo Wong in Korea, but they did not about him, they just read the text; it would not have enough information about him.

In short, the statistic above was right with the actual, the sophomores faced difficulties in background knowledge in writing.

d. Other difficulties

As mentioned in Figure 3, the percentage of other difficulties in writing was 6.1%. Let's get more detail in the table below:

Table 7: Other difficulties

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Strongly disagree
29. You often use acronyms in writing; it makes the essay unclear and the readers cannot understand what you want to express.	15.7%	60.8%	13.7%	9.8%	0%
30. You often make mistake with orthography.	23.6%	60.8%	7.8%	7.8%	0%
31. If having a poor memory and forgetting vocabulary and background knowledge easily, you cannot express ideas.	17.6%	66.8%	7.8%	7.8%	0%
32. You rarely spend time practicing writing at home as you have no passion with writing.	9.8%	74.5%	15.7%	0%	0%

Getting started with statement 29, "You often use acronyms in writing; it makes the essay unclear and the readers cannot understand what you want to express." The highest percentage showed 60.8% with the answer "agree" and 15.7% of them chose strongly agreed. About 11.8% of the participants had no idea. Nevertheless, the rate of "strongly disagree" and "disagree" still have a few (9.7% disagreed and no one strongly disagreed).

Moving the next one, statement 30, "You often make mistake with orthography." This was a common mistake students make in writing both English and Vietnamese. In the detail, the answer "strongly agree" and "agree" were 23.6% and 60.8% of the students were mistaken with orthography. Conversely, the sophomores who had no idea were 7.8% and the same as disagreed.

As for the statement 31, "If having a poor memory and forgetting vocabulary and background knowledge easily, you cannot express ideas." Sometimes, the learners try to

study more, but having a poor memory makes them forget what they studied. The rate 66.8% of them agreed and 17.6% strongly agreed with this statement. The same percentage was 7.8% of students who said that they had no idea and disagreed.

The last statement, the cause to write bad and have many difficulties as, "You rarely spend time practicing writing at home as you have no passion with writing." They did not spend time practicing as they have no passion in writing. Exactly, the percentage of the students who answered "agree" about 74.5% that was over three-fourths of the total 100%. Hence, the lowest was 15.7% of the participants who had no idea. Therefore, the participants said that they strongly disagreed and disagree was zero.

Besides the main difficulties, students still faced other difficulties. Therefore, they should be careful in the process writing.

4.1.2 Results of the interview

The interview questions were conducted by ten students. There were five questions. In the question 1, "Do you like writing? Why or why not?" about 8/10 students said that they liked writing because they could express thought by writing. Similarly, the interviewee shared that, "*I like writing as it helps me to describe what I experience by writing.*" Another one thought that he also liked writing as it was a good way to communicate. Moreover, one student believed that he could improve grammar through writing. Nevertheless, there was only two students did not like writing as their writing was bad and it was a boring skill.

Moving to question 2, "Do you think writing skill is the most difficult one? Why or why not?" all students (10/10) admitted that writing was very difficult. Actually, the participants said that writing required them to have grammatical knowledge, lexicons and background knowledge in many fields. Besides, it was hard as the students did not know the way to organize the text. Furthermore, they thought that writing was difficult as they lacked vocabulary, grammar structures, ideas arrangement as well as background knowledge.

As for the question 3, "Which difficulties do you face in learning writing skill?" The students showed that learning new words was difficult. In addition, they said that choosing words to write was very hard. Another one was the way to use correct grammar structures.

For the question 4, "Which is the most difficult factor that makes you cannot write effectively?" three students who thought grammar structures were the most difficult factor that made them not write effectively. In detail, they were mistaken with the tenses. Two students said that knowledge of the topic was the most difficult factor. They felt nervous and lacked knowledge when facing with new topic.

The last question, "Which solutions do you want to suggest for solving those difficulties?" Students suggested as they should learn more new words and read books, newspapers or materials. Besides they could get information from the internet when they faced the new topic. Additionally, the learners should always practice at home that may be the good way to improve writing.

4.2 Discussion

After analyzing the findings of the questionnaire, the results showed that more than a half of students have learnt English for 10 years. It meant that the time students learned English was long. In generally, 10 years proved that their English was good but English writing was still difficult. However, learning English 10 years was not sure that learning English writing was good. Exactly, in students' self-evaluation on their English writing ability part, although they learned English 10 years, there was no one who assessed that their writing was good. Actually, students surely faced with many difficulties in the process of writing. From the research results, the sophomores faced difficulties because of vocabulary, grammar structures, ideas arrangement, background knowledge and other difficulties.

Firstly, one of the difficulties was vocabulary. It was a main factor in language not only writing but also all other English skills. The difficulty belonged in vocabulary was the knowledge of words. Indeed, they often made mistakes in the choice of words. Choosing the appropriate words was a challenge for students. The new words made them misunderstand about meaning. Thus, vocabulary was a key for students to learn English writing better.

Secondly, the errors that always appeared in the essay was grammar structures. Even if students who were good, still made mistakes. If students cannot understand the grammar structure, they can change the meaning of the writing. The results showed that, tenses, part of speech and punctuations were difficult. As for tenses, students easily misunderstood between the past tenses and present tenses. Specifically, about part of speech, students made mistake in functions and rules of part of speech. The punctuations were small errors, but the learners still faced them if they did not pay attention.

The next, it can be seen that ideas arrangement and background knowledge were hard. They were related together. The students lacked knowledge in the fields as they did not have real around experiences. It caused that they had no ideas to express. Besides, the essay was redundant words by lacking the main ideas and topic sentences. If students were not careful, they were easily wrong.

Finally, students met difficulties in writing by some other causes. Their writing was not good because they did not spend much time to practice. Besides, they often made mistake with orthography. The students would make many mistakes if they did not try to practice.

In short, English-majored sophomores at Tay Do University faced many difficulties in writing as vocabulary, grammar structures, ideas arrangement and background knowledge. The students should pay attention to the errors from the research results. They can overcome the difficulties and become a good writer.

5. Conclusions, implications and recommendations

This chapter includes conclusions, implications and recommendation of the research.

5.1 Conclusions

In fact, English is indispensable in our life that is also the common language in the world. Everyone knows that most reputable companies, corporations require their candidates proficient in English communication skills in life and work. If we can use English fluently, we will have much good chances in work that requires English skills. Writing skill is more and more necessary in communication, but students usually face difficulties when learning English. Especially, English writing skill is the most challenge for them.

Actually, English-majored sophomores at Tay Do University are a specific example. They recognize that there are many difficulties during the process of learning writing skill. After collecting and analyzing the information and data from the questionnaire, essay samples and the interview, it is recognized that the second year students face some common difficulties in learning writing such as vocabulary, grammar structure, ideas arrangement, background knowledge. Besides above difficulties, students sometimes make mistake with other problems as orthography, poor memory and time practicing. If having a poor memory and easily forgetting vocabulary and background knowledge of what they learnt, students cannot express ideas. Finally, students rarely spend time practicing writing at home as they have no passion with writing. To overcome the difficulties, learners should know their difficulties to find the ways to improve their writing.

In short, the study "Difficulties in writing skill of English-majored sophomores at Tay Do University" intended to figure out the problems that the sophomores faced in learning writing English.

5.2 Implications

The students can reveal the important role of writing that is also a motivation for them who are passionate about learning English writing skill. Moreover, they know about their difficulties in learning writing skill after analyzing the results of questionnaire, essay samples and the interview. Actually, the students recognize many difficulties in writing process from the study as their weak points in vocabulary, grammar structure, idea arrangement and background knowledge. Therefore, it is hoped that the study can help students find out the appropriate learning methods to improve their level in writing. Besides, not only students but also the teachers that can base on the results to look out the teaching method accurately and maybe find out the other good materials that help students to learn writing effectively.

5.3 Recommendations

The other researches can be based on the result of this study to develop their research larger with other participants such as English-majored freshmen, juniors and seniors about the difficulties in writing process, not only sophomores. Besides the difficulties in vocabulary, grammar structures, ideas arrangement and background knowledge; the researchers can look for other difficulties in the process of learning English. Hence, they

can find out the effective methods to improve writing. It will be a motivation for students to practice more to develop the writing skill.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

About the Author

Nga H. T. Nguyen is a Professor at Tay Do University since 2008; she teaches English for a Bachelor of English, English for specific purposes for a Master of Business Administration and a Master of Banking and Finance. Nga is the main author of the articles and books such as, Difficulties in studying TOEIC listening comprehension of non-English-majored freshmen at Tay Do University, in Vietnam; Difficulties in writing essays of English-majored sophomores at Tay Do University, in Vietnam; Difficulties in reading comprehension of English-majored sophomores at Tay Do University, Cantho, Vietnam, and English for Pharmacy, respectively.

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