



A SURVEY ON THE DIFFICULTIES IN WRITING ESSAYS OF ENGLISH MAJORED SOPHOMORES AT TAY DO UNIVERSITY, VIETNAM

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Abstract:

This thesis “A study on the difficulties in writing essays of English-majored sophomores at Tay Do University” was conducted to examine the difficulties that second-year students majoring in English often met in writing essays. For this purpose, the participants in this study were 100 English majored sophomores in classes 14A, 14B and 14C at Tay Do University. The interview with 3 extended statements for English majored teachers and a questionnaire with 25 closed statements for students is used as instruments to collect the data. The data from the interview and questionnaire were collected to make clear and prove the problems that the students have had in writing essays. The study figured out some difficulties about background knowledge, vocabulary, grammar structure, idea arrangement and orthography in writing essays faced by English majors sophomores at Tay Do University. Besides, this study also helps students realize their challenges and improve their writing essays.

Keywords: writing essays, difficulties in writing essays, English majored sophomores

1. Introduction

Chapter one presents the rationale, the significance of the research and the organization of the research paper.

1.1 Rationale

Language plays a principal part in human life in today's globalized world. English is the international language for exchanging knowledge with other nations, out of all the languages spoken on the planet. It has become one of the most widely spoken languages

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in a variety of areas including finance, education, medicine, business, tourism, history, technology, culture, etc. English is the most common language taught in Vietnam. The aim of teaching and studying a foreign language is to improve the communicative abilities of students. Many Vietnamese, especially students who want to get good jobs with a high salary or advance in their careers, consider English to be one of the prerequisites.

Additionally, writing in English is essential because it is a form of written communication. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are the four English skills that English learners must acquire in order to master the language effectively. Of all four skills, writing is considered a crucial skill in teaching and learning English as a foreign language. Boonpattanaporn (2005) stated that *“Writing is one of the necessary means for people to express their thinking or emotion and to communicate precisely”*.

Besides, writing is also appreciated highly in comparison with reading, listening and speaking. It is one of the most difficult tasks because writing requires the English learners to penetrate and use a complex combination of language skills, vocabulary, and spelling the ability to organize ideas logically.

Furthermore, essay writing is not an easy task and it is sure that essay writing is harder for English learners who use English as a second or foreign language country like Vietnam. Most students confirm that they always get problems in writing essays. Especially, in a university environment, students must deal with a variety of discourse texts including narrative, descriptive, explanatory and argumentative. Grammar and vocabulary are the most noticeable problems. Besides, a lack of unity in the organization, a lack of coherence that language learners have to confront.

However, English majors sophomores at Tay Do University still face difficulties because of five reasons. Background knowledge is a big challenge because it is difficult to convey their ideas if they do not have the information related to what they want to talk about. The lack of vocabulary is a big problem for them. They do not have the efficient vocabulary to express their ideas, feelings and thinking. Mistakes in grammatical structures and orthography are the reasons affecting their writing. They also have obstacles in the way that they arrange their own ideas.

Recognizing the difficulties faced by students in writing essays, some researchers have previously explored and found the various difficulties students encounter in writing argument essays, for example, Adams, K. & Keene, M. (2000) *“Research and writing across the disciplines”*, Tiriyaki, E. N. (2011) *“University students’ skills of writing argumentative text and writing anxiety and critical thinking skills”* and Rahmatunisa, W. (2014) *“Problems faced by Indonesian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners in writing argumentative essay”*, etc. However, there are few studies that investigated the difficulties in writing essays by English-majored sophomores at Tay Do University.

For this result, the topic titled *“A study on the difficulties in writing essays of English-majored sophomores at Tay Do University”* is conducted to further understand what the causes are and help English-major sophomores at Tay Do University. It is also a reference research topic for the other researchers recognizing their students’ obstacles in writing

essays. Therefore, the researcher hopes that students can improve their writing skills in a positive way.

For those difficulties, the researchers decided to conduct the study on “*A survey on the difficulties in writing essays of English majored sophomores at Tay Do University*” to explore those issues deeply to find out ways to improve the difficulties relating to writing essays that English majored sophomores at Tay Do University meet.

1.2 Research aims

The research aims at investigating the difficulties in writing essays encountered by English majors sophomores at Tay Do University. The implication of the findings contributes to the understanding of students' writing difficulty, the information obtained enable lecturers to help students in developing substantive knowledge of the writing process to produce effective writing.

1.3 Research questions

To reach the aims mentioned above, the research is conducted in order to answer the following questions:

Q1: What are some difficulties that English majored sophomores at Tay Do University encounter?

Q2: How can they overcome those challenges?

1.4 The significance of the research

Writing is an indispensable skill in many contexts in students' life that needs to be cultivated. This research was expected to help English major sophomores at Tay Do University recognize their common difficulties in writing English essays. On the basis of the findings, they would be more conscious of their problems in essay writing. Besides, they also can figure out their own problems for making some useful solutions or update some helpful writing methods to improve their essay writing skills.

1.5 The organization of the research paper

The research consists of five chapters including:

- Chapter I - *Introduction* states the introduction of the study that includes the rationale, research aims, research questions, the significance of the research and the organization of the research paper.
- Chapter II - *Literature review* is about the theoretical background of writing and essay writing, the importance of writing, the definition of essays, the difficulties of writing and some previous studies.
- Chapter III - *Research methodology* focuses on the study method used in the thesis including hypothesis, research design, participants, instruments and procedure.
- Chapter IV - *Result and Discussion* report the findings of the research to figure out the participants' problems in essay writing and then the discussion will follow up to wrap up this chapter.

- Chapter V - *Conclusion, limitations, implications and recommendations* give the conclusion, limitations; reflect on the implication of the study and put forward recommendations for further research.

2. Literature review

Chapter II explains the definitions of writing and its importance to students; the definitions of essays; difficulties in writing essays and previous studies.

2.1 Definitions of writing

Among the four basic language skills, writing is one of the productive skills that requires remarkable attention because it is a “convergent” skill. Writing competence plays a special role in delivering a written message exactly and productively. However, if students do not have effective writing strategies, they often get failure rather than success in writing skill. Moreover, writing takes much more time in comparison with the three other skills. In order to develop writing, the ability is a really slow process and English learners need hard work and continual practice.

Writing is the process of using symbols such as letters of the alphabet, punctuation and spaces to communicate thoughts and ideas in a readable form. According to Chastain (1988) showed that “*writing is a basic communication skill and a unique asset in the process of learning a second language*”. However, writing has received less importance since the introduction of an audio-language method and has been considered the least useful of four language skills.

On the other hand, writing helps to provide a welcome tempo change throughout the class by bringing in insight into the grammar system, serving as a means of conscious attention to linguistic form, providing an opportunity for individuals to practice naturally, and coming up with a specific outcome or product for students to test and study. Therefore, writing appears to have different definitions for different groups of people, aimed at meeting their various writing needs and goals.

Another definition of writing skill was also defined by Lannon (1989) “*writing as the process of transforming the material discovered by research inspiration, accident, trial and error, or whatever into the message with definite meaning - writing is a process of deliberate decision*”. In language teaching and learning, according to Tribble, (1996) It is a “*language skill*” that involves “*not just a graphic representation of speech, but the development and representation of thoughts in a structured way*”. Beside “*writing is a system for interpersonal communication using various styles of language.*” (Jalaludin, 2001). It is crucial in both our personal and professional lives. It enables one to connect with people separated by distance or time.

In addition, Tribble, (1996) also stated that “*writers must not only have ideas in their heads, but also know how to put those ideas in a logical and structured order*”. Among the definitions listed above, this one is considered the most comprehensive because it nearly covers all aspects of writing, including content, grammar, and organization. Especially,

emphasis should be placed on the goals of writing as well as the organization of writing. It is a method of visually or tactilely representing language. Writing systems employ sets of symbols to represent speech sounds, as well as symbols for punctuation and numerals. Furthermore, in academia, the ability to write clearly in the conference, journal, and book publishing presentations are very necessary, which all have an effect on the spread of new ideas and concepts. Besides, *“writing ability is necessary when you remember that writing is required in almost every course”* (Ahmadi, Maftoon & Gholami Mahrdad, 2012). Moreover, it is much more essential since English majors students at university learn English, they must have sufficient expertise to compose and produce unique writing genres. In addition, written correspondence seems to be critical for learners' progress in the twenty-first century in order to successfully exchange ideas and knowledge in and across global networks. As a result, one of the most valuable qualities for second language learners is the ability to express effectively in writing.

In summary, writing skills comprise all the information and talents connected to convey thoughts via the written word.

2.2 The importance of writing

Writing is a linguistic talent that has made a significant contribution to human labor. It is a valuable skill in a variety of contexts including business, classrooms, offices, neighbourhoods, etc. The ones who are good at writing skill can express their messages consistently and easily. The better the learner writes, the more easily readers can understand. Moreover, it is also the ability to write the text successfully for a variety of purposes. It is a networking and learning medium that helps people to gather and distribute informative information. It is wonderful to get the opportunities for a well-paid and interesting career when learners have a good command of English. Knowing English allows people from different countries to communicate more easily. (Effortless English)

Furthermore, university students must write essays, mission notes, and theses in English. International sources and scholarly writing are frequently published in English. Besides, students at Tay Do University will learn how to extend their vocabulary, master grammar constructs, and articulate their concepts and opinions precisely by writing skills. They will also learn how to construct a coherent statement. As a result, students must comprehend the significance of writing and work to improve their writing abilities. There are some types of essays that they have to acquire in the curriculum like compare and contrast essay, evaluation essay, explanatory essay, argumentative essay, etc.

2.3 Definitions of essay

The outline format for a definition essay is similar to that of a typical essay, but it has a few differences. An essay is a short piece of writing written by a writer for publication on a specific topic. In other words, an essay is a piece of writing in which the author expresses his or her own point of view - but the definition is ambiguous, overlapping with those of a paper, an article, a pamphlet, and a short story.

An essay has been defined in a variety of ways. Langan, (2004) showed a simpler definition of “essay” by comparing between “paragraph” and “an essay”. The author claimed that “an essay does the same thing a paragraph does”. However, the difference is “a paragraph is a series of sentences about one main idea or point, while an essay is a series of paragraphs about one main idea or point called the central idea”. Besides, one definition is shown by Phillips (1979) “an essay is a series of paragraphs that develop a topic and express a writer’s opinion about that topic. The hardest part of writing a good essay is to decide what your opinion is and find proof to support it”.

Typically, essays include the introduction, the body and the conclusion parts. Moreover, there are many different styles of writing, from informal to formal and many kinds of essays such as comparison and contrast, evaluation, explanation, argument, discussion, etc.

2.4 Definitions of some kinds of essays

2.4.1 Comparison and contrast essays

Comparison in writing discusses elements that are similar while contrast in writing discusses elements that are different. A comparison and contrast essay means analyzing two subjects by comparing them, contrasting them, or both.

For example, *some people want to live in a house while others prefer living in an apartment. Does living in a house bring more advantages than living in an apartment? Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.*

There are many people who believe that living in a house is the best. However, some people disagree with this opinion and instead prefer to live in an apartment. This essay makes a comparison of the two and chooses the most preferred option.

To begin with, living in a flat definitely brings several advantages to a resident. One of the most important reasons behind this is the huge convenience it offers. An apartment is a part of a large building giving a feel of living in a small societal association that takes responsibility for any fix or repair or maintenance required. For example, if one needs to repair the roof, the maintenance charges are borne by the landlord. Moreover, various facilities, as well as amenities, are available nearby including a shopping mall, tuition center, medical store, bus station and so on.

On the other hand, living in an owned house does not offer the facilities that one can avail of while living in an apartment. One reason for this is that it is quite lonely to stay in a house which occupies a large land area bringing boredom and snatching the joy of living with so many people around. For example, it would be such a dull experience of sitting alone in the garden with no one around to share life experiences. In addition to this, maintenance and cleanliness of the house are borne by the owner and thus it is costly to live in a house.

Conclusively, living in an apartment is comparatively better than staying lonely in a house. Though a house provides a large spacious area to move around, living in an apartment enhances more social interaction and adds more excitement to life.

Furthermore, the key to a good comparison and contrast essay is to choose two or more subjects that connect in a meaningful way. The purpose of conducting the comparison or contrast is not to state the obvious but rather to illuminate subtle differences or unexpected similarities.

In brief, comparison and contrast essays can be found in a wide range of subjects. Writers must keep one thing in mind when making decisions about what to include: significance and relevance aids in determining which traits are worth contrasting and comparing.

2.4.2 Evaluation essays

An assessment essay is a piece of writing in which writers make value judgments about a subject based on a set of criteria. Evaluative writing, evaluative essay or report, and critical evaluation essay are all terms for the same thing. *“Any kind of review is essentially a piece of evaluative writing,”* says Allen S. Goose (2001) *“This type of writing calls for the critical thinking skills of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation”*.

The purpose of an evaluation essay is to present an opinion or viewpoint on a subject or body of work. It should firstly provide a summary of the article in question, then using a thorough, well-structured argument the writer presents a point of view supported with examples and evidence.

Considering the example below, it is obvious which one provides the clearest definition of what the essay is about, and the argument it will present: *Doing an enjoyable activity with a child can develop better skills and more creativity than reading. To what extent do you agree? Use reasons and specific examples to explain your answer.*

Parents throughout the world place spend time reading with their offspring to prepare them for a school where their literacy skills are further developed; however, recent research suggests that focusing on reading at an early age can be detrimental, and participating in fun activities would be far more beneficial. I am a strong advocate of this approach, and the benefits of it will be covered in this essay.

A fundamental reason for this is that there is no biological age for reading and pushing infants to acquire this skill before they are ready could have repercussions. For example, in the UK, many boys are reluctant readers, possibly because of being forced to read, and this turned them off reading. By focusing on other activities and developing other skills such as creativity and imagination, when they are ready to read, they usually acquire this skill rapidly.

In addition, the importance of encouraging creativity and developing a child’s imagination must be acknowledged. Through play, youngsters develop social and cognitive skills, for example, they are more likely to learn vocabulary through context rather than learning it from a book.

Furthermore, play allows youngsters to mature emotionally, and gain self-confidence. There is no scientific research which suggests reading at a young age is essential for a child’s development; moreover, evidence suggests the reverse is true. In Finland, early years’ education focuses on playing.

Reading is only encouraged if a child shows an interest in developing this skill. This self-directed approach certainly does not result in Finnish school leavers falling behind their foreign counterparts. In fact, Finland was ranked the sixth best in the world in terms of reading.

Despite being a supporter of this non-reading approach, I strongly recommend incorporating bedtime stories into a child's daily routine. However, reading as a regular daytime activity should be swapped for something which allows the child to develop other skills.

In summary, in order to evaluate the success of the essay, the writer needs to have a convincing argument. It is critical to research thoroughly the issue or understand the full text.

2.4.3 Explanatory essays

An explanatory essay is one that describes our views or opinions on a particular subject or topic. The main function of an explanation essay is to clear up the issue of the research, describe it and reveal the essence of the matter in a brief and coherent way. To make the work easier, apply the following questions to your thesis statement such as What? Who? Why? What for? When? How?

For example, *how are hurricanes similar to tornadoes? Explain your ideas.*

Hurricanes and tornadoes are magnificent weather phenomena that inspire awe or fear in all those who see and experience them. Regardless of how you feel about them, it must be noted that they are remarkable and are very similar in structure, design and destruction. It is very evident those both are related and should command similar respect. Both hurricanes and tornadoes are caused by instability in weather conditions such as temperature and pressure and have a rotating column of air. Their rotation varies depending on whether it's the southern hemisphere or the northern hemisphere. In the first case, the rotation is clockwise while in the latter case it's counterclockwise. Another feature they both share is their strong winds and rain. However, it should be noted that hurricanes can sometimes bring about tornadoes but tornadoes cannot bring about hurricanes.

A hurricane is different from a tornado in terms of the fact that it only brings rain as precipitation, whereas tornadoes can bring about rain, hail and sleet. Another defining factor is that hurricanes last for days while tornadoes have a lifespan of a few minutes. The amount of warning given for a hurricane can be between days to a week whereas a tornado warning is from a few minutes to a few hours. Another key point of difference is their size, hurricanes span hundreds of kilometers whereas a tornado spans hundreds of meters.

While a hurricane and tornado have several differences, their similarities are much more striking. Both are formed in a similar manner, have a similar makeup, rotate similarly and bring about rain, strong winds and possibly similar destruction. Based on these factors, it can be said that the similarities outweigh the differences so a hurricane and a tornado are very much alike.

In conclusion, an explanatory essay is a type of writing in which the author presents some point of view on a certain topic, event or situation. This view does not necessarily have to be one that the writer agrees with, but it must have some research and logic to make it feasible.

2.4.4 Argumentative essays

An argumentative essay is one that makes a point and backs it up with arguments and proof. Its aim is to convince the reader to agree with the point of view offered.

Different scholars have suggested a number of concepts for an argumentative essay. White & Billings (2008) defined an argument as *“A form of discourse in which the writer or speaker presents a pattern of reasoning, reinforced by detailed evidence and refutation of challenging claims, that tries to persuade an audience to accept the claim”* (p.4). Besides, argumentation necessitates the opportunity to assume a position, anticipate the audience's competing opinions, contradict certain ideas, and persuade the reader to trust that position with ample supporting proof. Rather than only the author's thoughts and views, a strong argumentative article would use proof and evidence to support the argument.

Furthermore, according to Oshima and Hogue (2006), an argumentative essay is one in which the authors accept or do not with a particular topic and then present facts to justify their stance. Students should be able to have *“the clear and logical presentation facts (premises) so as to arrive at valid conclusions”* while writing an argumentative article.

For example, *some people believe that hobbies need to be difficult to be enjoyable. To what extent do you agree or disagree?*

Some hobbies are relatively easy, while others present more of a challenge. Personally, I believe that both types of hobbies can be fun, and I, therefore, disagree with the statement that hobbies need to be difficult in order to be enjoyable.

On the one hand, many people enjoy easy hobbies. One example of an activity that is easy for most people is swimming. This hobby requires very little equipment, it is simple to learn, and it is inexpensive. I remember learning to swim at my local swimming pool when I was a child, and it never felt like a demanding or challenging experience. Another hobby that I find easy and fun is photography. In my opinion, anyone can take interesting pictures without knowing too much about the technicalities of operating a camera. Despite being straightforward, taking photos is a satisfying activity.

On the other hand, difficult hobbies can sometimes be more exciting. If an activity is more challenging, we might feel a greater sense of satisfaction when we manage to do it successfully. For example, film editing is a hobby that requires a high level of knowledge and expertise. In my case, it took me around two years before I became competent at this activity, but now I enjoy it much more than I did when I started. I believe that many hobbies give us more pleasure when we reach a higher level of performance because the results are better and the feeling of achievement is greater.

In conclusion, simple hobbies can be fun and relaxing, but difficult hobbies can be equally pleasurable for different reasons.

Based on the meanings above, an argumentative essay is a category of essay that is structured around a simple thesis point. The aim of writing is to persuade readers to support or agree with the writer's point of view on a contentious subject or question.

2.4.5 Discussion essays

Discussions are well-informed deliberations that are rooted in experience. In order to have a constructive and tactful debate, all opposing views must be considered, resulting in a balanced perspective throughout the article. Discussion essays present topics that concern a specific subject that is often considered to be open to debate.

As a result, a discussion essay must provide a detailed examination of both sides of a given subject. Before the writer expresses his personal conclusions and views, the article should provide a thorough understanding of all problems.

It is an example of a discussion essay; *some people think that all university students should study whatever they like. Others believe that they should only be allowed to study subjects that will be useful in the future, such as those related to science and technology. Discuss both these views and give your own opinion.*

People have different views about how much choice students should have with regard to what they can study at university. While some argue that it would be better for students to be forced into certain key subject areas, I believe that everyone should be able to study the course of their choice.

There are various reasons why people believe that universities should only offer subjects that will be useful in the future. They may assert that university courses like medicine, engineering and information technology are more likely to be beneficial than certain art degrees. From a personal perspective, it can be argued that these courses provide more job opportunities, career progression, better salaries, and therefore an improved quality of life for students who take them. On the societal level, by forcing people to choose particular university subjects, governments can ensure that any knowledge and skill gaps in the economy are covered. Finally, a focus on technology in higher education could lead to new inventions, economic growth, and greater future prosperity.

In spite of these arguments, I believe that university students should be free to choose their preferred areas of study. In my opinion, society will benefit more if our students are passionate about what they are learning. Besides, nobody can really predict which areas of knowledge will be most useful to society in the future, and it may be that employers begin to value creative thinking skills above practical or technical skills. If this were the case, perhaps we would need more students of art, history and philosophy than of science or technology.

In conclusion, although it might seem sensible for universities to focus only on the most useful subjects, I personally prefer the current system in which people have the right to study whatever they like.

2.5 Difficulties in writing essays

In the writing stage, the most difficult part is getting started with planning. As Ebow (1973) confirmed that *“much writing time is spent not writing: wondering, worrying, crossing out, having second thoughts.”*

One of the core problems students have with writing is that they are not able to write a clear, understandable and strong thesis statement. They may come across a similar problem while writing the essay. It is difficult for many English learners to write essays or compositions in their native language, it is worse for students that are learning English as a second or foreign language. It is for that reason that the research team decided to investigate and analyze this situation, since it was noticeable that English composition students were having serious difficulties when writing.

According to Kroll (2001), *“writing assignments written by students and the methods of the feedback given by the teacher as the two basic components of any writing course.”* So, doing their job means they are improving their writing skill and getting feedback from their teachers to recognize their writing ability. It is for them to know how to write essays in the right ways.

2.5.1 Background knowledge

The ability to achieve communicative competence in writing is a major aspect of language development and academic success among students at all levels of the education system. Writing is considered *“the most principal skill that students require in order to enhance their personal development and academic success.”* (Mukulu, 2006). In addition, Adams and Keene (2000) noted that *“learning to master writing skills can help students to deal successfully with their academic demands and to perform effectively in their disciplines and professional contexts.”* In the academic context, Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998) point out that *“the students are required to produce specific writing genres such as essay, summary, critical review, and research paper.”*

English learners who want to write a successful essay must have a broad understanding of a variety of subjects. They are unable to comprehend the subject or coordinate their thoughts due to a lack of understanding. Since they lack realistic social experience, they may feel uncomfortable when confronted with new or difficult topics.

2.5.2 Vocabulary

Vocabulary is one of the knowledge areas in language and plays a great role for learners in acquiring a language. However, in writing skills, a lack of vocabulary knowledge is a huge obstacle for students. Richards and Renandya (2002: 252) stated: *“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 fact, lack of vocabulary is a reason why the students cannot show what they are thinking. They just keep it inside because they do not have adequate vocabulary to clearly explain ideas, feelings and thoughts. According to Thornbury (2002, p.33) *“without*

grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed". If the students do not have a sufficient vocabulary, they will be confused when expressing thoughts in writing. Moreover, they also meet challenges in choosing appropriate words in particular contexts.

To sum up, a word does not merely have a meaning that it has various meanings in a particular context. Therefore, the students usually face troubles in identifying suitable words when showing their thoughts in essay writing.

2.5.3 Grammar structure

Grammar is a principal element in writing essays because it is easy for readers to understand. It is the framework that allows the writer to express specific meaning to the audience. In addition, the use of grammar reasonably will help them have a quality essay. So, if a student wants to write an essay well, he or she must be competent and fluent in grammar because grammar is the skeleton of the language.

James (2005) pointed that "*Grammar is a study of language and describes the way of putting words together to make a meaningful stance*". It is very crucial in writing essays because it offers knowledge that aids the reader's comprehension. It is the framework that allows the learners to express specific meaning to the audience. However, students often make grammatical errors in their writing such as tenses, part of speech, word order and prepositions. They need to make their writing clearly and coherently. When English learners use the wrong tense, the meaning of the sentence may be wrong, too.

For examples of grammatical mistakes about tense and superlative adjectives:

He likes Vietnamese food. (wrong)

He likes Vietnamese food. (right)

She is the beautifulest girl in the class. (wrong)

She is the most beautiful girl in the class. (right)

When students have poor grammar, their sentences can be vague or ambiguous, causing readers to be unable to understand what they are trying to say or change the context of the sentence. As a result, if students want to write a good essay, they must know how to use the proper tenses.

2.5.4 Idea arrangement

Idea arrangement is also a big obstacle for learners in writing essays. Although readers are attracted by interesting and logical ideas, it is not easy for them to build their ideas in writing essays. If students do not have a clear idea or understand a topic, they may be off-topic or fail to convey the main message. Besides, developing ideas and organizing information in a certain way can help readers focus on the essay.

The loose sentence starts with the key point and then moves on to the explanatory content. For instance, to fix a current issue at work, such as employees opening windows while the air conditioning or heat is on, it might start with the main concept and then add supporting details:

“Open office windows can result in a variety of issues including increased heating and cooling costs, noisy streets or emissions, and potentially unsafe situations.”

There is another way to write this sentence effectively. That is using a balanced sentence is constructed to highlight similarity or contrast between two or more of its components.

“Everyone has decided that closing the office windows would save money on heating and cooling while also creating a more peaceful and secure working atmosphere.”

In addition, they usually make mistakes in the way to organize their ideas in the essays. They often translate from Vietnamese sentences because they are affected by the Vietnamese literature style. They do not know how to put their ideas in order and they just write out what they have thought unconsciously. Until they finish writing their essay, they are also too lazy to read it again and again to check the grammatical or vocabulary mistakes.

On the other hand, they sometimes write redundantly and unnecessary. Although their essays are very long, they cannot receive good marks. Therefore, students need to pay attention to idea organization in English writing.

2.5.5 Orthography

Orthography including punctuation, spelling and contraction, homophones, etc. are the difficulties that the students face. According to Pakir (1896, p.75), *“punctuation is the pragmatics of written language”*. Punctuation is one of the most important things in written English. It is used to create sense and clarity in sentences. Students often use punctuation to structure and organize their writing. Using the wrong punctuation or even wrong placement of punctuation can change the meaning of the sentences. Without any punctuation will make the readers unclear.

In English orthography, the same letters may represent different sounds.

For example, *the digraph /ch/ represents the first syllable in “choice” and “choose”, but when used in the words “character” and “chorus” the /ch/ digraph is pronounced differently (a hard /c/ or /k/ sound), to rhyme with “court”*.

2.6 Previous studies

The studies published that were disseminated in the past are examples for these research findings. This could mean the authors tested a specific hypothesis, tested the tenets of the theory, or tried to answer a specific research question. The results provide support for the argument that *“Instruction designed to enhance writer knowledge improves learners’ writing performance”* (Graham 2006). There are several other studies that confirm that instruction in writing positively correlates with writing performance.

For example, the first one that should be mentioned is the research *“Difficulties in writing essays of English majored”* by Nyang’au Benard Nyasimi (2008), this study was

carried out in Manga district, Nyamira County, Kenya. The target population consisted of 52 teachers of English language and 8,727 students in the public secondary schools in Manga district. The research instruments which were used to collect data included an interview schedule for teachers, a questionnaire and an essay writing test for students. Based on the findings of this study, the common methods used in teaching essay writing skills include lecture, teacher demonstration, question and answering.

Therefore, it was logical to conclude that teaching methods teachers use to influence the learning of essay writing skills among students. The study results showed that using correct grammar and L1 (The first language) interference are the greatest challenges students face in learning essay writing skills.

Similarly, Mehdi and Mojgan (2012), the subjects of this study were 33 learners studying English in an English language school located in Isfahan, Iran. The instruments used in this study were one pretest and posttest on the topic of *"Immunity against Infectious Diseases"*, ESL (English as Second Language) composition profile, and the statistical program of SPSS 16. Moreover, the participants of this study took part in an English writing course for 16 sessions, two sessions a week and each session lasting for an hour and a half. The findings of the study confirm that writing knowledge correlates with writing performance and that the instruction could influence and improve the learners' performance in general and benefit learners a lot to better cope with their problems while writing in English.

Besides, there were also many Vietnamese research papers on difficulties in writing essays of students such as the research paper *"Difficulties in writing essays of English-majored sophomores at Tay Do University"* conducted by Nguyen Hiep Thanh Nga, Pham Thu Uyen and Phan Thi Minh Uyen. This investigation was conducted to discover some difficulties in learning and writing essays of 53 sophomores from 12A and 12B classes at Tay Do University. The instruments of this research were questionnaires, interview questions, and essay samples. Exploration has found that sophomores had many difficulties in writing essays such as vocabulary, grammar structures, idea arrangement, background knowledge, and others. Based on the research results, students could recognize their difficulties and find ways to overcome them.

Moreover, a persistent theme in writing is *"A study on the difficulties in writing argumentative essays of English-majored sophomores at Tay Do University"* was conducted by Dang Thi Hanh, Chau Thanh Hai and Tra To Quyen with the aim of carrying out some of the difficulties faced by second-year students in essay writing. The participants of this study were 90 English-majored sophomores of course 13, and two teachers who teach the English language at Tay Do University. During this study, questionnaires and interviews were used as two tools for data collection. They feel that their study enhances academic understanding of the factors including vocabulary, grammar and coherence, organization and development of an argumentative essay, and the lack of critical thinking.

In short, with the previous studies, it can be concluded that writing essays is a crucial challenge for academic students. The findings of these studies also showed that

students had a lot of challenges in writing essays such as vocabulary, grammar, and orthography. English majored sophomores at Tay Do University also have difficulties with vocabulary such as lacking word choice, lacking practicing vocabulary. The last one, orthography including punctuation, spelling contraction and homophones are the difficulties that the students often encounter in writing essays.

3. Research methodology

The methodology is outlined in this chapter to demonstrate how this study was carried out. First, this chapter is begun with some research aims. Then, it mentions the research questions, hypothesis, research design and participants. The research was followed by research instruments with the result of the interview and questionnaire in detail.

3.1 Hypothesis

According to most English majored sophomores at Tay Do University, writing is the most difficult skill although they have learned this subject from high school to university. Through the literature review and the research questions, it is hypothesized that English majored sophomores at Tay Do University could face difficulties in writing essays such as background knowledge, vocabulary, grammar structures, ideas arrangement and orthography. These difficulties could be the principal causes that they have met in writing essays.

3.2 Research design

A survey research was conducted to answer the research questions so that it could find out some difficulties in writing skills. This survey research was carried out at Tay Do University. The participants were English majors sophomores in Tay Do University. The reliability and the validity of the research results are based on the questionnaires and interviews that were used to collect data from the participants. This research data was analyzed to investigate the difficulties in writing essays of English majors sophomores.

3.3 Participants

The participants in this research were 100 English majored sophomores studying in three classes including English 14A, 14B and 14C at Tay Do University. Most students are at the age of 19 to 23 and they come from different provinces. They speak Vietnamese as their mother tongue and English is a second language to them. The reasons for choosing these participants are based on the English writing skill they are learning, the length of their English learning, and their competence in English as a foreign language. Their ages and learning process are nearly the same, so they have the same ways of thinking and have faced some similar difficulties. Therefore, it is easier during the process of collecting data. All of them were given questionnaires about the difficulties in writing essays to collect the data for the research. Besides, there were five English majored teachers being

invited to conduct interview questions. They have 12 to 20 years of experience in teaching English at university.

3.4 Instruments

The instruments of this research were an interview with three questions and a questionnaire with 25 statements. All of the statements used in the questionnaire were designed originally in English. Questionnaires were a useful and convenient tool to collect information because they had high reliability and validity and provided an easy and practical way for collecting data from a number of people in a short time. Besides, in order to provide more specific feedback, the interview is designed.

3.4.1 Interview

There are five English majored teachers being invited to conduct interview questions. The interview questions are used to get a better understanding of students' attitudes toward writing essays by their teachers. The paper interview was a very valuable method for gathering input from teachers because when answering questions, they specifically articulated their students' challenges and feelings toward those difficulties, as well as suggesting any solutions for the researcher.

3.4.2 Questionnaire

The research chose randomly one hundred students in a total of one hundred and twenty English majored sophomores to answer the questionnaire. It includes two main sections. The first section was about students' personal information such as gender, age, class, hometown, years of learning English and some general questions about their English proficiency. The second section is designed on the basis of the five-degree scales including strongly agree (1), agree (2), neutral (3), disagree (4), strongly disagree (5). The questionnaire was very important in this study because it clearly showed the difficulties students. It consists of 25 questions and it is classified into the following groups:

Summary of the content of the statements group	Group
Students' background knowledge	Group I. From S1 to S4
Students' interest in writing essay	Group II. From S5 to S8
Students' difficulties in vocabulary	Group III. From S9 to S12
Students' difficulties in grammar structure	Group IV. From S13 to S16
Difficulties in idea arrangement	Group V. From S17 to S20
Difficulties in orthography	Group VI. From S21 to S25

3.5 Procedure

The action of the research was presented. It took about 18 weeks to fulfill this study and the process was divided into 4 steps. All the activities of carrying out the research were listed in the following table:

Time	Activities in study process
Step 1 The first two weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meeting the supervisor and choosing a suitable topic. - Making the outline of the study. - Designing the questionnaire and interview. - Finding materials. - Writing chapter 1: Introduction.
Step 2 From the 3 rd to 5 th week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Writing chapter 2: Literature review. - Delivering questionnaires and interviews for the participants. - Writing chapter 3: Methodology.
Step 3 From the 6 th to 9 th week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Analysing the data collected from the questionnaire. - Evaluating the data collected from the interview. - Writing chapter 4: Results and Discussion.
Step 4 The last three weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Writing chapter 5: Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendations. - Completing the research.

4. Results and Discussion

The study's findings are presented in chapter 4 by using reliable evidence from the questionnaire and interviews. Via statistical proof, the findings show that English-majored sophomores have difficulties in writing essays.

4.1 General results

The goal of the study was to investigate students' difficulties in writing English essays. For this aim, the questionnaires were delivered to 100 English majored sophomores' course 14 at Tay Do University. They gave their opinions by checking the blank according to five scales from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The section was to answer the research question that I presented at the beginning of this paper. The results included statistical evidence on (1) background knowledge, (2) students' difficulties in vocabulary, (3) difficulties in learning grammar, (4) the difficulties in idea arrangement and (5) orthography.

4.2 Results of the questionnaire

The researcher can measure the fundamentals during their writing thanks to the question regarding the time students spent studying English. In response to the question, "*How long have you studied English?*". There were 58 students (58 %) who said they had studied English for nine years. This indicates that the majority of them learned English from grade six before they entered university. Nearly one third of the students (29/100) have been studying English for 11 years. In addition, 13% percent (13/100) of the remaining students had studied English for 14 years.

4.2.1 Students' background knowledge

Table 1: Students' background knowledge

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Students' background knowledge					
1. Background knowledge is an essential component in the process of second or foreign language acquisition.	30%	25%	22%	19%	4%
2. I do not know how to develop ideas or my writing due to an unfamiliar topic because I have a shortage of background knowledge.	47%	21%	14%	3%	15%
3. It is very essential to have good background knowledge in order to learn essay writing better.	41%	39%	3%	15%	2%
4. I am not confident in writing a new essay assignment because I do not have sufficient background knowledge of the topic that I am going to write about.	16%	27%	17%	28%	12%

In the first statement “*Background knowledge is an essential component in the process of second or foreign language acquisition.*” It was crucial to determine whether background knowledge had a significant impact on learning English or not. Approximately 60% of respondents (25% agreed and 30% strongly agreed) believed that background knowledge was a significant element in the writing process while the percentage of people who did not realize the importance of background knowledge was exactly 23% and those had no idea was 22%. Dealt with statement number 2, the students’ questions faced by unfamiliar topics, specifically, more than half of sophomores (68%) shared that they had faced obstacles with unfamiliar topics in their English writing. Besides, 47% of them completely agreed. In contrast, there were only 15 % of participants who believed that was not a big deal and 14 % who did not give any opinion.

With the response to statement 3, the majority of students (nearly 80%) quite agreed that “*It’s very essential to have the good background knowledge in order to learn essay writing better*” with 39 % of participants who agreed and 41 % who fully agreed that in some reasons, they did not have enough good information or experience that made them less confident when writing. On the opposite side, the percentage of sophomores choosing “disagreed” and “strongly disagreed” were 15 % and 2 % whereas 3 % of them showed neutrality.

In the last statement of the background knowledge, 43% of students felt unconfident when writing an essay without good background knowledge of the given topic in their writing tasks.

4.2.2 Students' interest in writing subject

The majority of students admitted that they are interested in writing; nearly fifty percent of them agreed that *"writing is their favorite subject"*. They are trying to improve their English skills because they have understood the principles of English as well as the ability to write in English writing. In the sixth statement, it was about the importance of learning English, most of the participants accepted that writing is very important in learning English; there were 66% (66/100) of them who thought that writing is really significant, only 15% (15/100) did not agree with the above idea.

Unfortunately, students believe that their English writing ability is not good. More than two-thirds (71%) of students considered that they had many challenges in writing essays if they were given their writing assignments. It was a noticeable high percentage because many students thought that essay writing was a big challenge.

With statement number 8, almost all students admitted that their writing ability is not very good.

Table 2: Students' interest in writing subject

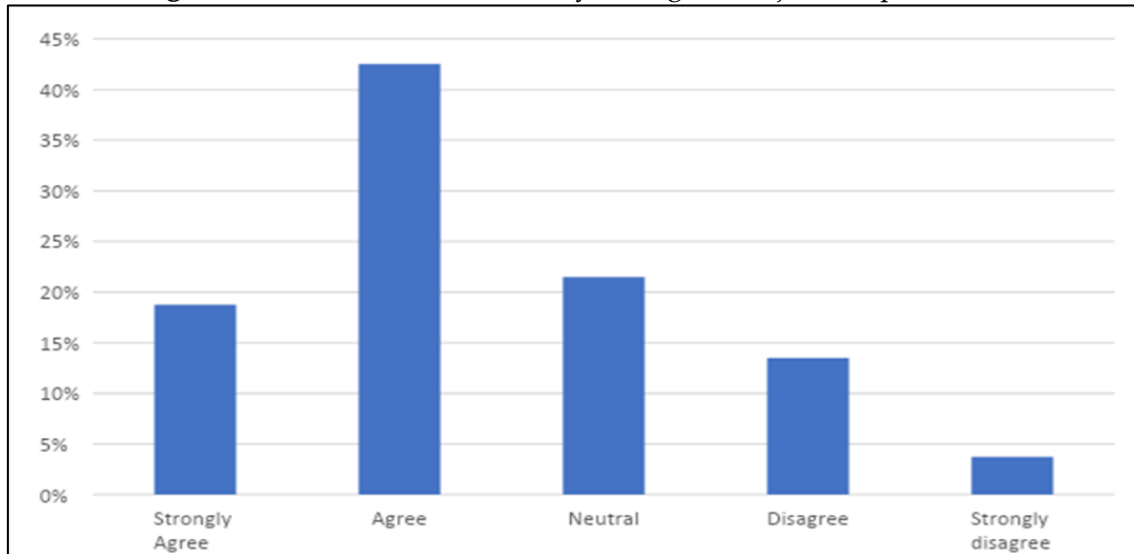
Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Students' interest in writing subject					
5. Writing is my favorite subject.	15%	33%	43%	4%	5%
6. In my opinion, writing is very important.	20%	46%	19%	10%	5%
7. Writing is the most challenging subject.	25%	46%	20%	6%	3%
8. My writing skill is good.	3%	13%	11%	61%	12%

4.2.3 Vocabulary

When facing some difficulties in essay writing, good knowledge of vocabulary is indispensable and very necessary for students majoring in English. It is a crucial component to have good writing essays. However, English majored sophomores at Tay Do University often struggle with vocabulary when writing essays.

The figure showed the percentage of students' difficulties in studying vocabulary. As can be seen from this chart, 61% of students completely agreed that they had difficulties in studying vocabulary, including 46% of students who agreed and 21% strongly agreed. Meanwhile, 18% of students did not think that new words are important in writing essays with the percentages of 14% "disagree" and 4% "strongly disagree". The figures indicated that participants really had problems with vocabulary when writing essays.

Figure 1: Difficulties in vocabulary of English majored sophomores



Vocabulary is one of the challenges to complicated writing essays. Specific difficulties that students faced in vocabulary were lacking words, word choices, and collocation. The statistical table showed that the students who lacked words were 72% (72/100). Besides, they also said that they do not know the exact meaning of the words and how to use it in the context. Half of the participants (50%) admitted that they made mistakes about misspelt words in their writing essays. Let's see the table below.

Table 3: Difficulties in vocabulary of English majored sophomores

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
9. My vocabulary is poor and repetitious.	23%	35%	26%	14%	2%
10. There are often misspelt words in my writing.	15%	50%	23%	9%	3%
11. Lack of vocabulary makes me confused when trying to express my ideas.	21%	51%	23%	4%	1%
12. I do not know the exact meaning of the words and how to use them in the context.	16%	34%	14%	27%	9%

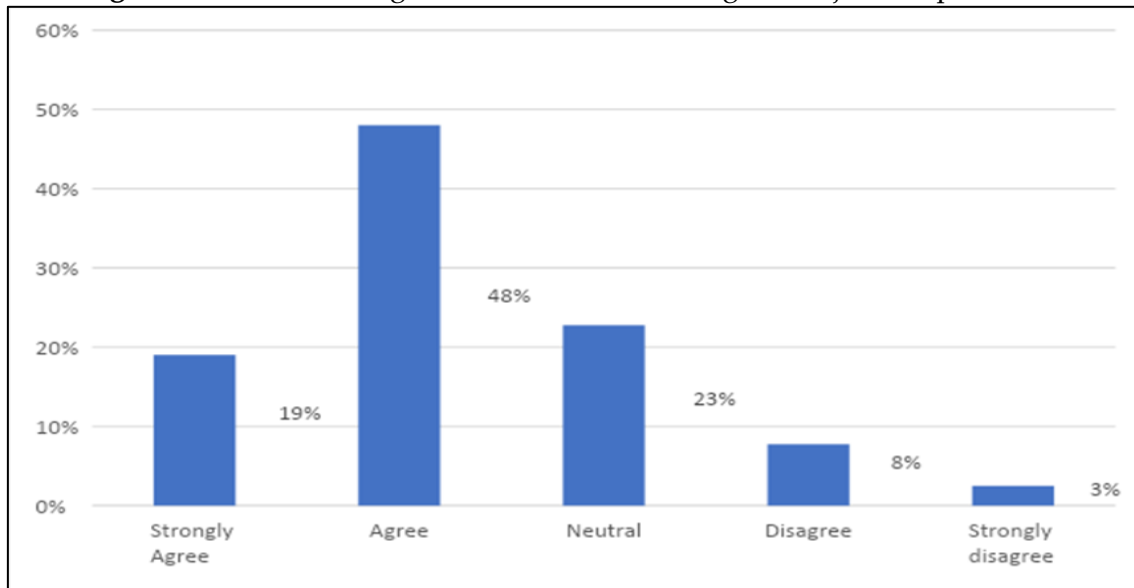
As can be seen from the table, English majored sophomores agreed with statement 9 that their vocabulary is insufficient and they often use repetitive words with 58% of them agreeing with this statement. Misspelling in writing was also their big challenge with more than 60% of responses in statement number 10. Besides, lack of vocabulary in essay writing can make students confused when trying to express their ideas, more than 70% of them accepted that statement. With statement 12, 50% of participants considered that they do not know the exact meaning of the words and how to use it in the context. It is not easy to know the meaning of new words and understand how to use them in different

contexts. To sum up, English majored sophomores at Tay Do University often faced some difficulties in the writing process such as lacking words, misspelt words, the meaning of the words.

4.2.4 Grammar structures

The results about students' difficulties in grammar were shown in the following chart.

Figure 2: Difficulties in grammar structures of English majored sophomores



Up to 67% of students participating in this study agreed that grammar was difficult for writing essays of English majored students including 48% of students agreed and 19% strongly agreed. As shown in the chart, there were only 11% of students among them 8% of students disagreed and 3% strongly disagreed. It claimed that they met difficulties in grammar in writing essays like tense, subject-verb and noun-adjective agreement, ill-formed sentences, grammatical errors.

Table 4: Difficulties in grammar structure of English majored sophomores

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
13. I make some grammatical errors such as errors of tense, subject-verb and noun-adjective agreement.	27%	46%	18%	6%	3%
14. Due to my habit, I usually write my ill-formed sentences.	19%	51%	21%	7%	2%
15. I often get bad marks in writing due to grammatical errors.	13%	47%	29%	9%	2%
16. My writing is full of grammatical mistakes and errors.	17%	48%	23%	9%	3%

As can be seen from the table, there was a remarkable number of students (73%) who think that their grammar knowledge is not good enough, such as using tenses, subject-verb, and noun-adjective agreement in statement 13. Besides, in statement 14, students also claimed that they usually write may ill-formed sentences because they do not understand clearly the functions and rules of part of speech leading them to misuse the function of the word making the readers unable to understand or the sentence is wrong meaning with more than 70% of participants agreed with statement 14. Sophomores agreed with statements 15 and 16 that their writing is full of grammatical mistakes and errors with nearly 60%. According to the examined data, the most challenging aspect of grammar use for students was the tenses used in a sentence. They also lacked a basic knowledge of how to use 12 tenses in English competently which resulted in using grammatical or meaningless sentences. An article requires many kinds of sentences, all of which must be well-organized and interconnected in tenses and sentence structures.

To summarize, grammar is an essential aspect of teaching and learning. Students can focus on grammar constructs if English learners want to write good essays.

4.2.5 Idea arrangement

A successful essay requires not only correct grammar structure and a large, natural vocabulary, but also a rational and appealing arrangement of ideas. Figure 3 shows the percentage of difficulties in idea arrangement of English majors sophomores.

Figure 3: Difficulties in idea arrangement of English majored sophomores

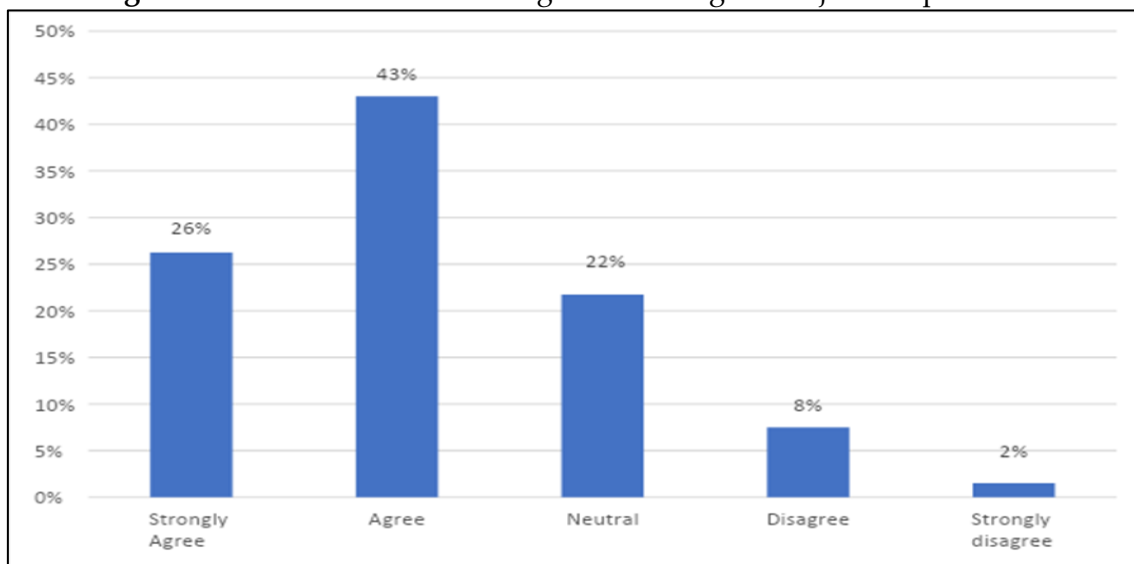


Figure 3, it shows the percentage of difficulties in idea arrangement. Overall, the students did not know how to get ideas and arrange their ideas orderly. About 69% of them met some obstacles when arranging the ideas with 43% of students agreeing and 26% strongly agreeing. These students had to face the enormous number of finding ideas or they did not know the way to arrange ideas logically. As mentioned in the above line

chart, 10% of students did not have an opinion about these problems (8% disagreed and 2% strongly disagreed).

Table 5: Difficulties in idea arrangement of English majored sophomores

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
17. I get some difficulties when I try to explain my ideas because I do not know how to arrange my ideas effectively.	20%	45%	24%	10%	1%
18. I do not know how to put my ideas in a moderately organized format.	18%	49%	27%	6%	0%
19. When writing some topics, I think in Vietnamese first then translate my ideas into English.	49%	31%	12%	5%	3%
20. My writing is not good enough because I have poor ideas or few ideas.	18%	47%	24%	9%	2%

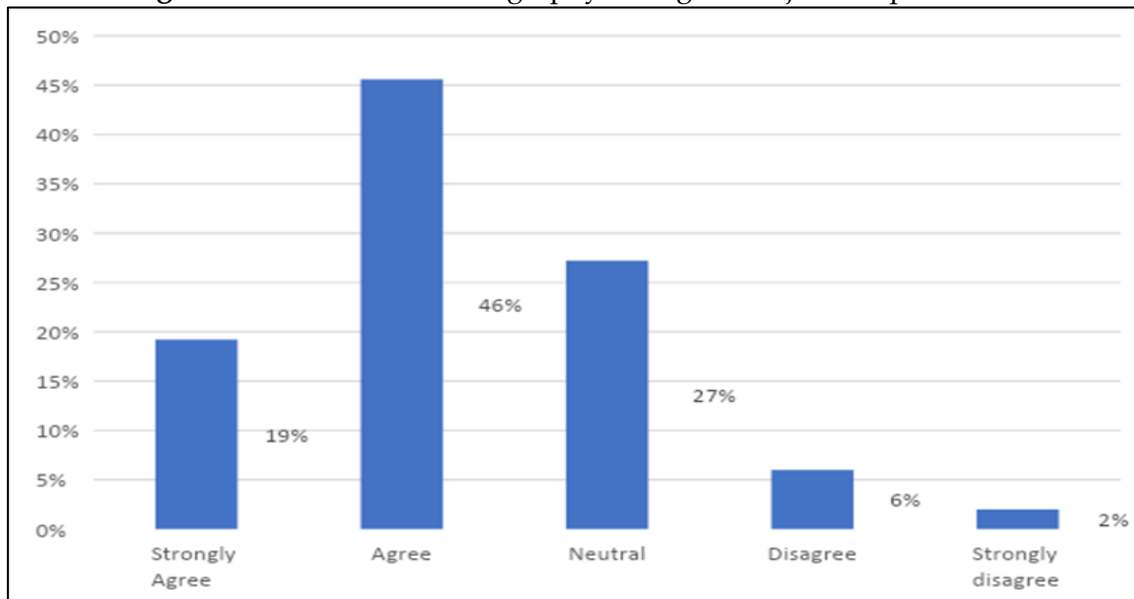
Based on the results in the statistics table, about 65% of sophomores agreed with statement 17; they found that they had some difficulties when trying to explain their ideas because they do not know how to arrange theirs effectively. Furthermore, 67% of students also said that they cannot put their ideas in a moderately organized format in statement 18. About the effect of mother tongue language when writing, 80% of participants admitted that when being given a topic for writing, they usually think it in Vietnamese first then translate their ideas into English, or some of them use the Google tool to translate into English, that is ineffective and very dangerous for their writing skill.

Focused on the analyzed data from Figure, thinking in Vietnamese first then translating ideas into English was the greatest challenge for sophomores in idea arrangement. Besides, with strange topics or practical experiences, sophomores usually had no ideas to write about. When students do not have enough ideas in essay writing, their essays can be short and uninspiring. In brief, thinking in Vietnamese first, writing an article with repetitive terms, no key ideas or subject sentences, or a small number of ideas, may be misleading to readers. As a result, students should concentrate on the organization of their thoughts.

4.2.6 Orthography

The results about students' difficulties in orthography were shown in the following chart.

Figure 4: Difficulties in orthography of English majored sophomores



Most of the students often have to face orthography like conventions of spelling, homophones or [punctuation](#) which is also a big barrier when writing essays. This column chart gave the percentage of the students' difficulties in orthography. The students' difficulties differed considerably in this chart. There were 8% of students disagreed (6% disagree and 2% strongly disagree) with the feasibility of orthography that was given in the questionnaire while 92% of students agreed with the problems in the questionnaire (46% agree, 19% strongly agree and 27% neutral). This demonstrated that *"it is difficult to apply orthography in writing"*.

Table 6: Difficulties in the orthography of English majored sophomores

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
21. I often write English sentences/paragraph/essay in the Vietnamese way.	32%	40%	22%	4%	2%
22. I usually meet difficulties in punctuation in writing.	13%	50%	27%	8%	2%
23. Spelling is another difficulty that I face in writing.	16%	45%	29%	7%	3%
24. I usually have the habits to use contraction forms in essay writing.	18%	49%	28%	3%	2%
25. I usually meet difficulties in homophones.	17%	44%	30%	8%	1%

The first challenge was orthography which included punctuation, spelling, contraction and homophone which students often encountered. As for statement 21 *"I often write English sentences/paragraphs/essays in the Vietnamese way"*, there were 72% of sophomores agreed. Also, there were 53% of them agreed with statement 22 *"I usually meet difficulties*

in punctuation in writing". In statement 23, second-year students often made mistakes about spelling because they did not pay attention, misspelling could make readers less likely to trust the writer with 61% of English learners agreeing and 10% disagreed, while the remainder of 29% had no ideas.

Moreover, up to 67% of students agreed that sophomores should avoid using contractions in essays since they are often found in expression and casual prose and only 5% disagreed. Besides, 61% of the total participants claimed that the homophone also was a big impediment during writing essays.

To summarize, background knowledge, vocabulary, grammar structure, idea arrangement and orthography are really the challenges for students to compose an essay. To strengthen their writing skills, they should practice them more and more in order to develop a deep love for writing, and they should also broaden their experience in various fields of life.

4.3 Results of the interview of three questions

The paper interview consists of three questions including the first question is the teachers' challenges when teaching writing essays for English majored sophomores, the difficulties that students encounter in their writing essay course, and propose some suggestive strategies that teachers often use to teach essay writing better.

In question 1 "*What are some difficulties you often have when teaching writing essays for English majors sophomores at Tay Do University?*" 100% of teachers (5/5) confirmed that students do not have enough ideas and vocabulary to write when they were given a topic about essay writing, especially for some topics about culture and travelling abroad. In addition, they do not know how to arrange their ideas logically. It is difficult to understand if the essay is long and dull. They may be off-topic or fail to communicate the main message if they do not have a clear idea or understanding of the topic. Therefore, the cohesion of ideas and coherence of the text is indispensable and compulsory.

Besides, three teachers (3/5) confirmed that students still make mistakes in sentence fragments, paragraph organization, and grammar structures. As a result, they don't know how to use different structures to make their writing more attractive.

In the next question "*Which one of those students' problems (vocabulary, grammar structure, idea arrangement, background knowledge and orthography) do English sophomores at Tay Do University often encounter in their writing essay course?*" All teachers admitted that almost all students get all the problems above. Besides, four teachers (4/5) stated that the most challenging is ideal arrangement. They often think and write at the same time because of the effect of their mother tongue and do not know how to organize the writing styles.

Furthermore, all teachers who are invited to conduct interview questions have 12 to 20 years experience in teaching English at university. Therefore, they suggested some helpful strategies such as planning and writing a clear purpose in mind before writing, identifying and following patterns used by good writers, create a "skeleton" outline to organize the major points in writing.

Besides, they also gave more beneficial suggestions in question number 3 “ *Could you suggest some effective strategies that help English sophomores at Tay Do University study essay writing better*” such as asking students working in groups to share ideas before writing and giving their essays to their friends for finding some simple mistakes, encouraging students in reading English materials for learning new words and the ways to arrange ideas logically and requesting students to spend more time on practicing writing and avoiding plagiarism.

4.4 Discussion

The researcher can measure the basics of their talents and knowledge during their writing thanks to the survey about the time students spent learning English. They have been studying English for 9 to 11 years. In addition, the remaining students have studied English for 14 years. Their English is rather good, but they are not sure how good their writing skills are. They could talk and listen well, but the writing was a challenge for them. Since writing is a challenging task, students often concentrate on skills such as listening and communicating rather than writing. According to the research results, there were five main causes including background knowledge, vocabulary, grammar structures, ideas arrangement and orthography are the challenges that cause English majors sophomores to write unsuccessful essays.

First of all, students were unable to arrange their thoughts due to a lack of prior information. As a result, they will be perplexed when confronted with new subjects due to a lack of expertise in various fields. Another issue with context education was a lack of realistic social life experiences. Besides, sophomores often lacked the requisite vocabulary when writing. It was difficult for them to describe themselves clearly and topics also. When presenting with new subjects, they will be perplexed. Additionally, students found it difficult to use suitable vocabulary in various ways. There are many major collocations in the context that must be remembered.

Consequently, students were unsure what collocations, word combinations, the way words are combined. It was a common stumbling block for students. Apart from that, the importance of grammar in literature cannot be overstated. Grammar constructs became the most daunting aspect of writing essays. When using coherency, personal pronouns and tenses incorrectly in English, it may risk confusing or misinforming the audience. Besides, English pronunciation is a significant challenge. It is difficult for students because there are so many distinct tones. Although they are spelt the same, verbs and nouns are usually pronounced differently. Furthermore, students struggled with subject-verb structure, resulting in grammatical errors in their sentences. Moreover, the organization of ideas was also a challenge for students when writing the essay. They did not know what they were talking about or did not understand it well enough. Besides, they might have misunderstood the subject or failed to articulate the key meaning. In addition, students struggled with objectively organizing concepts and missing key ideas or subject sentences in paragraphs and essays. They often got too many thoughts at times while writing, resulting in paragraphs that were lengthy, repetitive, or needless.

Consequently, students often had to deal with orthography issues such as punctuation, pronunciation, and contractions, which were common problems.

All things considered above, English majored sophomores at Tay Do University faced many difficulties in writing including background knowledge, vocabulary, grammar structures, ideas arrangement, and orthography. To improve their writing skills, students must identify their challenges and devise effective solutions.

5. Conclusions, Limitations, Implications, and Recommendations

This chapter can be considered as the report of the study. Firstly, the conclusions of the study will be pointed out. Next, the implications and the limitations of the thesis will be presented. Finally, this chapter ends with some recommendations for further research.

5.1 Conclusions

English is the most commonly used language for communication worldwide and it is still the first language in many countries. Fluency in English encourages students to go to foreign countries as well as collaborates or interacts with multinational businesses and organizations around the world. Moreover, writing in English can also help people advance in their careers. In short, this research gives a summary of the study findings in relation to “*A survey on difficulties in writing essays of English majored sophomores at Tay Do University*”. From these results, it could be concluded that the English majored sophomores met difficulties in writing essays such as background knowledge, vocabulary, grammar structure, idea arrangement and orthography.

5.2 Limitations

It is difficult to collect the questionnaire because the time was short during the classrooms. The researcher chose randomly one hundred students in a total of one hundred and twenty English majored sophomores in three classes 14A, 14B and 14C at Tay Do University to answer the questionnaire. The research did not escape limitations due to the prolonged pandemic situation despite careful planning when finding challenges and gathering information from students through questionnaires in a short time. If I had more time, I would do a more thorough analysis of this. The brief survey and its findings do not seem to be adequate to demonstrate the students’ individual writing abilities or the realistic challenges they encountered.

5.3 Implications

The study has shown the significance of writing essays in schooling and the future of one's work. It also aids students in recognizing their writing challenges and finding ways to solve them, allowing them to develop their writing skills and write better. Teachers should also use the research findings to discover suitable teaching strategies and improve them so that students can improve their writing skills.

Based on the findings of the research titled “*A survey on difficulties in writing essays of English majored sophomores at Tay Do University*”, the following recommendations were made:

For teaching activity, this study may be significant for teachers and syllabus designers as they should pay more attention to the instruction of writing skills and include much more practice on writing in their courses and textbook materials. So, teachers should make learners aware of the importance of writing for their academic work and give more exercises in this area.

For the learning process, students should study vocabulary regularly, read English books and read selectively, and practice writing every day. Besides, it is better for them to think about WH-questions and write a clear purpose in mind before writing. Furthermore, they try to work in groups to share ideas and vocabulary together.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on this study, other researchers will do further studies with the other students studying English or other majors regarding their challenges in learning to write. Researchers may also use this analysis to complement and refine their studies while looking at other challenges in the process of learning English. As a result, students may consider their problems in the study’s findings, as well as identify a suitable solution to their dilemma.

Conflicts of Interest Statement

The authors whose names are listed immediately below certify that they have no conflicts of interest, authorship, and disclosures in publication. They confirm that this work is original and has not been published elsewhere, nor is it currently under consideration for publication elsewhere.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1: Questionnaire for Students

Dear friends,

My name is Thanh Trung, I am currently a senior in English language 12A at Tay Do University. Firstly, I would like to give my thanks to you for spending your valuable time helping me. This is the questionnaire for my research about “A survey on difficulties in writing essays of English majored sophomores at Tay Do University” used to collect important information from you. Thus, please take your time to fulfill these below questions carefully because your answers are really significant and helpful to my research. Once again thank you so much!

A. Personal Information

Student’s age:

Gender: Male Female

Class:

How long have you studied English?years

B. Questionnaire

Please check (✓) only one column for each statement featuring 5-degree scale, namely

- (1) Strongly Agree;
- (2) Agree;
- (3) Neutral;
- (4) Disagree;
- (5) Strongly disagree.

Statements	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
I. Student’s background knowledge					
1. Background knowledge in an essential component in the process of second or foreign language acquisition.					
2. I do not know how to develop ideas or my writing due to unfamiliar topic because I have a shortage of background knowledge.					
3. It is very essential to have the good background knowledge in order to learn essay writing better.					
4. I am not confident in writing a new essay assignment because I do not have sufficient background knowledge of the topic that I am going to write about.					
II. Students’ interest in writing subject					
5. Writing is my favorite subject.					
6. In my opinion, writing is very important.					
7. Writing is the most challenging subject.					
8. My writing skill is good.					
III. The difficulties in vocabulary					

9. My vocabulary is poor and repetitious.					
10. There are often misspelled words in my writing.					
11. Lack of vocabulary makes me confused when trying to express my ideas.					
12. I do not know the exact meaning of the words and how to use it in the context.					
IV. The difficulties in grammar structure					
13. I make some grammatical errors such as errors of tense, subject-verb and noun-adjective agreement.					
14. Due to my habit, I may usually write ill-formed sentences.					
15. I often get bad marks in writing due to grammatical errors.					
16. My writing is full of grammatical mistakes and errors.					
V. The difficulties in idea arrangement					
17. I get some difficulties when I try to explain my ideas because I do not know how to arrange my ideas effectively.					
18. I do not know how to put my ideas in a moderately organized format.					
19. When writing some topics, I think in Vietnamese first then translate my ideas into English.					
20. My writing is not good enough because I have poor ideas or few ideas.					
VI. The difficulties in orthography					
21. I often write English sentences/paragraph/essay in the Vietnamese way.					
22. I usually meet difficulties in punctuation in writing.					
23. Spelling is another difficulty that I face in writing.					
24. I usually have habits to use contraction forms in essay writing.					
25. I usually meet difficulties in homophones.					

Appendix 2: Interview for Teachers

My name is Le Thanh Trung and I am a senior majoring in English at Tay Do University. This interview is designed for instruments of my thesis entitled “A survey on difficulties in writing essays of English majored sophomores at Tay Do University”. I would be appreciated if you spend your priceless time helping answer some questions. Your ideas will be very precious for my research. Thank you very much!

A. Personal Background

Teacher’s name:

I have taught English for years.

1. What are some difficulties do you often have when teaching writing essays for English majored sophomores at Tay Do University?
2. Which one of those students’ problems (vocabulary, grammar structure, idea arrangement, background knowledge, orthography) that English sophomores at Tay Do University often encounter in their writing essay course?
3. Could you suggest some effective strategies that help English sophomores at Tay Do University study essay writing better?

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