# VIETNAMESE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE EFFECTS OF OBSERVATIONAL LEARNING ON THEIR WRITING PERFORMANCE

**Ta Minh Khoi**[i]
Can Tho University,
Vietnam

**Abstract:**
The objective of this study was to investigate EFL students' perspectives on the effects of observational learning in writing classes. This research is an embedded design mixed-methods study including interviews taking place after the survey using a questionnaire to clarify and investigate students' perspectives on the impact of observational learning on their writing knowledge, writing process, and writing products. The questionnaire based on the literature review on observational learning was designed and delivered to 26 students who took three writing lessons with observational tasks to collect data on their perspectives which were further deepened by an interview with three volunteers. The students reported that learning through observation had a positive impact on their writing knowledge, writing process, and written products. The study offers useful implications for teaching writing through observational learning.

**Keywords:** observational learning, observational learning in writing, writing performance, learner perspective

## 1. Introduction

Writing is considered to be an exceedingly important skill for accomplishing various goals, especially for communicative purposes (Graham, 2006, as cited in Graham, Gillespie Rouse, & Mckeown, 2012). Despite this, writing is a difficult-to-acquire skill for those who learn English as a second language because they fail to present or express their views or thoughts in an effective manner (Schleppegrell & Go, 2007). This is closely related to the learners' native language, their linguistic competence, and their motivation (Akramovna, Alimovn, and Djurakulovna, 2020). Language transfer is one of the factors that cause the failure to convey information in the written language among learners because they have a tendency to transfer written knowledge and writing strategies from their first language to the target language or ESL/EFL.

[i] Correspondence: email khoitm7@fe.edu.vn

In addition to learners' internal factors, their learning of writing skills also relies on external ones such as the writing teaching methods or approaches that their teacher uses in their writing classes. Traditionally, during writing lessons, teachers assigned a writing task and students completed it (Rijlaarsdam, Braaksma, Couzijn, Janssens, Kieft, Raedts, & Van den Bergh, 2008). In more detail, it was often the teacher who imparted knowledge about writing skills, and had their learners perform the writing task right after that. The learners only applied what they generally comprehended from the knowledge that the teacher had directly imparted to them, with almost no self-discovery from different learning resources. The teacher played a central role in constructing knowledge for their learners. This practice steals learners' opportunities to learn by exploring.

In the Vietnamese context, both Vietnamese EFL learners and teachers respectively consider learning and teaching writing a challenging mission (Nguyen, 2021; Tran, 2007). Supporting learners to write poses a major obstacle due to the heavily focused examination, as stated by Nguyen and Pham (2016), which requires both teachers and learners to pay special attention to developing grammatical and lexical range. After completing the high school program, students who want to receive a high school certificate or GCSE must take the national high school examination, in which students must complete an English test with 50 multiple-choice questions within 60 minutes. Apparently, writing skills are not emphasized even in the national high school exam. As a consequence, the teaching and learning of writing have not been given sufficient investment or have not been prioritized in most high schools in Vietnam.

Resultantly, writing skills should be taught in such a way that students not only acquire linguistic components (e.g., grammatical structures, lexical items, and coreference and connectives), but are also explicitly taught writing skills (e.g., analysing a writing task, making an outline, self-monitoring, and revising) as well as the writing process (e.g., pre-writing, drafting, responding, revising, editing, and post-writing). Learning to write through observation can be an option for consideration. Observational learning occurs when we learn new skills by watching or observing others (Bandura, Freeman, & Lightsey, 1999). Previous studies have shown that observational learning is a pedagogical approach that has positive impacts on learners' writing ability (Van Steendam, Rijlaarsdam, Van den Bergh, and Sercu, 2014; Braaksma, Rijlaarsdam, Van den Bergh, and Van Hout-Wolters, 2004; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2002; Couzijn, 1999; Graham and Harris, 1994).

Although the previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of observational learning on writing skills, it is of paramount importance to investigate Vietnamese high school students' perspectives on it.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Observational learning

Although it is claimed that observational learning focuses on animal learning and refers to a behavioural transformation that results from watching others (Zental, 2012), Dorwick and Jesdale (1991 as cited in Spriggs, 2011) argued that observational learning is for both behavioural and cognitive changes, which occur due to the observation of others performing similar actions, and it can also be described as humans' actions of observing someone executing a task and mimicking it (Mierowsky, Marcus, and Ayres, 2020). In other words, observational learning can be understood as humans' act of watching another individual performing an action and imitating it, which is set to cause changes in both cognitions and behaviours. Moreover, observational learning, which according to Catania (1998) can be viewed as learning by observing how another subject responds to the surrounding, is different from imitation (Douglas Greer, Dudek-Singer, & Gautreaux, 2006). "*The critical difference between observational learning and imitation or emulation is the focus on long-term learning of a skill and a relatively permanent change in behaviour rather than a discrete performance*" (Causer, McCormick, and Holmes, 2013, p.2). Imitation occurs when an individual copies behaviour from others as they are performing them meanwhile observational learning occurs when an individual observes behaviours from another, but they are executed later. In other words, observational learning can include observing and performing.

However, in observational learning, the two actions of observing and performing do not occur simultaneously is a must. In a clearer view, observational learning is the process of acquiring a new skill through observing models emitting that skill (Taylor & DeQuinzio, 2012 as cited in Castro & Rehfeldt, 2016). From Taylor's and DeQuinzio's perspective, we can think of observational learning in writing as a process by which learners acquire writing skills, or obtain writing knowledge and writing strategies from observing one or more models performing the same act of writing. Nonetheless, when learners learn by observation, they observe the processes of writing and the completed written products of model writers in place of executing the writing task immediately (Braaksma, Rijlaarsdam, and Van den Bergh, 2018). Observational learning only actually takes place when a writing learner observes the writing process and the written work of a model writer, and subsequently performs the same act of writing. To rephrase it, in learning writing through observation, observing the models and performing the same writing task are not to be conducted at the same time.

Similarly, Bandura (1986, p.47) concluded that "*most human behaviour is learned by observation through modelling. By observing others, one forms rules of behaviour, and on future occasions, this coded information serves as a guide for action.*" He also supposed that learning by doing is not only slow but also error-prone and inefficient, which means the development of learners' writing ability via learning by doing is slow and it is very easy for the learners to make mistakes during their writing process, which are set to cause

inefficiency in learning writing. When compared to learning by doing, observational learning is believed to be a faster, less error-prone, and more effective way of learning.

As a consequence, Bandura's social learning theory emphasized the importance of observing, modelling, and imitating other people's behaviours and attitudes. According to the theory, learning is viewed as a continuous interactive process between environmental, cognitive and behavioural factors. Environmental and cognitive factors exert a major impact on how an individual learns and behaves. An individual will oftentimes learn the behaviours and attitudes of the surrounding people including their parents, teachers, siblings, and peers known as models. In other words, he/she observes and pays attention to some of the aforementioned individuals, encodes and remembers the demonstrated behaviours and attitudes, and may imitate and act the same.

However, task performance can be influenced by observational learning processes (Yi and Davis, 2003). Since individuals vary in their cognitive and attentional capabilities, an individual may be more attentive, get more actively involved in encoding and transforming knowledge, reproduce the modelled behaviours more effectively and frequently, and become more motivated in learning and executing the task than others.

Therefore, in order for observing, modelling and imitating to work effectively, it is necessary to satisfy a couple of conditions. Initially, a learner needs to take notice of relevant behaviours in the learning environment. Subsequently, the learner stores information in memory followed by translating that information into practical actions and having the motivation to perform the actions. In other words, navigating learning through observation is of paramount importance. Bandura (1986) asserted that observational learning is negated by the four processes incorporating attention, retention, production, and motivation.
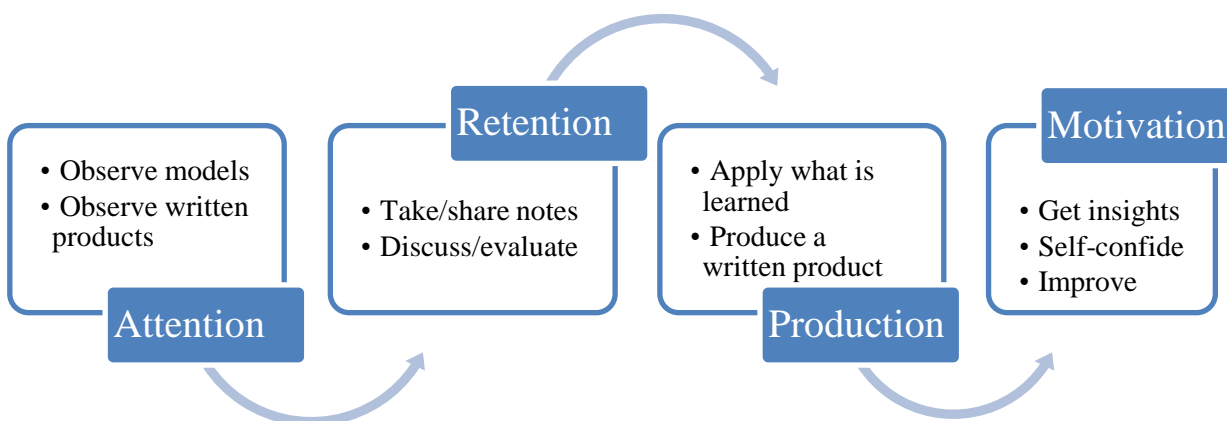


**Figure 1:** Processes in observational learning in writing

As shown in Figure 1, observing a model activates attention, so models demonstrating how to solve a problem should attract and sustain observers' attention. While observing, learners can take notes, and then share and discuss what they have observed in groups based on the questions of evaluation given by the teacher, which all

contribute to the retention of information because the process of transforming and restructuring the transitory knowledge obtained from observation into memory traces is necessary. Renkl (2014), and Van Rijn, Dalenberg, Borst, and Sprenger (2012) stated that there is a possibility of such memory traces being strengthened thanks to cognitive rehearsal. The strength of memory traces is driven by the frequency of cognitive manipulation, meaning that the more repetitively the cognition is performed, the more developed the memory traces become. Next, in the production stage, the knowledge and strategies from memory traces will be converted into practical actions, which means the learners apply what they have observed and learned to produce a product. However, the learners need to have the motivation to perform what they have learned from observation. It behoves the learners to assume that they can execute the task on their own or to find themselves in the enacted models. Raedts, Rijlaarsdam, and Van Waes (2006) asserted that by watching another person perform a task successfully, learners tend to become motivated or stimulated to execute the same task themselves. Besides that, when they have some insights on the task during or after the processes of observation and discussion, they would likely be ready for producing a written text.

## 2.2 Writing performance

The production of written texts (Wening, 2017) is considered one of the two productive skills aside from speaking. Nation (2013, p.1) viewed writing performance as "*producing original meaningful language,*" which can be displayed in the form of a sentence, a paragraph, or an essay. Moreover, writing performance as a process involves students' application of strategies and steps in order to generate a written product. In more detail, writing performance can be understood as a recursive process in which forming intentions and composing drafts take place (Muluneh, 2018), or more specifically, pre-writing, drafting, responding, revising, editing, and post-writing occur (Widodo, 2008). Writing performance is also stated as a person's ability to express ideas and thoughts in the form of written language (Dani, 2014; Supiani, 2016; Sinthianuary, Regina, & Bunau, 2020). Mahran (2000) added that this capability involves not only creating written texts but also doing so in a comprehensible and professional way. In more detail, writing performance entails the ability to logically and intelligibly present or express what we want to convey in written language with sufficient information, accurate use of grammatical structures and vocabulary items, and proper compliance with conventions (Salem, 2013), incorporating format, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization rules.

## 2.3 Effects of observational learning on writing

One of the outcomes of observational learning is the *writing knowledge*. Cindy Lin, Monroe, and Troia (2007) noted that the types of knowledge that a writer can gain include knowledge of writing genres, knowledge of writing purposes, knowledge of the writing process, and knowledge of the application of the above types of knowledge into writing. A knowledgeable writing learner is one who understands the different types of writing, such as expository, descriptive, narrative, and persuasive writing; one who understands

the purpose of his writing, such as entertaining, informing, persuading, and expressing feelings; one who understands the writing process, as previously described; and, most importantly, one who understands how to apply the aforementioned knowledge to the construction of a piece of writing.

According to Graham and Harris (1994), strategies such as observations, evaluations including reflections, and reactions come into play in the process of constructing writing knowledge. The obtained writing knowledge changes what writers have already known and what they usually do. That is, the newly constructed knowledge will replace the old knowledge that is no longer relevant, and with this new knowledge, learners will self-provision new implementation steps. Take the writing process as an example. After observing the model writer, students realize the importance of making an outline in promoting the logical organization of ideas and begin to form the habit of planning or outlining after analysing a writing task instead of jumping into writing without initially organizing ideas as before. In addition, when utilizing observational learning strategies, learners have chances to reconsider their own writing strategies (Braaksma, Rijlaarsdam, Van den Bergh, & Hout-Wolters, 2006) because observational learning provides the learners with strategic knowledge (Collins, Brown, and Newman, 2018). In comparison with traditional ways of writing instruction in which learners jump right to writing tasks, observational learning provides them with more opportunities to learn how to write, namely thinking conscientiously of their own writing strategies after observing models and constructing alternative more-effective writing information. This approach shifts from completing writing tasks to learning how to write (Rijlaarsdam & Couzijn, 2000). As mentioned earlier, learners' evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the models observed for both the writing process and writing products is one of the strategies in observational learning. Hence, learners can learn from the positive and negative points of models' performances (Zimmerman, 2000).

Observational learning also has an effect on the *writing process*, which according to Seow (2002) includes planning, drafting, responding (sharing), revising, editing, evaluating, and post-writing. In a study in relation to observational learning published in 2004, Braaksma, Rijlaarsdam, Van den Bergh and Van Hout-Wolters concluded that learners who learn through observations become more aware of analysing the writing task, and planning or orienting goals like identifying the audience before starting to write. Regarding writing task analysis, language learners should analyse the writing task before writing in order to expand their lexical resources in their writing (Jullanan, 2018). It is necessary for learners to take notice of the key terms or keywords in the writing task and come up with their synonyms so that they can avoid word repetition and prove their wide range of vocabulary. Additionally, learners monitor more frequently and more thoroughly during their writing process (Braaksma et al., 2004). Compared to writers who learn by doing, writers who learn by observing have been proved to self-review or self-monitor their writing process more. For example, they may self-monitor paragraph components (a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence), mechanics (capitalization and punctuation) (Goddard and Sendi, 2008), and linguistic

features (lexicons, grammatical structures, and cohesion) (Crossley, 2020; McNamara, Crossley, and McCarthy, 2010). Ultimately, learners have a clearer tendency to proofread and revise their writing products after the completion of the writing (Braaksma et al., 2004).

Braaksma and her colleagues (2004) also found a relationship between goal-orientation as well as writing task analysis and writing quality. If students execute more goal-orientating and writing task analysing activities, they will produce more quality writing products. An improvement of *written products* was also found. Zimmerman and Kitsantas (2002) investigated the effects of modelling on writing. In their study, three modelling conditions included no model, a coping model making errors at first and then gradually reducing the errors, and a competent model making no errors. After the study, the authors indicated that learning by observation has positive effects on learners' writing products. In more detail, in comparison with the students observing the competent model, those who observed the coping model performed the task better. Specifically, the number of errors such as grammatical errors, word choice errors, and punctuation errors can be gradually reduced, and the learners' written performances receive more positive feedback or comments from either their writing teachers or their peers.

Braaksma, Van den Bergh, Rijlaarsdam, and Couzijn (2001) identified effective learning activities for observations in argumentative reading and writing. The study focused on two elements incorporating an evaluation of the performance of the model (observed writing process and observed written products) and elaboration on this evaluation. The results of the study showed that both evaluation and elaboration make a positive contribution to the development of argumentative writing ability among students.

## 2.4 Learner perspective

In this study, the researcher was inclined to investigate students' perspectives on the effects of observational learning on their writing performance. Perspective is viewed as a person's vision and perception (Weaver, 1997) and is defined as the ability of a person to interpret something or someone from a certain angle or position (Pshenychnykh, 2022). More specifically, perspective refers to a direct bodily interaction with the outside world in which the experience explores and perceives reality with his or her eyes (Hall, 2012). In addition, perspective is also related to the human cognitive capacity (Langacker, 2008) for perceiving, through which individuals visualize the world around them from a particular point of view. With the above points of view, learner perspectives can be understood as perceptions or evaluations that they can form based on their bodily experiences with their surroundings, such as teaching and learning approaches or methods. In this research, after partaking in writing sessions with observational learning, student participants verbally articulated and interpreted their standpoints, thoughts as well as feelings about the effects of observational learning on their writing knowledge, writing process, and writing products.

## 3. Material and Methods

This study is mixed-methods research, involving the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods (Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun, 2012). In other words, and in more detail, this study is an embedded design mixed-methods research, in which one data set predominates while the other plays a secondary function (Caracelli and Greene, 1997). Quantitative data collection is given precedence, and qualitative data collection is subordinate (Creswell and Clark, 2017) for the purpose of examining the intervention process (Doyle, Brady, and Byrne, 2009). Therefore, a questionnaire as a quantitative data collection tool and interviews as a qualitative data collection tool were respectively utilized only for the participants in the experimental group in order to identify the students' perspectives on the effects of observational learning on their writing performance after partaking in the research intervention.

### 3.1 Participants
Only the experimental group experienced observational learning in writing classes. Resultantly, after participating in the experiment and having a general view of observational learning in writing, 26 students from the experimental group of 14 males (53.85%) and 12 females (46.15%) were invited to participate in the survey.

Three students (2 males and 1 female) from the experimental group were selected on purpose. According to the test results, out of those 3 students, 1 student proved to have improved their writing ability, 1 student had shown no improvement or even a poorer performance in the post-test compared to the pre-test, and the other student had remained unchanged in writing performance. When invited, they were willing to participate in the interview to express their deeper and more profound views on observational learning.

### 3.2 Material
*Pathways: Reading, Writing, and Critical Thinking, 2nd edition*, first published in 2018 by National Geographic Learning, is a reading-writing course book from the series of five levels, including Level Foundation (A1-A2), Level 1 (A2-B1), Level 2 (B1-B2), Level 3 (B2), and Level 4 (C1), written by Mari Vargo and Lauri Blass. In this research, *Pathways 3: Reading, Writing, and Critical Thinking, 2nd edition* was selected because it was the main course book used in the chosen research participants' current classes. *Pathways 3: Reading, Writing, and Critical Thinking, 2nd edition* comprises 10 units covering such themes as behavioural science, technology, sociology, nature, economics, linguistics, and psychology. In this study, the students learned 3 out of 5 units (from Unit 6 to Unit 10) for the second semester, namely Units 6, 7, and 8 with the themes of communication, environmental science, and health, respectively.

## 3.3 Instruments

A questionnaire is viewed as a document containing a series of questions or statements which are designed to solicit respondents for their information or opinions for analysis afterwards (Babbie, 2020; Al Kilani and Kobziev, 2016). Hence, in this study, in order to collect quantitative data on the learners' perspectives about the observational learning experience in improving their writing performance, a questionnaire was made full use of. The questionnaire was designed and delivered to the participants in the week after the post-test.

The first part of the questionnaire was about the general personal information of the survey participants. It included their name, date of birth, gender, contact information via phone number and email, and the number of years of studying English. In this part, gender was of particular interest because the researcher wanted to investigate the difference between male and female students in terms of perspectives on the effects of observational learning on their writing performance.

In the second part of the questionnaire, 30 close-ended items (including 2 reversed items to ensure reliability) were responded to with the Likert scale consisting of five points ranging from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree to (5) strongly agree, as shown in Table 1. The question items were designed and divided into three clusters, consisting of (1) effects of observational learning on writing knowledge, (2) effects of observational learning on the writing process, and (3) effects of observational learning on writing products. The designed questions were based on the observational learning theories initiated in the previous studies.

**Table 1:** Scoring range of Likert scale of the survey

| Evaluation criterion | Value | Range |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly disagree | 1 | 1.00-1.80 |
| Disagree | 2 | 1.81-2.60 |
| Neutral | 3 | 2.61-3.40 |
| Agree | 4 | 3.41-4.20 |
| Strongly agree | 5 | 4.21-5.00 |

Cluster 1, which consisted of 13 question items including 1 reversed item to check the reliability, was mainly about the effects of observational learning on writing knowledge. Question item number 12 was included with an emphasis on the students' motivation for learning writing through observation.

Cluster 2 was designed with 8 question items, including 1 reversed item. These question items were formulated based on the effects of observational learning on the writing process that have been demonstrated in previous studies to test whether Vietnamese high school students perceived the same way.

The final cluster of 9 question items was formed to explore the students' self-recognition or identification of their writing ability development demonstrated through their writing products such as how much they applied what they had learned from observation, to what extent errors were reduced in their written work, and how positive

the feedback on the writing they received was. To ensure the learner participants could understand all the provided questions in the questionnaire, a Vietnamese version was incorporated under each question item.

Following the completion of data collection from the questionnaire, *semi-structured interviews* were conducted. Interviews are employed to gather additional information which cannot be obtained from the questionnaire in order to conduct a more profound investigation of the research topic (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). As a consequence, face-to-face interviews with learner participants (N=3) were organized with the intention of double-checking and clarifying their points of view on the effects of observational learning on their writing performance, which were unlikely to be gleaned from the questionnaire. The interviews in this study were aimed at the learners' perspectives on experiencing observational learning in their writing classes. In more detail, the interviewer focused on changes in the writing process, especially analysing the writing task, planning, outlining before writing, and monitoring or proofreading and editing while writing and after writing. Furthermore, discovering whether the learners had learned more from strong model writers or weak model writers was a major goal of the interview. During the interview, the students were required to confess whether they improved their writing ability after the intervention. Last but not least, the interviewer attempted to determine their motivation for writing and their preference for experiencing learning writing through observation. In addition to the suggested interview questions, follow-up questions were posed based on the answers of the interviewees in order to collect sufficient data.

To achieve the goal of collecting as much reliable data from the participants as possible, the researcher selected the interviewees by encouraging volunteers who would feel ready for the interviews and/or through the positive learning attitude that the researcher, also the teacher, perceived. Furthermore, Vietnamese was the main language used during the interview to help the volunteer interviewees freely express their views and feelings without any hindrance. To ensure that no significant information for later analysis was missed during the interviews, they were voice-recorded with the participants' permission.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Results from the survey

As with previous studies, observational learning in this study also illustrates positive results for learning to write. Besides that, it is important to check whether the students thought positively about the benefits of observational learning in their writing ability improvement.

The questionnaire including 30 question items about learners' perspectives on observational learning in writing had been translated into Vietnamese to ensure understandability before it was delivered to high school students in the experimental group (N=26). Prior to the analysis of the collected data, a Scale test was run in order to

examine the reliability of the questionnaire. The result of the Scale test indicates that the reliability was acceptable ($\alpha$=.942) as described in Table 2 below. With an alpha of 0.942, the results from the survey were reliable for data analysis.

**Table 2:** Reliability of the questionnaire

| Cronbach's Alpha | N of items | N of population |
|---|---|---|
| .942 | 30 | 26 |

Then, a Descriptive Statistics test was run in order to determine the experimental group participants' perspectives on observational learning in writing. The table below indicates that the participants from the experimental group, according to the scoring range of Likert scale survey (Table 1), expressed their agreement on the effects of observational learning generally (MeanS=3.74) and particularly on writing knowledge (MeanA=3.68), on the writing process (MeanB=3.89), and on writing products (MeanC=3.65). This can also be interpreted as the students acknowledging the effectiveness of observational learning in improving their writing ability after the intervention.

**Table 3:** Survey clusters' mean scores

|  | N | Min | Max | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| MeanA | 26 | 1.46 | 4.85 | 3.68 | .66 |
| MeanB | 26 | 1.88 | 5.00 | 3.89 | .62 |
| MeanC | 26 | 1.11 | 5.00 | 3.65 | .80 |
| MeanS | 26 | 1.48 | 4.80 | 3.74 | .64 |

In order to measure whether males or females differed in terms of levels of agreement on the effects of observational learning on writing, writing process, and writing products, an Independent Samples t-test was calculated. The results as shown in Table 4 indicate that no difference was documented regarding male or female participants' levels of agreement on or perspectives towards the effects of observational learning on writing (t=-.014; p=.99), writing process (t=-1.654; p=.11), and writing products (t=-.475; p=.64). In other words, both male and female participants demonstrated the same levels of agreement on the effects of observational learning on writing, writing process, and writing products.

**Table 4:** Comparison between male and female participants' perspectives

|  | Gender | N | Mean | SD | *t* | *p* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| MeanA | Male | 14 | 3.68 | .79 | - .014 | .99 |
|  | Female | 12 | 3.68 | .49 |  |  |
| MeanB | Male | 14 | 3.71 | .73 | - 1.654 | .11 |
|  | Female | 12 | 4.09 | .39 |  |  |
| MeanC | Male | 14 | 3.58 | .96 | - .475 | .64 |
|  | Female | 12 | 3.73 | .60 |  |  |

In general, based on the above research results, the students had a positive view of observational learning in improving their writing ability, regardless of male or female students. To get a more detailed understanding of the student's level of agreement, the responses to the question items were given as a percentage for the analysis.
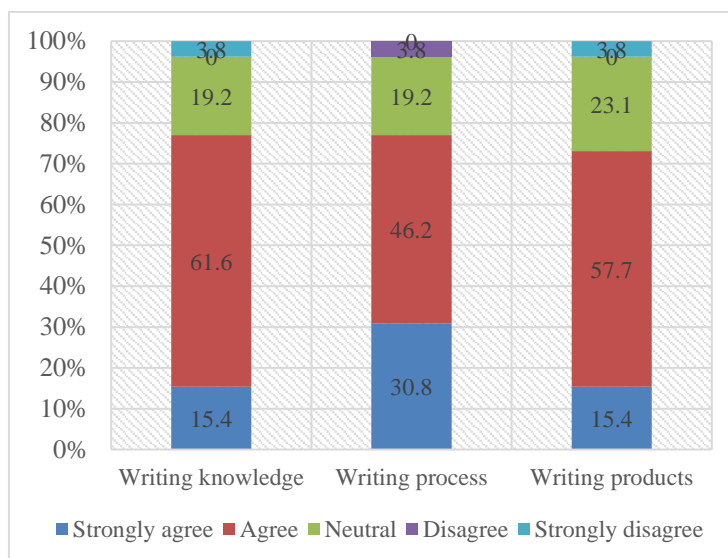


**Figure 2:** Sample's overall levels of agreement about the effects of observational learning

The mean score in regard to the level of agreement, based on the scoring range of Likert scale survey (Table 1), in each cluster, namely writing knowledge, writing progress, and writing products was calculated as a percentage.

The chart above (Figure 2) describes the level of agreement of the entire population in the experimental group about the benefits that observational learning brought to their writing performance in connection with 3 aspects including writing knowledge, writing process, and writing outputs or products. As can be seen from the chart above, in proximity to 80% of the students agreed and completely agreed about the impact of observational learning on all three aforementioned aspects. In contrast, very few students (only 3.85%) either disagreed or completely disagreed.

The following table presents the participants' perspectives on the effects of learning by observing writing knowledge. Over 65% of the participants claimed that with observational learning they constructed new knowledge related to writing such as writing genres, writing purposes and writing processes. Meanwhile, approximately 20-25% of the students could not identify whether observational learning had had a positive influence on the new formation of the above types of knowledge, and a few of the students (under 12%) did not acknowledge the benefits. In addition, 19 out of 26 participants accounting for 73.08% found that they learned from observing both strong and weak model writers. On the contrary, the percentage of the students who were neutral and admitted to disagreeing about learning from observing the model writer was 11.54% and 15.38%, respectively.

**Table 5:** Participants' perspectives towards the effects
of observational learning on writing knowledge

| Statements | Scale | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| OL helps me construct knowledge of writing genres. | 3.85% | 0% | 26.92% | 34.62% | 34.62% |
| OL helps me construct knowledge of writing purposes. | 3.85% | 7.69% | 23.09% | 46.15% | 19.23% |
| OL helps me construct knowledge of writing process. | 3.85% | 0% | 19.23% | 46.15% | 30.77% |
| OL helps me learn from strengths of models. | 11.54% | 3.85% | 11.54% | 38.46% | 34.62% |
| OL helps me learn from weaknesses of models. | 7.69% | 7.69% | 11.54% | 42.31% | 30.77% |
| OL helps me become more motivated in writing. | 11.54% | 3.85% | 26.92% | 42.31% | 15.38% |

Nevertheless, despite a large number of participants stating that they acquired the mentioned types of writing knowledge through observational learning, only about more than 50% of the students felt motivated to write after observing the models, and the rest of them did not express specific views or disagreed that observational learning had motivated them to write.

Next, Table 6 gives information on the participants' perspectives on the effects of observational learning on the writing process. It reports that the respondents had positive opinions about how learning by observing had an impact on their writing process. In more detail, the number of participants tending to analyse writing task requirements as well as the plan before writing accounts for 80.77%; meanwhile, only one student, accounting for 3.8% speculated that observational learning had not strengthened their habit of analysing writing tasks and orienting goals or planning before writing. The rest of the students, about 15%, wondered if observational learning had had this impact. Also, regarding the initial stage before writing, however, only about 40% of the respondents agreed that observational learning made them more concerned about the readers their writing was aimed at. Additionally, becoming more conscious of monitoring their writing during the writing process was one of the positive effects that nearly 85% of the participants thought observational learning had had. Only 2 out of 26 students (around 7.7%) disagreed or were unsure of their views on this effect. Surprisingly, approximately 90% of the participants speculated that they became more aware of revising their written product after its completion, and only about 10% of the students contradicted this view.

**Table 6:** Participants' perspectives towards
the effects of observational learning on writing process

| Statements | Scale | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| OL helps me be more aware of analysing the task before writing. | 3.85% | 0% | 15.38% | 46.15% | 34.62% |
| OL helps me be more aware of orienting goals or planning before writing. | 0% | 3.85% | 15.38% | 53.85% | 26.92% |
| OL helps me focus more on the readers whom my writing aims at. | 3.85% | 15.38% | 38.46% | 15.38% | 26.92% |
| OL helps me be more aware of monitoring my writing during the writing process. | 3.85% | 3.85% | 7.69% | 57.69% | 26.92% |
| OL helps me be more aware of revising my written product after completing the writing. | 3.85% | 7.69% | 0% | 53.85% | 34.62% |

Finally, Table 7 below depicts the participants' opinions on the influence of observational learning on their written output. As can be seen, 76.9% of the respondents stated that they used words and grammatical structures from the better model writers in their writing and could avoid the vocabulary mistakes they had observed from the weaker model ones. In contrast, only 1 student (3.85%) confessed that they did not use the observed vocabulary items and grammatical structures from the model writers in his/her own writing, and only 2 students (7.69%) did not think in their own writing they could avoid the mistakes related to word use that less competent model writers made thanks to observational learning. However, compared to the percentage of the students who agreed with their application or use of grammatical structures and lexical items from the observed writers, the percentage of the respondents who claimed that the number of grammatical and lexical errors in their writing decreased was lower, at 53.84% and 57.69%, respectively. In addition, only 57.71% of the respondents speculated that their writing had fewer punctuation errors and became more coherent while only about 3-5 students (less than 20%) opposed these two standpoints. Last but not least, contrary to the half of the students who confirmed that they had received more positive feedback on their written products, approximately 15% of them expressed their opposite points of view.

**Table 7:** Participants' perspectives towards the
effects of observational learning on writing products

| Statements | Scale | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| I used vocabulary I learned from strong models in my own writing. | 3.85% | 0% | 19.23% | 42.31% | 34.62% |
| I used grammatical structures I learned from strong models in my own writing. | 3.85% | 0% | 19.23% | 42.31% | 34.62% |
| I can avoid inappropriate use of vocabulary from weak models. | 3.85% | 3.85% | 15.38% | 65.38% | 11.54% |
| My writing gradually becomes more | 3.85% | 15.38% | 23.09% | 46.15% | 11.54% |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| coherent. | | | | | |
| I can gradually reduce the number of grammatical errors in my writing. | 11.54% | 7.69% | 26.92% | 38.46% | 15.38% |
| I can gradually reduce the number of word choice errors in my writing. | 3.85% | 11.54% | 26.92% | 42.31% | 15.38% |
| I can gradually reduce the number of punctuation errors in my writing. | 3.85% | 7.69% | 30.77% | 34.62% | 23.09% |
| I have received more positive feedback for my writing. | 3.85% | 11.54% | 34.62% | 38.46% | 11.54% |

## 4.2 Results from the interviews

### 4.2.1 Students' perspectives on the effects of observational learning on the writing process

Through the interview, the researcher found that the students had positive perspectives about the effects of observational learning in their writing learning. Via guided questions, after observing, giving comments, and having discussions with friends about the writing processes and writing products of the models, they had a good grasp of the logical writing processes and could apply them in their own writing, especially the first two steps of analysing the writing tasks and outlining before starting to write. During the process of analysing, the students might take notice of the key terms in the writing task by underlining them and then spend a few minutes thinking of their synonyms and noting them down for later use in their own writing because this could help them avoid repeating words, which could contribute to their wide range of lexical resource.

> "…When analysing the writing task, I think I should underline the keywords and try to note down some of their synonyms so that I can avoid word repetition in my writing. […] Before, I didn't know how to make an outline, so I usually jumped into writing and wrote what was on my mind when having a writing task. Thus, my writing was not well-organized and the ideas were not arranged logically. […] But when I saw the models make outlines, I think I could make a better outline than before." (Learner A)

> "…I have learned to carefully analyse the writing task and make an outline before writing. […] and when we find synonyms while analysing, we can avoid word repetition." (Learner B)

However, one participant asserted that she had the habit of making an outline in mind without writing the ideas down. This habit might have been practiced for a long time, which could be hard for her to make a change. Therefore, to her, observational learning did not change her pre-writing planning step.

> "…When I am given a writing task, I have had a habit of reading the task carefully and making an outline in my mind without noting down. […] so, I didn't change my habit of making an outline in my mind." (Learner C)

Regarding re-reading and editing during writing as well as re-reading and editing after completing their writing, all three interviewees replied that they all did that for different purposes. Some students proofread after each paragraph meanwhile the others did that after a few lines. At this stage, most of them confessed that they reviewed lexical and grammatical aspects. They, in addition, paid attention to word spelling, the content in order to make sure the information was relevant to the topic, and the correlation level between sentences in order to assure cohesion and coherence. When asked why they re-read and edited during the writing process, they stated that after finishing the entire essay and detecting errors, the correction would become extremely complicated. Occasionally they would have to leave the whole part out of their essay and/ or replace it with another quality one when idea relevancy was not guaranteed.

Regarding self-correction after completing the essay, one student re-read it with the inclination to re-checking the organization of ideas or make sure that the ideas were logically organized. Another student also had the habit of re-reading the essay after its completion, but this process took place swiftly because revising and editing had been conducted thoroughly during the writing process.

*"…After I finish writing a few sentences or a paragraph, I often review grammatical and lexical aspects and the logic of the sentences. [...] I usually correct them right at that time because I think it will be very difficult to make adjustments if we finish everything. Finding a lot of things to correct after finishing the whole writing will be so confusing […] In the past, I didn't usually re-read my writing after I wrote it, but now I'm in the habit of re-reading my writing and making corrections if needed."* (Learner A)

*"…I often re-read after each paragraph to check the content, vocabulary and grammar because if I don't check to the end of my writing and then find that there is something irrelevant, I have to cut the whole part of a paragraph or edit the whole paragraph, which is a waste of time. […] after I complete my writing, I usually read it again to ensure the ideas are logically arranged throughout the essay."* (Learner B)

*"…After I finish writing a few lines, I often re-read them to correct spelling and grammatical errors. [...] but I only swiftly re-read my writing after it is completed because it is carefully checked during the writing process."* (Learner C)

## 4.2.2 Students' learning subjects through observational learning: strong model writer or weak model writer?

Through observational tasks, the students learned skills as well as strategies not only from models who wrote well, but also from models who wrote poorly. In more detail, they could figure out what they should and should not do to gain effectiveness in the writing process as well as in their writing products from both strong model writers and weak model ones. Nonetheless, some students found that they could learn more from weaker model writers because at that time the process of self-reflecting took place. It

means they could easily recognize their similar mistakes made by the model writers during the observational process or the discussions with their classmates and teachers. As a consequence, they were capable of avoiding those mistakes in their own written products. Additionally, by observing more competent model writers, they asserted that they learned academic topic-related lexical items, either words or phrases, and made exertions to apply them in their own writing.

> *"…I feel like I learned more from weaker writers because that was when I reflected on myself, so I could realize my similar mistakes more easily. After discussing with friends or listening to their opinions about the writers, I could avoid the mistakes that the weak writers made but I couldn't recognize. […] for better writers, I found them underline the keywords from the writing task and note down their synonyms, and I also observed how they used topic-related words or expressions, and tried to include them in my writing."* (Learner A)

> *"…I mainly noticed how they used academic words related to that topic, […] but for worse writers, after discussing with friends, I could identify some problems of their using words that I had not recognized during my observation."* (Learner B)

> *"…I find I learned a lot more from weaker writers. When I observed them making mistakes, I thought to myself that I had to be more careful while writing because probably I would make those similar mistakes. This was also the time when I looked at myself and compared myself to them to see what I lacked and needed to improve."* (Learner C)

### 4.2.3 Students' perspectives towards their writing improvement with the help of observational learning

After the intervention period, all interviewees reported the greatest improvement in vocabulary. This confirmation of lexical resource improvement was compatible with observing, learning, and applying topic-related vocabulary items from the model writers as described above. Additionally, one of them claimed to change his ways to construct a writing. Another student agreed to have expanded his range of sentence structures meanwhile the other found her grammatical structures had not been much developed due to her far more attention to lexical items during observations.

> *"…vocabulary and ways to build up a writing. For vocabulary, when observing the model writers thought of synonyms, I learned a lot of them. And I also learned how to write logically."* (Learner A)

> *"…I think I have expanded my range of vocabulary and sentence structures."* (Learner B)

> *"…I think that I improved my vocabulary because when observing models, I usually paid attention to the vocabulary they used, took notes of some of them, and tried to apply in my*

*writing, so I think I learned more vocabulary than grammatical structures. Grammatical structures were harder to recognized than vocabulary."* (Learner C)

### 4.2.4 Students' motivation to write via observational learning

With what they had learned from observational tasks, the students affirmed that they had been motivated to write. More specifically, two students out of three noted that they were motivated to write after observing because they found that after watching the writing models, they could gradually form ideas about the topic, and pick up topic-related words or phrases. This encouraged them to start the topic of writing to apply what they had formed during their observations. However, although the motivation to write took place after observation, there was a difference in the period of time of wanting to begin their writing between these two students. One student said that after identifying the difference in the language used between himself, who self-assessed as using the spoken language in his writing products, and the model writers who used a wide range of vocabulary, especially synonyms, in their writing, he longed to apply them to his writing at once. Meanwhile, the other student yearned to complete her writing task immediately after observing and discussing with her classmates the model writers and their sample writings because she wanted to ensure that her judgments about the writers and their products were acceptable. Besides that, she also wished to consult the ideas of the model writers by recalling them before the writing process started.

> *"…In the past, […] when I wrote, I often used spoken language to write, so my writing was not well-qualified. […] After observing and seeing how model writers used synonyms, I wanted to apply them to my writing immediately."* (Learner B)

> *"…I wanted to write as soon as I finished observing and discussing with my friends because I wanted to make sure my opinions about the model writers were reasonable and consistent with my partners', and recalled the ideas of the model writers before writing."* (Learner C)

Different from the two students above, the other one was eager and stimulated to start writing during the period of observation, especially when observing good writer models because he was inclined to apply good features obtained from observations in his own writing. He also compared himself back then to before. Previously, he had felt that completing a writing task was perplex and time-consuming and had no motivation to write, but during the period of observation, witnessing good strategies from the model writers and dreaming of being as competent as them, his writing motivation was activated.

> *"…In the past, I didn't like to write very much because I was quite lazy to write and found it difficult and time-consuming, but now I feel like writing more because model writers have good strategies to write and I want to be good like them. […] While observing good*

*model writers, I witnessed good things from them. […] I felt very excited and wanted to try them for myself right away."* (Learner A)

### 4.2.5 Students' preference and willingness to enrol in a writing course with the application of observational learning

Ultimately, when being asked whether or not to enrol in another writing course with observational learning, the students showed their interest in partaking in observational tasks. One in three interviewed students reaffirmed the effectiveness of observational learning and described himself as an experientialist for whom observational learning was a completely new approach to learning to write. However, he and another student suggested that effectively organizing a writing class with observational learning ought to be under some conditions, particularly in terms of time limit because there would be students whose concentration ability was not guaranteed and who thus switched off due to the long period of observation time. Moreover, if it could be, the process of observing the model writers should be assigned in groups and at home in order to save time for more discussion in class.

*"…I feel like and positive about this observational learning method because it is a new method compared to my previous learning methods. […] I also find it effective in some ways. However, because the observation time is quite long, it will distract some students who are not able to concentrate."* (Learner A)

*"…I think I will join, but the video should be taken home and observed in groups so that the class time is devoted to discussions only. As I told you before, this method is more suitable for teaching to write something shorter like a paragraph instead of an essay."* (Learner B)

Contrary to the two students above, the other student did not feel that long videos were a big obstacle to learning writing through observation because she was completely confident in her ability to concentrate. Besides, as she shared, the fact that she trusted her teachers in supporting her to study well and develop her skills well, encouraged her, in the future, to enrol in another writing course in which the teacher initiated observational learning as the principal approach.

*"…I trust my teacher will bring something of value to improve my skills. Besides, I'm confident in my ability to concentrate, so I don't mind watching long videos. As for myself, I also got some positive things from learning through observation as I shared before. Therefore, I am willing to attend writing classes with this method."* (Learner C)

In summary, this study investigated the impacts of observational learning on English writing ability among EFL high school students. The results showed that with observational learning, the students' writing ability improved significantly, especially in

terms of *task response*, *lexical resource*, and *grammatical range and accuracy*, after the period of intervention. In addition, the results from both quantitative and qualitative data identified that the students had positive perspectives about observational learning in improving their writing ability. Besides that, observational learning was thought by the student participants to have helped them construct their new writing knowledge, strengthen their writing process, and develop their writing products.

## 5. Discussion

This study provided insight into students' views or perspectives on observational learning in their writing classes. The survey results showed that the majority of the students who had experienced learning through observation expressed their agreement on the effectiveness of this approach in improving their writing performance. Moreover, male students (N=14) and female students (N=12) did not differ in terms of their perspectives on the effects of observational learning on constructing new writing knowledge, shaping and mastering appropriate and feasible writing processes, and producing quality writing products.

Observational learning helped them construct new knowledge of writing, including writing genres, writing processes, vocabulary, and grammatical structures. Graham and Harris (1994) concluded that by means of metacognitive strategies, including observation, new writing knowledge is constructed. Braaksma, Rijlaarsdam, and Van den Bergh (2002) emphasized that noncompetent learners learn more from weak models, and competent ones learn more from strong models. In this study, many students also stated that they learned from observing both strong and weak model writers. More specifically, not only did they gain knowledge from strong writers, especially in terms of vocabulary, grammatical structures, and the writing process, but they also learned to avoid the mistakes made by weaker writers, especially in terms of word use. The study, however, did not investigate whether noncompetent or competent learners learned more from observing weak or strong model writers. During the observational tasks, the students were required to make notes about the performances of the model writers and their written texts based on the questions provided by the teacher about the differences between the two models, specifically in terms of the writing process, followed by discussions in pairs or groups and as a whole class. Consequently, the students were conditioned to repeat the knowledge they had perceived from the models, which activates the retention of knowledge.

Braaksma and her colleagues (2004) demonstrated the impact of rich writing knowledge on the act of organizing a writing plan. It implies that if a student has a solid understanding of writing, such as writing genres and writing processes, he or she is more likely to come up with writing steps. Similar to the previous study, observational learning helped the participants in this research become more conscious of analysing the tasks, including identifying keywords and discovering their synonyms to reduce word repetition, and making outlines to ensure the ideas were logically and properly

structured before writing. Because these first steps were made visible to the learners, they learned to put these steps into action when they performed a writing task themselves (Braaksma, Rijlaarsdam, and Van den Bergh, 2018). They also had a tendency to monitor their writing after either several sentences or each paragraph was completed because they believed that this practice helped them save time and avoid the elimination of a whole part that includes irrelevant information or ideas, at the last step of revising, and for some of the students, re-reading as well as revising their written products were necessary to assure themselves of the logical organization of ideas and the logical distribution of paragraphs in the whole essay. This practice is also known as "*a natural step back*" (Braaksma, Rijlaarsdam, and Van den Bergh, 2018, p.275), which is set to cause students' stimulation to self-monitor, self-evaluate, and self-reflect on their task performance processes, resulting in a more quality writing product.

Regarding students' written products, half of them or more confessed that observational learning was likely to help them produce their essays with fewer grammatical, vocabulary, and punctuation errors, and receive more positive feedback for their written work, either from their teacher or their classmates. It is because many of the students asserted that they tried to use the lexical items and grammatical structures they had learned from observing strong model writers as well as to avoid the vocabulary errors that were witnessed from observing weak model ones. Similarly, Couzijn (1999) also concluded that the written products of the students applying the theories from observational tasks were better than those of the students writing on their own.

Furthermore, the students claimed that observational learning had motivated them to write. In particular, although each student confirmed their motivation occurred at different stages, such as during observation, after observation, or after discussion, this motivation occurred mainly when students achieved or obtained something from observing the model writers. In other words, when a student obtains insights into a writing task from observation and believes in their capacity to execute the same task, known as self-efficacy, his or her motivation for completing the writing task will increase, resulting in an increase in the risk of giving up (Schunk, 2003).

Ultimately, due to the fact that the students perceived the positive impact of learning to write through observation or recognized that their writing ability improved in some respect after experiencing observational learning, the students had a sense of excitement and willingness to take another writing class where observational learning was a priority. In addition, the students' approach to a writing learning method that appeared new to them compared to previous learning methods fuelled their desire to experience it.

## 6. Recommendations

The survey and interviews in this study only focused on the positives or benefits that observational learning brought, which means that the researcher did not place proper emphasis on the shortcomings or limitations that the students perceived through the

experience. Future researchers can take this issue into consideration in order to clearly understand the problems that students face in the process of learning to write through observations, and then be able to propose more effective techniques for a certain group of students.

It is recommended that writing teachers apply observational learning in their teaching. If time is a barrier to implementing this method, the teacher can try having his or her students make observations at home and take notes based on the questions he or she posed. This makes it possible for the students to make observations multiple times, leading to a clearer understanding of and a more in-depth look at the model writers as well as their pieces of writing. Furthermore, in class, the teacher and students will have sufficient quality time to share and discuss their comments or evaluations of the model writers and their written texts. This stimulates the retention of information and hence aids their execution of the task. For students whose self-discipline is not high, the teacher can assign observational tasks in groups. After the students have made notes about the model writers as well as their pieces of writing, the teacher has the students discuss in groups with other members, followed by a discussion in front of the class for retention before moving to the stage of production.

## 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, most students perceived learning through observation as an effective approach for improving their writing knowledge, writing process, and writing products. Observational learning provided them with motivation to complete similar writing task and interest to partake in future English writing classes with observational learning.

**Conflict of Interest Statement**
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

**About the Author**
Ta Minh Khoi is currently completing a Master in Principles and Methods in English Language Education at Can Tho University, Vietnam. He has extensive experience in teaching writing to students. He has an inclination for conducting research on language skills in general and writing skills in particular.

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