



EFFECTS OF IDEA-GENERATION STRATEGIES ON VIETNAMESE EFL STUDENTS' EXPOSITORY WRITING QUALITY AND SELF-EFFICACY

Tran Thi Thao Nguyen,
Thach Son Leⁱ,
Nguyen Thi Phuong Nam
Tra Vinh University,
Vietnam

Abstract:

This quasi-experimental study was conducted to investigate the effects of idea-generation strategies, group discussion, and freewriting on Vietnamese EFL students' expository writing quality. Changes in these students' writing self-efficacy after they used the two strategies were also explored. Forty-seven EFL sophomore students of Tra Vinh University were chosen to be the participants of this study. The students were divided into two groups: experimental group 1 and experimental group 2. In the pre-writing stage, while students in experimental group 1 shared their ideas in a group discussion, students in experimental group 2 generated their ideas through freewriting. Data were collected through two writing tests including a pretest and a post-test, and a self-efficacy questionnaire delivered before and after the six-week intervention. Analysis of the test results exhibited that both group discussion and freewriting enhanced the quality of students' texts in terms of content and organization, with group discussion resulting in better content than freewriting. Specifically, both strategies helped students' writing self-efficacy with respect to writing ideation, writing conventions, and writing self-regulation change positively. Finally, some recommendations for future researchers are also mentioned.

Keywords: idea-generation strategies, group discussion, freewriting, writing quality, writing self-efficacy

1. Introduction

Writing is obviously a complicated process (Hamp-Lyons & Heasley, 2006) because it requires managing several sub-processes at once (Levy & Ransdell, 2013). Writers have to *"change ideas into texts, repair organization, and mechanics, and monitor their success - all*

ⁱ Correspondence: email tsle@tvu.edu.vn

while trying to formulate a coherent message" (Levy & Ransdell, 2013, p. 93). Therefore, competent writing is often seen as the last language skill to be mastered for native speakers of the target language as well as for learners of a foreign or second language (Hamp-Lyons & Heasley, 2006).

In the university context where this study was undertaken, students have difficulties in their writing process, especially in generating ideas which is described as a sub-process of the writing process by Hayes and Flower (1980). This can be clearly seen from their written texts which are not rich in ideas. As a result, their writing performance is poor and their results of writing final exams have not been high. Therefore, having effective idea-generation strategies can improve students' writing performance. In recent years, a considerable number of researchers have stressed the significance of these strategies in students' writing performance in their studies (Byrd, 2011; Hwang, 2010; Joaquin *et al.*, 2016; Mohseniasl, 2014; Nguyen *et al.*, 2018). They have agreed that idea-generation strategies can help students improve their writing fluency, writing quality, and their confidence in writing. It is apparent from the current research that the effects of idea-generation strategies on students' writing performance have been examined in many studies in foreign and Vietnamese contexts. However, too little attention has been paid to the effects of group discussion and freewriting on Vietnamese students' writing performance. Therefore, the researchers would like to set objectives for the study. The first objective is to investigate the effects of idea-generation strategies, group discussion, and freewriting, on Vietnamese EFL students' expository writing performance. The second one is to find out the changes in these students' writing self-efficacy after they used the idea-generation strategies for their writing.

This study is aimed at addressing the two following research questions:

- 1) What are the effects of idea-generation strategies, group discussion, and freewriting, on Vietnamese EFL students' expository writing quality?
- 2) Are there any positive changes in Vietnamese EFL students' writing self-efficacy after they used the idea-generation strategies for their writing?

2. Literature review

According to Langan (2001), writing is the transformation of a spoken language into a written language. For Lindemann and Anderson (2001), writing is defined as a communication process that conveys a message to a reader through using a conventional graphic system. Having the same idea, Nunan (2003) states that writing is not only the physical process of transferring words or ideas to some medium but also the mental process of creating ideas, considering how to convey them, and arranging them into sentences and paragraphs that are understandable to a reader. As a whole, writing is a process of generating and organizing ideas in a comprehensible manner.

Writing is classified into four types (Richards & Schmidt, 2002), one of which is expository writing. Expository writing is writing that is used to explain, describe, define, instruct, convince, or inform. It is also used in writing reports and other nonfictional

works. Some types of expository paragraphs or essays are sequential, descriptive, chronological, compare/contrast, cause and effect, and problem-solution (Wendling & Mather, 2008). In this study, expository writing is chosen as the genre for writing lessons because of two following reasons. First, it is a type of writing that is found in some extent in exercises in university courses (Hale *et al.*, 1995). Second, the genre requires students' original ideas and thoughts.

According to Hedge (1998), good writing performance involves common elements of something more than the ability to produce clear and accurate sentences. Particularly, the features must be related to communicative functions such as the purpose or function of writing, types, generic features, text organization/structure, and language resources of text (Glasswell, Parr & Aikman, 2001). To measure writing performance, there are two main types of scoring: holistic scoring and analytic scoring (Genesee & Upshur, 1996). In holistic scoring, a single score is given to a student's total writing performance; meanwhile, in analytic scoring, the individual score is assigned to separate aspects of writing performance. As compared with holistic scoring, analytic scoring has been proven to be a more reliable measurement by some researchers (East, 2009; Weir, 1990). Therefore, in this study, analytic scoring will be used to assess students' writing performance. From the social cognitive theory or social learning theory, self-efficacy refers to a person's beliefs in his or her abilities to "*organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments*" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). In the field of writing, examining students' writing self-efficacy is necessary because it has a positive relationship with writing performance. This relationship was acknowledged by many researchers (McCarthy, Meier & Rinderer, 1985; Meier, McCarthy, & Schmeck, 1984; Shell, Murphy & Bruning, 1989; Woodrow, 2011) who investigated the predictive value of self-efficacy in relation to writing performance and concluded that self-efficacy is a strong predictor of actual writing performance. That is why students' writing self-efficacy was examined in this study.

Idea-generation strategies are strategies used in the pre-writing stage and known as pre-writing strategies which can help students overcome their difficulties in developing ideas and ultimately improve their writing skills. Specifically, in a review study by Byrd (2011), the author mentions six types of pre-writing activities: brainstorming, clustering, drawing, dyads, and triads (small discussion groups), freewriting, and graphic organizers. These activities are effective for idea generation and writing quality. Moreover, Mohseniasl (2014) displayed that pre-writing activities, including brainstorming, concept mapping, and freewriting, can reduce students' writing anxiety and improve their writing performance. In this study, group discussion refers to small group discussion. According to Brillhart *et al.* (2001), a small group discussion is a small group of people talking with one another to reach an interdependent goal, such as better comprehension, activity coordination, or a solution to a common problem. In a group discussion, individuals can experience learning with their groupmates and also internalize these experiences on their own (Erbil, 2020). Freewriting, according to Elbow (1973), is writing what you are thinking while writing, under a set time limit, and without

pausing for anything - even to check the spelling. It is a powerful tool for generating ideas which was unfamiliar to the writers and it also promotes writing coherence. According to Belanoff, Elbow & Fontaine (1991), freewriting helps students to gain deeper insights into particular topics since it encourages them to think inductively rather than quickly generalizing. Elbow (1998) confirmed that when students practice freewriting regularly, they can enhance their writing fluency since their words come out easily, and thus their writing is less forced. In this study, focused freewriting is used.

2.1 Related studies on the effects of group discussion and freewriting on students' idea generation

Various recent empirical research has discussed the positive effects of group discussion and freewriting on students' idea generation (Arumugam *et al.*, 2018; Neumann & McDonough, 2014). In a recent systematic review study of Ellis (2021) which reviewed 32 experimental studies on the effects of pre-task planning on second language learning, there was only one study on pre-writing discussion found with findings on idea generation. Another study found was Choi's (2012), who reported that the ideas generated by Korean university students in their freewriting were included more in their argumentative essays.

2.2 Related studies on the effects of group discussion and freewriting on students' writing quality

The effects of group discussion on students' writing quality have been explored in several studies. Most studies have measured students' writing quality based on analytic ratings and shown that collaborative pre-writing discussions might lead to better content and organization (Arumugam *et al.*, 2018; Neumann & McDonough, 2014; Li & Zhang, 2021, for argumentative texts; Shin, 2008, for expository texts).

Like the group-discussion strategy, recent studies on the freewriting strategy also suggest that this strategy resulted in better text quality. Choi (2012) found that freewriting improved students' argumentative writing quality. Phan and Phuong's (2017) research result demonstrated that students using freewriting had better writing quality in terms of content and vocabulary.

2.3 Related studies on the effects of group discussion and freewriting on students' writing self-efficacy

Relatively few studies on the effects of group discussion and freewriting on students' writing self-efficacy, also known as students' perceptions of writing, exist. Two of the few studies were Soh's (2022) study and Mohammadi *et al.*'s (2023) study. Soh (2022) found that pre-writing dyadic discussion encouraged Malaysian university students to feel more confident and motivated to participate in L2 argumentative writing. In addition, these students perceived that it would be simpler, more enjoyable, more fascinating, and more motivating to perform the subsequent individual argumentative writing tasks. In

another research, Mohammadi *et al.* (2023) found that peer-led collaborative pre-writing discussions could heighten students' writing self-efficacy.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This quasi-experimental study used a two-group pretest-posttest design to explore the effects of idea-generation strategies, group discussion, and freewriting, on Vietnamese EFL students' expository writing performance (see Table 1).

Table 1: Research design

Panel	Pre-test	Intervention	Post-test
Group			
EXP 1	O ₁	Group discussion	O ₂
EXP 2	O ₁	Freewriting	O ₂

Note: EXP = Experimental Group, O = measurement.

3.2. The participants

This study was conducted at Tra Vinh University, Vietnam. The participants were 47 EFL sophomore students (aged from 19 to 20) at this university. These students were supposed to have a similar level of English proficiency, pre-intermediate level because they had finished the second module of the General English subject. They had been learning English as a foreign language for more than ten years.

The participants were from two intact classes that were learning the third module of the General English subject. They were split into two groups: experimental group 1 (EXP 1) which consisted of 26 students, and experimental group 2 (EXP 2) which included 21 students. Particularly, students in EXP 1 shared their ideas in a group discussion which is a common activity in their university. Meanwhile, students in EXP 2 generated their ideas through freewriting which is a new activity for them. It is believed that freewriting instruction could be applied in the context of the university because the students here were active in cooperation with the teacher.

3.3. Research instruments

In order to have the data for the study, two writing tests and a self-efficacy questionnaire were applied. The two tests were designed with the same format, including two parts. The first part is the writing context adapted from the two books of the Cambridge Preliminary English Test. The second part is the guidance for writing which was given as a type of scaffolding with the purpose of facilitating the students' writing process. The content of the tests is relevant to the writing topic that the students had written in class. After the tests had been finished, they were judged on whether or not they were appropriate by two lecturers. Accordingly, the tests are valid.

After an orientation session, the pretest was administered to the students of both groups to assess their initial writing level. At the end of the intervention (six weeks later),

the post-test was given to the students to see whether there were any differences in these students' writing performance. For doing each test, the students in EXP 1 shared and discussed their ideas with their groupmates for 25 minutes before they were given 45 minutes to write their texts. The students in the EXP 2, were given 25 minutes to free write about the topic and 45 minutes to write their texts. Finally, the tests were separately graded by two teachers, not the researcher, with more than five years of teaching experience at the university. Before grading, the two teachers discussed the assessment scale and how to count the number of ideas.

The research instruments used in this study consist of two writing tests and a self-efficacy questionnaire. They were given to students of EXP 1 and EXP 2 twice, before and after the intervention. To make the data reliable and easy to interpret, the author used a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = disagree somewhat, 4 = undecided, 5 = agree somewhat, 6 = agree, 7 = strongly agree).

3.4. Research procedures

All of the participants attended nine weekly 100-minute meetings (six meetings for the interventions). In the first meeting, an orientation session was provided to briefly introduce the purpose and procedure of the course. Students were also informed that the data from the course would be used for research. Then, the pre-test and pre-questionnaire were administered to them. In the second meeting, the group-discussion strategy was illustrated for EXP 1 while the freewriting strategy was trained for EXP 2. Students in EXP 2 were asked to free-write individually about the writing topic in 15 minutes and then review their freewriting and determine suitable or good ideas for their writing in 5 minutes. Freewriting is writing what students are thinking while writing, under a set time limit, and without pausing for anything - even to check the spelling. When freewriting, if the students are unable to come up with a new word or phrase, they will just rewrite the last ideas they had until they can move on to another new idea or concept.

After training, from the third to eighth meetings, the students wrote on the six chosen writing topics. For each writing topic, they were given the same instruction, for example on how to analyze a sample text, and the same allotted time (15 minutes for planning their ideas and 85 minutes for writing the text), but they generated their ideas with different strategies that they had been trained before. In the ninth meeting, the students took the post-test and post-questionnaire.

3.5. Data processing method

The author devised the SPSS 28 to analyze the responses given by the participants. Data were collected at two moments: at the beginning (pretest and pre-questionnaire) and the end (post-test and post-questionnaire) of the intervention.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Results

Research question 1: What are the effects of idea-generation strategies, group discussion, and freewriting, on Vietnamese EFL students' expository writing quality?

This section reports the results of students' expository writing performance on the pretest and the post-test concerning the quality of the text.

Table 2: Results of the Independent-samples T-Test on the quality of text of students in group discussion and freewriting groups before the intervention

		Group	M	SD	t	p
Pre-test	Content (C)	Group discussion	2.25	1.32	1.22	.23
		Free-writing	2.69	1.10		
	Organization (O)	Group discussion	2.81	1.09	.65	.52
		Free-writing	2.98	.56		
	Text quality (C + O)	Group discussion	5.06	2.24	1.07	.29
		Free-writing	5.67	1.47		

Table 2 compares the mean scores of the text quality of the pretest with regard to the content and organization of students in group discussions and freewriting groups. As can be seen from this table, the mean scores of content (M=2.25, SD=1.32) and organization (M=2.81, SD=1.09) of group-discussion group were lower than those of freewriting group (M=2.69, SD=1.10; M=2.98, SD=.56, respectively), resulting in the mean score of text quality of group-discussion group (M=5.06, SD=2.24) was lower than that of freewriting group (M=5.67, SD=1.47).

Nevertheless, the *p*-values of content, organization as well as text quality were *p*=.23, *p*=.52, and *p*=.29, which are greater than .05, so the mean scores of content, organization as well as text quality between the two groups were not significantly different.

Table 3: Results of the Independent-samples T-Test on the quality of the text of students in group-discussion and freewriting groups after the intervention

		Group	M	SD	t	p
Post-test	Content	Group discussion	4.02	.64	2.18	.04
		Freewriting	3.57	.75		
	Organization	Group discussion	3.31	.78	-.71	.48
		Freewriting	3.45	.59		
	Overall text quality (Content + Organization)	Group discussion	7.33	1.27	.86	.40
		Freewriting	7.02	1.12		

Table 3 compares the mean scores of the text quality of the post-test regarding content and organization of students in group discussion and freewriting groups. From the data in this table, it is apparent that the mean score of the content of the group-discussion group (M=4.02, SD=.64) was higher than that of the freewriting group (M=3.57, SD=.75)

and the p -value was $p=.04$, which is less than $.05$, so the mean scores of the content of both groups were different.

By contrast, the mean score of organization of freewriting group ($M=3.45$, $SD=.59$) was higher than that of group-discussion group ($M=3.31$, $SD=.78$), but this difference was not significant since the p -value ($p=.48$) was greater than $.05$. Although there was a difference in the mean scores of content of both groups, this did not lead to the difference in the mean score of overall text quality of both groups since the p -value was $p=.40$.

Table 4: Results of the Paired-Samples T-Test on the quality of text of the pre- and post-tests of students in group-discussion group

		Mean	Mean difference	SD	t	p
Content (C)	Pretest	2.25	-1.77	1.37	-6.57	<.001
	Post-test	4.02				
Organization (O)	Pretest	2.81	-.50	1.03	-2.48	<.02
	Post-test	3.31				
Overall text quality (C + O)	Pretest	5.06	-2.27	2.15	-5.38	<.001
	Post-test	7.33				

Table 4 shows the difference in the mean scores of the text quality of the pre and post-tests of students in the group-discussion group. According to this table, the mean scores of content and organization on the pretest were 2.25 and 2.81, respectively. These figures reached 4.02 and 3.31 on the post-test, respectively. The p -values were less than $.05$ ($p<.001$ for content and $p<.02$ for organization), showing that there were differences in the mean scores of content and organization.

Particularly, the mean score of content on the post-test was 1.77 higher than the mean score of content on the pre-test and the mean score of organization on the post-test was .50 higher than the mean score of organization on the pretest. The increase in the mean scores of content and organization led to an increase in the mean score of the overall text quality from 5.06 to 7.33 (with $p<.001$).

Table 5: Results of the Paired-Samples T-Test on the quality of text of the pre- and post-tests of students in the freewriting group

		Mean	Mean difference	SD	t	p
Content (C)	Pretest	2.69	-.88	1.15	-3.51	.002
	Post-test	3.57				
Organization (O)	Pretest	2.98	-.48	.81	-2.68	.014
	Post-test	3.45				
Overall text quality (C + O)	Pretest	5.67	-1.36	1.64	-3.80	.001
	Post-test	7.02				

Table 5 shows the difference in the mean scores of the quality of the text of the pre and post-tests of students in the freewriting group. It can be observed that the mean scores of content and organization on the pretest were 2.69 and 2.98, respectively. These figures reached 3.57 and 3.45 on the post-test, respectively. The p -values were less than $.05$ ($p=.002$

for content and $p=.014$ for organization), representing that there were differences in the mean scores of content and organization.

Specifically, the mean score of content on the post-test was .88 higher than that of content on the pre-test and the mean score of organization on the post-test was .48 higher than that of organization on the pre-test. The rise in the mean scores of contents and organization led to the rise in the mean score of the overall text quality from 5.67 to 7.02 (with $p<.001$).

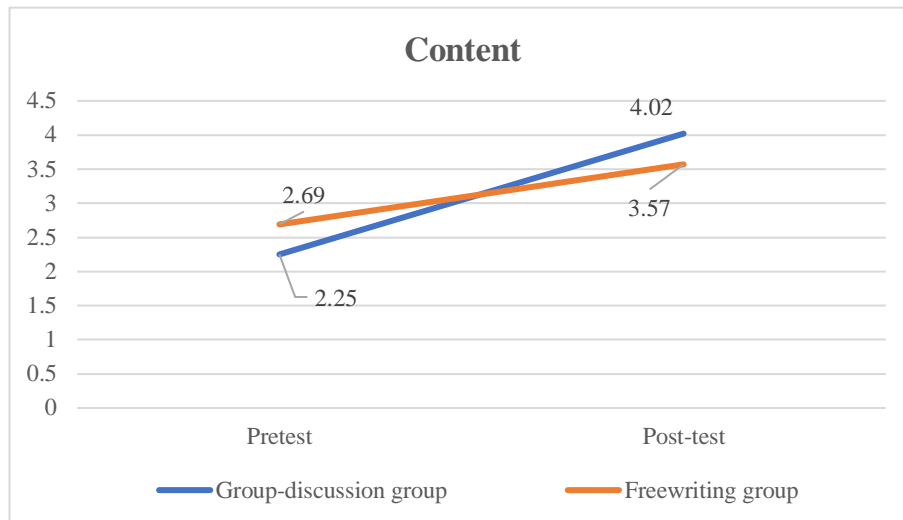


Figure 4.1.1: The development patterns of the quality of content of students in group-discussion group and freewriting group before and after the intervention

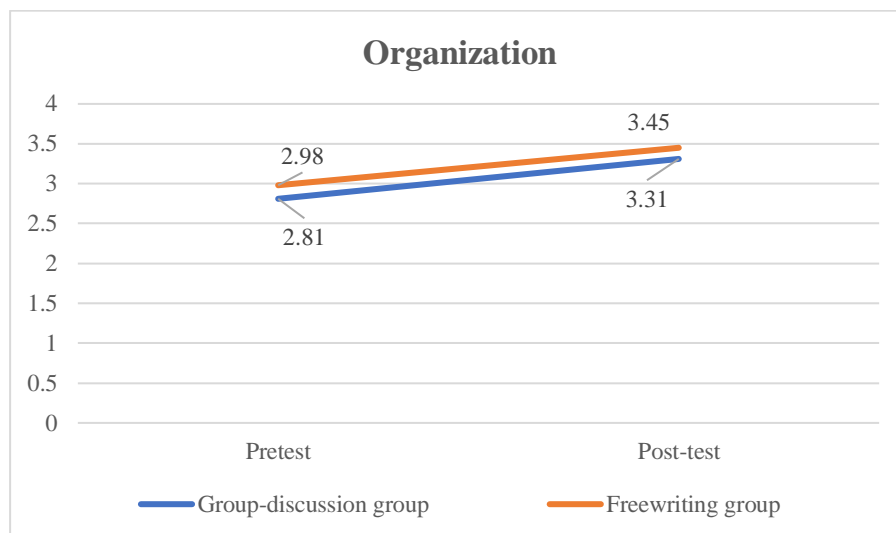


Figure 4.1.2: The development patterns of the quality of organization of students in group-discussion group and freewriting group before and after the intervention

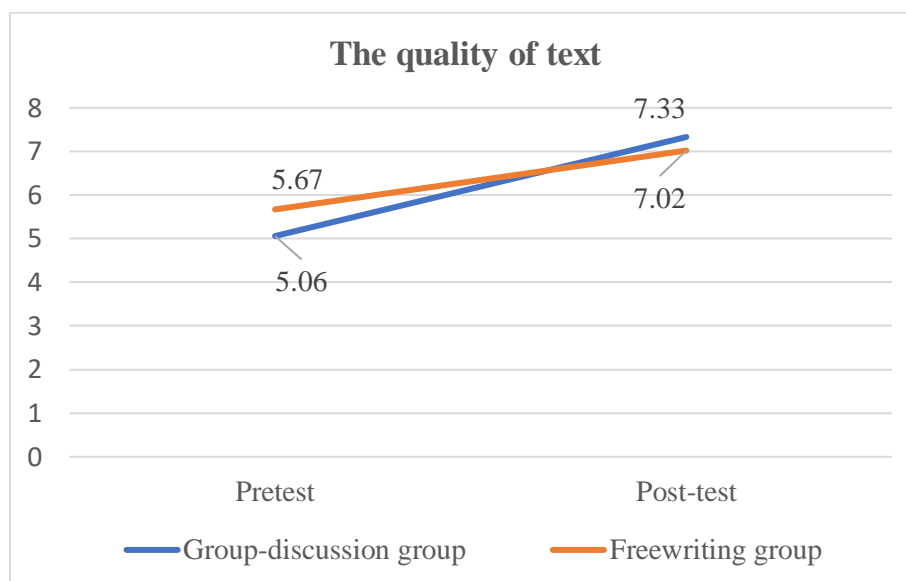


Figure 4.1.3: The development patterns of text quality of students in the group discussion group and freewriting group before and after the intervention

Research question 2: Are there any positive changes in Vietnamese EFL students' writing self-efficacy after they used the idea-generation strategies for their writing?

4.2 Differences in students' overall writing self-efficacy of the group-discussion group before and after the intervention

Table 6: Results of the Paired-Samples T-Test on students' writing self-efficacy of the group-discussion group before and after the intervention

		Mean	Mean difference	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Overall writing self-efficacy	Pre-Q	3.56	-.81	.64	-6.53	<.001
	Post-Q	4.37				

According to Table 6, the mean score of students' writing self-efficacy on the post-questionnaire ($M=4.37$) was higher than that on the pretest ($M=3.56$) and the p -value was $p<.001$, indicating that there was a significant difference in the students' overall writing self-efficacy between the pre- and post-questionnaires.

Table 7: Results of the Paired-Samples T-Test on the three aspects of students' writing self-efficacy of the group-discussion group before and after the intervention

		Mean	Mean difference	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Self-efficacy for writing ideation	Pre-Q	3.70	-.87	.61	-7.31	<.001
	Post-Q	4.57				
Self-efficacy for writing conventions	Pre-Q	3.25	-.82	.83	-5.08	<.001
	Post-Q	4.07				
Self-efficacy for writing self-regulation	Pre-Q	3.78	-.74	.79	-4.80	<.001
	Post-Q	4.52				

It can be observed from Table 7 that the mean scores of self-efficacies for writing ideation ($M=4.57$), writing conventions ($M=4.07$), and writing self-regulation ($M=4.52$) on the post-questionnaire were higher than self-efficacy for writing ideation ($M=3.70$), writing conventions ($M=3.25$) and writing self-regulation ($M=3.78$) on the pre-questionnaire. The p -values of the three aspects were less than .001. This discloses that there was a significant difference among the mean scores of the three aspects.

Table 8: The Paired-Samples T-Test on students' overall writing self-efficacy of the freewriting group before and after the intervention

		Mean	Mean difference	SD	t	p
Overall writing self-efficacy	Pre-Q	3.91	-.51	.62	-3.80	<.001
	Post-Q	4.42				

Table 8 depicts the differences in the mean scores of students' overall writing self-efficacy of the group-discussion group on the pre- and posts. As shown in this table, the mean score of students' overall writing self-efficacy of students in the freewriting group on the post-questionnaire ($M=4.42$) was higher than that on the pretest ($M=3.91$) and the p -value was $p=.001$ (which is less than .05). This represents that there was a difference in the mean score between the pre- and post-questionnaires.

Table 9: The Paired-Samples T-Test on the three aspects of students' writing self-efficacy of the freewriting group after the intervention

		Mean	Mean difference	SD	t	p
Self-efficacy for writing ideation	Pre-Q	3.95	-.65	.73	-4.04	<.001
	Post-Q	4.60				
Self-efficacy for writing conventions	Pre-Q	3.58	-.46	.80	-2.61	<.017
	Post-Q	4.04				
Self-efficacy for writing self-regulation	Pre-Q	3.25	-.44	.67	3.04	<.007
	Post-Q	4.69				

Table 9 shows the differences in the mean scores of the three aspects of students' writing self-efficacy of the freewriting group before and after the intervention. As shown in this table, the mean scores of self-efficacy for writing ideation ($M=4.60$), writing conventions ($M=4.04$), and writing self-regulation ($M=4.69$) on the post-questionnaire were higher than self-efficacy for writing ideation ($M=3.95$), writing conventions ($M=3.58$) and writing self-regulation ($M=3.25$) on the pre-questionnaire. The p -values of the three aspects were $p=.001$, $p=.017$ and $p=.007$, respectively. This represents that there were significant differences among the mean scores of the three aspects. Hence, it can be concluded that students' self-efficacy for writing ideation, writing conventions, and writing self-regulation of the freewriting group increased after they used freewriting strategies.

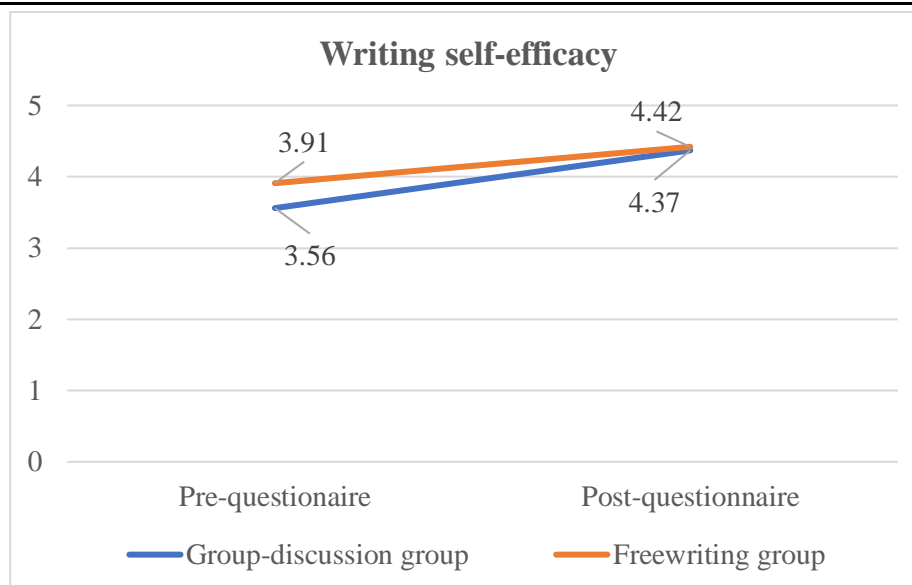


Figure 4.1.4: The development patterns of students' writing self-efficacy in group-discussion group and freewriting group before and after the intervention

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. The effects of idea-generation strategies on Vietnamese EFL students' expository writing performance

The results of the two writing tests confirm the first research question that both group discussion and freewriting might improve students' expository writing performance. Before the intervention, students in both groups had a comparable level of writing performance in terms of idea generation and text quality. At the end of the intervention, these students' writing performances were better. This result supports the conclusions of positive effects of pre-writing strategies in general (Byrd, 2011) and freewriting (Choi, 2012; Elbow, 1973) in particular on students' idea generation.

Regarding the content and organization of the text, students in both groups improved the content and organization of their expository texts, which is consistent with the results of previous studies (Arumugam *et al.*, 2018; Li & Zhang, 2021; Neumann & McDonough, 2014; Phan & Phuong, 2017; Shin, 2008).

Students in both groups also enhanced their overall text quality. This result is in agreement with the results of previous studies (Choi, 2012). Although the group-discussion strategy helped students gain better content, this did not lead to better overall text quality. No significant difference in the effects of group discussion and freewriting on improving students' overall text quality, which corroborates the results of Joaquin *et al.* (2016) and Nguyen *et al.* (2018).

4.2.2. The changes in Vietnamese EFL students' writing self-efficacy after using the idea-generation strategies

The results from the self-efficacy questionnaires were discussed. The questionnaire results showed that group discussion and freewriting might motivate students' overall

writing self-efficacy. In other words, these two strategies contributed directly to students' writing self-efficacy. This result accords with the results of Soh's (2022) study and Mohammadi *et al.*'s (2023) study. Particularly, students' writing self-efficacy was stronger pertaining to writing ideation, conventions, and self-regulation. Therefore, the second research question was confirmed.

5. Conclusion

The current study attempted to reach two objectives. The first objective is to investigate the effects of idea-generation strategies, group discussion, and freewriting on Vietnamese EFL students' expository writing performance. The second one is to explore the changes in these students' writing self-efficacy after they used the two strategies. The study used a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = disagree somewhat, 4 = undecided, 5 = agree somewhat, 6 = agree, 7 = strongly agree). For the effects on students' text quality, both group discussion and freewriting improved the content and organization of students' expository texts, but group discussion resulted in better content than freewriting. In addition, both strategies also enhanced students' overall text quality. For the results of the self-efficacy questionnaires, there were positive changes in Vietnamese EFL students' writing self-efficacy after they used the idea-generation strategies, group discussion, and freewriting. The results have brought invaluable information to both EFL learners of English and EFL teachers.

However, the study has some limitations. First, the current study was limited by a small sample size and sampling method. There were only 47 students at a university in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam participating in this study and the number of students in each group was not the same (26 students in the EXP 1 and 21 students in the EXP 2). It is extremely difficult for the researchers to choose either a random or a systematic nonrandom sampling method, so they could only use convenience sampling. Therefore, the results of this study might not be transferable to all university students in Vietnam in general and in the Mekong Delta in particular. Second, this study had only examined the effects of two idea-generation strategies, group discussion, and freewriting, on students' performance in expository writing. Therefore, the researchers could not study their effects on students' performance in other kinds of writing.

Considering the limitations of this study, it is recommended that further research be undertaken with a larger sample size and a better sampling method. Additionally, future researchers should lengthen the time frame of their study and combine both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Furthermore, more research is needed to determine the effects of other idea-generation strategies (for example, journal writing and looping) on other kinds of writing.

Conflicts of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Authors

Thach Son Le is a lecturer of English at the School of Foreign Languages, School of Southern Khmer Language - Culture - Arts and Humanity, Tra Vinh University, Vietnam. He earned his Master's Degree in TESOL at Hawai'i Pacific University, Hawai'i State, USA. He has taught English since 2003. His interests include teaching reading and writing skills, pronunciation, translation, and discourse analysis.

Tran Thi Thao Nguyen is a graduate student at the School of Foreign Languages, School of Southern Khmer Language - Culture - Arts and Humanity, Tra Vinh University, Vietnam.

Nguyen Thi Phuong Nam (PhD) is the Vice Rector of the School of Southern Khmer Language - Culture- Arts and Humanity, Tra Vinh University, Vietnam. She holds her Master of Arts in TESOL from the University of Canberra (Australia), followed by a PhD. in English Language and Literature from the University of Amsterdam. Her research interests are in the areas of second language acquisition, foreign language literature, and writing across cultures.

References

- Arumugam, N., Jambulingam, M., Supramaniam, K., & Kaur, K. (2018). Prewriting discussion and academic writing. *Advanced Science Letters*, 24(4), 2569-2572.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W. H. Freeman and Co.
- Belanoff, P., Elbow, P., & Fontaine, S. I. (Eds.). (1991). *Nothing begins with N: New investigations of freewriting*. SIU Press.
- Brilhart, J. K., Adams, K. H., & Galanes, G. J. (2001). *Effective group discussion: Theory and practice*. McGraw-Hill.
- Byrd, D. R. (2011). Putting the writing process into action in the L2 classroom: Pre-writing techniques that work. *The Journal of Language Learning and Teaching*, 1(1), 64-77.
- Choi, Y. H. (2012). Prewriting tasks in L2 writing: Comparison of freewriting and clustering in L1 and L2. *Korea Journal of English Language and Linguistics*, 12(3), 567-600.
- East, M. (2009). Evaluating the reliability of a detailed analytic scoring rubric for foreign language writing. *Assessing writing*, 14(2), 88-115.
- Elbow, P. (1973). *Writing without teachers*. Oxford University Press.
- Elbow, P. (1998). *Writing without teachers* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2021). The effects of pre-task planning on second language writing: A systematic review of experimental studies. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 44(2), 131-165.
- Erbil, D. G. (2020). A review of flipped classroom and cooperative learning method within the context of Vygotsky theory. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 1157.
- Genesee, F., & Upshur, J. A. (1996). *Classroom-based evaluation in second language education*. Cambridge University Press.

- Glasswell, K., Parr, J., & Aikman, M. (2001). *Development of the asTTle writing assessment rubrics for scoring extended writing tasks*. University of Auckland, asTTle project.
- Hale, G., Taylor, C., Bridgeman, B., Carson, J., Kroll, B., & Kantor, R. (1995). A study of writing tasks assigned in academic degree programs. *ETS Research Report Series, 1995(2)*, i-61.
- Hamp-Lyons, L., & Heasley, B. (2006). *Study writing: A course in written English for academic purposes*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hayes, J. R. & Flower, L. S. (1980). Identifying the organisation of writing processes. *Cognitive processes in writing*, 3-30.
- Hedge, T. (1998). *Writing resource books for teachers*. Oxford University Press.
- Hwang, J. A. (2010). A case study of the influence of freewriting on writing fluency and confidence of EFL college-level students. *Second Language Studies, 28(2)*, 97-134.
- Joaquin, A. D. L., Kim, S. H., & Shin, S. Y. (2016). Examining prewriting strategies in L2 writing: Do they really work? *Asian EFL Journal, 18(2)*, 156-181.
- Langan, J. (2001). *College writing skills with readings*. McGraw-Hill Higher Education.
- Levy, C. M., & Ransdell, S. (2013). *The science of writing: Theories, methods, individual differences and applications*. Routledge.
- Li, H. H., & Zhang, L. J. (2021). Effects of structured small-group student talk as collaborative prewriting discussions on Chinese university EFL students' individual writing: A quasi-experimental study. *PloS one, 16(5)*, e0251569.
- Lindemann, E., & Anderson, D. (2001). *A rhetoric for writing teachers*. Oxford University Press, USA.
- McCarthy, P., Meier, S., & Rinderer, R. (1985). Self-efficacy and writing: A different view of self-evaluation. *College composition and communication, 36(4)*, 465-471.
- Meier, S., McCarthy, P. R., & Schmeck, R. R. (1984). Validity of self-efficacy as a predictor of writing performance. *Cognitive therapy and research, 8*, 107-120.
- Mohammadi, K., Jafarpour, A., Alipour, J., & Hashemian, M. (2023). The impact of different kinds of collaborative prewriting on EFL learners' degree of engagement in writing and writing self-efficacy. *Reading & Writing Quarterly, 1-18*.
- Mohseniasl, F. (2014). Examining the effect of strategy instruction on writing apprehension and writing achievement of EFL learners. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 4(4)*, 811.
- Neumann, H., & McDonough, K. (2014). Exploring the relationships among student preferences, prewriting tasks, and text quality in an EAP context. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 15*, 14-26.
- Nguyen, P. N. T., Admiraal, W., Janssen, T., & Rijlaarsdam, G. (2018). Learning to write: Effects of prewriting tasks on English writings of Vietnamese students. *Asian EFL Journal, 20(9.1)*, 57-74.
- Nunan, D. (2003). *Practical English language teaching*. McGraw-Hill.
- Phan, T. M. L., & Phuong, H. Y. (2017). *High school students' perception and writing performance with freewriting technique implementation* [Paper presentation]. The 5

- Open TESOL Conference - Innovation and creativity in teaching and learning foreign languages, Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam.
- Richards, J. C., & Schmidt, R. (2002). *Longman dictionary of applied linguistics and language teaching*. Longman.
- Shell, D. F., Murphy, C. C., & Bruning, R. H. (1989). Self-efficacy and outcome expectancy mechanisms in reading and writing achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 81*(1), 91.
- Shin, Y. (2008). *The effects of planning on L2 writing: A study of Korean learners of English as a foreign language*. The University of Iowa.
- Soh, S. B. (2022). Task Complexity and Pre-writing Condition: Exploring Malaysian L2 Learners' Perceptions on Argumentative Writing. *3L: Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies, 28*(4).
- Weir, C. F. (1990). *Communicative language testing*. Prentice Hall Regents.
- Wendling, B. J., & Mather, N. (2008). *Essentials of evidence-based academic interventions* (Vol. 57). John Wiley & Sons.
- Woodrow, L. (2011). College English writing affect: Self-efficacy and anxiety. *System, 39*(4), 510-522.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Writing Test 1 (Pretest)

Time allotted: 70 minutes

Date:

Class:

Your Australian friend, **Oliver**, wants to travel around your country for a month. He wants to know when and where he should go. Now write a letter (about 100 words) to him.

In the body of the letter, you should write TWO paragraphs.

In the **first** paragraph, using the simple present to write about when he should come. You should write:

- when he should come,
- what the weather is like at that time,
- what he should wear if he comes that time,
- explain why you recommend that time to him.

In the **second** paragraph, using the simple present to write about a place(s) where he must go in your country. You should write:

- where the place is,
- what it is like,
- where he can visit there,
- what he can do there,
- explain why you recommend that place to him.

(adapted from Part 3, Writing Test 2 - Cambridge Preliminary English Test 3, p. 37)

Your letter here:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

The end.

Appendix 2: Writing Test 2 (Post-Test)

Time allotted: 70 minutes

Date:

Class:

Your American pen friend, **Mathis**, lives in a very busy street, so he wants to visit a quiet place for his next holiday. He wants to know about where you live and where you would like to visit for your next holiday. Now write a letter (about 100 words) to him.

In the body of the letter, you should write TWO paragraphs.

In the **first** paragraph, using the simple present to write about where you live. You should write:

- where you live,
- what your place is like,
- how the street is.

In the **second** paragraph, using the simple present to write about where you would like to visit for your next holiday. You should write:

- where you would like to go,
- what the place looks like,
- who you want to go with,
- what you can do in that place,
- explain why you want to visit that place.

(adapted from Part 3, Writing Test 4 - Cambridge Preliminary English Test 7, p. 85)

Your letter here:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

The end.

Appendix 3: Two Students' Texts on The Pretest and Post-Test

The following are the texts of **two students**, one from the EXP 1 and another from the EXP 2, on the pre- and post-tests. The students' original texts are typed by the researcher without any correction.

A. Pretest

a. The text from student A of the EXP 1

Dear **Oliver**,

How are you? I fell very happy the we are about to meet. You know, Viet Nam is the country with wonderful scenery, you should go in the autumn of September to the end October. Because the autumn in Ha Noi is very, warm with rows of cool green strees. The air is cold with yellow leaves, Because this suggest that time for you relax after tired.

You should wear a cool clothes go to Ha Noi. The flowers vendors look great with grills wearing pretty litte flowers ao dai take photo.

And you will enjoy all Ha Noi food noodles: Bun Cha, bun moc, bun thang, ...here streets. You can visit like Ho Guom, You can go to visit by car or by bus or bay taxi. I hope you will a trip great in Ha Noi. Ha Noi is the most suitable place for you to experience, See you soon.

Love,

(Student A's name)

b. The text from student A of the EXP 2

Dear **Oliver**,

How are you? Long time no see. You should come my country on summer. Because the scenery is very beautiful in summer. it's winter now and the weather is very cold in the morning and hot in the afternoon. I think you should come hear in the summer because the summer weather is very suitable for going to the beach. When you come my country, you should wear a lot of money Because food in Viet Nam so cheap.

When you come my country, you can eating: Pho, Bun Bo Hue, Banh Xeo, ... You can visit Old Quarter Hoi An, Ha Long Pay, Phong Nha - Ke Bang, Hue imperial palace. You can visit Uncle Ho's Mausoleum Because Uncle Ho is the great leader of Viet Nam. You will feel happy because Vietnamese people very friendly.

Love!

(Student A's name)

B. Post-test

a. The text from student A of the EXP 1

Dear **Mathis**,

How are you? Thank you for your letter. I am very happy to tell you about where I live. Currently, I am living in district of Tra Vinh City, always is place peaceful, where there are many straight rice fields, many rows of green trees, friendly people always help each other. The road in the morning is crowded motorbikes, because people go to works and school, the road is quite easy to go, the weather is quite warm.

Sapa is place I want to visit next summer vacation and go to visit with my friends. A very famous place in Viet Nam is tourists destination worth going and experiencing especially the chilly air. I really like that feeling. When go to Sapa, we can take a pictures with my family, my friends, go trekking, many beautiful scenes, house on stilts, enjoy many delicious dishes such as "Com Lam, Xoi bay mau, Ca sua nuong,..", wear people's costumes. Sapa look very nice because of the mountains and atmosphere here. I love Sapa. You should come and experience it.

Love

(student A's name)

b. The text from student A of the EXP 2

Dear **Mathis**,

How are you? Long time no see. I was born and raised in Tra Cu district Tra Vinh province. In my hometown have a lot of rice fields so beautiful and the river so beautiful. When I was child I used to swim in the river with my friends. I like the people in my hometown because they are very friendly. The street in my hometown so beautiful because both sides of the road have a lot of flower.

I want to going Ha Long Bay in next holiday. I want to going with my family because I love my family very much. I want to going Ha Long Bay because when I was child I watched Ha Long Bay on television and I love Ha Long Bay. I like the food and beautiful scenery here. The people in Ha Long Bay very friendls. I will come Ha Long Bay on next holiday.

Love,

(Student A's name)

Appendix 4: A Sample Lesson Plan for The Experimental Group 2 (Using Freewriting Strategy)

Writing topic 4: Food and restaurants.

Course: General English 3,

Level: Pre-intermediate,

Group: The experimental group 2,

Duration: Two periods (100 minutes),

Learning outcome: By the end of this lesson, students will be able to write about their favourite restaurant,

Teaching approach/learning strategy: Process-genre approach/ freewriting strategy,

Materials: Writing worksheet (a writing topic and a sample text from the book entitled "Cambridge Preliminary English Test 5").

Procedure		
Contents	Teacher's activities	Students' activities
Pre-writing (50 minutes)		
<p>Activity 1: Preparation for writing (10 minutes) (see Activity 1 in the Writing worksheet)</p> <p>Suggested answer key:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an English friend • to tell about a favorite restaurant • The letter will be about a favourite restaurant: name, location, food, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Give students a writing topic. - Ask students to read the writing topic and identify the writing context in terms of writing purpose, target audience and writing content by answering the given questions. - Ask students to give their answers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Read the writing topic and answer the questions. - Share their answers with the whole class. - Read the sample text and answer the questions. - Share their answers with the whole class.
<p>Activity 2: Sample text analysis (20 minutes) (see Activity 2 in the Writing worksheet)</p> <p>Suggested answer key:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sam • Leo • To tell about a restaurant • The letter begins with "Dear Leo," and ends with "Love, Linda". • Tense - present tense, passive voice, relative clause, etc. • Paragraph 1 is about the writer's favorite 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Give students a sample text. - Ask students to read the sample text and analyze the text in terms of writing purpose, target audience, text structure, grammatical features and the content of the text by answering the given questions. - Ask students to give their answers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Receive and read the text to get the gist. - Analyze the text. - Pay attention to the writing purpose, target audience, etc. - Provide the answers with the whole class.

<p>restaurant. Paragraph 2 is about the food and what the writer likes about the restaurant.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paragraph 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ what the name of the restaurant is ○ where it is situated ○ how often the writer goes there • Paragraph 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ what food the restaurant has ○ what the writer likes about the restaurant and her reasons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elicit students to think of the name and location of the restaurant, etc. - Ask students some questions. - Elicit students to think of the food in the restaurant and especially the reasons why the writer like it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Listen and answer as a whole class or individually. - Volunteer to answer. - Listen, take notes, and then answer individually or as a whole class.
<p>Activity 3: Idea generation (20 minutes)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask students to <i>freewrite individually</i> about the topic in 15 minutes. - Ask students to <i>review their freewriting and determine suitable ideas</i> for their writing in 5 minutes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Free write individually about the topic. - Review their freewriting and determine suitable ideas for their writing.
<p>II. While-writing (30 minutes)</p>		
<p>Independent writing</p>	<p>Ask students to write their first draft independently in 30 minutes.</p>	<p>Write their first draft independently in 30 minutes.</p>
<p>III. Post-writing (20 minutes)</p>		
<p>Self-revising and editing (see activity 5 in the writing worksheet)</p>	<p>Ask students to self-revise their draft by using the checklist and then edit their drafts.</p>	<p>Self-revise their draft by using the checklist and then edit their drafts.</p>

Creative Commons licensing terms

Author(s) will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions, and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions, and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of Foreign Language Teaching shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage, or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflicts of interest, copyright violations, and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated into the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed, and used in educational, commercial, and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).