

An investigation into the challenges of writing practice under awareness of the English majors at AGU

Binh Nguyen Thi Xuan*, Ngoc Le Thi Bich**

*Faculty of Foreign Languages, An Giang University, Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

**Alumni of Foreign Languages, An Giang University, Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to better understand the primary characteristics associated with difficulties in writing practice as perceived by An Giang University (AGU) final-year English majors, with a focus on linguistic features. A questionnaire was used to gather data from 131 English majors in total. The findings demonstrate that the proficiency in the linguistic components of writing in English, such as vocabulary, grammar structures, ideas, organization layout, and consistency, was a hindrance. These results have significant role for assisting students in identifying the causes of challenges and the formulation of potential remedies.

Keywords: Writing practice, linguistic features/ components, hindrance, challenges

1. Introduction

For EFL students, learning at university requires the progressive advancement of four English language skills, with writing being the most difficult topic. According to Ibnian’s (2017), “Lack of ideas” was the most frequent writing obstacle Jordanian EFL learners had, followed by “incorrect use of writing mechanics,” which aimed to determine the writing difficulties faced by university students. Besides that, another study of 52 EFL students at IAIN Samarinda (Samarinda State Institute of Islamic Studies in Indonesia) conducted by Toba and Noor’s (2019) found that the primary cause of writing challenges was a lack of proficiency in areas such as content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. Meanwhile, the lecturers’ use of the writing instruction technique, a lack of writing experience, a hatred of writing, anxiety when writing, a poor writing impression, a lack of motivation when writing, and time-consuming pressure were among the second factor’s personal components. In order to have a better understanding of the difficulties students face with writing in the context of Vietnam, the researcher focused on this topic with the AGU community. The stated problem has been understood by a survey conducted on 131 fourth-year students majoring in English Linguistics and Literature, and English Language Teacher Education by the researcher.

2. Findings and discussion

2.1 Challenges of writing practice in terms of linguistic aspect

By processing the data gathered from a survey questionnaire, the descriptive statistics test was run to find out the overall mean and standard deviation of the difficulties in terms of linguistic components.

The findings in Table 2.1 demonstrate that the participants encountered every challenge mentioned, with a mean score ranging from 3.63 to 4.023. They most frequently struggled with vocabulary, which is characterized by the excessive use of terminology from higher levels when writing and their restricted vocabulary. It is believed that this result brought about the unavoidable consequence of presenting idea under the aspect of vocabulary limitation, with $M = 3.90$ for idea

Table 2.1: Descriptive statistics of the difficulties

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	7 categories of the difficulties:
V	4.0267	1.09248	131	V: Vocabulary
G	3.8353	.90057	131	G: Grammar
A	3.9070	.82447	131	A: Idea
O	3.6357	1.10777	131	O: Organization
L	3.8779	.90413	131	L: Lack of consistency
D	3.7461	.79674	131	D: Other

To be more detailed, pictures of the challenges in each category have been provided beneath graphs (Figure 2.1– 2.6) to help effectively convey the findings for this issue.

2.2. Obstacles to vocabulary

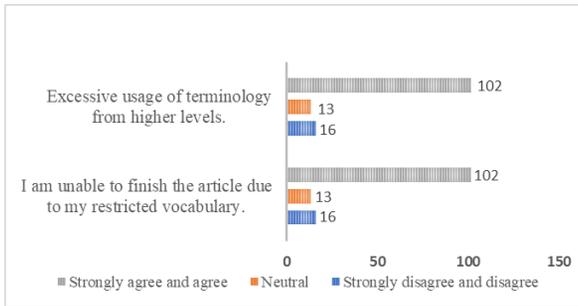


Figure 2.1. Vocabulary Difficulties

Note: the x-axis presents the number of students responding to the questions

The results in Figure 2.1 are consistent with those of Al-Khairi's (2013) study, which found that students' limited vocabulary size was the main obstacle to academic writing. According to Toba and Noor's (2019) research, students also struggled to select appropriate words and registers for their compositions depending on the situation and context. This conclusion was supported by Cooley and Lewkowicz (1995), who discovered that students' inability to write well was caused by issues with word choice, namely those related to formality and inappropriateness. Similarly, the figures presented in Figure 2.1 illustrated the participants' barriers to vocabulary, most of them got limited vocabulary range, especially terminology to improve their writings.

2.3. Challenges with idea

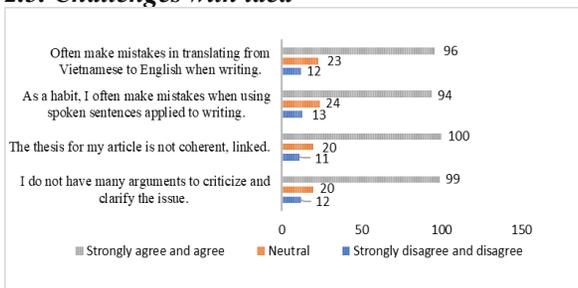


Figure 2.2. Ideas

Note: the x-axis presents the number of students responding to the questions

Most sophomores agreed that they had trouble struggling with their opinions and arguments to support their positions. Concurrently, 94 and 96 participants expressed concern about their tendency to make mistakes for converting spoken words into written compositions, and translating from Vietnamese into English when writing in turn. Besides, writing development was also their big problem for lack of arguments to illuminate the issue

as required, as well as linking the ideas logically for coherence.

2.4. Grammar structure difficulties

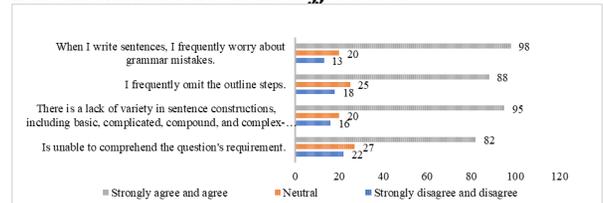


Figure 2.3. Grammar

Note: the x-axis presents the number of students responding to the questions

According to 95 and 98 out of 131 responses in Figure 2.3, the most concern about learning writing includes making grammar mistakes and employing various sentence structures. Considered as a problematic issue, grammar was seriously investigated under scientific researches. Firstly, Al-Khairi (2013) found the challenge of not using correct grammar with a mean at 3.56 and emphasized Al-Khasawneh's (2010) discovery that students regard grammar to be the most difficult component of academic writing. Additionally, Toba and Noor (2019) found that students struggled the most with subject-verb agreement, tenses, pronouns, auxiliary verbs, plural forms, -s/-es, and -ed forms. Lastly, according to Al Fadda (2012), transformation is actually a prevalent writing problem for EFL students.

2.5. Consistency

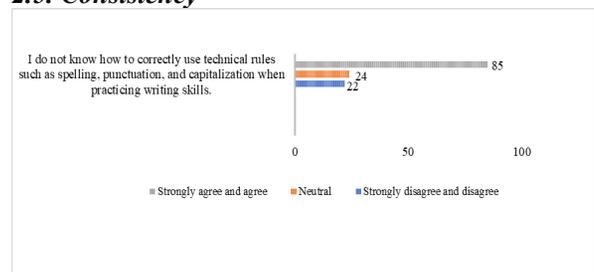


Figure 2.4. Consistency

Note: the x-axis presents the number of students responding to the questions

Shown in Figure 2.4, most students were not sure to correctly apply certain technical rules of writing when practicing writing skills although these are understood as basic elements, including spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

2.6. Organizational layout

The most prevalent challenge in the organizational layout category is structure of an essay with three

main parts as introduction, body, and conclusion, as seen in Figure 2.5. It is found that most of the final-year students (≥ 80) struggled with writing these sections as well as paragraph structure. Also, this problem is strongly illustrated by 79 respondents of mismatching between the students' writing style and order with the required category's order, or they experienced anxiety when frequently making error of not reading the required genres.

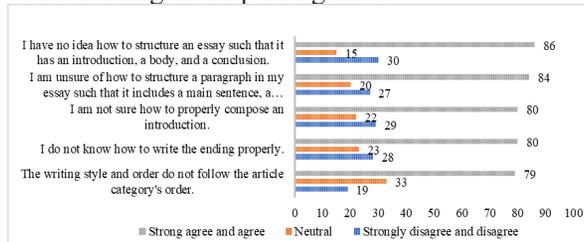


Figure 2.5. Organizational layout

2.7. Other difficulties

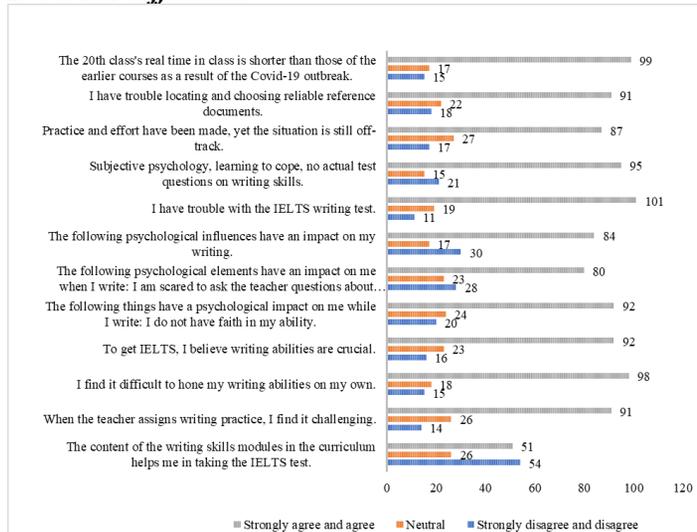


Figure 2.6. Other difficulties

Figure 2.6 shows that apart from language aspects, psychological influences took a crucial role in hindering students' competence (≥ 80 respondents), especially the feelings of taking the writing portion of an important examination or even doing in-class writing practice were also under pressure for a considerable percentage of students at 77,1%. Moreover, under the participants' perception, other challenges relating to course duration, materials, assignments, course content might not assist them to improve their writing ability, and may be interpreted as an irrelevance to the expected level of competence.

3. Conclusion

The study's findings demonstrate the challenges

senior English major students at AGU faced in practicing writing skills by answering the question "What problems relating to the linguistic components do students face in doing writing tasks?". Based on the data collected from the survey, the responses to the question reveal a thorough grasp of students' challenges through the inability to express ideas coherently and cohesively in English, limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, poor writing practice, a lack of flexibility in sentence structures (complex, simple, compound, and compound sentences), and more.

The contribution of the study, therefore, significantly advances the field of academic writing research in general and writing skills in particular. The results of the study can help teachers and students at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of AGU make the required adjustments to teaching and learning writing skills, in addition to enabling further research.

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