

Teaching english writing For students majoring in information technology at Hai Phong university, difficulties and solutions

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Abstract: *Writing skill plays an important role in the process of teaching and learning English. It is one of the four required skills for language learners. Through the practice of teaching English to students majoring in information technology at Hai Phong University, the author found that students encountered many difficulties when learning this skill. This article proposes some appropriate solutions to improve writing skill for students in general and students majoring in information technology at Hai Phong University.*

Keywords: *Writing skill, teaching and learning, students majoring in information technology*

1. Introduction

According to today's educational innovation trends, writing skill is one of four indispensable skills in the process of teaching and learning languages. Written language is not only a combination of thinking and words, but also interference among cultures that the language belongs to. Good writing must express the writer's own ideas and identity, but still retain the characteristics of English.

From the current situation of teaching English, including teaching writing skill to students majoring in information technology at Hai Phong University, the author found that students were still quite confused during writing class. Many students, when working independently, cannot write short sentences or paragraphs despite previous suggestions from teachers. This situation significantly affects the quality of English teaching and learning for students majoring in information technology.

2. Content

2.1. Some difficulties in teaching writing skill to students majoring in information technology at Hai Phong University

Through analyzing and studying to determine students' abilities correctly as well as evaluating the difficulties that teachers encounter when teaching English writing skill in class, the author finds that the above situation comes from many different subjective and objective reasons.

Firstly, students' language abilities are quite

limited. Students are lacked of vocabularies and sentence structures, so it is difficult for them to convey the ideas in their head to the pages. Most of the sentences are quite clunky, lack of coherence, and/or are incorrect in both structure and word usage. Furthermore, the writing lacks applicability and creativity, so the content is sketchy and not appealing to readers.

Secondly, some students tend to think in Vietnamese and then translate it into English. As a result, sentences have unclear meanings or are incorrect. The assembly arbitrary of words without any rules or structure makes the sentences naive and difficult to understand, completely unlike the way native speakers use written language.

Thirdly, many students are not interested in class. They attend class or write papers reluctantly. Writing is a persistent process and cannot be successful in just one day. Sharing the same view on this issue, Hogue & Oshima (1991) once asserted that "Writing is a process, not a product" (p.208). Therefore, to be able to achieve writing skills, students must have will, perseverance and constant effort.

The above situation significantly affects the quality of teaching and learning writing skill, and makes it difficult to keep up and meet the requirements of current foreign language teaching and learning in general and to improve the quality of English teaching for information technology students in Hai Phong University in particular.

2.2. Solutions to improve writing skill to students majoring in information technology at Hai Phong University

a) Use of class time effectively

According to Oshima & Hogue, 1997 (p.128), to utilize to effectively class time, each teacher must prepare lessons carefully to be able to organize learning activities well and fully implement the writing teaching process in 3 steps: Pre – writing, While- writing and Post – writing Activities.

Stage 1: Pre-writing Activities

Teachers need to apply modern teaching principles from “speaking” to “writing” by providing discussions in pairs and small groups to prepare the necessary ideas, vocabulary, and grammatical structures for articles.

Pre- writing activity can be organized in the form of a game to create excitement for students, helping them actively participate in class so they can produce better and more creative writing.

Pre- writing activity is an extremely important stage because writing skill, especially essay writing skill, are not simply writing down what the writer is thinking, but it requires the research and practice to become more proficient. That means when writing anything even just a short writing or writing a story or a novel it’s always a process of editing, adding, and completing.

Stage 2: While – writing Activities

This is the next activity of Pre-writing activity, so there needs to be a connection and inheritance of the activities that students have just performed. At this stage, students must complete their writing products in draft. The level of writing difficulty depends on the requirements of the article. Students can be asked to write sentences, short conversations or simple paragraphs with the suggested phrases provided. For groups of students who are quite talented, the teacher can ask them to write freely about topics in the lesson.

The organization of activities in this section can be done individually, in pairs or in small groups. However, teacher supervision and support is needed so that students can complete the assigned tasks correctly and with the highest quality and efficiency.

Stage 3: Post – writing Activities

This is a key step in writing class to help students compare, discuss and improve their writing. Sharing their views on this issue, Arnaunet & Barrett (1990) once asserted, “Feedback and

comments on writing play an important role in the process of teaching writing” (p.147). It would be meaningless if teachers skip this step because this is the step to evaluate student performance. Students need to recognize their own strengths to actively promote them, and at the same time overcome their limitations to improve their future writing.

However, the class time is short, so using overlapping pairs and groups to correct errors and give comments is quite appropriate. These activities not only helps students be more active in class but also helps them learn, strengthen their writing skills and the habit of completing their own writing. To do students self-correcting effectively, teachers needs to set clear criteria or list the questions to help students do it more easily. In addition, the teacher’s role in this stage is very important. They will direct, supervise and support students as needed. At the same time, it is necessary to summarize important points so that students can complete their writing more quickly and effectively.

b) Provide complete background knowledge of structural vocabulary before writing practice sessions

One of the requirements of writing is to write grammar correctly. No matter how good the author’s idea is, if the grammar is too bad, the article will not be successful. An incorrect sentence does not make sense or distorts the idea the writer wants to convey. Many students really want to learn to write a lot and well, but the more they write, the more mistakes they make. Therefore, it is necessary to provide them additional types of lessons to review vocabulary and reinforce structure in vocabulary and structure lessons.

These types of exercises will help students practice and expand their vocabulary and sentence structure. As a result, students can confidently and flexibly use them in practicing listening, speaking, reading and writing. If time is limited, teachers can assign homework for them to do on their own. Teachers can choose exercises from grammar books, writing books or on the internet. If students have many opportunities to consolidate and practice, their vocabulary and grammar will soon be improved.

c) *Let students read sample articles to familiarize themselves with the topics and writing genres.*

Reading sample writing plays an important role in the process of teaching and learning writing. Students learn writing partly through studying writing samples. By carefully reading and reviewing many similar writing samples, students not only understand the layout and structure of each writing genre, but also know how to express sentences clearly and coherently. The writing samples will enrich students' vocabulary and sentence structure. They will learn how to use words and sentence structures correctly in each specific situation. On the other hand, reading literary samples also supports and improves social knowledge that they can later apply in their writing.

d) Enhance pair and group activities during writing lessons

In teaching writing, teachers should let students to work individually, in pairs or in small groups. These will increase students' enthusiasm, encourage them to know how to complete their writing and not focus too much on writing single errors. Sharing the same opinion on this issue, writing teaching expert, Krashen (1982) also pointed out: "Teachers should not only focus on language errors but must also mention the content and structure of the writing." (p.109). This prevents students from feeling self-conscious and feeling guilty when they write incorrectly, and at the same time helps them work harder in the next writing lessons.

It can be seen that carefully preparing learning activities for students is extremely necessary in writing lessons. These activities must closely follow the general objectives of the subject and are divided into 3 steps: Pre-Writing, While-Writing and Post Writing. Depending on the lesson content, teachers can immediately use the activities in the book or can flexibly convert them to best suit to students. This is the key step to the success of a writing lesson. Writing a description or short paragraph all comes from the foundation of understanding language, understanding culture and the synthesis of logical thinking.

3. Conclusion

To have an effective writing lesson, it requires each teacher to have suitable teaching methods and good lesson content that arouses students' interest in learning. However, the success of each lesson depends not only on the preparation of each lecturer but also greatly on the efforts and cooperation of

the students. Understanding students' strengths and weaknesses will help teachers approach and teach writing more effectively. From student's side, they also reflect on themselves, thereby consciously trying to achieve the best academic results.

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