

# Investigating difficulties faced by second-year English major students in learning English writing skills at Hanoi University of Natural Resources and Environment

*Tran Xuan Hao\**

*\*Hanoi University of Natural Resources and Environment.*

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**Abstract:** *This study aims to identify the problems faced by English major sophomores at Hanoi University of Natural Resources and Environment (HUNRE) in acquiring writing skills. It also aims to propose solutions that may be helpful for students to overcome writing difficulties. The participants of this research were eighty-eight students who were English major sophomores at HUNRE. The instruments used in the present study were two questionnaires. The results showed that the students had eight difficulties in learning English writing including difficulties with Motivation and Confidence, Background Knowledge, Grammar, Vocabulary, Ideas and Developing Writing, Coherence, Organization, and Cultural differences. Among these difficulties, "Background knowledge" caused the most difficulty for the students.*

**Keywords:** *Writing difficulties, writing skills, learning English writing, Hunre*

## 1. Introduction

Writing skills are essential for academic and professional success and also is a way of communicating ideas, information, arguments, and opinions to a specific audience. In terms of the need and importance of the English language, English writing is viewed as a talent that students acquire as part of the learning process. In truth, writing necessitates a variety of modest abilities that are built at numerous levels such as sentence level, paragraph level, essay level, and so on. So, It is difficult for students to meet all the requirements of writing.

Though much research is dedicated to students' difficulties, no research focuses on HUNRE students' writing challenges. Therefore, more research needs to be conducted to understand how English major sophomores at HUNRE view writing. The objectives of the study are to identify the difficulties that sophomores HUNRE English major encounter when writing in English with the following research questions: 1) What difficulties do English major sophomores at HUNRE face in learning English writing? 2) Which is the most prominent problem among the participants' writing difficulties? From those results, the author proposes solutions to help students overcome those difficulties.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Definition of writing

Writing is one of the language skills studied in the classroom. Linguists describe writing in a wide

range of ways. Nunan (2003: 88) states that writing is an intellectual activity of finding ideas and thinking about the way to express and arrange them into a statement and paragraph that is clear to be understood by the people. It indicates that the writers are demanded to show their thoughts and organize them into a good composition. In addition, writing presents the writer's concept of understanding an issue that is shown to the public. It requires the integration of ideas systematically written.

Raimes (1983: 76) states that writing is a skill in which we express ideas, feelings, and thoughts which is to be arranged in words, sentences, and paragraphs. Writing also reinforces the use of sentence structure and tenses, idioms, and vocabulary correctly in order to make the reader get the idea clearly.

From the opinion above, it can be said that writing is a versatile and indispensable skill that plays a crucial role in communication, education, culture, and personal development. It is the most significant activity in the process of learning a foreign language.

### 2.2. The importance of writing

One of the most crucial English abilities is writing. Writing helps people not only develop their writing abilities and knowledge but also with other key English skills. The necessity of raising pupils' understanding of the value of writing skills is also acknowledged by Feldmann and Usoff (2001). The ultimate objective is to help students write more efficiently, and that is also the first step. To put it

briefly, the writers emphasize the value of writing, which is crucial for EFL students' success.

### 3. Methodology

To explore the difficulties of writing in English encountered by English major sophomores at HUNRE, the researchers conducted mixed-mood research. Therefore, the researchers administered the close questionnaire results to reveal students' difficulties in writing English. The questionnaire included eight main problems that 88 students had. Each difficulty was designed with two to five items. Each item had five levels for the students to choose. 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree. The students' responses were analyzed quantitatively using Google Sheets and the SPSS software program to discover the type of difficulties most frequently encountered by students. These difficulties were analyzed quantitatively to investigate students' difficulties.

#### 3.1. Participants

The participants of the study were 88 English majors from the HUNRE in two classes for the academic year 2022-2023. The reason behind choosing the whole students for the second year is that although they are studying a course in Reading – Writing 2 and they expected to experience good writing, they still face difficulties in writing showing a negative attitude towards it.

Table 1: Participants

No.	Class Name	No of student	Percentage
1	ĐH11NA1	47	53.4%
2	ĐH11NA2	41	46.6%
<b>TOTAL</b>		88	100%

#### 3.2. Results of the Study

The answers of the students to the questionnaire items were collected and statistically analyzed using Google Forms and SPSS software. The author took out the highest mean for each group to compare to find out the most challenges faced by English major sophomores at HUNRE.

Group No.	Student's difficulties in studying writing	Questions No.
1	Problem with Motivation and Confidence	1-5
2	Problem with Background Knowledge	6-10
3	Problem with Grammar	11-14
4	Problem with Vocabulary	15-18
5	Problem with Ideas and Development	19-21
6	Problem with Coherence	22-25
7	Problem with Organization	26-28
8	Problem with Cultural differences	29-30
<b>TOTAL</b>		30 questions

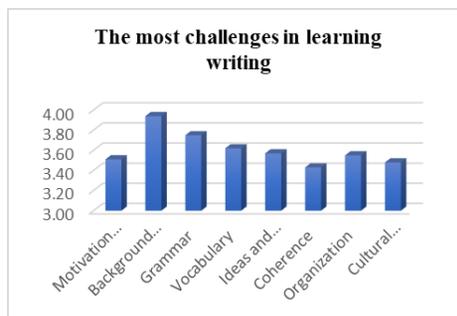


Table 2: Question group of difficulties in studying writing

Chart 1 above table stated the degree of difficulties that the participants encountered when they learned English writing skills. The chart implied that the students had the biggest difficulties with 1. Background Knowledge (Mean 3.9). The second problem was about 2. Grammar (3.7) and the third problem was about 3. Vocabulary (3.9). The trouble with 4. Ideas and Development was the fourth difficulty that the students encountered (3.55) Problem with 5. Organization was the fifth difficulty (3.55). The next trouble was about 6. Motivation and Confidence (3.51) The seventh trouble was 7. Cultural differences (3.48). The problem with 8. Coherence was the latest difficulty (3.43). Generally, the students had writing difficulties with Background Knowledge, grammar, and Vocabulary which offered the highest rates of comparison. In contrast, problems with Coherence held the lowest percentage among the eight major problems that students encounter.

#### 3.3. Discussion

The information analysis method concluded that the findings supported the hypothesis. Many English majors sophomores at HUNRE found it challenging to learn writing. The major writing challenges the sophomores faced while learning writing were issues with background knowledge, grammar, and vocabulary. The study's main premise was that students had trouble with grammar and vocabulary when learning English writing in class.

According to the results of this research, the sophomores not only faced writing problems with vocabulary and grammar but also encountered writing difficulties with a lack of background knowledge. They agreed and strongly agreed that Background knowledge plays an important role in their writing. Lack of background knowledge in writing can lead to inaccuracies, superficial content, and difficulties in explaining complex ideas, making it challenging

to engage readers effectively, so they have writing difficulties in class. Moreover, a lack of background knowledge led them to poor vocabulary, bad grammar, bad developing and organizing ideas, and uninterested in writing topics. Therefore, they felt unconfident, and they had English writing difficulties. In addition, students' interest, students' try and students' motivation in studying were also factors that affected their background knowledge. Those elements directly influenced their writing abilities, which mainly caused writing problems for the students. In short, the main factor that affected HUNRE sophomores' writing problems was background knowledge.

#### **4. Recommendations**

##### **4.1. Recommendations for the students**

First of all, students need to seek help from Teachers and friends. Seeking guidance from teachers and peers is essential. Teachers provide expertise and personalized feedback, laying a strong foundation for effective writing. Peer support, through collaboration and peer review, offers fresh perspectives and a sense of community.

Secondly is Utilizing Educational Resources. Educational resources like textbooks, online courses, and writing centers are valuable. They offer comprehensive explanations, structured learning experiences, and expert guidance to address writing challenges.

Thirdly, is Practicing Regularly and Reading Widely. Regular writing practice and reading diverse materials enhance proficiency and confidence. Critical reading skills help students understand effective writing techniques.

Next is Studying Grammar and Mechanics. Mastery of grammar and mechanics ensures writing clarity and correctness. Resources like grammar guides and online tools aid understanding, with proofreading and editing reinforcing this knowledge.

The last one is Setting Goals. Goal setting provides direction and motivation. Specific objectives, deadlines, and a structured revision process foster discipline and improvement in writing skills.

##### **4.2. Recommendations for the teachers**

To help students overcome difficulties related to background knowledge, grammar, vocabulary, and motivation in learning writing, teachers should adopt several effective strategies. Firstly, they should prioritize creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment where students feel comfortable asking questions and seeking help. This can encourage

students to address gaps in their background knowledge and express their concerns openly.

Secondly, teachers should provide targeted instruction and resources to address grammar and vocabulary challenges. This may include grammar-focused lessons, vocabulary-building exercises, and recommended readings to expand their linguistic toolkit.

Motivation plays a crucial role in learning. Teachers should strive to make writing engaging and relevant by incorporating real-world examples and encouraging creativity. Setting clear goals and celebrating students' progress can boost their motivation and confidence.

Lastly, regular feedback and assessment are essential. Teachers should provide constructive feedback on students' writing, highlighting areas for improvement and acknowledging their strengths. This personalized guidance can inspire students to continue honing their writing skills and overcome their difficulties effectively.

#### **5. Conclusion**

By collecting and analyzing student responses, I would like to confirm that the difficulties of English major sophomores can be attributed to three major causes. The first factor was their own. They lacked background knowledge in vocabulary, grammar, social experiences, and knowledge. Furthermore, they lacked motivation and enthusiasm to study well at times. The second factor was related to other elements such as the facilities, the study environment, the different levels, and the limited time they spent practicing this skill. The third factor is a lack of assistance from both teachers and friends. These factors had a direct impact on students' ability to learn foreign languages, particularly English.

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