

BUILDING MOTIVATION FOR ENGLISH WRITING AMONG THE STUDENTS OF DONG NAI UNIVERSITY: APPROACHES TO IGNITE AND MAINTAIN INTEREST

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ABSTRACT

In the progress of international integration, English has become one of the effective tools for people from all over the world to communicate with each other. One of the ways people use to communicate is to write. In this situation, the author mentions to write in English. Although English has been one compulsory subject in Vietnam for a long time, some students still have difficulties in writing English. Little exposure to practical situation is one of the reasons for this issue. Moreover, writing takes students a lot of time to brainstorm, make an outline, and produce their outcomes. Therefore, writing, especially in a foreign language sometimes makes students bored and tired. What students need in these situations is a motivation that can help them to overcome their problems. Understanding the reasons and the importance of writing, the author has tried a variety of strategies to build students' interest in writing English. These strategies are gathered from many researchers. The application of these strategies into classroom may help to arouse students' attention, making students become more active in class.

Key words: *writing English, motivation, students' interest*

1. INTRODUCTION

English writing skill is really crucial for students in the time of globalization, especially in non-English-speaking countries like Vietnam. The ability to write English effectively has become an important key to academic and professional success. However, for university students, especially those in non-English majors, writing in a foreign language is really a big challenge. There are such a lot of reasons for this difficulty, including lack of motivation, insufficient practice, and a disconnection between writing tasks and students' personal interest. Building an interest for writing can help students improve their language skills, boost their confidence, and open up new opportunities.

At Dong Nai University in Vietnam, many students have difficulties in using English, especially in writing. Therefore, this paper aims to collect various strategies for students to overcome their barriers and maintain their interest. The paper gathers studies from various sources to recommend some practical approaches for educators to apply to encourage and sustain students' interest in writing.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Importance of Motivation in Language Learning

Motivation plays a critical role in the process of language learning. It directly affects learners' effort, persistence, and success. According to Deci and Ryan (1985), intrinsic motivation – completing a task simply because people

find it enjoyable- is a significant key to students' engagement in learning activities. Writing, a complicated skill, requires not only good knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but also persistent interest and motivation which help learners overcome challenges (new words or difficult grammar points).

Particularly, Harmer (2015) states that providing a good learning environment where students feel comfortable and inspired is essential for boosting their passion for writing. Without enough motivation, students may easily lack the initiative to engage with writing tasks, leading to low proficiency outcomes.

Motivation is the key for all learners to acquire a new language in general and to better writing skill in particular. Especially, as Brown (2007) and Harmer (2015) stated, student motivation and engagement are essential factors in improving writing proficiency.

2.2. Challenges among Students in Writing English

Many students in Vietnam are afraid of writing in English because of lack of vocabulary, fear of making mistakes and limited exposure to English outside their classroom. This highlighted in a research by Nguyen (2017) that many Vietnamese students feel anxious in writing English due to the fact that they may use incorrect grammar or they don't have enough structure to make a meaningful sentence.

Spending a lot of time on a writing task also makes it become a tedious one. Because of this, it is really difficult for students to stay motivated.

2.3. Best Practices in Teaching Writing

These days, a lot of strategies have been applied to ignite students' interest in writing. Researches by Hamer (2015) and Raimes (1983) indicate that interactive and student-centered writing tasks, for example group writing projects, peer editing, and writing for a real audience, can improve students' motivation and engagement in writing. Lee (2018) also emphasizes the importance of integrating personal interests into writing tasks in his study. Having a chance to write about a topic that learners are really interested in makes them likely to brainstorm more ideas, be more active and produce higher-quality outcomes.

Besides that, according to Warschauer & Healey (1998), the use of technology in writing, such as blogging and online writing platforms, has been indicated to help students better their engagement.

3. STRATEGIES TO IGNITE INTEREST IN ENGLISH WRITING

3.1. Student-Centered Writing Tasks

From Lee's research (2018), learners seem to more active and enthusiastic when they are allowed to write about topics that they have good knowledge of or they feel familiar with. The topics may be about their hobbies or any social issues that they care about. This increases their motivation, critical thinking skills and creativity in writing English.

Moreover, giving students a chance to choose what they want to write about makes them easy to engage with the task, and get good results.

3.2. Technology Integration

Technology plays a really essential role in human life. Therefore, using multimedia tools such as blogs, podcasts, online forums is obviously an effective way to arouse students' inspiration in writing. By using these kinds of tools, students are allowed to share their work in public and receive a lot of feedback from the others quickly without a feeling of being shy as they are in class.

Warschauer & Healey (1998) has proved in their study that applying technology in writing helps students not only better their writing skills but also boost their confidence and ability to communicate through online platforms.

3.3. Creative Writing Activities

Creative writing means students have opportunities to create their own stories, poetries, or role plays.... to express their creativity in English and find out their potential ability. These kinds of tasks help students not

only to relax and but also to explore new language structures (Harmer, 2015). By this way, students can absorb language more easily. Moreover, applying these activities in class is also a way to make English become closer and more practical to learners themselves.



Figure: Posters for Earth Day by Students at Dong Nai University

3.4. Collaborative Writing and Peer Editing

Collaborative writing is group writing. Students write in a group, share ideas and give feedback to each other before producing a complete work.

Working in a group creates a safe environment for students. They do not need to feel shy when expressing their ideas. It also encourages students to be more responsible when every member in a group has a balanced role in completing the final work.

Working and editing together is an effective method for students to learn from each other. They can learn not only from other's mistakes but also from other's strength.

In their study, Johnson & Johnson (2009) shows that working in groups, especially in writing, improves students' writing skills and strengthens their communication and teamwork abilities.

4. DISCUSSION

The strategies discussed in this paper imply that to build and maintain a passion for English writing requires a lot of approaches.

At Dong Nai University, the author has applied these four strategies in teaching English writing. Each strategy has its own advantages and disadvantages.

For Student-centered Writing Tasks, students write about what they are familiar with. The problem is that the given topic may be a good one to this group of students; however, for other ones, it may not be a good topic any more. To solve this, the author provides a variety of topics so that it suits every member in class. Nevertheless, it really takes time to give feedback and some students may feel distracted.

For Technology Integration, with the help of technology, students can write and publish their writing any time they like. It may bring a lot of benefits to students in improving their writing if they are interested in it. The only problem is that sometimes students can be too dependent on technology without understanding grammar structure deeply. This leads to the lack of awareness of their mistakes and the weakness in improving their writing skills independently.

For Creative Writing Activities, this is really an exciting learning method for students who are quite good at English themselves. This is a chance for them to express what they have known and create new ideas. However, for those who are not good at English, this is really a challenge.

For Collaborative Writing and Peer Editing, although working in groups helps students learn from each other, sometimes it is easy to lead to conflicts. This may take students a lot of time to solve the conflict.

Each kind of strategies will suit only a group of students, not all students in a class. Therefore, to maintain an interest among all of students requires educators a lot of effort to be flexible and adapt suitable teaching methods to the preferences of students.

5. CONCLUSION

Creating an exciting environment for students to study English in general and to write English in particular inquires careful planning and the combination of various strategies. The use of student-centered writing task, technology integration, creative writing activities or collaborative writing can build and arouse students' motivation, which helps them develop the essential skill for their success.

At Dong Nai University, the author thinks that by combining these kinds of strategies together, educators can make all the members in class become more active, and enhance students' engagement with English writing.

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