

FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENTS' MOTIVATION IN WRITING

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ABSTRACT

Among the four skills integrated in learning English, writing seems to be the biggest challenge to students especially students from disadvantaged areas as Thai Nguyen and some nearby mountainous provinces. The study aimed at addressing factors affecting students' motivation in writing. First year non-English major students were randomly selected from three classes during the school year 2023-2024 to be respondents in the study. Some suggestions on how to motivate students to write were drawn basing on the results of the study in the hope of helping students find it more involved and interested in writing lessons.

Keyword : - motivation, writing skills, Thai Nguyen University of Sciences

1. INTRODUCTION

Along with the trend of globalization, the increasing importance of English is also acknowledged in university level education in Vietnam. English is now compulsory in universities as mentioned above about 330 hours. To be proficient learner of English, students need to have access to a wide range materials and to be good at integrating the four language skills: speaking listening, reading and writing. This seems to be a reasonable long-term goal. It is difficult to reach this goal as freshmen students receive virtually almost no training in such skills.

Motivation is always considered one of the crucial factors which decide the success of learners. Chilingaryan and Gorbatenko defines motivation as a thing that can promote students' determination and interest in language learning. According to Dornyei (2011), motivation is "what moves a person to make certain choices, to engage in action, to expend effort and persist in action". Budiharto & Amalia (2019) and Ryan & Deci (2000) classify motivation into two kinds: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation implies the internal feelings of a person which encourage him or her to do some things, while extrinsic motivation means factors from outside of the person. It has been believed that intrinsic motivation is more pivotal than extrinsic motivation in urging a person to implement something (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In language teaching and learning, motivation seems to be a key factor leading learners in the way of success. However, Ellis (1996) explains Vietnamese EFL learners' motivations are determined by teachers' plan and the students' determination, especially in testing. Also, Le (2000) argues in Vietnam, learners tend to have more extrinsic motivation under the pressure of exams. Interestingly, a lot of Vietnamese students appear to have less interest in writing lessons, compared with learning other skills. Tran (2001) explains the common method in teaching writing in Vietnam as an individual activity while the teacher is the sole audience and the students are very quiet. However, Tribble (1996) complains the process of writing as well as writing as a communicative activity seems to have been neglected in teaching and evaluating writing tasks. More importantly, writing is considered very complicated and time – consuming by most students. According to Ly (2007), lack of interest and motivation in writing is a real problem that many Vietnamese students have faced.

However, as a matter of fact, the number of researches on how to motivate students in learning writing in Vietnam seems to be limited. That is the reason why the researchers decided to carry out the study at Thai Nguyen University of Sciences with the hope of finding out the factors affecting students' motivation in learning writing and their challenges. Thus, they could give some solutions to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning writing skill at the university.

2. SUBJECT AND METHODOLOGY

The descriptive method was also used in the study to collect the data related to students' motivation in writing.

The study was conducted in the College of Sciences, Thai Nguyen University. The College offers 20 full-time bachelor programs majoring in natural and social sciences. It has 300 fulltime instructors and professors. Every

year, the college admits more than one thousand students who mainly come from mountainous provinces in the north of Vietnam.

The subjects of this study were 150 students coming from 3 classes of General English 1 during the second semester of school year 2023-2024 at Thai Nguyen University of Sciences. They are studying different majors including natural and social sciences at the College. Most of them are from mountainous provinces in the North of Vietnam which limits their opportunities for the use of English.

A survey questionnaire was prepared to collect information of the students' motivation in writing.

3. FINDINGS

The following are the findings of the study:

3.1. Students' Profiles

Table 1 presents the profile of the students according to their age and sex. As indicated in the table, majority of them with 84 percent are 18 years old, while 6.7 percent of them are in 17 years old. The rest are older, with 4 percent at age 20 years old and 2 percent has age of 22 years old. The mean age is 18.29 with a standard deviation of 1.10, indicating that the students are at the right age for first year level in college.

As regards their sex, 35 or 23.3 percent of the students are males and 115 or 76.7 percent of them are females with total of 150 participants who are first year college students. The findings reveal that most of the students are dominated by females as reflected in the frequency of 115 or 76.7 percent.

Table 1. Profiles of students in terms of age and sex.

Age	Frequency (n = 45)	Percent
17.0	10	6.7
18.0	126	84
20.0	6	4
21.0	5	3.3
22.0	3	2
Mean Age = 19.6		
Sex	Frequency (n = 45)	Percent
Male	35	23.3
Female	115	76.7

Table 2 presents the profile of the students according to their experience in learning English. As indicated in the table, majority of them with 50 percent have learned English for 8 years (from primary school to high school), while 11.3 percent of them admitted learning English for only 3 years at high school. It can be seen from the table that most of students at Thai Nguyen University of Sciences have been exposed to English from secondary school to high school.

Table 2. Profiles of students in terms English learning experience.

Years of learning English	Frequency (n = 45)	Percent
12.0	58	38.7
8.0	75	50
3.0	17	11.3

3.2. Factors affecting students' motivation in writing

Table 3 presents mean level of factors that motivate students to write. It could be seen from the table that all factors *moderately motivate* students in writing. Specifically, from among these factors, it is *the teacher* that got a mean score of 3.73 with standard deviation of 0.69 followed by *the writing strategies* with a mean score of 3.38 with standard deviation of 0.53. *Importance of writing skills* got a mean score of 3.27 with standard deviation of 0.81 and *the students' background knowledge of English language* with a mean score of 3.20 with standard deviation of 0.69. The factor that got the lowest mean from among these factors is *the reading materials* with a mean score of 3.02 and a standard deviation of 0.75.

The findings could be ascribed to the fact that students were not being taught to practice writing strategies a great deal, so they were not much aware of significance of writing strategies for success in writing. Although, it was previously found in Binh's (2009) study that higher marks in writing subject did not lead to higher motivation, it was interesting to realize that nearly half of the students supposed success was important to their studying the subject. In terms of self-esteem, students would like to show their achievement internally by their progress that they can self-evaluate rather than by the marks explicitly given by teacher only. It was also accounted for their psychological characteristics as adult learners. Nevertheless, teachers and early success are crucial in initiating motivation, but it is only to internalize those external factors, can learners maintain motivation for long-term benefit. as professed by LI Dongfeng (2012).

Table 3. Factors that motivate students to write.

Variables	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Description
The reading materials (topics, information, level of challenge)	3.02	0.75	<i>Moderately motivated</i>
The teacher of writing (teacher's personality, teacher's teaching and assessing method, teacher's pedagogical ability)	3.73	0.69	<i>Moderately motivated</i>
The background knowledge of the English language	3.20	0.69	<i>Moderately motivated</i>
Importance of writing skills in studying	3.27	0.81	<i>Moderately motivated</i>
The writing strategies	3.38	0.53	<i>Moderately motivated</i>
Overall Weighted Mean = 3.32 SD= 0.70			Remarks: <i>Moderately motivated</i>

Legend:

- 3.00 – 4.00 – *Moderately motivated*
- 2.00- 2.99 - *Motivated*
- 1.00 – 1.99 - *Less motivated*
- 0 – 0.99 - *Not at all motivated*

3.3 Students' Responses to Teacher's Activities

Table 4 presents the reading materials which the students are exposed to. As gleaned from the table, students admitted that their teacher used some techniques to motivate them to write. Students said that among 9 different motivational techniques mentioned, they really enjoy almost all techniques listed except for one which they only quite like. Topping the list of the techniques they really enjoy is giving feedback regularly and appropriately with mean score of 3.96. This was followed by asking students to reconstruct the writing from the notes with mean score of 3.73. Technique that appealed as well to the students was holding discussion before writing which got a mean score of 3.60. Moreover, students really enjoy writing when their teacher often gave them supplementary reading materials or discussed with them about the topics of their interest as well as using visual aids with a mean score of 3.56. In here, the teacher employed and explored the advantages of visual aids and combined the text book with relevant materials for extensive writing to satisfy students' needs and interests. Following the list of techniques that they really enjoy are the items on asking students to make notes under the following headings with a mean score of 3.33, discussing the

tasks with the students, then record and evaluate the discussion with a mean score of 3.29, tending to focus on a limited number of problems (e.g. the mechanics of the writing process) with a mean score of 3.29, and constructing some similar writing tasks and administer them to a group of students with a mean score of 3.13. Lastly, what they only quite like is asking students to work with another class member who has brought in a different type of written text with a mean score of 2.78.

Accordingly, Binh's (2009) posits that it may be assumed that together with learning writing, students have great needs to write, to express what they had experienced and gained in the target language. It was also surprising that the students were not willing to write notes or things related to the topic before writing. As being adult learners, students needed much pre-teaching of new vocabulary and supplementary writing materials.

Table 4. Students' Responses to Teacher's Activities.

Variables	Mean	Weighted Deviation	Standard Deviation	Description
The teacher constructs some similar writing tasks, and administers them to a group of students.	3.13	0.69	0.69	Really Enjoy
The teacher discusses the tasks with the students, then records and evaluates the discussion.	3.29	0.46	0.46	Really Enjoy
The teacher tends to focus on a limited number of problems (e.g. the mechanics of the writing process) in teaching writing.	3.29	0.59	0.59	Really Enjoy
The teacher asks students to work with another class member who has brought in a different type of written text.	2.78	0.79	0.79	Quite Like
The teacher asks students to make notes on headings he/ she provided.	3.33	0.64	0.64	Really Enjoy
The teacher asks students to reconstruct the writing from the notes.	3.73	0.69	0.69	Really Enjoy
The teacher asks students to have discussion before writing.	3.60	0.65	0.65	Really Enjoy
The teacher requires students to use visual aids (pictures, maps, music)	3.56	0.50	0.50	Really Enjoy
The teacher gives feedback regularly and appropriately.	3.96	0.30	0.30	Really Enjoy

Overall Weighted Mean = 3.41

SD= 0.59

Remarks: Really Enjoy

Legend:

3.00 – 4.00 - Really Enjoy

2.00- 2.99 - Quite Like

1.00 – 1.99 - Don't Mind

0 –0.99 - Don't Really Like

3.4 Students' Responses to reading materials

Table 5 shows the responses of the students on their reading materials. As regards reading materials at home, majority of the students have reading materials such as school textbooks, dictionaries, journals, pocket books, newspapers, and magazines. These reading materials of students at home show that these are related to their work in school.

There are 41 of the students whose reading materials are not related to their school work such as pocket books (specifically stories and novels) in Vietnamese. It is then implied that since most of the reading materials of the students are related to their school work, the students had a purposive approach in reading. They only read what are required to them in school. This finding then shows that students read materials that help them cope with their school activities. Their reading habit is not voluntary. Only few read for self-enjoyment; however, the medium used is not English but Vietnamese.

Table 5. Reading materials of the students.

Materials	Frequency* (n = 150)	Percent
Pocket books	41	27.3
Dictionaries	80	53.3
Newspapers	59	39.3
Magazines	36	24
Journals	45	30
School Textbooks	132	88

4. CONCLUSIONS

Regarding the profiles of students, findings revealed that majority of the students are females. They read materials at home which are school-related. They assessed themselves to have writing difficulties on determining proper word choice; organizing thoughts and subject-verb agreement, and most of these writing activities are texting, and writing diaries which are considered informal.

In the light of findings of the study, it is concluded that students of Thai Nguyen University of Sciences have considerable exposure to English from secondary school to high school, even more. However, their motivation in writing skills specifically is quite low. Most of students get motivated through teachers' factors including teacher's personality, teacher's teaching and assessing method, teacher's pedagogical ability. This can be inferred that students themselves have not yet realized the important of writing skills and haven't found interest in writing strategies either. More importantly, the students at Thai Nguyen University of Sciences students read materials that help them cope with their school activities. Their reading habit is not voluntary. Only few read for self-enjoyment; however, the medium used is not English but Vietnamese. As a result, their reading has not helped to increase their motivation in writing.

Based on the foregoing findings and conclusions, teachers should make use of a variety of methods to get students inspired in writing at Thai Nguyen University of Sciences.

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