

The Effectiveness of Free-writing in Improving Students' Writing Skill

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ABSTRACT

Writing is one of the important skills in learning English. However, the students often get problems in the process of writing training. In addition, they get the troubles in finding the suitable methods to practice their writing skill. Hence, this study aims to present a good way for students, especially the Tay Do university students, to solve their difficulties in writing and ameliorate their writing by giving the advantages of this method and the effects of the experimental process. The study was conducted with the sample of 40 English majors at Tay Do University. The instruments used for this research were the pre-test, post-test and the questionnaire. The result of this study showed the effectiveness of free – writing method in improving the students' writing skill.

Keyword: *The Effectiveness of Free-writing, Free-writing, Improving Students' Writing Skill*

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the most four important skills of English. In addition, writing can be a tool to show the emotions of someone and explore their feelings and attitudes by the activities as keeping a personal journal. However, writing is not an easy subject. To have a good writing skill, a student needs to practice a lot, especially he needs to brainstorm flexibly.

Nevertheless, we have to face to a big issue that the present day Vietnamese students become passive in thinking. The students do not concede to read the material before coming class which makes the teachers have to note each concept by underlining them in every page for them. For many years, our students have been passive to wait for their teachers to read each word to write down. Because of this reason, it leads to an unexpected result.

In addition, many students do not like writing because in English learning to write fluently and expressively is the most difficult of the macro-skills. It requires the students a rich store of social knowledge, a good command of the language as well as a mastery of necessary writing skills and techniques. As this reason, our students often get problems when they write. The students need a lot of time to overcome them and this is an uneasy process which requires the students have a high patient ability. This is the reason which lots of students are not interested in the writing.

In this study, the researcher approached to get Vietnamese students, especially majored English sophomores at Tay Do University, to brainstorm effectively, actively and flexibly by “free-writing” method. Many writers use free - writing to get started on a piece of work. This method has been studied and proved that it is very useful to people want to improve their writing skill.

Research question

This study was conducted in order to answer the following question:

Does free-writing improve writing skill of the English-majored sophomores at Tay Do University?

Hypothesis

Based on the definitions and the materials about free - writing and its benefits, I hypothesized that the students' writing skill could be improved when they practiced free-writing regularly.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definitions of free-writing

Free-writing is associated with the name Elbow (1975) when he calls it stream – of – consciousness – writing. In other words, it is a technique which the writer writes continuously in a set period of time without regard to spelling, grammar, or topic. Besides, Robinson (1975) states that free-writing is all about loosening and limbering the thought

process, not about a product or a performance for a student or a writer. Having the same view point, McKinney, F. (1976) asserts that it is a way of getting the brain in gear, and it's an exercise you can do on your own, safe to try in your own home. Bryant (1999) said ""If writing was dinner, then free-writing would have to be dessert."

In short, according to the material, references and some resources which the researcher got, free-writing is a good method to practice writing without caring about anything. You can write whatever your mind is thinking. Why do I say this is a good method? As you know, the students often get some problems when they write. Especially, an issue which they usually face is lacking the ideas. Because of it, they do not know where to begin from, how to start and what to talk about. Free - writing is you can write about any topic which you want.

2.2 The advantages and disadvantages of free-writing

The advantages of free-writing

Free-writing may seem crazy but actually it makes simple sense. Think of the difference between speaking and writing. Writing has the advantage of permitting more editing. Natalie Goldberg (1998) says that writing practice is different from free - writing encouraged in undergraduate and creative writing programs. Writing practice encourages the writer to be aware of their thoughts throughout the writing practice, and may be an ends unto itself, rather than a means to produce a more polished piece.

Besides, Winterowd (1981) states that there is a good chance that this uncontrolled, effortless writing will begin to assume a direction that you can follow. This offers students a rewarding experience of writing because it can avoid the inhibitions which normally influence writing, inhibitions that have developed since first grade of elementary school, i.e. writing had to be clear, correct and neat.

Roberta Jean Bryant (1999) showed many benefit and the advantages, they are (1) this method only takes a few minutes a day, but there are many benefits to be gleaned from free - writing exercises. (2) It promotes writing activity; it keeps the writer sharp and in control of his writings. Practicing free - writing everyday is one of the best preventions against writer's block and boredom in the writing process. (3) this method allows you to stop thinking and make mistakes without judgments, you can write freely, allow yourself to be a kid, misspell and imperfect. (4) Free - writing gives us the freedom to be ourselves with all our faults.

The disadvantages of free-writing

Although there are many good things which this method brings about, it can take some disadvantages for the people who apply it. To let this method promote its effect, we need a long time, so the practicers can be discouraged or lazy. Moreover, if a person is very busy and tired with his work, to keep practicing continuously is not easy. The solution for this risk is you should make a clear time table for it, for example, you should do it every day or three times a week at least, and you will spent how much time for it. Try to keep this plan because it helps you avoid forgetting and leading wrong ways to practice it.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

The participants were 40 English-majored sophomores of Tay Do University. Their ages ranged from 18 to 20 and Vietnamese was their first language. They were all sophomores so their English proficiency was considered as equal. The students were divided into 2 groups. The control group consisted of 20 students including 3 males and 17 females. After finishing the pre – test, they were not introduced to the free – writing method. In contrast, the experimental group studied writing with the free – writing method during the time the research took place. Finally, the students of the both two groups took the post – test to find out whether there was a change in their writing skill via the differences of the marks.

3.2 Instrument

Tests

The researcher used pre-test and post-test to evaluate the students' writing skill. In each test, the students were asked to write a paragraph in 30 minutes. To score their papers, the researcher designed a rubric based on the one in the writing course book Interaction 2 (p. 18 – 19). The students' writing papers were evaluated in term of content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, spelling and mechanic according to three levels: 3= excellent, 2 = adequate, 1 = developing. The researcher graded the students' writing as follow:

- Poor level : the score were from 5 to 7.
- Fair level : the score were from 8 to 9.
- Rather good level : the score were between 10 and 11.
- Very good level : the score reached from 12 to 13.
- Excellent level : the scores were over 14

Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of 15 questions divided into 3 parts regarding students' attitude about free - writing, the feasibility and effectiveness of this method in learning writing. The questionnaire was designed with the 5-degree Likert-type scale including strongly agree, agree, no idea, disagree and strongly disagree.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Results of pre-test

The results from the pre-test were presented in the following table.

Table 1. Results of the pre-test

Experimental group	Poor	Fair	Rather good	Very good	Excellent
Experimental group	20%	20%	25%	30%	5%
Control group	15%	15%	25%	35%	5%

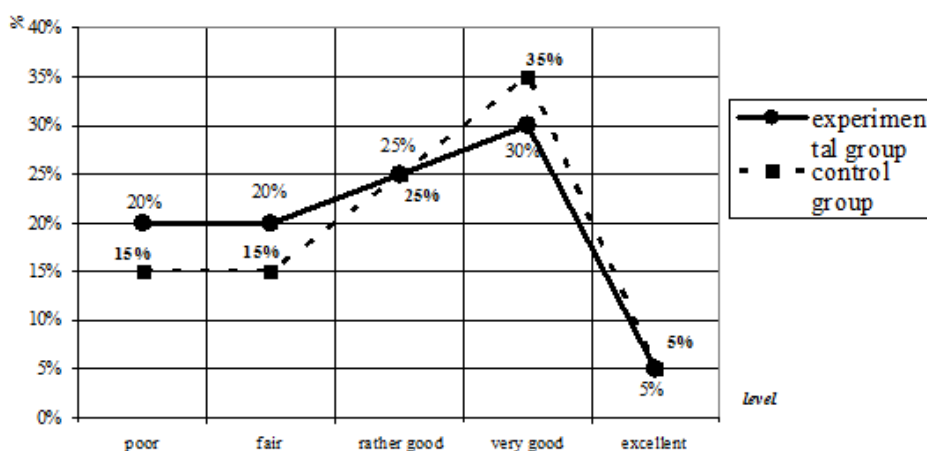


Fig 1. A comparison of the results of 2 groups in the pre-test

As we could see in figure 1, the poor and fair level of experimental group was 5% higher than those of the control group. However, the number of the high - mark participants in control group (very good: 35%) was higher than the experimental group (very good: 30%). It proved that in the initial stage, the writing skill of the control group was better than the experimental group.

4.1 Results of post-test

The results from the post-test were presented in the following table.

Table 1. Results of the post-test

Experimental group	Poor	Fair	Rather good	Very good	Excellent
Experimental group	5%	10%	40%	25%	10%
Control group	5%	40%	30%	15%	0%

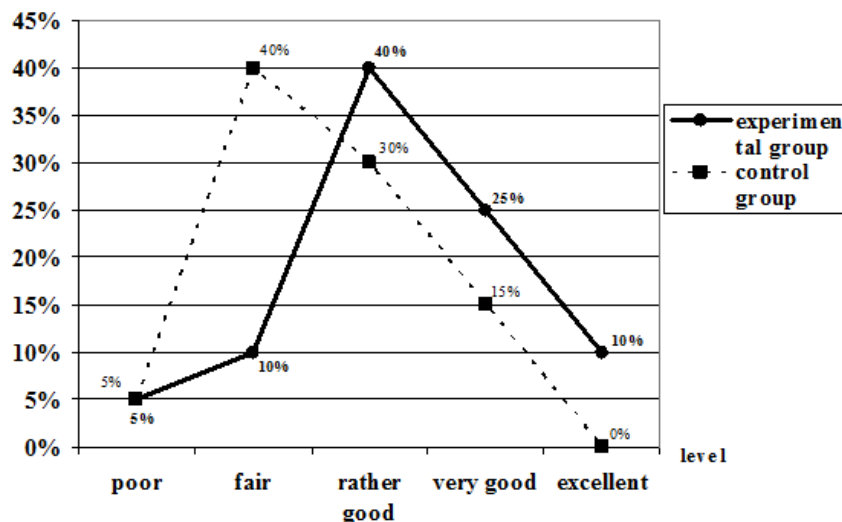


Fig 2. A comparison of the results of 2 groups in the post-test

As we could see in figure 2, at the fair level, there was only 10% of participants in experimental group while 40% of control group got that level. In contrast, the experimental group got higher than control group about 10% at 'rather good' and 'very good' levels. Furthermore, no one of control group was at excellent level and at this grade, there was 10% of experimental group.

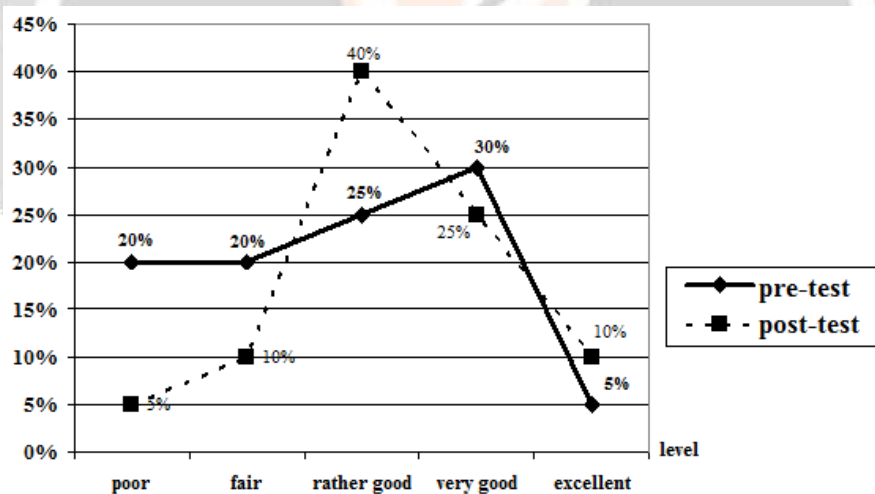


Fig 3. A comparison of the results of the experimental group via pretest and posttest

Figure 3 showed that there was a big change in the scores of the experimental group. At the poor level, the percentage decreased from 20% of pre-test to 5% of post-test. In contrast, at the 'rather good' level, the students' grades raised from 25% to 40%. Similarly, at the excellent level, the percentage also went up from 5% to 10%. These results proved that the experimental group achieved higher grades after the treatment.

4.3 Results of the questionnaire

The results from the questionnaire were presented in the following table.

Table 2. The students' feedback about free-writing method

Criteria	Choosing	Strongly agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Strongly disagree

The students' attitude of free-writing method	13.75%	53.75%	26.25%	6.25%	0%
Free-writing's effectiveness	15%	53.75%	27.5%	3.75%	0%
Free-writing's feasibility	17.5%	56.25%	21.25%	5%	0%

For the students' attitude towards free-writing method, there was only 6.25% of the students did not like this method while a large number of the students had positive attitude (13.75% for 'strongly agree' and 53.75% for 'agree'). Regarding the effectiveness of free-writing method, there were only 3.75% of the participants who thought that this method was not really useful but 68.75 % of them agreed that it was effective. Last but not least, 73.75% of the students agreed that this method was very feasible while only 5% of them thought that this method was not really feasible.

5. CONCLUSION

Writing often makes the students bored and unexcited. Finding a good learning method making students interested in writing is very difficult, so this method, free-writing, is very useful and feasible. The researcher hope that this study would bring a good method to the teachers who want to find the new way to teach and retransmit their good knowledge to the students. In addition, the researcher also hopes that the students will apply this method in their writing learning process. Since English is very important nowadays, free-writing is a good equipment for the students to improve their English.

6. REFERENCES

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