

# LEARNING PARAGRAPH WRITING AMONG ENGLISH NON-MAJORS AT THU DAU MOT UNIVERSITY

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## ABSTRACT:

Writing skills play an integral part in language learning, which helps to develop other linguistic skills. It is considered a very difficult skill, which many students have ignored when they have been asked to write in English exams. Though many studies about teaching English writing have been carried out to improve the students English writing, the implementation has overlapped and has not reached expected goals. This study is an attempt to use a questionnaire to discover how English non-majors learn to write English paragraphs at Thu Dau Mot University. The study's findings are expected to improve the learning and teaching practices at Thu Dau Mot University and other schools with similar contexts.

**Keywords:** paragraph, English learning and teaching, English non-majors, practice.

## 1. Introduction

English is the most popularly used language. As a result, writing paragraphs is a great demand for learners who wish to apply for their jobs effectively. In recent final exam of English non-majors on writing a paragraph at Van Lang University, many students got bad marks. Among them, some did not write any word in the exam papers. In this article, questionnaire is employed to investigate how writing a paragraph is learnt in that regard helps students write more effectively in the future. This study is an attempt to seek for appropriate answers to the questions as follows:

(1) What are the best ways to help English non-majors learn writing English paragraphs effectively?

(2) How have they ever improved their English writing?

## 2. Literature reviews

### 2.1. Definitions of a paragraph

As defined in Corbulid Advanced English dictionary, a paragraph is a segment of text that always starts on a new line and includes at least one sentence. According to Thornbury (2006), a paragraph is a unit of written material that is organized into a series of topic-related sentences. Eight years later, Oshima & Hogue (2014) have defined a paragraph as a collection of related sentences that describe one and generally only one central theme. Therefore, a paragraph is divided into three parts. A topic sentence and supporting sentences appear in every paragraph.

A concluding sentence appears at the end of most paragraphs.

### ***2.2. The basic structures of a paragraph***

Normally a paragraph consists of three main parts: (1) one topic sentence; supporting sentences, and (3) one concluding sentence.

#### ***2.2.1. The topic sentences***

According to Oshima & Hogue (2014), a topic sentence appears in every good paragraph. The most important sentence in a paragraph is the topic sentence. The topic sentence clearly states what the paragraph will be about. As a result, the topic phrase serves as a useful guide for both the author and the reader. The writer can see what information should be included and what information should be left out. Because the reader can see what the paragraph will be about, he or she is better equipped to comprehend it. The topic phrase, for example, in the writing model warns the reader to look for unproductive communication techniques. Here are three key factors to mind while writing a topic sentence:

(1) a topic sentence is a complete sentence which comprises both a subject and a verb;

(2) there are two parts: the topic and the controlling idea;

(3) because it just states the topic and the guiding idea, a topic sentence is the most generic statement in the paragraph. It does not provide any specific information.

#### ***2.2.2. The supporting sentences***

According to Oshima & Hogue (2014), supporting sentences explain and prove the topic sentence. One of the most serious issues with student writing is that students frequently fail to effectively substantiate their views. To be complete and compelling, the learners must use specific details. There are several kinds of specific supporting details such as examples, facts and statistics, and quotations.

#### ***2.2.3. The concluding sentences***

According to Oshima & Hogue (2014), a concluding sentence has two purposes: it marks

the end of the paragraph, and it reminds the reader of the main points. It can accomplish this by either summarizing the paragraph's essential points or by repeating the topic sentence in other language.

### ***2.3. Principles for teaching writing a paragraph***

According to Sokolik (2003) as cited in Nunan (2015), there are four principles for teachers to teach writing as (1) understanding the students reasons for writing; (2) providing many opportunities for students to write; (3) making feedback helpful and meaningful; (4) Clarifying for the teachers, and for their students, how their writing will be evaluated.

#### ***2.3.1. Understand the students reasons for writing***

According to Nunan (2015), a learner-centered approach to instruction begins with determining what to teach, how to teach, and how to assess. A traditional curriculum will have similar characteristics as a learner-centered curriculum. Mismatches between the teacher's goals and those of his or her students are the most common reason of discontent among students in the writing classroom. It's critical to understand how a writing course fits into the rest of the curriculum.

#### ***2.3.2. Providing many opportunities for students to write***

According to Nunan (2015), this idea reflects the learning-by-doing attitude. Learners can improve their writing by having a lot of writing practice, just as they can improve their speaking by having a lot of speaking practice. However, the actual writing should be accompanied by reflection on the process and comments on the final output.

#### ***2.3.3. Making feedback helpful and meaningful***

According to Nunan (2015), encouraging self-checking and peer evaluation is led by checklists like the one in the vignette to make feedback more valuable. These point students to particular parts of the written material.

#### ***2.3.4. Clarifying for the teachers, and for their students, how their writing will be evaluated***

According to Nunan (2015), to decide how well

learners have performed, it also entails making judgements about why they did well on some objectives but not on others.

#### **2.4. Approaches for teaching writing**

Writing is a means of communication that allows learners to express themselves verbally, arrange their knowledge and opinions into persuasive arguments, and transmit meaning through well-constructed text. Written communication, in its most sophisticated form, can be as vivid as a piece of art. According to Manuel (2021), as a classroom activity, process writing incorporates the four basic writing stages as (1) planning, (2) drafting, (3) revising, (4) editing.

##### **2.4.1. Planning**

According to Manuel (2021), any practice that encourages students to write is referred to as pre-writing. Consider the following points before you begin writing:

- (1) making sure learners know what kind of paragraphs they are going to write;
- (2) choosing a topic for their paragraph and narrow it down; considering who they are writing for;
- (3) making a list of some resources that provide information on their issue;
- (4) learning everything they can about the topic they will be writing about.

##### **2.4.2. Drafting**

According to Manuel (2021), the initial attempt at writing is drafting, which occurs when enough ideas have been gathered during the planning step. At this point, the writers of a piece of work are more concerned with writing fluency than with accuracy or neatness of the manuscript. Readers are typically considered by writers since they might dictate the style to be employed. Learners frequently obtain feedback from teachers before moving on to the revision stage. This feedback might be verbal or written.

##### **2.4.3. Revising**

According to Manuel (2021), when students rewrite, they do due to the comments they

received during the responding step. They went through what they had written again to assess how well they had communicated their ideas. Revising is done to improve the whole content and order of ideas, not just for grammatical faults. During this stage, teachers can accomplish the things as follows:

- (1) rearranging the order of the words, phrases, or paragraphs;
- (2) taking out or adding parts;
- (3) doing more research if you think you need to;
- (4) replacing overused words;
- (5) reading their text aloud to make sure it flows smoothly.

##### **2.4.4. Editing**

According to Manuel (2021), skilled writers must learn to analyze their own language by looking for faults in their own work. They can also share material with their peers because it is typical for writers to ask friends and coworkers to proofread their work for spelling and other errors. The writers are advised not to submit their writing before checking the following points as: (1) correct spelling; (2) capitalizing; (3) punctuating; (4) recognizing unclear words that need to be changed; and (5) formatting.

### **3. Research design**

#### **3.1. Research method**

To collect the data, the researcher distributed questionnaire about English non-majors teaching and learning to thirty-two third-year English non-majors. The questionnaire includes:

- (1) the importance of the writing skill;
- (2) the ways of learning writing a paragraph effectively;
- (3) how to teach writing a paragraph in the classroom;
- and (4) the students attitudes towards learning writing a paragraph.

Based on it, the researcher can find out the answers for the questions mentioned in introduction part.

### 3.2. Participants

The participants in the study were 32 third-year English non-majors consisting of thirteen males and nineteen females. Based on the results of basic English among four classes that the researcher has taught, thirty-two students of class Basic English 3 who got high marks ranged from 5.0 (1.5) to 8.3 (2.5) were chosen as good sample to investigate the ways of their writing learning for this study as showed in the following table. Table 1 showed that fourteen students got from 5.0 (1.5) to 6.7 (2.0) marks with the ratio 40.4% and eighteen students getting 8.3 (2.5) gained 62.5%.

**Table 1. The final results of basic English 3 class**

| Number of the students 32 | The final results of Basic English 3 |            |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------|
|                           | 5.0-6.7                              | 8.3        |
|                           | 14 (40.4%)                           | 18 (59.6%) |

### 3.3. Data collection

In order to gain the results, the research data were collected from questionnaire having directly delivered to thirty-two third-year English non-majors about the opinions on the ways that the students have ever learnt writing a paragraph. The mean was used as the main measure including all the values in the data set for its calculation. Based on the students answers, the researcher used

Excel to calculate mean in statistics analyzed and explained in Part 4.

## 4. Discussion and implications

The study investigated paragraph writing skills of a class with 32 third-year English non-majors at Thu Dau Mot University. The collected data from questionnaire were analyzed and interpreted.

### 4.1. The importance of the writing skill

Table 2 on page 6 indicates that the majority of the students expressed an agreement with the items of this statement. They strongly agreed with the fact that it is an important part for developing communicating English; it helps improve grammar; good writing helps English learners use correct vocabulary in communicating with native speakers; and it helps you speak the language fluently and accurately proved with the mean (M = 1.2; M = 1.4; M = 1.6; M = 1.7). They think that it is an essential skill to practice regularly with the mean (M = 2.0).

In sum, the students evaluation for the statement mentioned above was positive. Most of the students realized that English writing skill is very important in English language learning.

### 4.2. The ways of teaching writing a paragraph

It is only through language that the learners could communicate with each other; share their ideas, tell others they have experienced to express their wishes and desires, solve complex

**Table 2. The importance of pronunciation**

| Themes                                                                                               | The choices of the students |       |       |       |        | Mean |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|--------|------|
|                                                                                                      | SA (1)                      | A (2) | N (3) | D (4) | SD (5) |      |
| The importance of pronunciation                                                                      |                             |       |       |       |        |      |
| 1. It is an important part for developing communicating English.                                     | 28                          | 2     | 2     | 0     | 0      | 1.2  |
| 2. It is an essential skill that you need to practice regularly                                      | 10                          | 15    | 4     | 3     | 0      | 2.0  |
| 3. It helps improve grammar.                                                                         | 19                          | 13    | 0     | 0     | 0      | 1.4  |
| 4. Good writing helps English learners use correct vocabulary in communicating with native speakers. | 12                          | 20    | 0     | 0     | 0      | 1.6  |
| 5. It helps you speak the language fluently and accurately.                                          | 11                          | 21    | 0     | 0     | 0      | 1.7  |

problems by drawing on information they interact with one another. To achieve these objectives, however, they have to learn the language as communication.

#### 4.3. The ways of learning writing a paragraph affectively

Table 4 shows the mean of the students opinions on the ways of learning writing a paragraph

**Table 3. The ways of teaching writing a paragraph**

| Themes                                                                                                           | The choices of the students |      |       |       |        | Mean |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------|-------|-------|--------|------|
|                                                                                                                  | SA(1)                       | A(2) | N (3) | D (4) | SD (5) |      |
| The ways of teaching writing a paragraph                                                                         |                             |      |       |       |        |      |
| 1. My teacher has ever experienced writing paragraphs in the classroom.                                          | 14                          | 18   | 0     | 0     | 0      | 1.6  |
| 2. My teacher guides how to write the topic sentences in the classroom.                                          | 4                           | 28   | 0     | 0     | 0      | 1.9  |
| 3. I have learned the ways to write supporting sentences and concluding sentences successfully in the classroom. | 10                          | 20   | 2     | 0     | 0      | 1.6  |
| 4. I am always convinced to work in pairs and in groups.                                                         | 19                          | 13   | 0     | 0     | 0      | 1.4  |
| 5. Mistakes are always corrected considerably.                                                                   | 15                          | 14   | 2     | 1     | 0      | 1.7  |

It can be seen from Table 3 that the students strongly agreed and agreed with the items through mean ( $M = 1.6$ ;  $M = 1.9$ ;  $M = 1.6$ ,  $M = 1.7$ ) that the teacher ever experienced writing paragraphs in the classroom for students to learn directly; she also guided how to write the topic sentences in the classroom; the students learned how to write supporting sentences and concluding sentences; they studied the ways to write supporting sentences and concluding sentences in the classroom successfully; and they recognized that mistakes were always corrected considerably. In learning writing paragraphs, most of the students expressed their agreement on being always convinced to work in pairs and in groups ( $M = 1.4$ ).

In sum, the students evaluation for ways of teaching writing a paragraph of the teacher in the classroom was positive. Most of the students realized that learning writing a paragraph should be cooperated with friends through pair works and groupworks.

affectively. The mean of the students who contented with all items in this statement was remarkable. The students score the similar mean of these items ( $M = 1.8$ ) as “I have to do a lot of practice; I work very hard with my friends to check mistakes; I follow the principles of learning writing a paragraph”. They think that learning carefully about the basic structures of a paragraph before writing is very necessary, so they strongly express on it with the mean ( $M = 1.5$ ).

In sum, the students evaluation for the ways of learning writing a paragraph affectively was highly appreciated. The majority of the students realized that the students have to understand the structures of a paragraph when they begin to learn writing paragraphs.

#### 4.4. The students attitudes towards learning writing a paragraph

Table 5 on page 8 highlights the mean of the students opinions on attitudes towards English learning writing a paragraph with ( $M = 1.3$ ;  $M = 1.6$ ;  $M = 1.8$ ) about the issue is that I am aware of

Table 4. The ways of learning writing a paragraph affectively

| Themes                                                                         | The choices of the students |       |       |       |        | Mean |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|--------|------|
|                                                                                | SA (1)                      | A (2) | N (3) | D (4) | SD (5) |      |
| The ways of learning writing a paragraph affectively                           |                             |       |       |       |        |      |
| 1. I do a lot of practice.                                                     | 13                          | 15    | 2     | 2     | 0      | 1.8  |
| 2. I work very hard with my friends to check mistakes.                         | 12                          | 16    | 3     | 1     | 0      | 1.8  |
| 3. I follow the principles of learning writing a paragraph.                    | 13                          | 15    | 2     | 2     | 0      | 1.8  |
| 4. I learn carefully about the basic structures of a paragraph before writing. | 17                          | 14    | 1     | 0     | 0      | 1.5  |

Table 5. The students attitudes towards learning writing a paragraph

| Themes                                                                                  | The choices of the students |      |      |      |       | Mean |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------|------|------|-------|------|
|                                                                                         | SA(1)                       | A(2) | N(3) | D(4) | SD(5) |      |
| The students attitudes towards learning writing a paragraph                             |                             |      |      |      |       |      |
| 1. I am aware of the importance of paragraph writing.                                   | 11                          | 17   | 1    | 1    | 0     | 1.3  |
| 2. I believe in the methods of teaching that my teacher has ever used in the classroom. | 14                          | 18   | 0    | 0    | 0     | 1.6  |
| 3. Good writing helps me feel more confident in communicating with native speakers.     | 26                          | 6    | 0    | 0    | 0     | 1.2  |
| 4. Good paragraph writing helps my future jobs.                                         | 10                          | 19   | 2    | 1    | 0     | 1.8  |

the importance of paragraph writing; I believe in the methods of teaching that my teacher has ever used in the classroom; and good paragraph writing helps my future jobs". They strongly agree with the item "good writing helps me feel more confident in communicating with native speakers" ( $M = 1.2$ ). Therefore, writing is an important skill for developing English Language, and it helps English learners have good competence of communicating.

In summary, all items in "attitudes towards learning writing a paragraph" showed that writing skill help improve other skills and linguistics.

## 5. Conclusion and recommendations

The research showed the ways of learning writing a paragraph among third-year English non-majors at Thu Dau Mot University. Although the topic is not new, it has been prompted that helping English non-majors at university the ways of learning writing paragraphs is a very important part. It helps the students both get good marks on it and develop other language skills, especially communicating effectively with others. Besides, good writing helps learners have good jobs in the future ■

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## **NGHIÊN CỨU VỀ CÁCH HỌC VIẾT ĐOẠN VĂN TIẾNG ANH CỦA SINH VIÊN KHÔNG CHUYÊN TIẾNG ANH TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC THỦ DẦU MỘT**

**● NGUYỄN THỊ KIỀU HƯƠNG**

Trường Đại học Thủ Dầu Một

### **TÓM TẮT:**

Kỹ năng viết đóng vai trò không thể thiếu trong việc học ngôn ngữ và giúp phát triển các kỹ năng ngôn ngữ khác. Kỹ năng viết được xem là một kỹ năng khó mà nhiều sinh viên đã bỏ qua khi được yêu cầu trong các kỳ thi tiếng Anh. Mặc dù đã có nhiều nghiên cứu về việc nâng cao kỹ năng viết tiếng Anh của sinh viên nhưng việc thực hiện vẫn còn chông chéo và chưa đạt kết quả kỳ vọng. Trong nghiên cứu này, bảng câu hỏi được sử dụng để tìm hiểu cách học viết đoạn văn tiếng Anh của sinh viên không chuyên tiếng Anh tại trường Đại học Thủ Dầu Một. Kết quả nghiên cứu được kỳ vọng sẽ giúp cải thiện phương pháp giảng dạy tại trường Đại học Thủ Dầu Một và các trường khác có điều kiện tương tự.

**Từ khóa:** đoạn văn, giảng dạy tiếng Anh, không thuộc chuyên ngành tiếng Anh, thực hành.