

WAYS TO LEARN ENGLISH PARAGRAPH WRITING SKILLS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FINANCE AND MARKETING'S NON-ENGLISH MAJORED STUDENTS

● PHAM THI THUY TRANG

ABSTRACT:

Writing skills play an important part in language learning. They help develop other language skills. However, writing skills are quite difficult for many students. Although many studies about teaching English writing skills have been conducted to improve the writing skills of students, the implementation of these studies' solutions and recommendations have not yet gained expected results. In this study, a questionnaire is used to discover how non-English majored students of the University of Finance and Marketing learn to write English paragraphs. This study's findings are expected to improve the English teaching and learning activities at the University of Finance and Marketing and other organizations having similar contexts.

Keywords: paragraph, English learning and teaching, non-English majored students, practice.

1. Introduction

English is a very necessary language used the most popularly. 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 University of Finance and Marketing, 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 Cobuild 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; (2) 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 a number of 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; (2) doing more research if you think you need to; (3) replacing overused words; (4) 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*

In order 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 thirty-two

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 thirty-two third-year English non-majors at University of Finance and Marketing. 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. The majority of the students realized that English

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

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

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. The majority of the students realized that learning writing a paragraph should be cooperated with friends through pair works and groupworks.

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 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

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

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

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 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 helps 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 University of Finance and Marketing. 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 ■

REFERENCES:

1. Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy (4th edition)*. New York: Pearson Education, Inc.
2. Manuel, J. (2021). The Stages of The Writing Process. [Online] Available at <https://englishpost.org/stages-of-the-writing-process/>
3. Nunan, D. (2015). *Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages: An Introduction*. USA: Apex CoVantage, LLC.
4. Oshima, A. & Hogue, A. (2014). *Longman Academic Writing Series (5th edition)*. USA: Pearson education, Inc.
5. Thornbury, S. (2006). *An A-Z ELT: A dictionary of terms and concepts used in English Language Teaching*. USA: Macmillan Education.

Received date: July 4, 2022

Reviewed date: July 19, 2022

Accepted date: July 25, 2022

Author information:

PHAM THI THUY TRANG

University of Finance and Marketing

CÁCH HỌC KỸ NĂNG VIẾT ĐOẠN VĂN BẰNG TIẾNG ANH CỦA SINH VIÊN KHÔNG THUỘC CHUYÊN NGÀNH TIẾNG ANH TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC TÀI CHÍNH - MARKETING

● **PHẠM THỊ THUY TRANG**

Đại học Tài chính - Marketing

TÓM TẮT:

Kỹ năng viết đóng vai trò quan trọng trong việc học ngôn ngữ. Nó giúp phát triển các kỹ năng ngôn ngữ khác. Kỹ năng viết được xem là kỹ năng khó đối với nhiều học viên. Mặc dù đã có nhiều nghiên cứu về việc dạy viết tiếng Anh nhằm cải thiện khả năng viết tiếng Anh của sinh viên, nhưng việc thực hiện các giải pháp của những nghiên cứu này vẫn chưa đạt được kết quả mong muốn. Nghiên cứu này sử dụng bảng câu hỏi để khám phá cách sinh viên không thuộc chuyên ngành tiếng Anh tại Trường Đại học Tài chính - Marketing học cách viết đoạn văn bằng tiếng Anh. Nghiên cứu này kỳ vọng sẽ giúp cải thiện việc học và dạy tiếng Anh tại Trường Đại học Tài chính - Marketing, cũng như các tổ chức khác có bối cảnh tương tự.

Từ khóa: đoạn văn, học và dạy tiếng anh, không thuộc chuyên ngành tiếng Anh, luyện tập.