

ENHANCING WRITING SKILLS FOR ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS AT QUANG BINH UNIVERSITY: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

NÂNG CAO KỸ NĂNG VIẾT CHO SINH VIÊN CHUYÊN NGÀNH TIẾNG ANH TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC QUẢNG BÌNH: THÁCH THỨC VÀ GIẢI PHÁP

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ABSTRACT: *This study aims to assess the current situation and proposes solutions to improve the writing skills of English major students at Quang Binh University. Through surveys and interviews, the main difficulties that students face include limited vocabulary, weak grammar, lack of ideas, and low learning motivation. Instructor feedback has also been found inadequate in effectively facilitating students' writing development. Based on the findings, the study suggests solutions such as increasing writing practice, using active teaching methods, and providing detailed, encouraging feedback. These solutions aim to enhance the quality of learning and develop writing skills in a sustainable way.*

Keywords: *Writing skills, English major students, Instructor feedback, Improvement solutions*

TÓM TẮT: *Nghiên cứu này nhằm đánh giá thực trạng và đề xuất giải pháp cải thiện kỹ năng viết của sinh viên chuyên ngành tiếng Anh tại Trường Đại học Quảng Bình. Thông qua khảo sát và phỏng vấn, các khó khăn chính mà sinh viên gặp phải bao gồm: vốn từ vựng hạn chế, ngữ pháp yếu, thiếu ý tưởng và động lực học tập thấp. Phản hồi từ giảng viên cũng chưa đủ hiệu quả trong việc hỗ trợ sinh viên nâng cao kỹ năng viết. Dựa trên các kết quả thu được, nghiên cứu đề xuất các giải pháp như tăng cường thực hành viết, áp dụng phương pháp giảng dạy tích cực và cung cấp phản hồi chi tiết, khích lệ. Những giải pháp này nhằm nâng cao chất lượng học tập và phát triển kỹ năng viết một cách bền vững.*

Từ khóa: *Kỹ năng viết, sinh viên chuyên ngành tiếng Anh, phản hồi của giảng viên, giải pháp cải thiện.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the most essential yet challenging skills for English major students, requiring a wide vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, coherent organization of ideas, and the ability to convey content clearly and persuasively [8]; strong writing skills are indispensable not only for academic success but also for employment in translation, education, tourism, and commerce. Despite this significance, numerous English-major students at Quang Binh University

continue to face substantial challenges in developing their writing skills, as traditional teaching approaches and teacher feedback often lack the specificity needed to address their weaknesses. This study therefore seeks to identify the key obstacles these students encounter in the writing process and to propose practical, evidence-based solutions that can inform the development of a more effective writing curriculum.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Theoretical basis

Effective writing requires a strong command of grammar and vocabulary, the ability to organize ideas and construct logical arguments [2], and is closely tied to reading comprehension and critical thinking [6]. Mastering this skill requires continuous practice and revision [1], [4], [7], while motivation-particularly autonomy in topic selection-enhances engagement and writing quality [13]. Teacher and peer feedback are equally essential: instructors should act not only as technical correctors but also as engaged readers who provide constructive feedback [1], [3], [12], and dynamic approaches such as interactive and collaborative writing can further foster comprehensive skill development [8].

2.2. Research method

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining a structured multiple-choice survey of 125 students (2nd-4th year) on writing habits and difficulties with

in-depth semi-structured interviews of 10 purposively selected students on their specific challenges, perceptions of teacher feedback, and expectations for instructional support. Combining both methods provides a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the issues surrounding academic writing, despite the limited generalizability of convenience sampling.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study, based on survey results and in-depth interviews with English-major students at Quang Binh University, identifies the main challenges these students face in developing their English writing skills. The difficulties observed are not limited to language proficiency, but also include psychological factors, learning strategies, and the level of support provided by lecturers.

The results are shown in the following table:

Table 1. Survey on writing methods and writing problems of English students

	Question content	Level					
		Total	Totally disagree	Disagree one bit	Confused	Partially agree	Totally agree
Line 1: number of responses; line 2: percentage							
Question 1: Factors affecting students' motivation to learn							
1.1	Topics and writing tasks that interest students	125	45	20	10	25	25
		100	36.00	16.00	8.00	20.00	20.00
1.2	Teacher-designed writing activities engage students' active participation.	125	12	12	12	14	75
		100	10.00	10.00	10.00	11.67	62.50
1.3	Teachers have appropriate and interesting teaching methods that attract students.	125	13	12	12	46	42
		100	10.4	9.6	9.6	36.8	33.6
1.4	Active teacher feedback helps improve the quality of student writing	125	7	6	13	24	40
		100	5.83	5.00	10.83	20.00	33.33
1.5	Join study groups to do writing tasks to increase student motivation	125	11	12	14	15	73
		100	9.17	10.00	11.67	12.50	60.83

Question 2: According to you, which of the following methods can be used to improve writing skills?							
2.1	Read English documents regularly	125	0	0	30	46	49
		100	0.00	0.00	31.58	48.42	51.58
2.2	Practice writing creative writing genres like diaries and blogs at home	125	0	10	15	45	55
		100	0.00	10.53	15.79	47.37	57.89
2.3	Get feedback from teachers on every post	125	0	0	15	42	68
		100	0.00	0.00	15.79	44.21	71.58
2.4	Participate in group study sessions and interact with classmates	125	0	5	15	40	65
		100	0.00	5.26	15.79	42.11	68.42
2.5	Participate in classroom writing activities as required by the teacher	125	0	0	16	35	74
		100	0.00	0.00	16.84	36.84	77.89
Question 3: Writing problems students often encounter							
3.1	Lack of time for self-study and writing practice environment	125	0	8	3	20	94
		100	0.00	8.42	3.16	21.05	98.95
3.2	Not getting enough feedback from teachers	125	8	16	12	13	76
		100	6.40	16.84	12.63	13.68	80.00
3.3	Lack of knowledge of grammar structures and vocabulary	125	8	7	17	18	75
		100	6.40	7.37	17.89	18.95	78.95
3.4	Lack of ideas and content to write	125	12	13	12	15	73
		100	9.60	13.68	12.63	15.79	76.84
Question 4: Students' perceptions of teachers' feedback							
4.1	Teachers give positive verbal feedback to students' writings.	125	12	12	13	20	68
		100	9.60	12.63	13.68	21.05	71.58
4.2	Teachers provide direct feedback on students' self-study writing activities at home	125	12	13	15	20	65
		100	9.60	13.68	15.79	21.05	68.42
4.3	Teachers give negative verbal feedback to students' writing	125	6	6	9	17	87
		100	4.80	6.32	9.47	17.89	91.58
4.4	Teachers give direct positive feedback after each writing	125	3	14	16	21	71
		100	2.40	14.74	16.84	22.11	74.74
4.5	I feel very satisfied with the teacher's feedback.	125	68	15	7	35	0
		100	54.40	15.79	7.37	36.84	0.00

3.3.1. Report on writing methods and challenges of English major students at Quang Binh University

Regarding motivation, 62.5% of students agree that teacher-designed activities promote engagement (1.2) and 60.83% report that group work enhances motivation (1.5), yet only 35% agree that teachers use engaging methods (1.3). For

writing-improvement methods, students most strongly endorse classroom participation (77.89% - 2.5), teacher feedback (71.58% - 2.3), and peer collaboration (68.42% - 2.4), while regular reading and creative writing at home are also positively viewed (2.1, 2.2).

In terms of difficulties, students most frequently report a lack of time and suitable

writing environments (98.95% - 3.1), limited teacher feedback (80% -3.2), insufficient language resources (78.95% - 3.3), and a lack of ideas (76.84% - 3.4). Perceptions of feedback are mixed: most appreciate positive verbal (71.58% - 4.1) and written feedback (74.74% - 4.4), yet 54.4% are dissatisfied overall (4.5) and

91.58% report receiving negative verbal feedback (4.3) - pointing to the need for more constructive, balanced commentary. Overall, students remain motivated but face significant barriers in instructional methods, feedback quality, and self-study conditions.

Table 2. The Multiple choice questionnaire on students' English writing learning habits and preferences

1	In your opinion, which English skill is the most difficult among the four skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing?	125	40	5	7	73
		100	32.00	4.00	5.60	58.40
2	Which English skill do you like to learn the most?	125	14	55	25	31
		100	11.20	44.00	20.00	24.80
3	How much time do you spend practicing writing at home every day?	125	10	65	30	20
		100	8.00	52.00	24.00	16.00
4	Are you interested in writing activities in class?	125	55	37	33	0
		100	44.00	29.60	26.40	0.00
5	Do you participate in writing activities in class as required by your teacher?	125	100	18	7	0
		100	80.00	14.40	5.60	0.00
6	Are you satisfied with the teacher's feedback?	125	0	42	60	23
		100	0.00	33.60	48.00	18.40
7	Which issue most affects progress in writing skills?	125	9	50	7	59
		100	7.20	40.00	5.60	47.20

3.3.2. Report on Students' Attitudes and Practices in English Writing

The survey reveals that most students find writing the most difficult skill (58.4%) yet show limited preference for learning it (24.8%); 52% practice under 30 minutes daily, only 26.4% are interested in

classroom writing, and just 5.6% fully participate. Satisfaction with feedback is moderate (18.4% fully satisfied), and the main barriers to progress are ineffective methods (47.2%) and low motivation (40%) - confirming that students struggle with writing yet remain disengaged.

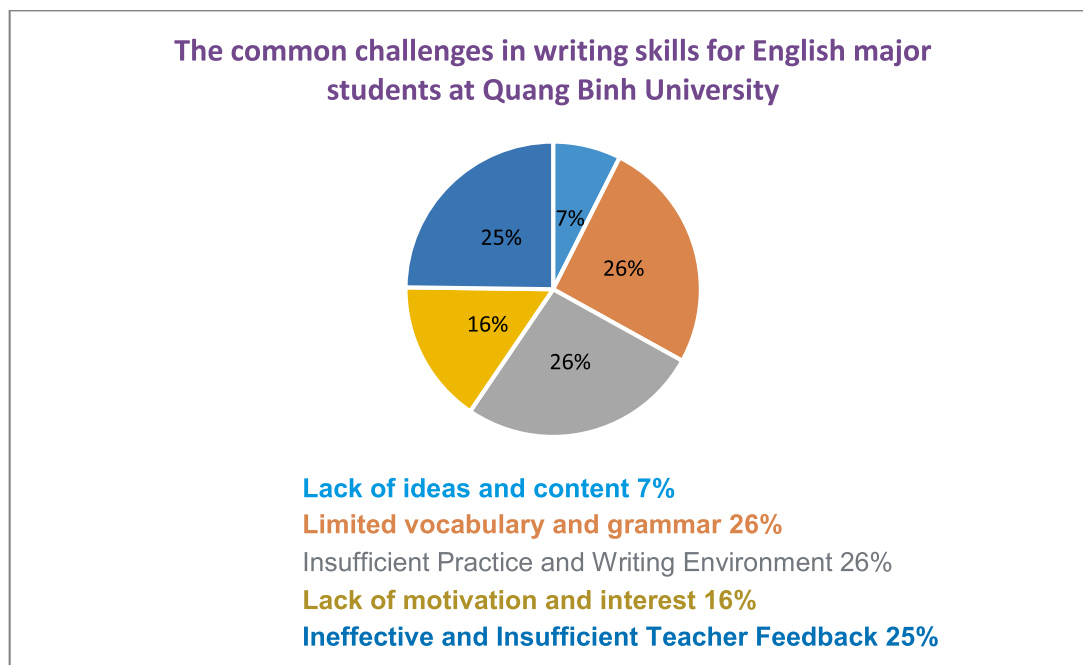


Chart 1. The common challenges in writing skills for students

3.3.3. Key factors contributing to students' writing difficulties

The survey highlights five key issues affecting students' writing performance:

a. Lack of ideas and content (7%)

Although few students identified idea generation as their primary challenge, limited exposure to academic topics and real-world experience restricts their ability to generate and develop content, particularly for essays requiring creativity or analysis. Educators should therefore integrate topic-based learning and structured support for idea development.

b. Limited vocabulary and grammar (26%)

Many students struggle to apply precise, varied vocabulary in writing even when they recognize the same words in listening or reading, while weak grammar skills lead to overly simple sentence

structures that lower academic quality and coherence.

c. Insufficient practice and poor writing environment (26%)

The majority of students write less than 30 minutes per day or only when required by teachers, as competing priorities and a lack of structured writing environments limit the consistent practice needed to build fluency and accuracy.

d. Lack of motivation and interest (16%)

Motivation remains a major barrier, as many students view writing tasks as irrelevant or uninspiring due to rigid teaching approaches and limited freedom in choosing topics; greater autonomy and real-life task design could foster more sustained interest.

e. Ineffective teacher feedback (25%)

A quarter of students reported dissatisfaction with teacher feedback, which was often vague and focused mainly on grammar errors rather than content and organization, pointing to the need for more frequent, constructive, and balanced commentary.

3.3.4. *Qualitative insights from student interviews*

Interviews with 10 students revealed recurring themes that deepen the survey findings, including a lack of confidence in expressing complex ideas in English, limited opportunities to write beyond classroom assignments, insufficient individualized feedback, and a desire for more interactive activities such as peer review and topic-based writing linked to real-life contexts.

3.3.5. *Solutions*

a. Lack of ideas and content

Students should read authentic materials, apply pre-writing strategies such as brainstorming, and write regularly on varied topics, while lecturers support idea development through content- and project-based learning, guided workshops, and formative feedback focused on clarity and depth.

b. Limited Vocabulary and Grammar Mastery

Students should read daily, maintain a vocabulary journal, use spaced-repetition tools such as Anki or Quizlet, and practice grammar individually and in groups, while lecturers teach targeted vocabulary and grammar mini-lessons and encourage sentence-combining exercises to build syntactic complexity.

c. Insufficient practice and writing

environment

Students are encouraged to schedule at least 30 minutes of daily writing practice, maintain a portfolio, and set clear weekly goals, while lecturers support this through flexible weekly tasks, interest-based prompts, and writing workshops that build a writing-positive classroom culture.

d. Lack of Motivation and Interest

Students should choose topics aligned with their interests, set achievable goals, and use creative formats such as blogging, while lecturers can boost motivation by allowing student choice, highlighting strengths in feedback, and relating assignments to students' future careers or societal issues.

e. Ineffective and insufficient teacher feedback

Students should request feedback on organization, content, and coherence-not only grammar-and use it to revise drafts, complemented by peer review, while lecturers should provide balanced feedback on ideas and structure through a process-based model with multiple drafts, clear rubrics, and one-on-one consultations.

Improving students' writing proficiency requires shared responsibility: students must be proactive in practicing and reflecting on their writing, while lecturers must provide structured, supportive instruction. This dual emphasis on process-oriented teaching and learner autonomy will gradually transform students into more confident, capable academic writers.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has identified the key challenges that English-language students

at Quang Binh University encounter in developing their writing skills-difficulties in generating ideas, limited vocabulary and grammar, poor content organization, and low motivation and practice-and, by integrating survey and interview data within a specific institutional setting, offers a grounded, context-specific contribution

to the field of second language writing. The findings underline the need for pedagogical innovation in feedback practices, learner autonomy, and real-world writing tasks, with future research examining tailored strategies such as scaffolded writing activities or AI tools like ChatGPT.

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Ngày nhận bài: 26/2/2025

Ngày gửi phản biện: 26/2/2025

Ngày duyệt đăng: 15/8/2026