

## Some Common Mistakes and The Methods to Improve Writing a Paragraph for English Majored Freshmen at a University in Vietnam

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**ABSTRACT:** *English is an extremely important tool for people to communicate with each other. It is not only a means of conveying thoughts and ideas, but also builds friendships, economic relationships and cultural and social relationships. Surely learning writing will help learners develop themselves, their minds and their personalities. Despite its importance, many students face significant challenges in developing effective writing skill. The research aimed to find some errors then suggested methods to help students improve English writing skill. This research was supported with participation of 41 freshmen who are in English class at Tay Do University. Questionnaire, pretest and posttest were the instruments. Participants were asked to write a paragraph in pre-test and post-test. Besides, they also answered questionnaire. The results showed students' opinions about writing skill; they also gave some difficulties in writing (vocabulary, ideas and grammar) and some improving methods (doing exercises, reading books, discuss with others, and so on) through the questionnaire.*

**KEY WORDS:** writing, English majored students, university

### INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, English is considered as an international language, and it is used to exchange information and ideas among different nations and cultures in the world. According to Wikipedia, there are more 400 million of people who use English as a native language and more than a billion people who use English as a second language. Especially, when Vietnam becomes one of the members of World Trade Organization, English is very necessary for Vietnamese students to develop themselves after graduating from university or college. If students want to develop in the integrated period, they need to communicate by English well. Besides, writing skill is more and more important nowadays. Becoming a proficient writer is one of the major objectives of many students, especially for those who want to become members of international business, administrative or academic communities (Tribble, 1997). Thus, one of the effective communication skills is writing skill.

However, "Writing is more complex in that it tests a person's ability to use a language and the ability to express ideas. As a result, a person needs to write not only coherently but correctly, which requires more time and effort" Liu and Braine (2005). Unlike other skills, it requires a great deal of conscious

application of rules, patience, knowledge and practice. Therefore, the learners face a lot of difficulties when writing, but they do not know how to improve their writing suitably.

In Vietnam, English is considered a compulsory subject in the curriculum at upper secondary schools and a medium of instruction at universities. One of the four English skills, writing is the challenging one for learners, especially for freshmen. Writing in English requires good knowledge about the grammar, vocabulary, and structure so that many second language learners usually find that writing is a difficult and complex skill to master. According to Zinsser (1976), "clarity" is paramount in paragraph writing. Writers should strive to express their ideas concisely and directly, avoiding unnecessary complexity or ambiguity.

This study was undertaken to address the common challenges encountered by English majored freshmen at Tay Do University when writing a paragraph. The primary objectives were twofold: firstly, to identify the specific difficulties faced by these students in mastering paragraph writing skills, and secondly, to propose effective ways aimed at mitigating these challenges and enhancing their writing abilities. Additionally, it was anticipated that the findings of this study would offer valuable insights for educators, enabling them to adopt more effective teaching methods and support their students more effectively in their writing endeavors.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Writing skill in English

#### Definition

English is an international language. Therefore, English studying is necessary. Besides skills: listening, speaking and reading, writing skill is also important. Writing skills are specific abilities which help writers put their thoughts into words in a meaningful form and to mentally interact with the message. Besides, writing is also the important expression language activity, Petty and Jensen (1980) define that, "Writing refers to the mental and physical act of forming letters and words, but it is much more than that; it is putting words into sentences, and paragraphs, spelling words correctly, and observing conventions in written forms and more."

Moreover, according to Byrne (1988), "Writing is a primary means of recording speech, even though it must be acknowledging as a secondary medium of communication." In fact, writing is a way of communicating a message to a reader for a purpose; it is the act of making up correct sentences and transmitting them through the visual medium as mark on paper. Writing is ability to put pen and paper to express idea through symbols. This way, representations on paper will have meaning and content that could be communicated to other people by the writers.

Besides, According to Oxford English dictionary, "writing is the penning or forming of letters of words, the using of written characters for purposes of record, transmission of ideas". The writing skill is the ability to write effectively, not only relates to academic success while in college but transfers to job success later in the real world. Writing is also viewed as a process as Hyland (2003) explains writing as, "A socio-cognitive activity which involves skills in planning and drafting as well as knowledge of language, contexts and audiences." Besides, writing involves many different aspects. They are handwriting, spelling, punctuation, sentence construction, organizing a text and paragraphing, and so on. All aspects are carefully considered by the writers.

In short, writing is a method of representing shared information through language and it is an important skill to share ideas, feeling or anything that exist in mind.

### **The important role of writing skill**

Tribble (1997) states that, “The writing skill is more and more important nowadays. Becoming a proficient writer is one of the major objectives of many students, especially for those who want to become members of international business, administrative or academic communities.” Writing skill is directly linked to the way students think and the way they learn. If learners want to study English well, they cannot ignore writing skill because that is one of the basic skills. As Swales and Feak (2012) point out that, “Writing is a critical skill for language students as it allows them to demonstrate their understanding, articulate their ideas, and engage with academic discourse.” Writing is one of the ways that people translate thoughts for other people. Some people are better at expressing themselves in writing than other ways. Moreover, that is one the essential ways of communicating. Besides, writing skill also has correlation with the other skills as speaking and reading. Strong written expression will help learners succeed in university or college or will help them find a job out of high school. In addition, writing well in high school will help students get higher grades to get into good college and universities. Some of people cannot speak their thoughts directly, but they have the innate ability to put their thoughts into paper. Therefore, some of people express themselves by writing novel, short story, biographies and even personal diaries. Especially, students usually have to write reports, essays or exams, so ideas are expressed by writing easier.

In addition, writing skill has correlation with the other skills. When people begin studying speaking skill, they usually write their ideas on paper that helps them to remember better. Also, when people want to have relative information to write, they will apply reading comprehension strategies to get ideas such as skim or scan. Both writers and readers utilize their life experiences. Writers use their background knowledge when writing, as readers use background knowledge to comprehend the text. Thus, if learners can practice reading skill when writing, their reading skill can be improved.

Finally, writing plays vital role in communicating. Letters or messages are typical communication ways by writing. People usually send their questions in lesson content, exercises, and ideas when they do not have time to meet directly. Therefore, people can save time and money. Electronic mail has become a very popular means of communication in the business world today, so writing is more beneficial.

In summary, there are many reasons to understand that writing is an essential skill. That is a necessary expression and communication way and writing helps student connect to the world around them, both on and off the page. Moreover, learners can improve speaking and reading skill when writing. “Writing skills are important for students' continued learning in all academic areas, communication and self-expression. Thus, this skill is important in many areas.

### **Students' problems in writing skill**

Writing is a vital skill, but it is not an easy skill because this skill required many factors. In writing process writers have to brainstorm all time, and find out terrific ideas, settings and something like that to make their writing attractive. Writing requires the learners know about many rules including grammar, spelling and punctuation. To become successful writer, the learners have to combine skills and knowledge in the writing process. Norrish (1983) states that, “We can conclude that writing is of course, not easy in some way, more difficult than speaking.” Students need to have a lot of vocabularies and to

know how to use them reasonably. Grammar is also an important factor, readers can misunderstand the content if grammar structures are not used exactly. Besides, if the students want to have a successful article, they need to have enough background knowledge to express ideas. Thus, these are also problems that the students usually face in writing skill.

### **Grammar**

According to Hirai et al. (2010), "Grammar is a way to organize the sentence and create a good language." The structure of sentences is determined by the way words are arranged. Languages are made up of a set of norms and conventions called grammar. Grammar is the body of structural principles that determine how words, sentences, and clauses are put together in a given natural language. According to James (2005), "Grammar is a study of the language and describes the way of putting words together to make meaningful sentences." Grammar is the structural foundation of our ability to express ourselves. The more we are aware of how it works, the more we can monitor the meaning and effectiveness of the way others and we use language. It can help foster precision, detect ambiguity, and exploit the richness of expression available in English. In general, we can simply define grammar as the set of rules to make word in order and meaningful.

Grammar choices affect writing style, sentence combining is an effective method for helping students to develop fluency and variety in their own writing style. Thus, grammar is very important in writing. However, this skill is not easy. Vietnamese grammar is simple, so, when writing, students are easy to apply. On the contrary, when switching to English grammar to be able to apply it fluently, it is a big challenge because students need to pay attention to a lot of small details such as tense and word order. Some of the students are usually poor grammar, and the first difficulty is tense. They do not know how to use suitable tense in writing exactly. The cause makes the readers to misunderstand the writers' meaning. Moreover, students are also face mistakes in using passive and active sentences, preposition. In addition, part of speech is also a common error in writing of the students. They can understand meaning of words but they forget part of speech when putting in sentences. Eight most common errors of students' writing were: verb-tenses, articles, word forms, capital letters, punctuation, missing words, spelling, and prepositions. However, they usually face many difficulties about tense, grammatical structure and part of speech.

In short, grammar is the essential factors in the writing process. Failure to master tenses, structure and part of speech easily leads to many difficulties as well as discourages students. Therefore, students need to master basic grammar to avoid those problems and to write better.

### **Vocabulary**

There are many different definitions of vocabulary. Linse (2005) writes, "Vocabulary is the collection of words that an individual knows". Vocabulary is the glue that holds stories, ideas and content together and that facilitates making comprehension accessible. Also, Richards & Renandya (2002) suggest, "Vocabulary is a core component of language proficiency and provides much of the basis for how well learners speak, listen, read and write". *Vocabulary is a central element of language proficiency and contributes much of the basis for how students speak, listen, read and write.* Vocabulary is an important part in writing, because English learners have to use vocabulary to communication with everyone about ideas, thoughts, and emotions to those around them. If students do not know the meaning of words, they will not be able to write anything.

Muncie (2002) also confirms that, it is difficult to write in a foreign language for writers with limited vocabulary since vocabulary knowledge is the most important factor in writing. Vocabulary can enhance students' writing skill. Student who improve vocabulary will result in improved writing skill. According to Krashen (1989), the reason for devoting attention to vocabulary is "a large vocabulary is of course essential for mastery of a language and "the lack of vocabulary is a major problem."

When learners are lack of vocabulary, it really affects their writing quality. Besides, some of words cannot be used in this situations but they can be used in the others although they have the same meaning, the meaning of vocabulary varies basing on contexts. Learners can know, understand meaning of an individual word, but cannot know its meaning when it goes with other words or in different situations. Therefore, the students feel confused when choosing words.

### **Ideas**

To write a good paragraph, students need to generate and organize ideas. Often students would rather not plan before writing, so they usually have difficulty in organizing their ideas or poor organization during writing. Students' ability to generate and organize ideas can affect the richness of final piece of writing. In order to arrange ideas well, students must be able to get started, concentrate on the task and monitor the quality of the work. In fact, students usually lack of ideas in writing, because they do not have background knowledge about their subject that makes readers to feel boring. An (2013) defines, "Background awareness as previous knowledge about a subject. Background knowledge can influence someone's ability to understand the meaning of texts." When they encounter certain circumstances or they know this before, they become aware of the meaning of topics easily. Students who lack sufficient background knowledge or are unable to activate this knowledge may struggle to access, participate, and progress throughout, the general curriculum. Therefore, their article will be bored and disjointed.

Moreover, the students usually lack of evidence for their opinions, because they do not have enough knowledge to prove. Learners need to read more and study proving ways for the ideas. Thus, giving evidence is very necessary so that the readers feel more attractive. Finding evidence is a prerequisite for students to develop ideas. Due to that reason, students have to widen their knowledge through the internet or books to get more ideas before starting to write a paragraph.

In brief, the students have a lot of problem in English writing skill. Some of them lack of background knowledge, some of them are poor grammar and the others are lack of vocabulary or do not how to use words reasonably. Besides, some of students feel uninteresting when writing. Therefore, it is hoped that this study will help students improve their writing skill.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research question**

This research is expected to emphasize the methods to improve writing skill for students. The research was undertaken with the purpose of dealing with the research questions:

1. What are some common mistakes that English majored freshmen at Tay Do University face when writing a paragraph?
2. What are some effective methods that can help English majored students at Tay Do University overcome these problems?



### Research Design

The target population and the research instruments were the elements that determined the reality and validity of the research. In this study, students who have been studying at an English class at Tay Do University were selected as the subjects to survey. The process of collecting information from the sample was conducted by the questionnaires and the tests.

### Participants

This study was carried out with 41 students in an English class. There are 36 students who are female and 5 students who are male. Their ages range from 18 to 19. They are freshmen at Tay Do University. They have studied English from 7 to 11 years. According to the interview questions, there were 65.5% of students who felt an average with writing skill. However, 6.9% of students were not favor in this skill and there were only 27.6% of students who liked writing.

### Instrument

**Pretest:** Students were asked to write a paragraph about a memory that they remember best. All students completed the paragraph in two weeks. After that, the researchers edited the paragraphs with the help from the writing teacher.

**Posttest:** Students continued to write another paragraph about travel that they enjoyed best. They were provided travel materials that related to the subject. Besides, the researcher recommended the students to get information on the internet and to check grammar in writing. After that, the researchers edited the paragraphs with the help from the writing teacher.

### Questionnaire

Collecting data via questionnaire is the final stage of this research. They were delivered to 41 students when they finished the last activity to provide detailed information with regard to writing skill. The questionnaire consisted of 19 questions. There are 11 questions that are multiple choice and 8 explaining questions. This strategy helped to ensure a one hundred percent return rate and the researchers could explain any ambiguities when necessary.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results from the questionnaire

#### Students' background

##### The English learning experience

The participants in research were freshmen at Tay Do University, they came from different places. Therefore, their English learning experience may cause different ideas in writing.

Table 1: Years of learning English of the participants

English learning years	The rate (%)
4	7.3
8	82.9
9-10	4.9
More than 10	4.9

Statistical data in the table showed that 82.9% of students who had 8 years in learning English (they have studied English since they were in secondary school), roughly 7.3% of students had 4 years (they have studied English since they were in high school), and about 10% of students had more than 8 years of learning English. Some students considered English as very necessary, so they were taught English from childhood. Otherwise, other students were from provinces they had 8 English learning years. They were only taught English in secondary school and high school. Therefore, the students have different ideas about writing skill and their difficulties are also different.

### The rate of students' ideas about writing skill

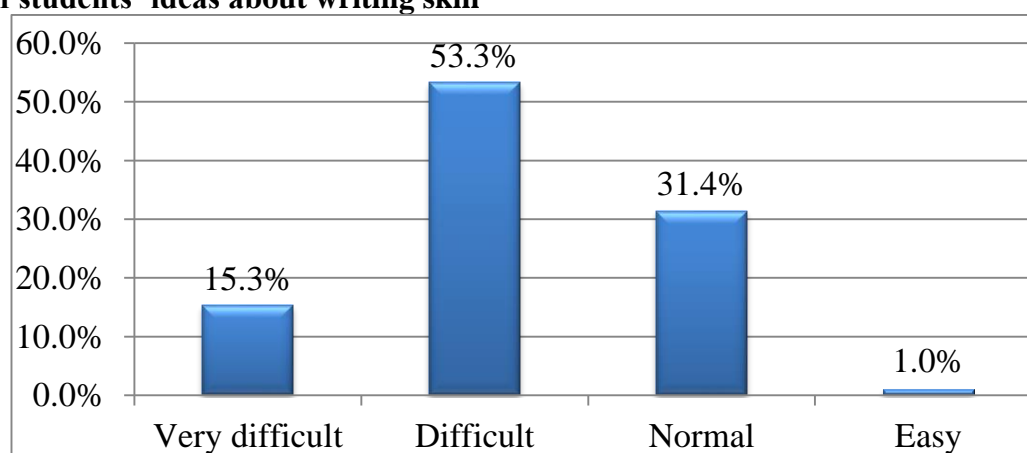


Figure 1: Students' ideas about writing skill

Figure 1 pointed out that 53.3% of students said that writing was difficult, 15.3% of students chose very difficult in writing, 31.4% of students thought that writing was normal and 1.0% of students agreed that this skill was easy. Especially, 43.7% of students studied English from 8 to 10 years said that writing required many skills such as: grammar, vocabulary, expression. However, almost students could understand the role of writing. They stated that writing helped them to train grammar and vocabulary. Besides, some of students also believed that writing effect other skills in English. Writing is a difficult skill for the students, but they also understand the important role of writing. Therefore, improving ways are very essential.

### Difficulties in writing

Through the result of questionnaire, students showed some difficulties in writing as well as the ways to overcome these problems. The data would be showed through the figures and the tables. The percentage of each part showed the real problems that the students face in their writing. Moreover, the result from the opened-question may support more information from the students' answer to show clearly about their difficulties.

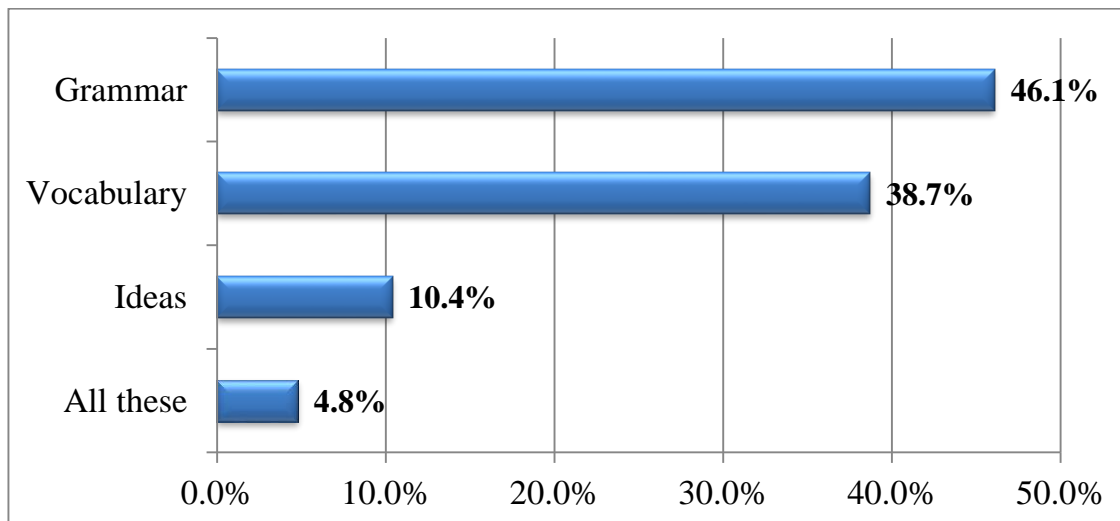


Figure 2: Difficulties in writing

There were 46.1% of students who had grammar difficulty and 38.7% of the students got vocabulary difficulty. Thus, the rate of grammar and vocabulary difficulties were higher than idea difficulty. Besides, some students had all difficulties about grammar, vocabulary and ideas, but the rate is not high (4.8%). Students said that they did not have enough vocabulary to write, so they could not express their ideas completely.

### Grammar difficulties

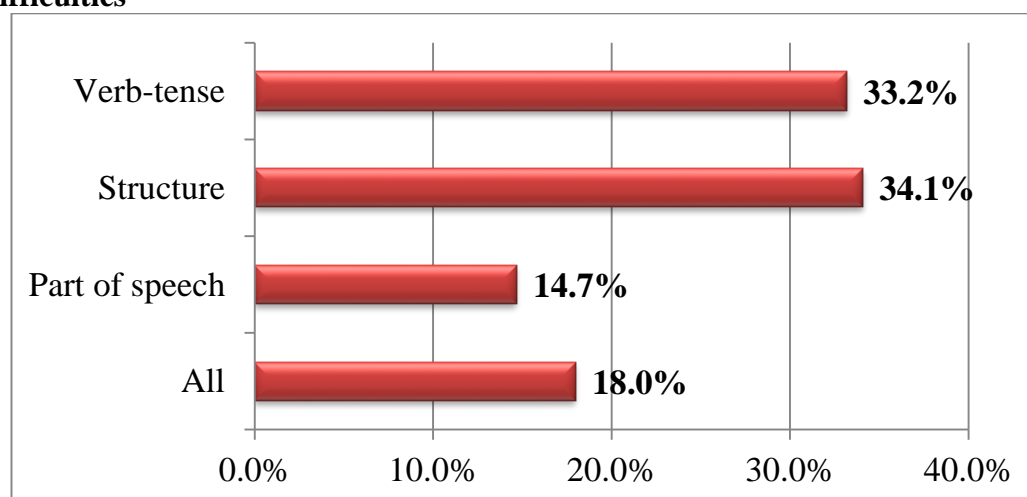


Figure 3: Grammar difficulties

The chart showed that the students had high rate about verb tense (33.2%) and structure (34.1%) difficulties and the rate of part of speech was the lowest (14.7%). Besides, some of students (18%) got all these difficulties. Thus, grammar is a big problem of students and they need a lot of time to improve. Although, students face difficulties in grammar, but they understand the role grammar in writing clearly. They state that grammar is an important factor in any languages and grammar help them to write correctly. The readers do not misunderstand the writers' ideas. Moreover, the students can learn other skills well, if they have good grammar.



### Vocabulary difficulties

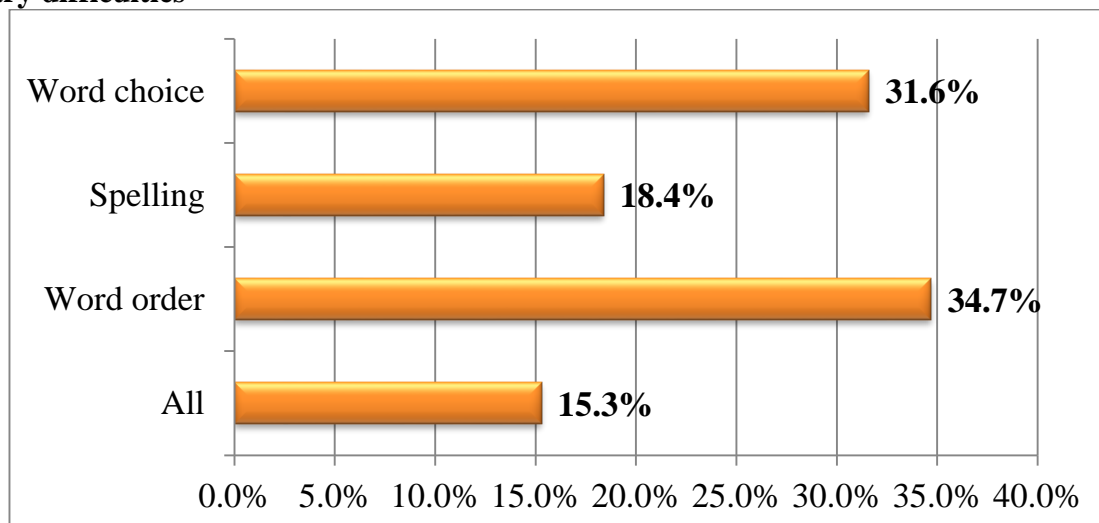


Figure 4: Vocabulary difficulties

34.7% was the highest rate of students who had word order difficulty. The reason is translation habit, so the students usually forget word order when they translate their ideas from Vietnamese into English. Besides, meaning of word is also problem of the students, 31.6% of the students who often had difficulty in word choice. Some words are synonyms, but students cannot use in the same situation. In addition, students usually write misspelling some long words because they do not remember word form clearly. However, they do not also use dictionary when writing. There were 15.3% of the students had all these difficulties.

### Idea difficulties

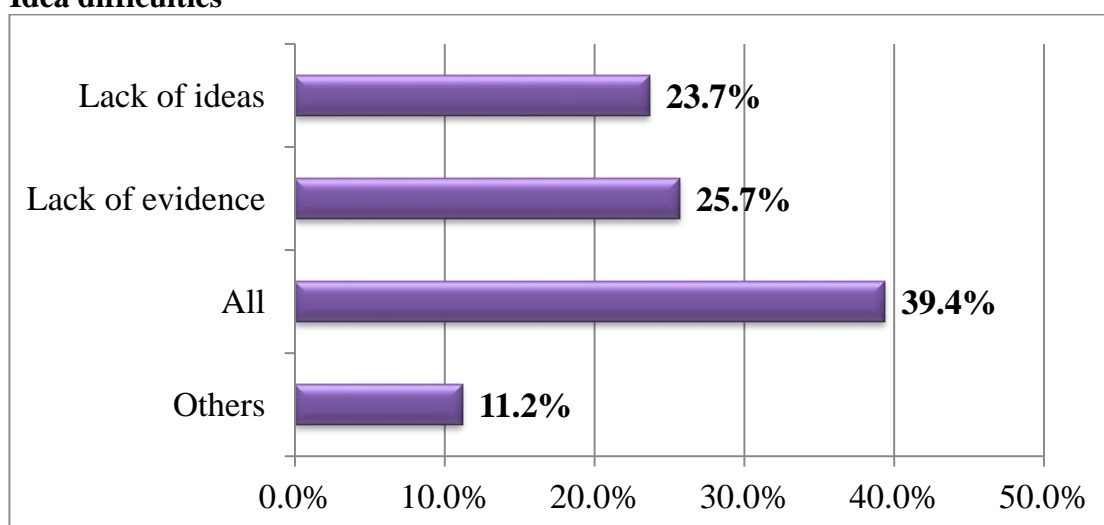


Figure 5: Ideas difficulties

There were 25.7% of students who lacked of evidence in writing. They state that they do not have enough background knowledge, so they do not have specific evidence. However, if the writers want readers to believe in what are written, they need to prove the ideas by evidence, but students are limited

by this requirement, because when they choose ideas to write, they need to have evidence for the ideas. In addition, 23.7% of the students admitted they lacked of ideas. Besides, 39.4% of students had to face both of difficulties. Some students found it hard to arrange their ideas, others have ideas that are not relevant to the topic. In brief, students got these difficulties because they are lack of background knowledge.

### The methods to improve writing skill

Table 2: Ways to improve grammar

Ways	The rate (%)
Doing grammar exercises	41.4
Reading and listening to grammar examples	19.5
Practicing the new structures frequently	26.8
Others	12.3

Table 2 showed some ways that help students to improve their grammar skill. 41.4% students used grammar exercises doing way, because they can remember the structures long. They can understand the structures using ways by doing sentence changing exercises. Learners say that they also do fill in the blank exercises, because they can write verb form correctly. Therefore, they can write better. Besides, learners also practice the new structures (26.8%) frequently, so the freshmen can remember grammar structure better. They use the structures by speaking and writing, so they can improve their speaking skill. They can write the sentences by the new structure, then they speak again the sentences. When they can remember the new structure, they should not write and try to speak. In addition, students also read examples (19.5%). When they read examples and compare with the structure, they can understand easier. Moreover, they say that reading materials can study the writers' structures and can expand background knowledge. Thus, students can improve their grammar by doing exercises, reading materials and practicing the new structures frequently.

Table 3: Ways to improve vocabulary

Ways	The rate (%)
Doing vocabulary exercises	43.9
Playing word games	9.7
Using the new words frequently	21.9
Others	24.5

Vocabulary is an important factor in writing, so students need to have good vocabulary. There were 43.9% students increasing their new words by doing exercises. They usually do multiple choice exercise, because they can remember meaning of word. Besides, learners also do matching exercises that help them study synonyms and antonyms of new words. Filling in the blanks also helps them to put word form in sentence correctly. Moreover, the students also use the new words frequently (21.9%) in writing and speaking, because they can remember longer. Besides, they also play word games (9.7%) such as:

letters arrangement, word typing, and train game. In short, students' vocabulary can be improved by reading materials, doing exercises and using the new words frequently.

Table 4: Ways to improve ideas

Ways	The rate (%)
Watching news	9.7
Reading materials	34.1
Exchanging information with others	43.9
Others	12.3

Ideas is soul in writing, readers can be attracted by good ideas. Therefore, writers need to have large background knowledge. 43.9% of the students usually exchanged information with everyone, they state that they feel more interesting when talking each other. Besides, reading materials (34.1%) was always an effective way, the students can learn vocabulary and expand their knowledge. There were 9.7% of the students who agreed that watching news was also knowledge expanding way, and they can improve their listening skill by foreign newsletter. In brief, students can expand background knowledge by watching news, reading materials and exchanging information with others.

### **Some other ways to improve writing skill**

Firstly, students should try writing in different places or at different times of the day. Maybe, they write their block at night; try getting up 15 minutes earlier and writing in the morning. If, they have trouble when writing in noisy places; try writing in a quiet and comfortable place.

Next, students should write daily. The importance of writing daily is that they start to create a new habit. Writing every day in English will soon become habit. Students can write dairy or favorite topic and they should write the topic that they understand clearly, because they can learn how to express ideas on paper. However, students also need to express ideas suitably. Therefore, they should write an outline so that they can arrange ideas and observe content generally. They can add or edit ideas before writing, so they can save time. In addition, they can remember ideas when writing and creating logic for article.

Moreover, if students want to have good ideas in the outline, they should read more. They need to read more what they are going to write, so that they can train creation in article. In fact, students should read different documents in free time. When getting these habits, they can express ideas when necessary and they do not need to find out information. In addition, they can think new ideas when there are a lot of background knowledge. Also, students should note new phrase when reading so that they can use when writing.

When students have good ideas, they should write draft firstly. Sometimes, their best writing becomes better after they take a break and work on a second or third draft. When they rewrite their article, they are often able to get their message across more clearly. They make think of things that they did not think to write in the first draft and they can add it in a later draft. Therefore, students should write more than one draft.

Next, when students complete the draft, they can ask their friends to edit. Therefore, writing in groups or pairs is also effective, they can edit errors each other. Besides, students can ask help from teachers.

However, they should read again their article before asking help, because they can remember their errors. They can avoid the errors in next time.

In addition, students can try talking with foreigners by writing when they can, because they can improve grammar skill and learn new vocabulary. Moreover, students should think about reader when writing, because they can avoid error that makes the reader misunderstand. Besides, they can also think ideas that make the reader to feel more interesting.

In summary, these are some ways to improve writing skill. Writing is a process, so students need to effort more. They need a lot of time to practice and apply ways to improve writing skill. If they can train hard, their writing skill can be better.

### The results from the pre-test

The result from pretest shows the rate of writing errors include: grammar, vocabulary and ideas.

### Students' errors in writing skill

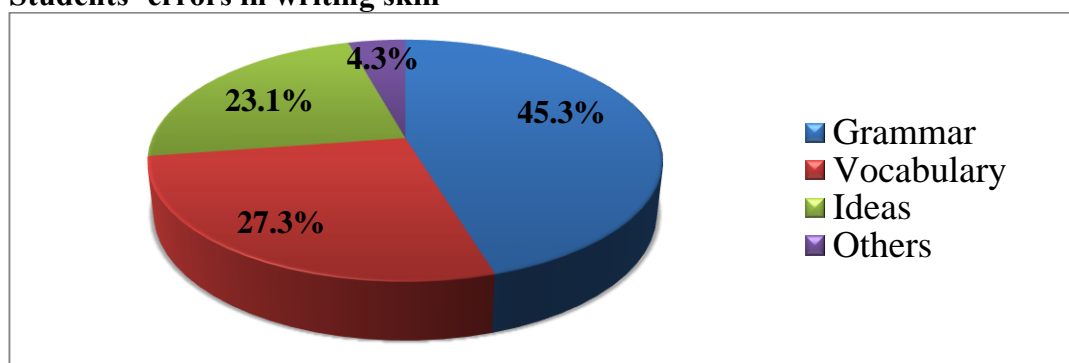


Figure 6: Errors in pre-test

Students were asked to write a paragraph (from 100 to 120 words) about a memory that they remember best. Through the figure, there were a lot of errors in students' paragraph. 45.3% of errors belonged to grammar, 27.3% of errors were vocabulary and 23.1% of errors were ideas or background knowledge. Besides, 4.3% of errors were layout errors, no introduction sentence or no conclusion sentence. Thus, students had three main errors: grammar, vocabulary and ideas. However, the rate of grammar errors was the highest.

Table 5: Grammar errors

Grammar errors		The rate (%)	
Verb-tenses		27.1	
Structures	Passive	4.2	9.9
	Clause	2.9	
	Comparative	2.8	
Part of speech		8.3	

The results in figure 6 stated that most of students had difficulties in term of grammar. There were three main errors in 45.3% of grammar errors: verb-tense, grammar structure (passive, clause, comparative) and part of speech. There were 4.2% of passive, 2.9% of clause and 2.8% of comparative in 9.9% of

grammar structure errors. Grammar structure was also a big problem in writing. For example, one of the sentences: “I *had* given a clock by my father on my birthday.” the auxiliary verb must be “was instead of had” in this sentence. Besides, 27.1% were verb-tense errors, students did not use tense at the suitable time. Especially, they misunderstood about present perfect and simple past using ways. A student wrote: “I *moved* to my grandfather’s house since 2009”. The student should use present perfect because he still lives in his grandfather’s house until the present. In addition, 8.3% of part of speech error showed that students usually forget word forms when writing a sentence. As a student wrote: “I am always *happiness* in my family”. “happiness” was part of speech error in the sentence, it should be corrected “happy”. Thus, the freshmen often have common grammar mistakes in writing.

Table 6: Vocabulary errors

Vocabulary errors	The rate (%)
Word order	11.6
Spelling	9.5
Word choice	8.3

Vocabulary error was also a big problem of students. There were 11.6% of word order, 9.5% of spelling and 8.3% of word choice. Spelling errors may cause because students did not check their paragraphs after writing. They usually wrote long words incorrectly. For example, they wrote “This is a *necessary* thing in my life” or “My father is *sucess* and he loves me so much.” Freshmen also wrote some words incorrectly such as: *difficult* (difficult), *enviroment* (environment), *specailly* (specially). In addition, word choice (8.3%) was also difficult. Because some words have the same meaning but they are different from using way. A student wrote that “because my house is *further* than his”, the words “further” and “farther” are the same meaning. However, the word “further” cannot be used in this situation, because “further” is used with non-physical distance. In fact, students often had problem with word meaning and the problem when using a suitable word. Besides, word order (11.6%) was also a difficulty, there was a sentence: “My *memories best* are my holiday trips with grandma”, the phrase “my memories best” should be corrected “my best memories”. Moreover, lack of vocabulary is considered as a difficulty in learners’ writing, they might cause from their dependence on dictionary. In short, students stated that vocabulary was the biggest problem in writing.

Table 7: Idea errors

Ideas errors	The rate (%)
Lack of evidence	16.2
Lack of logic	9.1

Idea errors are found in students’ paragraphs. 16.2% of idea errors were lack of evidence for ideas. Freshmen had ideas for their paragraphs. However, they usually did not offer evidence, they wrote, “I had a great memory. I felt happy.”, but they did not tell about the memory clearly. In addition, 9.1% of idea errors were lack of logic. Since students may have a lot of ideas, they did not know how to arrange them suitably. For example, they wrote a memory that was a birthday party and they showed time, place, participant, activity and feeling. However, they wrote about activities firstly, they should show time and place firstly. Therefore, they wrote and forgot ordering ideas logically or they may not write an outline before writing.

### The results from the post-test and comparing

The results of post-test showed the writing errors in post-test and the difference between pre-test and post-test. Besides, this part stated comparative between the results.

### The rate of students' errors in writing skill

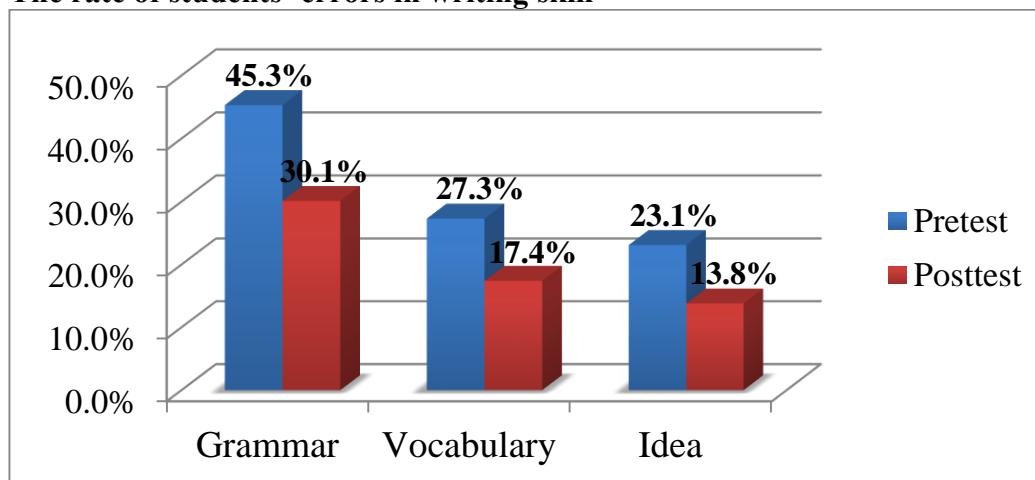


Figure 7: Errors in pre-test and post-test

Freshmen's paragraphs in pretest were edited and returned with the help from writing teacher. In posttest, students were asked to write a paragraph (from 100 to 120 words) about a place that they like best. The results of errors were showed in figure 7 including errors in grammar, vocabulary and ideas. The rate of grammar errors reduced 6.2% (from 45.3% to 39.1%), the rate of vocabulary errors also went down 9.9% (from 27.3% to 17.4%) and the rate of ideas errors got 9.3% lower (from 23.1% to 13.8%). Students avoided their errors in pre-test and wrote better their paragraph in post-test. Maybe, they exchanged some improving ways after the pre-test. Therefore, they could write better in post-test.

### Comparing grammar errors were showed in the following figure

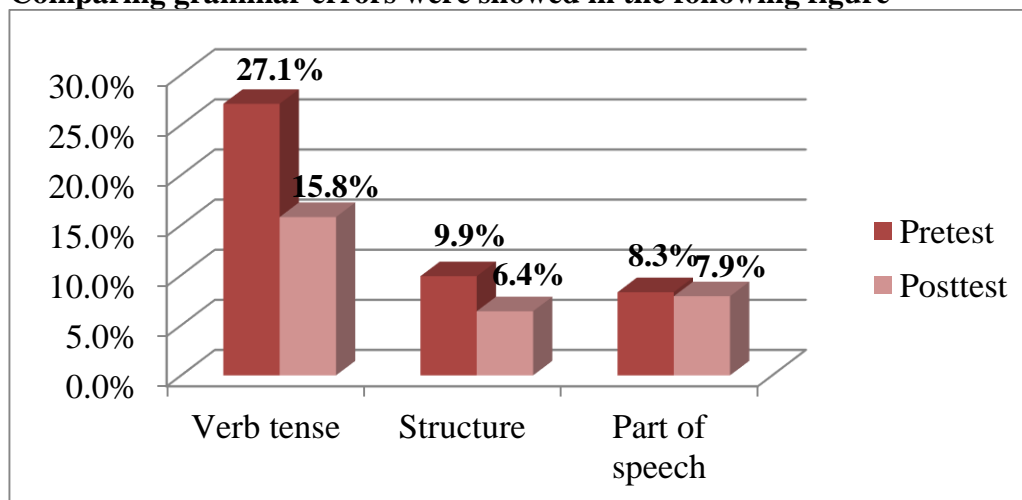


Figure 8: Grammar errors



Figure 8 showed difference between pre-test and post-test about grammar errors. The rate of verb tense error reduced 11.3% (from 27.1% to 15.8%). Besides, the rate of structure errors also got 3.5% lower (from 9.9% to 6.4%) and part of speech errors were 0.4% (from 8.3% to 7.9%). Students said that reading helped them improve writing in posttest. Because they were given a chance to read travel materials and they could learn the writer's structure ways. In brief, these errors can be improved, if the students try with suitable methods.

Table 8: Grammar errors

Pretest	Posttest
Ex: I <i>moved</i> to my grandma's house since 2009.	Ex: I have moved to Can Tho city.
Ex: I <i>had</i> given a clock by my father.	Ex: I was given a nice hat by my mother.
Ex: I am always <i>happiness</i> in my family.	Ex: When I came there, I felt wonderful and got comfort.

Comparing vocabulary errors were showed in the following figure

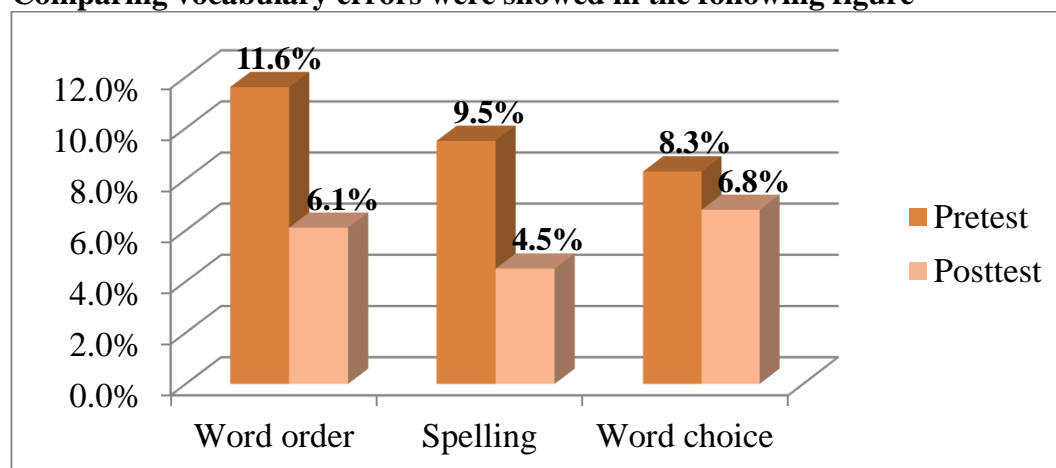


Figure 9: Vocabulary errors

Through observation, students used dictionary to arrange words suitably. Word order errors went down 5.5% (from 11.6% to 6.1%). Spelling errors also reduced 5% (from 9.5% to 4.5%). Students reread after finishing writing to check spelling, so the errors could be reduced. In addition, the rate of word choice error decreased only 1.5% (from 8.3% to 6.8%) Thus, word choice problem was still a difficulty of students.

Table 9: Vocabulary errors

Pretest	Posttest
Ex: One of my <i>memories best</i> are my holiday trips.	Ex: A best place is my house.
Ex: When I was childhood, I was <i>dificult</i> .	Ex: We have difficulty, but we are happy.
Ex: Because my house is <i>further</i> than his,...	Ex: This year we take a farther trip than last year.

**Comparing idea errors were showed in the following figure**

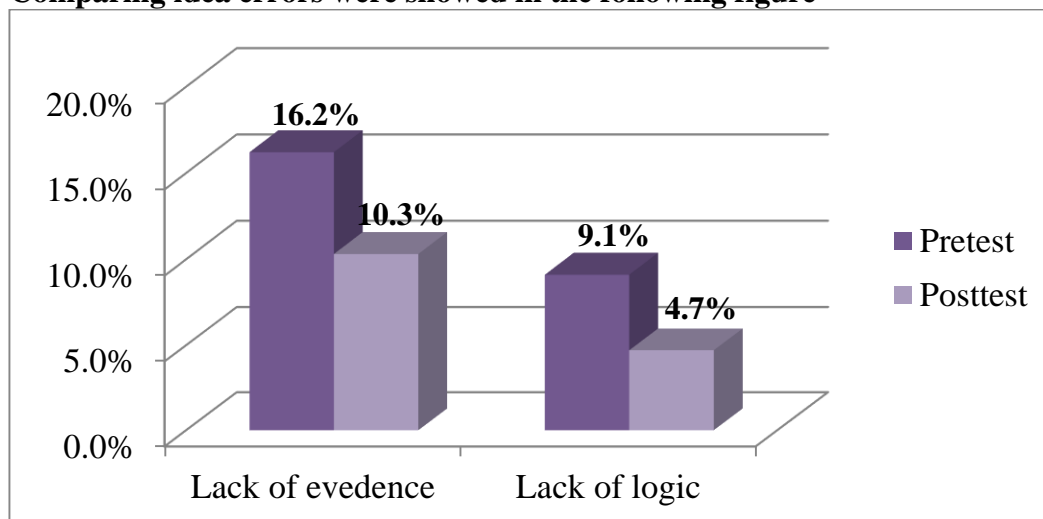


Figure 10: Idea errors

Figure 10 showed that students improve their idea errors, they read some travel materials before writing in post-test. Therefore, they knew how to give some evidences in their paragraph. When they wrote about beautiful sights, they showed some famous places or they wrote that “the weather is also great”, they also showed detail in day such as: weather, activity or time. For example, they write “We took some photos in the city flower garden.” or “It is so cold in the morning.” The rate of lack of evidence errors reduced 5.9% (from 16.2% to 10.3%). Besides, the rate of lack of logic error also decreased 4.4% (from 9.1% to 4.7%). The freshmen often showed sights to weather and feeling logically or they could describe the sight, then they explain why they like the place. In brief, students had some improving ways, so the idea errors could be improved in post-test.

## CONCLUSION

The research was conducted to find out some ways to improve writing a paragraph. After the errors had gathered in the pre-test and post-test, analyzed the data in the questionnaire, the researchers took out the conclusion for the study. There are some effective ways that can help students to improve their writing skill. The basic factors which involve the difficulties of students are vocabulary, background knowledge and grammar.

During writing process, students are confused with grammar. Therefore, they should do grammar exercises to remember structures. Furthermore, students can understand the ways how to use structures, so they can write better. They also use the new structures by speaking or writing frequently, so they can also improve expressing skill by English. Besides, reading materials helps students learn the writers’ grammar using ways. Students also ask their friends to edit grammar errors. Therefore, they should write in pairs or groups.

During the research process, some ways are showed to improve writing skill. Students do not express their thoughts or opinions completely, because they do not have enough vocabulary. Therefore, they can improve their vocabulary by doing exercises that help them remember meaning of words better. Besides, there are students who can learn vocabulary by practicing new words frequently. In addition, reading

materials is also effective ways, because that can overcome difficulties in word choice. Bilingual books are good for students; they do not spend a lot of time to find out dictionary. The students can learn the ways to use words in different situations.

The poor background knowledge makes students lack ideas in writing. For these reason, students read materials before writing. In the questionnaire, they stated that they could use knowledge in the materials to write. Especially, some materials are relative to their subject. Moreover, the students also exchange information when writing. They feel more interesting when talking. Therefore, learners should write in pairs or groups, they can edit errors each other. The organization in writing is also very important, so ideas are ordered logically. The students often write an outline that helps them remember ideas and organize opinions suitably.

In short, it is believed that the methods could apply to solve difficulties in writing. Besides, students can also ask the teachers to edit their errors. It is hoped that the students will practice these methods regularly to improve their writing skill effectively.

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