

## AN INVESTIGATION INTO FINDING COMMON MISTAKES OF WRITING SKILLS BY TEAM WORKING ON FACEBOOK

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**Abstract.** *This research attempts to investigate the effectiveness of using team working on Facebook toward writing skills improvement. Based on the discussion, a number of recommendations are suggested for teachers and students during the application of this method to improve writing skills. To answer the research problem, the data collected from the experimental study, questionnaire, and interview with first-year students of English Department at the University of Foreign Language Studies, The University of Danang, are analyzed quantitatively.*

**Key words:** *team working, writing skills, recommendations, experimental study, Facebook*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This article aims to find out the students' common mistakes in learning writing English. Our suggestion is that using team working on Facebook is the way to help English teachers improve students' English writing performance. English is one of the compulsory subjects in Vietnam. However, Vietnamese students still cannot write English fluently and coherently. The main reasons can be traditional teaching and learning methods. The students had not practiced writing a lot in classroom as well as at home. They did not have correction from their teacher and students' interaction, so they could not find out their mistakes in their academic writing.

According to National Foreign Language 2020 Project carried out by Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training, all students in University of Foreign Language Studies must pass the official proficiency examination (level C1, approximately IELTS 6.5) before graduating. However, many students had got low marks of writing skill in this kind of examination. Current research aims at identifying students' common writing difficulties. From that, some suggestions were made to motivate students in learning writing English.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Teaming working

Team working or group working started getting attention of educationists and researchers in the 70s. According to Harmer (1991), working together is worthwhile as “group work immediately increases the amount of students talking time”. Moreover, team working and group activities can enhance higher levels of thinking than the traditional lecture approach and help to retain knowledge. That is the reason why Ellis (1994) noted that generally students successfully learn in natural settings. Race (2000) identified the following benefits of team working for students:

- Students have a more enjoyable, social learning experience.
- They make friends.
- They get much more feedback on how learning is going.
- They receive better explanations of what they do not understand.
- They learn a lot by explaining things to fellow learners.
- They pick up useful skills which employers value, such as leadership roles.
- They gather evidence for their CV.

Therefore, with all those benefits, it can be seen clearly that team working creates a good studying environment for students to learn English skills in general, and writing particularly.

### 2.2. Facebook

Nowadays, Facebook has become one of the useful means for language learning, effectively enhancing writing abilities of the English foreign language students in general, and the first year students in English Department of The University of Foreign Language Studies in particular. According to Shih (2011), he reported that the students improved in paragraph organizations, content, vocabulary spelling, and grammar after receiving Facebook integrated blended learning. In addition, many different investigations showed that Facebook is surely an effective tool for language teaching and learning (Mills, 2011; Schwartz, 2009; Solomon & Schrum, 2007).

In terms of this theory, Facebook plays such huge role as a community of practice. Therefore, using it, our students can discuss their English writing difficulties and self-correct their common mistakes. During the discussion and feedback, the teacher can act as more knowledgeable and help their students to step from their actual stage of development (the position where they can master the task by themselves) to their potential stage of development (the position where they construct new knowledge after having some negotiation, collaboration, and assistance from more knowledgeable people (Lambert & Walker, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978)). In brief, the students can improve their writing competence from the assistance of other people through Facebook. They are able to learn new lessons, share and be shared, and they can enhance their academic writing better. In the classroom, the teacher can ask their students to create Facebook accounts and add their teacher and classmates. Therefore, they can support and receive support from others for their writing. Mazer, Murphy & Simonds (2007) described using Facebook as a tool for language learning actively encouraging a collaborative environment, building positive attitudes, increasing motivation and student participation, and sustaining teacher – student relationship.

### 2.3. Writing skill – common writing mistakes

Academic writing plays an essential role in learning a foreign language. Non-native speakers of the English language should be familiar with writing processes, elements and other features including formality, objectivity and complexity in order to use the language precisely and accurately. Kepner (1991) suggested that students' mistakes can be corrected and analyzed to increase their writing accuracy by defining two important points. The first involves the process of acquiring forms and structures of second language acquisition. The other factors involve the ability and willingness of teachers to deal with practical problems in terms of corrective feedback. However, there are many common mistakes in our writing class room including:

- Spelling
- Tense
- Content
- Subject/Verb Agreement
- Singular/Plural
- Punctuation
- Word formation
- Article
- Prepositions
- Pronouns

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### *Research questions*

- What are common writing mistakes the first year students met?
- To what extent did the students' team working on Facebook contribute to the enhancement of their writing competence?
- What were the attitudes of the students toward the effects of using team working on Facebook as pathway for English writing improvement?

#### *Research methods:*

Empirical research: 20 freshmen of the Department of English, the University of Foreign Language Studies, and the University of Da Nang are separated into Group 1 and Group 2 to finish the B1 writing test. It was a 3 unit credit course that met three hours weekly within a 15 week period. This course was usually taken by undergraduate students from different classes in English Department, during first semester. Group 1 was then instructed to work in a team on Facebook three times a week within 2 months, while Group 2 kept using common English learning methods. Another test of equivalent level will be taken after 2 months.

The pre-test and post-tests were designed in equivalent forms. The test was to be done in one hour. The total score of this test was 100 points. The writing contents were designed including writing a short paragraph and an informal letter. For each part in the test, the students were asked to write from 100 to 150 words. The criteria for grading the students' writing were covered task requirement, punctuation, organization and grammar rules and usage.

Test results are compared to identify the student's writing performance and the efficiency of using team working on Facebook toward the writing improvement.

- Questionnaire is separated into 2 sources: 1/ Efficiency of using team working on Facebook in practicing writing skills (only for Group 1) and 2/ Survey of the students' awareness of using team working on Facebook toward their English writing learning.
- Interview with students in the experiment to clarify the using team working on Facebook in practicing writing skills process and students' feeling after 2 months performing the experiment. The data were collected with an MP3 player. All the participants needed to answer the questions involve in the finding.

#### 4. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

##### 4.1. Common writing mistakes of the first year students in the University of Foreign Language Studies

The results from pre-test showed that most of the first-year students in the University of Foreign Language Studies are not good at writing, especially academic writing. Although the results reveal that the obtained scores of the post-test were statistically higher than those of the pre-test, students still have many writing common mistakes. It can be seen clearly from the following table:

Table 1 Common Writing Mistakes of the first year students in the University of Foreign Language Studies

| Writing Common Mistakes | Group 1  |           | Group 2  |           |
|-------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|
|                         | Pre-Test | Post-Test | Pre-Test | Post-Test |
| Spelling                | 18%      | 2%        | 16%      | 10%       |
| Tense                   | 20%      | 8%        | 24%      | 20%       |
| Content                 | 10%      | 2%        | 10%      | 4%        |
| Subject/ Verb Agreement | 8%       | 4%        | 10%      | 5%        |
| Singular/ Plural        | 10%      | 0%        | 10%      | 8%        |
| Punctuation             | 7%       | 2%        | 7%       | 7%        |
| Word formation          | 10%      | 5%        | 4%       | 5%        |
| Articles                | 5%       | 4%        | 5%       | 3%        |
| Prepositions            | 8%       | 4%        | 6%       | 4%        |
| Pronouns                | 4%       | 2%        | 8%       | 2%        |

From this table, it can be observed that from 20% to 24% students in both Group 1 and Group 2 had difficulties with tenses and spelling mistakes in their pre-test of writing. The results from the post-test indicated that most of students were satisfied with their writing score because they could avoid many different mistakes including: singular/plural (from 10% down to 0% in Group 1); tenses (from 20% down to 8% in Group 1) and subject/verb agreement (from 10% down to 5% in Group 2). The last test results of both groups are generally increased compared to the first test results. This is understandable as all students were practicing language skills at school and after school. However, the improvement of group 1 is greater than which of group 2 compared to first test results.

#### 4.2. Writing Competence Enhancement of the Students by using team working on Facebook

The statistical results as shown in the following table suggest that the student's team working on Facebook contributed to their writing competence, as they interact and receive feedback and correction from their teacher and friends.

Table 2 A comparison between the mean score of the pre-test and post-test in both Group 1 and Group 2

| Test      | Mean score of Group 1 | Mean score of Group 2 |
|-----------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Pre-Test  | 55.05                 | 54.94                 |
| Post-Test | 88.7                  | 60.03                 |

The mean scores of these two tests illustrate a statistically significant difference. At the beginning, the mean scores of group 1 was the same as group 2. However, after two-month writing practice, the results increased significantly from the pre-test, for example, the mean scores of group 1 was only 55.05 in the pre-test and peaked at 88.7 in their post-test. These findings indicate that the students made significant improvement in writing after the treatment. Besides, students in the experiment were asked about their opinion on the efficiency of using team working on Facebook for practicing and improving writing skills. The feedbacks are shown in Table 3 below:

Table 3 Group 1 feedback on the efficiency of using team working on Facebook

| Feedback   | % Students |
|--|------------|
| Very useful (helps gain ideas, new knowledge and viewpoints for students' writing performance) | 38.5%      |
| Very useful (helps correct common writing mistakes for students)                               | 32.5%      |
| Useful (helps improve writing score in class tests)  | 16.7%      |
| Useful (helps gain students' interaction and team working)                                     | 12.3%      |
| Not useful (helps gain nothing)  | 0%         |

Table 3 indicates that 38.5 of the students thought that using team working on Facebook is very useful because it helps gain ideas, new knowledge and viewpoints for students' writing performance. For 32.5% of the students, using team working on Facebook is very useful because it helps correct common writing mistakes for students. In addition, 16.7% of the students pointed out the one more advantage of using team working on Facebook is that it will help improve writing score in class tests.

#### 4.3. Attitudes of the students toward the effects of using team working on Facebook as pathway for English writing improvement

One of the most important parts of this finding is focused on the attitudes of the students toward the effects of using team working on Facebook as pathway for English writing improvement. As a result, most of first-year students regarded Facebook and team working on Facebook an effective means for English writing discussion and improvement. One interviewee said that it became easier to complete the post-test after she practiced writing on Facebook with her team. She said:

*It is very helpful for me. When I practiced my writing with my friends on Facebook, I learnt a lot. They helped me to correct my writing mistakes and discussed new ideas together. So, it will be easier for me to do the post- test.*

As for Facebook functions, all of the interviewees can chat, post comments upload and download files. Therefore, these functions contributed to the improvement of student's writing. Another interviewee told me:

*For me, I can do a lot of useful things on Facebook. I can download anything I want. I can discuss and share my writing problems with my teacher and my classmates. It is very useful, indeed.*

Students mentioned they had met difficulties in working in a team at first, but after two weeks they can share everything together. Therefore, they found that their English writing was much better. They responded that:

*Actually, sometimes I felt embarrassed to ask the teacher and my classmates again on Facebook. I am also afraid of showing my own ideas... I did not pay much attention and learnt nothing at first.*

*However, on Facebook, we have a great chance to discuss with many people. I can ask my teacher and many other students as much as I want. This enhances my writing competence as well as avoids common writing mistakes.*

In sum, with the statistical results and the interview responses, by using team working on Facebook is a really effective and useful method to enhance and improve students' writing skill.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Several results can be inferred from this investigation:

- This finding suggests that the enhancement of the students' writing competence resulted from their discussion, feedback and their teacher's support and correction.
- The correction from other people as well as their self-correction on Facebook is very useful for them to improve their writing score.
- The students had positive attitudes toward Facebook and team working on it. Facebook not only gave them convenience to study at their own pace but also enhanced their writing competences after they had discussions with the teacher and Facebook classmates.

As presented in the study, practicing writing by team working on Facebook can bring about the enhancement of writing competence. Hopefully, more and more researchers will investigate into the effect of Facebook into learning other language skills. In fact, the researchers can also upload language learning materials and discuss with their students, so the students can learn new ways of learning writing. The students can also learn from other's mistakes, and of course, they can improve their English skills in general.

Teachers may use team working on Facebook as a good way to enhance the students' writing skills. The introduction of team working on Facebook with interesting topics matching the students' level will be more effective in motivating students' approach to improve their writing skills. Moreover, teachers may let their students discuss and practice writing topics to motivate them in study, as well as improve their writing and grammar skills.

Students should use more time to work together on Facebook with their writing exercises in particular. Writing skills is as important as other skills and needs frequent practice. This requires the responsibility and awareness from each student. The self-motivation in using team working on Facebook is significantly raised and adds to improving students' writing skills to improve the writing skills.

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