

A Study On Applying Online Software In Improving English Writingskills Of Students In Advanced Program

Nguyen Vu Phong Van¹, Le Huy Hoang², Phan Minh Huyen³

¹(Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration)

²(Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration)

³(Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration)

*Corresponding author: Phan Minh Huyen

Abstract

English writing skill is one of the compulsory modules that students in the advanced program of the University of Economics and Business Administration – Thai Nguyen University (TUEBA) are required to take in their academic years. This productive skill plays an important role in students' English language ability as well as in their future career perspectives. However, their self-study efficiency was still low. In order to improve students' writing outcomes, online soft wares are applied, and after a semester, students' results do improve. This article will provide a clear look at the results of the process.

Keywords: English language, writing skill, online software, University of Economics and Business Administration

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I. Introduction

In the globalization process which is worldwide taking place, English has played a very important position which is the most commonly used language in international transactions. In Vietnam, in order to train future talented bachelors, as well as help them to master at least one foreign language to meet the higher and higher employment demands. English is the most dominant and important language in the Vietnam university education system [1, pages 22 – 37].

Basing on the labour market's employment demands, and to help to train the highly qualified workforce in the condition of international integration, the University of Economics and Business Administration – Thai Nguyen University (TUEBA), has implemented an advanced training program. Every major subject of this program is taught in English, thus, the English language is a compulsory subject that every first-year student of this program has to take before entering his/her following years at the university. This subject consists of modules helping students to develop their English language skills and abilities in order to support them with the necessary language to study their economic majors in English.

Studying a foreign language is a complicated process in which the development of language ability is influenced by many factors [2, pages 67 – 74]. Furthermore, writing skill is one of the most challenging ones for students because of many objectives as well as subjective reasons, especially for those who do not major in the English language. To overcome this challenge and master the writing skill, students have to spend a lot of time and try their best to master it; these will discourage students to continue trying to master this skill.

Besides that, many students don't realize the importance of this skill, they rarely spend time practicing writing skills at home. Knowing this situation, an intensive English writing course was designed to help to improve TUEBA's advanced program's students' writing outcome.

II. Literature Review

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) supported education implies all levels or strategies of the application of ICT in the field of education. It implies also the use of ICT equipment to guide education processes especially the actions and processes of teaching and learning. The use of ICT in the field of education has continued to pose serious challenges to educators and all those who facilitate the teaching and learning processes in the Nigerian education system (Edward, 2007). ICT supported instruction defines all ICT gadgets used as instructional media to deliver lesson contents as prepared by the instructor. Examples of this type of ICT include the broadcast audio and video which could come in the form of radio and television broadcast, audio and videotapes delivered to students as part of the learning kit.

Irshad Hussain, Muhammad Safdar (2008) said that Information technologies have affected every aspect of human activity and have a potential role to play in the field of education and training, especially, in

distance education to transform it into an innovative form of experience. The need for new technologies in the teaching-learning process grows stronger and faster. The information age becomes an era of knowledge providing sound and unmatched feasibility for discovery, exchange of information, communication and exploration to strengthen the teaching-learning process. Information technologies help in promoting opportunities for knowledge sharing throughout the world. The accurate and right information is necessary for effective teaching and learning; and information technologies, as noted by (Haag, 1998), are "set of tools that can help provide the right people with the right information at the right time." Students are independent and they can make the best decisions possible about their studies, learning time, place and resources.

Dwivedi, R & Chakravarthy, R. Problems (2015) concluded that writing helps us to express our thoughts and feelings on paper for the reader to see through the writer and through practice one could learn no matter what the conditions are and if the learner is willing to learn s/he will develop better skills and make a difference.

Writing is a form of communication where the writer has normally someone other than himself or herself to whom s/he intends to communicate. If the writers cannot convey the message, then there will be no communication. According to (Reid, 1994), "shared knowledge" (p.2) helps communication.

III. Subject And Methodology

3.1. Study contents

3.1.1. Subjects and Scope of the study

We chose students of TUEBA's K16 advanced training program to conduct the survey and collect the data to be analyzed.

The subject of our study is the English language issue in which writing skill is included.

The object of our study is students of TUEBA's K16 advanced training program.

The length of our study is from September 2019 to December 2019.

3.1.2. Methodology

From the practice of teaching and studying the English language of TUEBA's K16 students of the advanced training program, by using the observations, questionnaires, interviews, and data collected from the software, we have analyzed the results of students before and after taking part in the intensive writing course. Along with the study of literature and theories of English language teaching, we have recommended some suggestions to students of the program to overcome the difficulties and improve their studying results.

3.1.4. Primary data collections

To conduct the study, we have applied the data collection process by asking 63 students TUEBA's advanced program to do the questionnaire and both pre-course and end-of-course writing tests. The tests are designed to be similar to the English CEFR (A2 level), English writing skills only. After the course, we analyze the results to see if they are improved and we use the questionnaire to ask students what needs improving the online program.

3.1.5. The analysis

The data from the questionnaire and the results of the test were collected and analyzed by using Microsoft Excel software and using the descriptive method to interpret.

IV. The Results And Discussions

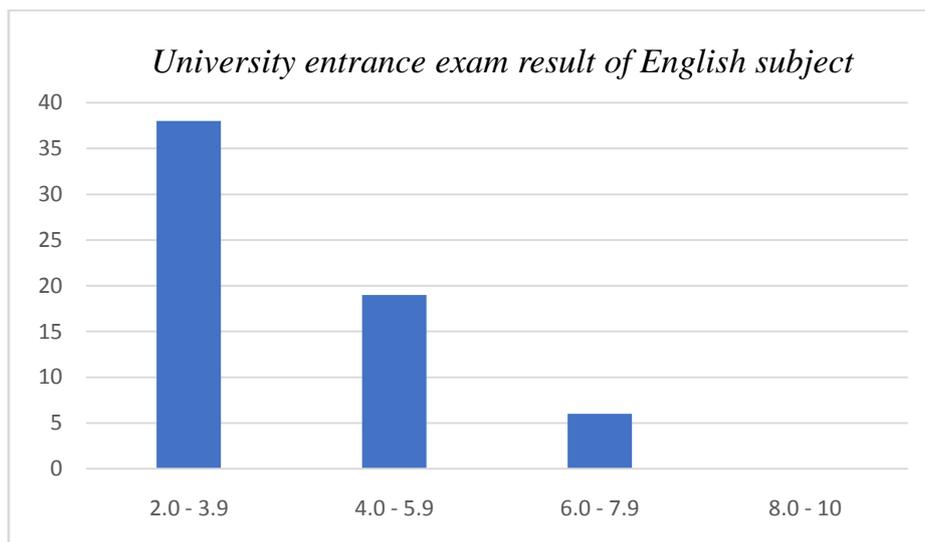
4.1. The attitudes of students towards English writing skill

Most of the students consider writing skill is an important skill when learning a foreign language and they had had a positive aim to study it. They (about 95%) added that though writing skill is one of the most frequent skills used in their future job. Thus, we can see that students are having a positive attitude toward studying English writing skills.

4.2. The test results

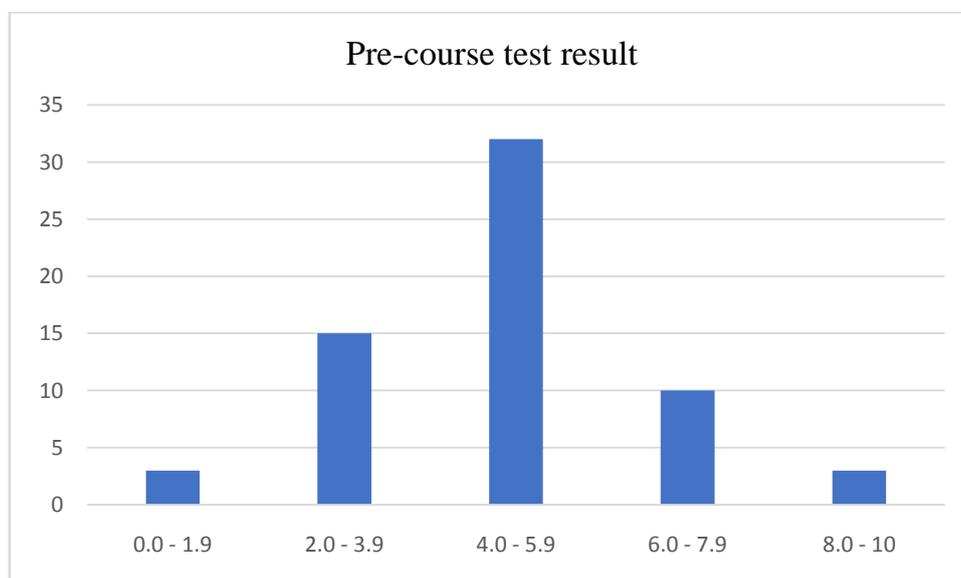
4.2.1. The pre-course test result

The result of the test was not high, subjectively, we think that there are two main reasons for this low result. Firstly, all the students were first-year students, they had passed the university entrance examination, they weren't used to the format and requirements of the CEFR-A2 level writing test. Secondly, they are non-English major students, they just studied a little or hadn't studied English in high school. This situation can be seen in the following graph.



Graph 1: University entrance exam result of English subject (Mark scale: 10)
 Source: Figures from the authors' survey – September 2019

The above two factors affected the result of the pre-course writing test of students. There were only three students who scored 8.2 out of 10 and three students who didn't score 2 marks. There were 47 students (74.6%) who scored under average and average marks. This situation was alarming because most of the students didn't get used to studying English in general and studying writing skills in particular.



Graph 1: Pre-course test result (Mark scale: 10)
 Source: Figures from the authors' survey – September 2019

4.2.2. The first progress test result

After this first step, we designed a course online focusing on improving the familiarity of the students to the A2 writing test. Every two days, besides studying compulsorily at classes, students had to sign in the system to do the test's 4 parts. After one month we asked them to take the first progress test and collected the result as shown in the following graph.



Graph 3: 1st Progress test result (Mark scale: 10)
 Source: Figures from the authors' survey – October 2019

We can see that, the number of students who got average marks did increase (to 60.3%), this may be because the students got used to the format of the test and they were also provided needed tactics to do the writing tests. The number of students who got bad and high mark slightly changed.

4.2.3. The second progress test result

We repeated the progress in the next month but did a few changes, we noticed that students could do the vocabulary questions (part 6) better than grammar questions (part 7), inferring questions (part 8) and writing composition question (part 9), so we cut down Part 6 questions and add more Part 7, 8, 9 questions in order to help students develop their skills of grammar, inferring and writing composition these kinds of questions in the real tests. And at the end of October 2019, we asked students to do the second Progress tests, and their results are shown in the following graph.



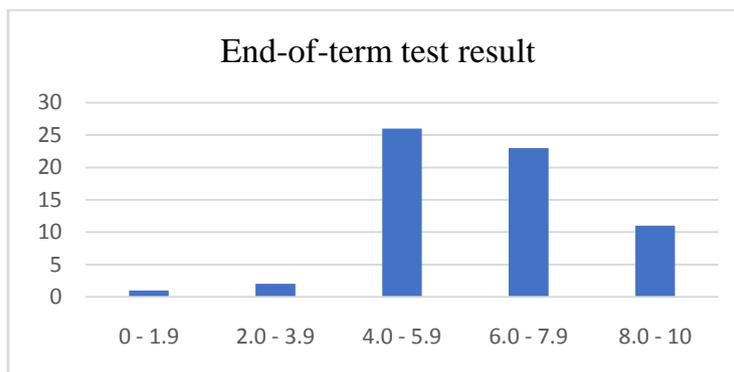
Graph 4: 2nd Progress test result (Mark scale: 10)
 Source: Figures from the authors' survey – November 2019

This month, the number of students who got average and good marks increase dramatically while those who got a bad mark slightly decreased (from 4 to 2 students). The number of students who got 2 – 4 marks also decreased significantly, which marked a very potential perspective of the process.

4.2.4. The end-of-course test result

We continued applying the process in the last month of the course, however, as there is the significant increase of marks of part 6 and part 8, we decided to decrease the frequency of these types of the test and focused more on part 7 and part 9. At the end of December 2019, we held the end-of-term test for all the

students and collected the writing skill result individually to analyze to know whether the English writing ability improves or not. Let's have a look at the following graph.



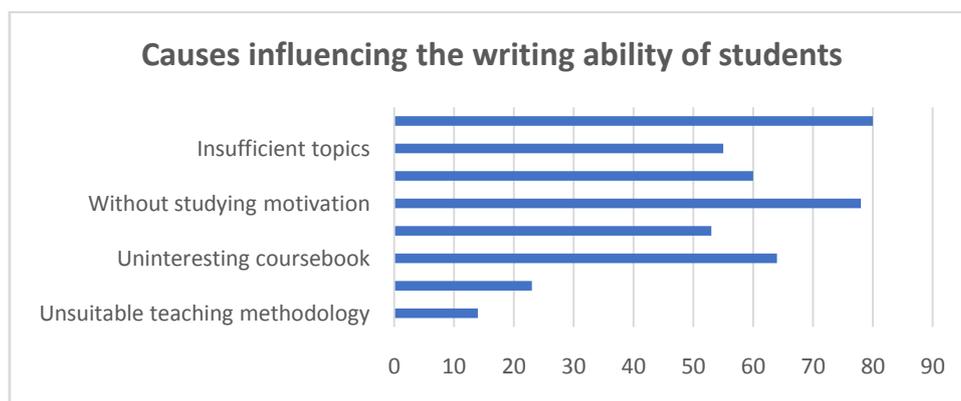
Graph 4: 2nd Progress test result (Mark scale: 10)
 Source: Figures from the authors' survey – December 2019

We can see that, the number of students who scored 8 – 10 did increase from one student at the beginning of the course to 11 students, and more significantly, the number of students who got under 4 dramatically decreased (only 2 students), especially those who got 2 – 3.9 dropped dramatically from 23.8% (pre-course test) to 0.3% (end-of-course test). The total of students who got average marks (from 4 – 7.9) also increased from 66.7% (pre-course test) to 77.8% (end-of-course test).

4.3. Some causes influencing the writing ability of students

We have identified eight causes which influence the writing ability of students of TUEBA's advanced program; we also have classified them in subjective and objective causes.

Subjectively, 78% of the students didn't have the right motivation in studying the English language in general and in studying writing skills in particular; over two-thirds of the students didn't have the right studying methods. Almost all students highly appreciate the teaching staff who had good teaching methodology and were enthusiastic in teaching. However, 23% of the students thought that the high outcome requirement or the course they were taking was one of the causes putting them under high pressure.



Graph 5: Some causes influencing the writing ability of students
 Source: Figures from the authors' survey – December 2019

V. Recommendations And Conclusions

5.1. Recommendations

Basing on the analyzing some factors affecting the English writing skill of TUEBA's students of advanced training program, we would like to recommend some suggestions in order to help to enhance the teaching and learning English writing skill of lectures and students of TUEBA's students of the program in particular and of the other students of TUEBA in general.

5.1.1. Improve students' awareness of the importance of learning the English language to help them in their studying at the university as well as support them in their future jobs.

5.1.2. Apply a suitable teaching methodology; get students to get used to the format of the required test they would have to take in the future.

5.1.3. Apply advanced technology in teaching writing skills, use the E-learning system to help students practice outside class.

5.2. Conclusions

Although the study was conducted on a small scale, it depicted the facts of teaching and studying English writing skills in TUEBA's advanced program. In the era of international integration, the demand for using the English language in employees' jobs is crucial. The fact of teaching the English language in general and teaching writing skills, in particular, are facing many limitations and challenges while the requirements of English language abilities are higher and higher. So, to catch up with the development of modern society as well as employments' requirements, TUEBA needs to develop the contents, the curriculum of the English language subjects, especially applying advanced technology to help control the self-study progress of students and help them to have better chances to practice English writing skill outside the class.

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