

PHÂN TÍCH KỸ NĂNG VIẾT NGHIÊN CỨU: GÓC NHÌN TỪ GIẢNG VIÊN HƯỚNG DẪN KHÓA LUẬN TỐT NGHIỆP VÀ LUẬN VĂN THẠC SĨ

Ngô Văn Giang, Nguyễn Thị Thùy***

Bài viết chỉ ra những hạn chế trong kỹ năng viết nghiên cứu của sinh viên năm cuối và học viên cao học chuyên ngành ngôn ngữ Anh. Cơ sở lý thuyết của bài viết là nguyên tắc phân tích văn bản của Bowen (2009). Cơ sở dữ liệu là các bài luận được lựa chọn thông qua quy trình: đọc rà soát, đọc chi tiết và diễn giải. Việc phân tích dữ liệu bao gồm 2 bước được thực hiện song song là phân tích nội dung và phân tích theo chủ đề. Văn bản được phân tích (document analysis) bằng hình thức kết hợp phỏng vấn sâu các giảng viên hướng dẫn (supervisors) với phỏng vấn sinh viên. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy học viên thiếu kỹ năng viết phần đoạn văn bản (paragraph writing skills), thiếu kiến thức và kỹ năng viết phần phương pháp luận nghiên cứu; các lỗi khác thường gặp liên quan đến cấu trúc bài viết, ngữ pháp, từ vựng và văn phong.

Từ khóa: kỹ năng viết, kỹ năng viết nghiên cứu, phân tích văn bản, khóa luận tốt nghiệp, luận văn thạc sĩ.

This study aims to unpack shortcomings in research writing skills delivered by English majors who are final-year students and graduates. The conceptual framework of this study is Bowen's (2009) method of analysing documents. The data include papers selected through skimming, reading and interpretation. Major instruments adopted in the study were document analysis and in-depth interviews with supervisors and students. Content analysis and thematic analysis were employed. The findings show that students lack the skills of writing an academic paragraph and methodology section. Other typical shortcomings include: organisation, grammar, vocabulary and writing style.

Keywords: writing skill, research writing, document analysis, bachelor's thesis, master's thesis.

AN ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH WRITING SKILLS: PERSPECTIVES FROM MA THESIS AND GRADUATION PAPER SUPERVISORS

1. Introduction

Major purposes of learning and using a language are to communicate and to

increase human interaction. English has emerged as a common language for such a purpose worldwide. This recognised position of English has been reinforced and evidenced by its presence in the education system at primary, secondary and particularly tertiary level and at different stages of the national education

* TS., Khoa tiếng Anh, Trường Đại học Hà Nội

** ThS., Phòng Công tác Sinh viên và Quan hệ Doanh nghiệp

Email: giangnv@hanu.edu.vn

system of Vietnam (Dudzik & Nguyen, 2015; Ngo, 2015; Nguyen, 2017). Vietnam has also recognised the status of English through its launching of the 2020 National Foreign Language Project initiated by and under the steering of the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam (MOET) since 2008 (Hung, 2013; Ngo, 2015; Nguyen, 2017). In doing so, learners of English are required and expected to make great efforts if they wish to achieve remarkable progress in learning and using this language for both learning opportunities and job prospects. English learners are aware that it is of equal importance to obtain skills of both spoken and written English (Zhang, 2013). Of the four basic language skills including listening and reading being known as receptive skills; speaking and writing being perceived as productive skills, the skill of writing is identified as the most challenging task to many and of prime importance in 'language production' (Fareed et al., 2016, p. 81). Final year students and MA students who major in English find this reality a harsh fact through which they need to get. The main reason lies in the fact that those students are, in most higher education institutions, required of producing graduation papers (for final year students) and theses and/or dissertations (for MA students). Numerous learners of this type have failed to meet the research writing requirements with regard to academic writing and rubric assessment of MA theses and graduation papers.

International cases and studies have shown several challenges confronting these English-majored learners. Typical barriers include students struggle to differentiate written and spoken registers, produce an acceptable draft, generate ideas, master other related skills needed for completion of the writing and know what errors need avoiding (Fadda, 2012). Other barriers are associated with the abuse of punctuations such as comma, semi colon, quotation marks and inaccurate use of words (Awad, 2012). Jeyaraj (2018) shows that a lack of any formalised structure in the writing process, academic writing requirements and not clear guideline for writing are major barriers preventing learners from producing their work in a timely manner.

In Vietnam, Luong and Nguyen (2008) conduct their study on challenges and implementation process through a research carried out by their student. Through surveys and in-depth interviews, the results show that writers were not well aware of grammatical and spelling mistakes. Another study conducted by Chi and Nguyen (2017) also referred to with challenges that students were faced with mainly focusing on the use of synonyms or lack of understanding of the original texts and the word roots.

Although several scholars have attempted to carry out different studies on difficulties confronting students during their writing process (Al Badi, 2015; Pineteh, 2014; Slomp, 2012), so far there has not been a study focusing on the

challenges that final year students and MA learners face in their completion of graduation paper and thesis, particularly in the context of research and academic writing. Therefore, our study aims to unveil major obstacles concerning research writing and completion. Accordingly, we suggest some writing strategies and research skills that serve as supporting platform for the learners, simultaneously improving learning outcomes in general and the quality of research writing in particular.

Another key motivation pushing me to conduct such kind of a research is that during my examination of several graduation papers and MA thesis, I have seen research writing errors frequently made by undergraduate and graduate students. This article belongs to a larger project conducted at ministry level focusing on figuring out research writing challenges and possible set of supportive research writing materials for the learners. Therefore, within the scope of this article, the challenges impacting students' writing performance remain the focus of the study, leading to the key research question as follows:

What are the major research writing challenges of final year students and MA learners?

The next session of this article elaborates on methodology shaping the conceptual background and methods taken in seeking the answer(s) to the question proposed above.

2. Theoretical ground and research methodology

This section presents both theoretical ground and methodology adopted for the study. Although the major research project covers a series of respective research methods, this article namely centres on document analysis based on suggestions by Bowen (2009) for analysis of selected graduation papers, theses and evaluation sheets.

2.1. Theoretical ground

With regard to research writing and academic writing, there are several definitions touching on this issue from different perspectives. Oshima and Hogue (2006) in their textbook "Writing Academic English" identify that academic text is a type of text that is required to be used in higher education context. It is different from other writing styles such as narrative, literature, business or mass media in terms of three characteristics: audience, style and purpose of writing. However, Labaree (2013) has a wider definition when showing that academic writing can be perceived as a typical presentation employed by scholars when it comes to definition of technical terms and of their expertise. Both Labaree and Oshima consider writing styles and purposes of writing the two important characteristics of academic writing.

Besides, Labaree (2013) also indicate the other characteristics such as word choice and use of pronouns with great detail, not focusing on the audience at a

great deal. In Vietnam, Nguyen (1997) defines academic text as texts that are applied in academic settings and environment in order to disseminate scientific knowledge. Hoa (1997) examines academic texts in such following areas as: words in the academic contexts must be objective through the use of third person; the grammar employed should be complex with logical conjunctions (so as to..., because..., yet..., however...etc.); presentation in the text should be condensed, clear, logic and direct to the research object. Therefore, we can adopt a working definition of research writing as a type of academic writing used in higher education setting [for the purpose of this study] with three typical features: audience, styles and purposes of writing.

Research writing features:

There are several research writing features that need taking into serious consideration. Of these features, the following three are of typical recognition:

Directness: most Western writers prefer the straight forward approach to writing because it is believed that such an approach indicates the intended purpose of communication in a personalised, polite way. This approach also has certain impacts on their academic writing styles with preference of putting major thesis before the subordinates etc.

Uniqueness and personality: Scollon (1991) believes that the Westerners highly appreciate the personal opinion with great

emphasis on personality features, on the creativity of new ideas. Therefore, a series of direct and personalised way of writing can be seen such as: “I think...”, “I believe...”, “It is said that...”, meanwhile the Eastern writers tend to be more cautious phrasing their writing as: “We think...” or “We assert that...”, “My group’s opinion is that...”, “People often say...”.

Being aware of such features, we adopted the following methodology in order to answer the research questions mentioned above.

2.2. Research Methodology

This study is conducted within the context of higher education setting, particularly in a developing country like Vietnam. Major participants include undergraduate, graduate and supervisors. The study employed document analysis as a major instrument to unpack the underlying errors made by research students, from which major writing challenges were identified. The students involved in this study were comprised of undergraduate and MA students of Hanoi University, Vietnam. For the purpose of communication, these students were labelled as learners [of both undergraduate and graduate]. Two specific methods included document analysis and in-depth interviews with supervisors and learners of English at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. 10 students and 10 supervisors were interviewed using purposive sampling technique (Tongco, 2007).

The documents collected included two sets of text: (i) graduation papers and MA thesis and (ii) supervisors' evaluation sheets. For MA thesis, 50 were selected for analysis and 50 graduation papers were collected for the same reason. As each MA thesis and graduation paper required at least two evaluation sheets, the number of evaluation sheets were 200 utilised to unpack the writing pitfalls identified by supervisors. Accordingly, in this article, the documents selected for analysis covered graduation papers, MA theses and evaluation sheets from both sources: undergraduate and post-graduate. Document analysis was employed as a research method because 'documents of all types can help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and

discover insights relevant to the research problem' (Merriam, 1988, p. 118). For such a purpose, the ultimate goal of this article is to offer insights into research writing challenges confronting the learners.

In order to analyse the texts selected, Bowen's (2009, p. 32) way of analysing documents was adopted focusing on three main steps: skimming (superficial examination), reading (thorough examination), and interpretation. These three steps refer to an iterative process of analysis and the process involves both content analysis and thematic analysis.

Following are samples of graduation and thesis evaluation sheets and feedback from supervisors and examiners:

HANOI UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

EXAMINER'S REPORT

Candidate:

MA Thesis title: An Investigation Into Vocabulary Learning Strategies Employed By The First Year Non-English Major Students At The University Of Finance And Business Administration

Examiner: ID3

Date: 04th January 2019

Having read this thesis, I have some remarks as follows:

STRENGTHS

This research offers insightful information concerning vocabulary learning strategies by the first year non-English major students at the University of Finance and Business Administration (UFBA). The research also aims at finding the differences in the use of vocabulary learning strategies between high and low achievers. Informative background is provided so that readers could visualise the importance attached to vocabulary learning and acquisition. The research objectives and questions were well formulated. With a limited scope of the study, questionnaire and

interview are used as two major research instruments. These specific instruments help answer the research questions and the findings interestingly show that the first year non-English major students at the UFBA are medium strategies users. Recommendations are suggested for improvement and limitations figured out for better change in future research.

AREAS NEED IMPROVING:

- The Abstract is a bit too long. It needs condensed and straight to the point.
- Background section should be more selective and stay focused on the theme of the research. Some statements need reference for consolidation and reliability (e.g., last paragraph of page 2)
- Significance section seems to be off track and the focus should be on students rather on teacher.
- Many subsections in the Literature Review section are mere listing of references. Analysis of relevant literature is required.
- Lack of linking sentences for each section within a chapter (e.g., p. 21)
- Lack of consistency in the use of tenses in Summary section of each chapter

Conclusion:

Overall, this is a well-structured academic work and is recommended that this work be defended at the request of the examination board.

Congratulations!

Question(s) for the candidate:

1. In the interview section, why were interviewees allowed to have 5 minutes for preparation prior to answering the 5 questions?

Examiner ID3

Another sample can be explored as follows:

HANOI UNIVERSITY

MA THESIS ASSESSMENT

Title of thesis:

AN INVESTIGATION INTO EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES AND ABILITIES TO DEVELOP LEARNING AUTONOMY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AT MILITARY SCIENCE ACADEMY (MSA)

Examiner: ID4

Student: _____

On reading the thesis I have got the following brief comments:

Merits

- Rationale for the study, research aims, research questions, study significance and thesis structural organization have been explicitly stated.
- The concept of learner autonomy and other issues including misconceptions on learner autonomy have been briefly presented in chapter 2. In addition, a concise report has been done on previous research works related to the theme of the thesis.
- As regards methodology, it is possible to say that basically, the research design is appropriate. The treatment of the data obtained from questionnaires and follow-up semi-structured interviews is well justified.
- The findings arranged in accordance with the 3 research questions appear to be interesting. These findings are well based on the collected data and the research methods appropriately applied.
- Conclusion has been obtained. The implications and recommendations offered in chapter 5 are, to the possible extent, useful for learners, teachers, and administrators.
- What is presented in the Summary booklet is faithful to the main text content.

Shortcomings

- It is much to readers' expectation that specific conclusions be given to each of the research objectives respectively.
- Source indications should have been provided in more detail where required.

General assessment

Great efforts have been made by the student. The tasks set forth for the research have been satisfactorily fulfilled. My recommendation is that the thesis be subject to further assessment by the examination board for an award of the MA degree on the author once all requirements are met.

My congratulations on the thesis accomplishment!

EXAMINER ID4

In other case, the examiner only produced general comments and feedback without identifying a clear-cut approach of strengths and weaknesses. Below is an example from Examiner ID25:

Hanoi University

Faculty of Post-Graduate Studies

EXAMINER'S REPORT ON MASTER THESIS

Thesis title: The effects of pre-reading activities on third year ESP students' reading comprehension at Hung Vuong university a quasi-experimental study.

Candidate:

Examiner: ID25

By using quasi-experimental method, this study investigates the effects of pre-reading activities and students' attitudes towards this approach. The introduction chapter has

introduced research questions, scope, significance, and method of the study; the organization of the thesis is also presented.

The literature review chapter covers the main relevant concepts and empirical theories in this area. Generally, the candidate demonstrates a reflexive perspective on her work. Related studies in Vietnam as well as in other countries have been presented.

Chapter 3 presents a well-structured and clear account of the methodology framework of the research, the research design and the description of the data collection and analysis. In general, the methodology chapter is coherent.

Chapter 4 reports the results of the study. The candidate shows understanding and analytical ability at a Master level. The results are well-presented. The findings reveal that there are remarkable changes in the post-test scores of the experimental groups as well as in the attitudes of students towards reading lessons.

In conclusion, the thesis is well-written, the candidate demonstrates abilities in the research field and the research meets the required standard of a Master thesis.

Hanoi, December 10, 2017

Sometimes, the examiner could provide very detailed feedback about the writing by MA students as evidenced in the evaluation sheet provided by Examiner ID9

HANOI UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

EXAMINER'S REPORT

Candidate:

Title of Thesis: THE EFFECTS OF PRE-READING ACTIVITIES ON THIRD-YEAR ESP STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION AT HUNG VUONG UNIVERSITY: A QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

Examiner: ID9

Date: 10/12/2017

Having examined the thesis, I have the following comments,

1. Strengths

- The study was carried out at Hung Vuong University to investigate the effects of pre-reading activities on ESP students' reading comprehension and on their attitude. As such, the study utilized the quasi-experimental design with a pre- and post- tests alongside the pre and post questionnaires. The participants were divided into two groups of 24 students each, with the experimental group being taught by the researcher using pre-reading activities in reading lessons while the control group learning in a traditional way. The findings showed that the students in the experimental group performed better on the posttest and showed more positive attitudes towards English reading skill and pre-reading activities than the control one.
- Generally speaking, the thesis is logically structured and clearly presented, meeting the requirements of an MA level.

- The Literature Review and Methodology chapters are satisfactory, showing the candidate's basic understanding of theories and methods.
- The recommendations are proposed, and the limitations are acknowledged.
- Finally, most of the entries in the reference list at the end of the report follow the APA 6th style. Most of the in-text citations are also properly presented.

2. Areas for improvement

The thesis, however, has numerous areas for improvement as follows,

1. In chapter 2 (Literature Review), the candidate should have mentioned two approaches in teaching reading, namely top-down and bottom-up. Under these two approaches, the candidate should have classified the pre-reading strategies accordingly.

2. In Chapter 3, a more detailed description of the treatment should have been provided. Answers to the following questions should have been included: Did the two groups belong to one big class and have the single timetable for reading lessons or were they completely two different classes? In case they shared the same class, how did the researcher manage to deliver different pre-reading techniques to the two groups?

Moreover, the researcher should have identified the relationship between the treatment and the tests (pre/post). It seems to me that the researcher taught one thing and tested another thing because it needed more than just pre-reading strategies in order to complete the reading tests.

Eventually, the use of tests to evaluate the effectiveness of pre-reading strategies is problematic due to several reasons.

First, both the pre/post tests were the achievement tests and they were supposed to be administered after the students had finished the course. However, the pretest was given to the students at week 1 - before they studied the contents. The posttest, in contrast, was administered at week 12 - after they studied the contents. In addition, some of the contents in the posttest were similar to the pretest. This, definitely, affects the validity of the study.

Second, as far as I know, pre-reading activities can be used to arouse students' interest in reading the texts, activating students' prior knowledge about the topic, which helps facilitate students' overall reading comprehension. These, unfortunately, do nothing with the tests the candidate used. In the pre/post tests, the test takers were supposed to use truly while-reading strategies, not pre-reading (e.g., while-reading strategies: understanding keywords in the questions and scanning for specific information, predicting meaning of words in context, analyzing parts of speech, skimming and understanding main ideas, making inference, understanding text organisation, etc.).

Then, better methods to evaluate the effectiveness of pre-reading strategies could be observation and different types of alternative assessment, which can be conducted at the time of teaching.

3. Samples of pre-reading activities and lesson plans are needed.
4. Grammatical and typo mistakes are found throughout the thesis.

Conclusion

Overall, this piece of work can be accepted and I recommend it to be defended before the examination board.

Examiner ID9

Question(s) for the candidate:

1. In what ways can pre-reading activities improve student reading comprehension?
2. How does the attitude framework in the Literature Review (pp. 18-21) relate to your attitude questionnaires?
3. How to ensure the validity of your study?

As can be seen from feedback provided by Examiner ID9, the examiner figured out shortcomings taken from each chapter in the thesis of the student.

3. Findings and discussion

3.1. Organisation of the writing

The organisation of the writing refers to the structure of either a graduation paper or an MA thesis. Regarding this, sometimes learners' writings were quite confusing as it lacks cohesion and coherence. From graduation papers and thesis collected and examined, most students preferred to use simple sentence structures and sometimes inexact use of selected collocations and words were identified. Writings examined show that students and MA learners knew how to use conjunctions at simple level, normally at word level, such as 'and, but, so, because...'. In some cases, use of different types of conjunctions are not totally precise: for example conjunctions of time (after, since, once...), reason (because, so that...), concession (although, *moreover*,

however, nevertheless), place (where, wherever), condition (even if, provided that...), and manner (as if, as though).

Some coordinating conjunctions were misled. Take the following sentence as an example:

"They are not only good for my study but also they give me a lot of information".

Both two clauses are not grammatically correct, and the meaning remains rather confusing and appears overlapping. In practice, the sentence could be rewritten as follows:

"They are not only interesting but also educational".

Besides, lack of paragraph writing skills is identified in several finished writing products of students and MA learners. In some cases, it caused confusion. Take the following extract as an example:

"Reading books is one of the interesting ways that I can get rid stress. Since I was a little girl, I have always

been keen on science book which is full of knowledge. I am reading animals book. The more I read, the more I understand developing of them. Do you like animals?...”.

The above-mentioned piece of writing failed to meet basic requirements of a paragraph. The paragraph appeared to be written with good grammar such as “have been”, use of “because, since...”; yet the topic was confusing as it switched from *science book* to animal theme. It would be better if the writing only focused on one major statement from which details and supporting ideas could be developed.

3.2. Grammar

From graduation papers and theses examined, we have found that the expression of English is not totally consistent in many ways:

Grammatical and typo mistakes are found throughout the thesis (Examiner ID9).

Grammatical errors remain a weak point for this study (e.g., p. vii, p. 38) (Examiner ID3).

There remain grammatical, spelling, and typo errors. For example:

Grammatical errors: pp. iv, v, 8, 27, 39, 42, etc. (Examiner ID8).

Students also had a habit of placing subordinate clause prior to the main clause. The emergence rate of 1 repetition/paper, 2 repetitions/paper, 3 repetitions/paper and more than 3 repetitions/paper accounted for 43.1%, 22.1%, 10%, and 14.8% respectively. The

following extracts can be seen as examples for illustration:

Example: Although fast food or canned food are recognized for its convenience, it discourages people to...

When people have more leisure time and become closer by the Internet use, they are likely to...

When we study in primary schools, we can have wonderful memory with friends.

Because the university offers more scholarships, students find their study less challenging.

Since not many teachers use this activity in the classrooms, I think we should use it as a spare one.

In our follow-up interviews with students, one of them expressed his/her concern as follows:

“I often think of a sentence in Vietnamese, then having it translated into English with word order being similar to that of Vietnamese”.

The main barrier in this case is associated with the intervention of mother tongue in the process of articulating an idea into English.

3.3. Vocabulary

From our analysis, around 26% of students showed their command of simple words and easy-to-do word choice. Many failed to produce exact collocations and frequently-used phrases. Most errors also go to misuse of word choice and part of speech or word formation, for example:

“She sings interestingly”, “His voice are the things I miss [remember/am impressed] the most about him”, “do the morning exercise on the terrain [in the garden]”; “I very understand her”.

In one of our selected interviews with students involved (Students ID7 and ID9), it is important to explore their opinion as it reflects how thinking [in relation with writing] is shaped:

“I often use Vietnamese-English dictionary or relevant phrases for idea expression” (Student ID7).

“I write one sentence in Vietnamese, then I have it translated into English” (Student ID9).

Moreover, translation is a challenging task and the intended message could be distorted if word-for-word approach is taken. This type of impact of L1 is comprehensible and can be overcome with appropriate learning strategies.

In our follow-up interview with Examiner ID3, the examiner affirmed this challenge:

One of the key obstacles that students at both graduate and undergraduate level face is associated with how to make the right word choice and maximise the use of vocabulary in expressing their ideas and thought throughout their finished [writing] work.

3.4. Lack of formal writing style

This shortcoming is seen quite often when it comes to writing examination of different parts that make up of the whole

writing. For example, several students failed to produce a standardised abstract. As a result, examiners came up with the following feedback:

Abstract is too long. The Abstract must be rewritten to secure the quality of the research (Examiner ID3).

The Abstract is a bit too long. It needs condensed and straight to the point. (Examiner ID4).

The abstract is rather long. It needs condensed and rewritten to follow strict format of an academic paragraph writing style. This abstract also needs to adhere to abbreviation rules (e.g., SILL in the second paragraph) (Examiner ID28).

In other cases, it can be errors related to format. Format is usually fixed with a standard form provided by the institution:

Format of the thesis should be revised. Not sure if Part A, B and C should be kept (Examiner ID15).

Lack of consistency in terms of thesis format (e.g., font size of each chapter headings) (Examiner ID18).

3.5. Lack of consistency in referencing

Feedback on how students cited references fell on three major categories:

First, students and MA learners might have in-text references employed in their writing.

Many references are missing in the research (p. 2) (Examiner ID3).

The reference format could be amended (Examiner ID5).

It is recommended that source indications for some of the presented ideas should have been more specific and provided where required (Examiner ID6).

In answering the main research question above, it can be summarised as follows:

The challenges were quite diverse and were categorized in terms of organisation of writing, grammar, vocabulary, degree of formality and consistency of referencing. Learners also had challenges in articulating their ideas, thoughts and intended messages through technical writing. In our conclusion and recommendations that follow, a series of possible writing and learning strategies are noticed.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

Analysis presented above signals the fact that writing graduation papers for final year students and MA students remains a challenge and it takes time to address such a productive skill. Understanding writing difficulties of students entails the application of teaching and learning strategies for better writing quality. Findings of this study show that L1 has a certain impact on the quality of the writing of the students examined. These impacts could be easily recognized when students struggle to find sentence structure and relevant vocabulary to express their ideas and messages. What is more important is that students struggled with different ways of express their idea

in written and with different linguistic features. This finding can be used for material design and teaching strategies for classroom lecturers.

The following recommendations centre on major areas that need further attention and research reflecting that writing process is truly 'complex' (Al Badi, 2015, p. 65):

- *Developing appropriate vocabulary and grammar learning and acquisition:* vocabulary is considered bricks in building further language competency of students. Vocabulary plays a key role in language acquisition. A good command of grammar will help learners convey their intended messages in a precise manner. During the process of writing completion supervision and feedback, good knowledge of both vocabulary and grammar ease the error correction process, thus creating an effective writing work and product.

- *Diversifying reading activities:* it is advised that to become a good writer for both academic and research purposes, students are required to read intensively and extensively (Karakoç & Köse, 2017). These two ways of reading will help learners of English, in this case the final year students and MA students, immerse themselves in different contexts in which English is used by native speakers. Specifically, learners will learn how to use words, phrases, sentences and the expressions frequently used by native

speakers. However, it is of utmost importance to put what they have learnt into frequent practice to obtain proficiency.

- *Learning logical and thinking in English*: from findings and discussion reviewed above suggest that students should train themselves in thinking in English rather than adopting translation method, that is translating what they intended to write in Vietnamese prior to putting the intentions down on the paper. What signals as a warning is that several students fail to do correction from feedback given. Rewriting their work is an effective way to minimise errors and generate new ideas that might not come out in the first draft.

- *Improving learner autonomy*: this means students should be aware of their unique role in writing process and completion. Students are advised to spend time in writing practice as well as mapping out action plan for actual writing. A good piece of writing is comprised of several writing phases from brainstorming, ideas organisation, drafting, correction and final production. Obviously, this writing approach and process takes time and students should familiarise themselves with all the writing steps, thus shaping good practice for research writing and training.

Along with graduation paper and MA thesis writing completion process, it is unavoidable to make writing errors and

mistakes. However, from pedagogical point of view, the errors committed by the learners could be explored to lift them out of writing confusion and challenges. Another implication is that there is a lack of a system for academic and research writing practice being applicable both online and offline for students at final year and MA thesis writers. Specific solutions will be introduced in the next article.

REFERENCES

1. Al Badi, I. A. H. (2015). *Academic writing difficulties of ESL learners*. The 2015 WEI international academic conference proceedings.
2. Awad, A. (1996). The most common punctuation errors made by the English and the TEFL majors at An-Najah National University.
3. Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative research journal*.
4. Dudzik, D. L., & Nguyen, Q. T. N. (2015). Vietnam: Building English competency in preparation for ASEAN 2015. *ASEAN integration and the role of English language teaching*, 41-71.
5. Fareed, M., Ashraf, A., & Bilal, M. (2016). ESL learners' writing skills: Problems, factors and suggestions. *Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, 4(2), 81-92.
6. Hung, N. N. (2013). National foreign languages 2020 project.
7. Jeyaraj, J. J. (2018). It's A Jungle Out There: Challenges In Postgraduate Research Writing. *GEMA Online® Journal of Language Studies*, 18(1).
8. Juzwik, M. M., Curcic, S., Wolbers, K., Moxley, K. D., Dimling, L. M., & Shankland, R. K. (2006). Writing into the 21st century: An overview of research on writing, 1999 to 2004. *Written Communication*, 23(4), 451-476.

9. Karakoç, D., & Köse, G. D. (2017). The impact of vocabulary knowledge on reading, writing and proficiency scores of EFL learners. *Dil ve Dilbilimi Çalışmaları Dergisi*, 13(1), 352-378.
10. Luong, Q. T., & Nguyen, T. M. H. (2008). Student writing process, perceptions, problems, and strategies in writing academic essays in a second language: A case study. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, [S.l.], v. 24, n. 3.
11. Moats, L. C. (1994). The missing foundation in teacher education: Knowledge of the structure of spoken and written language. *Annals of dyslexia*, 44(1), 81-102.
12. Na, C. D., & Nhat Chi Mai, N. X. (2017). Paraphrasing in academic writing: A case study of Vietnamese learners of English. *Language Education in Asia*, 8(1), 9-24.
13. Ngo, T. H. (2015). *An investigation into students' motivation to learn English in higher education in Vietnam*. Queensland University of Technology.
14. Nguyen, H. T. M., & Burns, A. (2017). Teacher language proficiency and reform of English language education in Vietnam, 2008-2020. *Phnom Penh*, 19.
15. Nguyen, N. T. (2017). Thirty years of English language and English education in Vietnam. *English Today*, 33(1), 33.
16. Oshima, A., & Hogue, A. (2006). *Writing academic English*. Pearson Education.
17. Pineteh, E. A. (2014). The academic writing challenges of undergraduate students: A South African case study. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 3(1), 12-22.
18. Robles, M. M. (2012). Executive perceptions of the top 10 soft skills needed in today's workplace. *Business communication quarterly*, 75(4), 453-465.
19. Slomp, D. H. (2012). Challenges in assessing the development of writing ability: Theories, constructs and methods. *Assessing Writing*, 17(2), 81-91.
20. Tongco, M. D. C. (2007). Purposive sampling as a tool for informant selection. *Ethnobotany Research and applications*, 5, 147-158.
21. Zhang, B. (2013). An Analysis of Spoken Language and Written Language and How They Affect English Language Learning and Teaching. *Journal of Language Teaching & Research*, 4(4).