

# TEACHING ACADEMIC WRITING

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Pham Vu Phi Ho  
Vice-Rector, Van Hien University

## Introduction

- Writing is more complex that tests a person's ability to use a language and the ability to express ideas (Norris, 1983) . Writing requires a person to write not only coherently but effectively.
- Homstad and Thorson (1996) state that writing in a foreign language is a frustrating and difficult activity for students, so the students are often reluctant to incorporate into these kinds of activities in or outside the classrooms.

## INTRODUCTION

- In a writing activity, language seems to be the most problematic difficulty for L2 writers (second language) due to their limited language proficiency or limited linguistic knowledge.
- Silva (1993) and Olsen (1999) state that EFL writers cannot create an effective written work due to the inadequacy of syntactic and lexical competence.
- Olsen (1999) and Sattayatham & Honsa (2007) found that less proficient learners had a higher number of grammatical, orthographic and syntactic and lexical errors.

## INTRODUCTION

- According to Wang and Wen (2002), L2 writers obviously get stuck when writing in the target language because their mother tongue mainly affects the use of the second language; as a result, they may at times combine the systems of the two languages in their L2 writing, which is called "language transfer or syntactic transfer".
- Pham, V. P. Ho (2013) conducted a study at the Faculty of Foreign Languages at HCMC Open University and found that the students had poor skills in writing, but they were assigned to compose only 4 to 6 writing assignments during the semester of 15 weeks. There seems to be not enough writing practice in terms of extensive writing to improve students' writing fluency.

## INTRODUCTION

- According to Homstad and Thorson (1996), one of the ways to help L2 students enhance their writing skills is to assign them to do extensive writing or writing journals. The writing journal is a place in which students can explore various topics and means of expression to develop fluency by writing extensively without fear of the instructor's red pen.
- Most studies investigated the students' writing errors in controlled manners such as teacher/peer feedback. Few have investigated those errors in "real situation" when the students use free expressions in their extensive writing. Therefore, the present study also takes this issue into account for deeper investigation.

## Case study 1: Extensive writing

- 115 students from 3 Writing-1 classes in charged by the research/instructor participated in the study.
- In Writing-1, students were assigned to write 4 paragraphs during the course. Besides, the students wrote journals every week. They wrote about 5 journals a week.
- Their writing style is free expression. My purpose is to help the first year students to get used to writing the second language and to see if it improves their writing fluency. The students could select any topic to write.

### Case study 1: Extensive writing

- The students wrote their journals in their notebooks. At the end of the course, they submitted their journal writing to the instructor/researcher for data analysis.
- After collecting journal writing from the students, numbers of words of every journal from 115 notebooks were counted to know the length of their journals.

### Case study 1: Extensive writing

- To investigate if the writing journals affect students' writing fluency in term of length of writing, I compared the average length of the 10 first journals of each student to those of the 10 last journals out of 62 journals of 115 students.
- The purpose is to see if there is any difference of the students' writing fluency in term of number of words.

### Students' writing fluency in terms of number of words

Descriptive Statistics					
N1	Mean	S.D. 1	N2	Mean	S.D. 2
Journal 1	83	48	Journal 53	102	54
Journal 2	79	41	Journal 54	97	48
Journal 3	80	42	Journal 55	98	43
Journal 4	84	42	Journal 56	96	48
Journal 5	88	79	Journal 57	98	44
Journal 6	90	58	Journal 58	100	52
Journal 7	88	51	Journal 59	97	46
Journal 8	86	45	Journal 60	96	43
Journal 9	84	42	Journal 61	99	53
Journal 10	83	37	Journal 62	101	53

■ N1 refers to the first 10 journals  
■ N2 refers to the last 10 journals

### Students' writing fluency in terms of number of words

Variable	M	SD	Correlation	Mean difference	t	df	p
First 10-drafts	846.83	352.26	352.26	-139.07	-4.1	114	.000
Last 10-drafts	985.90	356.35					

Pair-sample t-test

As can be seen from the table above, the mean scores of the students' first 10 writing journals was of 846.83 and that of the last 10 journals was of 985.90. The Sig. (2-tailed) reached at .00.

This indicates that the students' writing journals affect students' writing fluency in terms of the numbers of words in their writing. The length of their journals improved by numbers of words that the students committed to their writing activities.

### Findings

- According to Heder and King (2012), giving students extensive writing during the writing course will help students improve their confidence, speed, fluency and interest in learning English. Hyland (2002) states that teaching writing is a process and the instructors should let the students write and encourage them to write as much as possible. This might help students' improve their writing fluency and quality.
- The findings of the present study correspond to Luu Trong Tuan (2010) who found that journal writing as an extensive activity is to foster learners' writing motivation and enhance their writing skill as well as to build a close bonding between teachers and learners.

### Findings

- Homstad and Thorson (1996) confirm the importance of writing journals when stating that weekly writing journals strengthen writing skills and may also enhance critical thinking and cultural interaction.
- The findings of the present study and the literature discussed above indicate that the writing journals are beneficial activity and should take into account to encourage students to writing English.
- As a saying goes, "practice makes perfect". The writing journal activities may bring EFL students no longer frustrating and difficult attitudes towards writing a foreign language (Homstad, Torild & Thorson, 1996).

### Case study 2: Collaborative writing

- Collaborative writing is widely researched and its effectiveness is rather impressive by the researchers around the world. However, few studies conducted to test the effectiveness of collaborative writing on individual's writing skills.
- Dobao (2012) conducted a study on writing in pairs and in groups, and individually and found that the collaborative writing papers were usually more accurate compared to both individual writing and writing in pairs.
- Storch (2011) asserts that the collaborative writing will help create opportunities for students to learn more of language.

### Case study 2: Collaborative writing

- Shehadeh (2011) found that collaborative writing was better than that of individual writing in terms of content, structures of paragraph, and vocabulary. Furthermore, the students felt more confident in collaborative writing.
- Sutherland and Topping (1999) found that both individual and collaborative writing gained improvement in writing skills. However, students who learned to write collaboratively were significant different.

### Case study 2: Collaborative writing

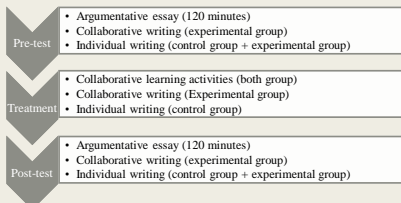
- The purpose of this study is to investigate if the collaborative writing activities affect individual's writing skills.
- Sixty-two 2nd year students at the Faculty of Foreign Languages at HCMC Open University, participated in the study of which 27 were in the controlled group and 35 in the experimental group.

### Case study 2: Collaborative writing

- The training activities of the two groups were similar in the processes of writing including topic selection, brainstorming, making outlines, peer and teacher comments, except composing an argumentative essay.
- The controlled group composed an argumentative essay individually while the experimental group made in collaboratively.
- Pre-tests and post-tests were compared to see if there are any differences in writing skills between the two groups.

### Case study 2: Collaborative writing

#### ■ Methods



**Table 2.** Comparison between Pre- vs. post-test of the control group

	Variable	M	SD	Correlation	Mean difference	t	df	p
<b>Writing quality</b>								
	Pre-test	5.978	1.274	.26	-.415	-1.489	26	.148
	Post-test	6.393	1.095					
<b>Paired Samples t-test</b>								

The Paired Samples t-test indicates that there was no statistically significant difference between post-test compared to that of the pre-test in the control group when  $t(26) = -1.49$ ,  $p = .15$  ( $p > .05$ ).

**Table 3.** Comparison between pre- vs. post-test of the Experimental group

Variable	M	SD	Correlation	Mean difference	t	df	p
Writing quality							
Pre-test	5.954	.917	.318	-.557	-2.815	34	.008
Post-test	6.511	1.076					
Paired Samples t-test							

- Different from the control group, Paired Samples t-test with  $t(34) = -2.82, p = .01 (p < .05)$  reveals that the writing quality of the post-test of the Students in the Experimental group gained greater improvement compared to those in the pre-test.
- This finding was consistent with previous studies such as Sutherland and Keith's (1999), Biria và Jafari (2013), Shehadeh (2011), Aminloo (2013), và Storch, (2005) who found that the students' writing quality, after learning to write collaboratively, has enhanced significantly. This indicates that the collaborative writing activities help students enhance their own writing skills.

**Table 4.** Comparison of the number of words between the pre- vs. post test

Variable	M	SD	Correlation	Mean difference	t	df	p
Writing fluency							
Pre-test	358.71	73.48	.486	-58.34	-4.41	34	.000
Post-test	417.06	80.42					
Paired Samples t-test							

The Paired Samples t-test in the table 4,  $t(34) = -4.41, p = .000 (p > .01)$  indicates that the number of words in the post-test papers of the collaborative writing group were significantly different from those in the pre-test.

The findings of the study contradicted to previous researchers' such as Zabihi and Rezazadeh (2013), Storch (2005) and Biria and Jafari (2013) who found that those students who wrote collaboratively were not enhanced their writing fluency in terms of number of words.

## Conclusion

- The study also indicates that the students' writing journals affect students' writing fluency. The length of their journals improved by numbers of journals that the students wrote during course.
- In other words, the more the students write, the more fluent in expressing ideas they become.
- Teachers should offer students opportunities for sufficient amount of writing practice.

## Conclusion

- The results of the study indicate that collaborative writing is effective on students' writing skills of both writing quality and writing fluency.
- One of the remarks to lecturers who wish to apply collaborative writing in their classroom is that this kind of activity should be conducted in the classroom so that the lecturers could manage students' collaboration in groups.
- If this activity was assigned students to do as homework, they could hardly control the quality of the group work.

■ Thank you