



**ELEVENTH-GRADERS' PERSPECTIVES TOWARDS THEIR ACTUAL  
ACQUISITION OF WRITING ENGLISH SKILLS. A CASE STUDY AT  
A PHAM NGU LAO HIGH SCHOOL, HUNG YEN**

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**Abstract:**

This study investigated eleventh graders' viewpoints on the practice of teaching writing English skills at their schools. A quantitative, descriptive method was conducted with the participation of 57 eleventh-graders at a high school in Hung Yen province during the second term of the academic year 2021-2022. The descriptive survey adapted partially to Marquette University's (2008) questionnaire was floated in the participants to examine their perspectives on General English Writing Skills; Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics Skills; and Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics Strategies. The results reveal that high school students are not good at writing English paragraphs due to the negligence of the testing and assessment format, which concentrates on multiple-choice tests. Besides, learner autonomy in improving writing skills is demotivated and discouraged to develop English paragraph writing. The finding of this research would help the educational policy-makers adjust the English teaching curriculum to give a priority to promoting writing skills. Simultaneously, teachers of English should change their pedagogical practices to raise their learners' awareness of the key role of writing English skills. English language learners, could recognize the importance of writing effectively in English. Lastly, future studies might consult the findings of this research for the reference to serving as the resourceful enrichment of their research liability.

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**QUAN ĐIỂM CỦA HỌC SINH LỚP 11 VỀ VIỆC HỌC KỸ NĂNG VIẾT  
NGHIÊN CỨU ĐIỂN HÌNH TẠI TRƯỜNG TRUNG HỌC PHỔ THÔNG PHẠM NGŨ LÃO,  
TỈNH HƯNG YÊN**

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Thông tin bài viết	Tóm tắt
<p><i>Ngày nhận bài: 05/08/2022</i></p> <p><i>Ngày sửa bài: 30/08/2022</i></p> <p><i>Ngày duyệt đăng: 25/10/2022</i></p>	<p>Nghiên cứu này đã khảo sát quan điểm của học sinh lớp 11 về việc thực hành dạy kỹ năng viết tiếng Anh tại trường. Phương pháp mô tả, định lượng được tiến hành với sự tham gia của 57 học sinh lớp 11 tại trường trung học phổ thông trên địa bàn tỉnh Hưng Yên trong học kỳ 2 năm học 2021-2022. Khảo sát mô tả được sử dụng một phần bảng câu hỏi của Đại học Marquette (2008) đã được sử dụng để khảo sát người tham gia, xem xét quan điểm của người học đối với kỹ năng Viết tiếng Anh tổng quát; Kỹ năng Ngữ pháp, dấu câu và hành văn, và chiến lược cách sử dụng Ngữ pháp, dấu câu và hành văn. Kết quả cho thấy học sinh trung học phổ thông viết đoạn văn tiếng Anh chưa tốt do hình thức kiểm tra, đánh giá môn tiếng Anh chỉ tập trung vào các bài thi trắc nghiệm, không có tự luận. Bên cạnh đó, sự tự chủ của người học trong việc cải thiện kỹ năng viết tiếng Anh không được khuyến khích, phát triển. Phát hiện của nghiên cứu này sẽ giúp các nhà hoạch định chính sách giáo dục điều chỉnh chương trình giảng dạy tiếng Anh để ưu tiên thúc đẩy kỹ năng viết. Đồng thời, giáo viên dạy tiếng Anh nên thay đổi phương pháp sư phạm để nâng cao nhận thức của người học về vai trò quan trọng của kỹ năng viết tiếng Anh. Đối với những người học tiếng Anh, họ có thể nhận ra tầm quan trọng của kỹ năng viết tiếng Anh hiệu quả. Cuối cùng, các nghiên cứu trong tương lai có thể tham khảo các phát hiện của nghiên cứu này nhằm nâng cao độ tin cậy cho những nghiên cứu của họ.</p>
<p><b>Từ khóa:</b></p> <p><i>quan điểm; sự không quan tâm; tính tự chủ; thực tiễn sư phạm; kiểm tra, đánh giá</i></p>	

### Introduction

English language teaching and learning (ELT) basically develops four fundamental micro-language skills, namely reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In fact, methodological approaches have been reshaped and reformed continuously with the aim to gain the most fruitful teaching and learning outcomes [1]. In addition, the role of teachers in class sessions

has been shifted from teacher-centered teaching to learner-centered approach, which focuses more on the learners' academic achievements [2]. Therefore, teachers' pedagogical practices have to be renovated to meet challenges and requirements of current ELT expectations. It can be said that teaching is an art, not science [3]. As such, language learners are unavoidable when language learners try to acquire not only a second language (L2) but also their mother tongue (L1). Writing

and speaking are classified as the productive skills referring to the production of words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs. It is, evidently, undeniable that writing plays an important role in ELT among four basic micro-skills in learning English as a foreign language (EFL). It is also considered as one of the most challenging and difficult skills to be developed as the ability to produce good writing pieces does not come from the inborn aptitude or innate skills, which has to be learnt and experienced by intensive teaching and learning practices [4]. Basically, writing comprises accurate and meaningful components intertwined to yield a well-written output, requiring a developed scheme for word choice to represent the writer's communicative ideas coherently and clearly [5]. The principal objective of writing is to convey messages to readers successfully. In particular, the conveyance of information to the audience in such a convincing and understandable way requires a writer to consider seriously rhetorical organizations, appropriate language use, or relevant lexicon which constitutes appropriate and purposeful writing pieces [6]. In other words, effective writing demands not only generating and organizing ideas coherently as well as cohesively but also expressing the ideas into readable texts meaningfully and accurately [7].

The current situation of ELT in EFL classes in Vietnam, especially at general education level, has reformed continuously to provide the most effectiveness for language learners to achieve expectant degrees [6]. Currently, the learning outcomes set for the end of the upper secondary level are to enable pupils to use English as a means of communication at a certain level of proficiency in four basic macro-skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing to meet basic and practical communication needs on familiar topics relating to school, recreational activities, careers [8]. Actually, writing skill seems to be inferior to other micro-skills, it is very different from the others in that a good or proficient writing piece demand the writer to be knowledgeable on the morphological, lexical, syntactical and mechanical components of grammar [9; 10; 11]. Any deviation from the rules of the components of grammar would result to errors. If these errors are not taken into consideration, it may affect the development of language competency on the part of the learners [12]. One typical problem might be the change in testing and assessment, which concentrates on the multiple-choice testing format. Although the importance of writing English skill is very remarkable, not many studies have conducted at the general educational level, which seems to be popular at higher education level. This research was conducted to fill in the missing piece of the overall pictures of ELT. Generally, the study aimed to examine high school students regarding their opinions on the practicality of learning writing English

skill at the general education level to serve as the useful reference for recommending some effective initiatives for pedagogical practices in regard with paragraph writing. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are high school students' perspectives towards the current situation of learning writing English skill?
2. How identical are male and female high school students' opinions in terms of learning writing English skill?

## **Method**

### ***Research Design***

The research was basically designed to conduct a cross-section of 57 eleventh-graders at Pham Ngu Lao high school. The descriptive, quantitative approach was implemented to evaluate their perceptions partially using the ESLP 182 questionnaire created by Marquette University [13]. 51 Likert-type scale questions including General English Writing Skills; Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics Skills; and Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics Strategies were implemented to find out the correlation of learners' perspectives towards writing English paragraphs. The research design of this study was also categorized under the analytic and deductive approaches. The correlational research design was also used to measure the students' viewpoints on the current writing English situation.

### **Respondents and Sampling Procedure**

The population of the study consists of 66 eleventh-graders coming from two classes 11A1 and 11A8 at Pham Ngu Lao high school. In order to select the participants of the present study, a simple random sampling method was used to obtain a representative sample during the academic year of 2021-2022, the total number of two classes was 66. According to Slovin's formula ( $n = N \div (1 + N \cdot e^2)$ ) with the margin of error ( $r = 5\%$ ), the respondents of the study was 57 eleventh-graders. In terms of time length of learning, learners had learnt English since the third form. As for competence, they had generally covered most basic grammatical categories and developed basic skills in reading, speaking, listening and writing. In general, the whole group was homogeneous in terms of age, cultural experience, and knowledge of both the mother tongue and English competency. In particular, 32 male eleventh-graders participated in the study, accounting for 56.1%, while 25 female learners were willing to serve as respondents of the study, making up for 43.9%. Overall, their English ability approximately fell at pre-intermediate level.

### **Research Instrument**

To investigate the perspectives of self-assessment on learners' writing skills and their probable improvement, a questionnaire of self-assessment was floated in eleventh-graders after they completed the third writing test. This questionnaire was adapted partly to the ESLP 182 Questionnaire created by Marquette University [13]. The researcher had chosen some resourceful parts in the questionnaire which comprised 68 Likert-type scale questions that addressed multiple dimensions related to General English Writing Skills; Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics Skills; and Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics Strategies to conduct the dry run to evaluate the suitability and liability of the questionnaire with 15 eleventh-graders. The components of the questionnaire which participants were demanded to rate their abilities for each item on a Likert-type scale of 1 to 5 ranging, namely (1) never or rarely true of me, (2) usually not true of me, (3) somewhat true of me, (4) usually true of me, and (5) always or almost always true of me. After receiving the results of the pilot study, the researcher used Cronbach's alpha to calculate the accountability of the questionnaire. The researcher selected the internal consistency in the questionnaire of the acceptable scales and above ( $0.8 > \alpha \geq 0.7$ ) according to the values set by Cronbach (1951). After the strictly serious selection, 51 questionnaire items were officially chosen to implement as the final version. The 51 Likert-type scale statements were printed out and handed out to the respondents then the data were screened to check the suitability for the data treatment using SPSS v.25 application.

### **Data Analysis**

To describe the profile of students as to gender, frequency counts and percentages were used. To assess the perspectives of the respondents, descriptive means and standard deviations were used to treat 51 Likert-scale items according to the interval scales such as very low (1.0 – 1.80), low (1.81 – 2.60), moderate (2.61 – 3.40), high (3.41 – 4.20), and very high (4.21 – 5.0). In addition, ANOVA was correlating the relationship between the writing performance and the number of writing errors of the respondents, and an independent sample T-test was used to compare genders in terms of their opinions on the questionnaire.

### **Findings and Discussion**

#### ***The evaluation of the respondents' beliefs towards their practices of writing English skill.***

As regards the perceptions of the respondents regarding the general English writing skill, eleventh-graders generally confessed that they had very low or low esteem for this basic skill. Table 1 evaluated three stages of writing, namely before writing, during

writing, and after writing. Harmer [4, p. 4] emphasizes the important role of the preparatory step before starting to write, which is consistent with the finding of this study. Unfortunately, the respondents failed to produce their brainstorming ideas ( $M = 1.66$ ;  $SD = .549\%$ ), to transfer their reading notes to the writing ( $M = 1.70$ ;  $SD = .626\%$ ), and to sketch out their writing plan effectively ( $M = 1.60$ ;  $SD = .776\%$ ). These figures demonstrate that the respondents had serious problems in preparing for good paragraph writing, which was also consistent with the findings in other studies in Vietnam [e.g., 8; 13; 14]. As seen in Table 1, statements 4 to 13 evaluated the respondents during the writing process, they admitted to having low and very low viewpoints on these items. Significantly, they were unable to write clear topic sentences ( $M = 1.88$ ;  $SD = .657\%$ ). A topic sentence is the most important one standing commonly at the beginning of the paragraph to give an overview of the sentences to follow. When the writer cannot write a good topic sentence, the successive sentences could be organized in a chaotic order which causes confusion and ambiguity for the readers to understand, this is confirmed in the previous study [15]. The respondents had trouble with writing a good topic sentence, which explains why they felt greatly problematic to continue writing other components in paragraphs, which could be illustrated clearly with Table 1. In writing skills, rewriting skills plays an important process to create effective paragraph writing. However, this capacity was troublesome with the respondents as they expressed very low opinions on their ability to revise and improve their writing ( $M = 1.49$ ;  $SD = .756\%$ ), to recognize their writing errors ( $M = 1.78$ ;  $SD = .627\%$ ), and to fix problems with their writing ( $M = 1.62$ ;  $SD = .521\%$ ). The self-efficacy in producing, identifying, and fixing written errors is essential and demanding in acquiring L2 language, this is also found in other studies [e.g., 1; 16; 17]. The respondents' deficiency of writing skills might be a consequence of changes in testing and assessment forms in Vietnam, which concentrates mainly on multiple-choice tests, which negatively influences learners' cognitive and reasoning skills in expressing their thought in writing. These findings are also in line with the previous research [e.g., 6; 8; 10]

**Table 1. The perceptions of eleventh-graders towards general English writing skills**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
<b>General English Writing Skills</b>				
1. I can effectively brainstorm to gather ideas before writing.	57	1.66	.549	very low
2. I can take good notes on readings and then use them to help support my ideas in my writing.	57	1.70	.626	very low
3. I can write an outline, map, or flowchart to logically organize my ideas before writing.	57	1.60	.776	very low
4. I can write clear topic sentences that identify the topics and controlling ideas of paragraphs.	57	1.88	.657	low
5. I can logically organize my ideas when I write a paragraph.	57	1.72	.921	very low
6. I can write using various expository strategies to logically organize my writing (e.g., process, comparison, cause, effect).	57	1.75	.786	very low
7. I can logically support and develop my main point when I write a paragraph.	57	1.65	.694	very low
8. I can logically support and develop my thesis with my own experiences and reasoning, paraphrases, summaries, and quotations.	57	1.67	.715	very low
9. I can accurately summarize and paraphrase information that I have read in English.	57	1.82	.735	low
10. I can write using an academic style and tone.	57	1.76	.539	very low
11. I can use my own independent thinking in my writing.	57	1.65	.686	very low
12. I can effectively write under time constraints.	57	1.60	.684	very low
13. I can use appropriate vocabulary, word forms, and grammar to effectively communicate with the readers.	57	1.57	.616	very low
14. I can revise my own writing to improve the development and organization.	57	1.49	.756	very low
15. I can identify problems in my writing and see what should be improved.	57	1.78	.627	very low
16. I can use appropriate strategies to fix problems with my writing.	57	1.62	.521	very low

In the same circumstance of general English writing skills, eleventh-graders generally expressed low and very low views on grammar, punctuation, and mechanics skills. Particularly, they much strongly disagreed that their errors in grammar, punctuation, and mechanics did not deter people from understanding their ideas ( $M = 1.76$ ;  $SD = .515\%$ ). Besides, the participants encountered seriously some grammatical components such as correct use of hyphen ( $M = 1.77$ ;  $SD = .525\%$ ), various past tenses ( $M = 1.80$ ;  $SD = .775\%$ ), correct modal verbs ( $M = 1.78$ ;  $SD = .721\%$ ), subject-verb agreement ( $M = 1.73$ ;  $SD = .611\%$ ), and correct article use ( $M = 1.74$ ;  $SD = .621\%$ ). For these ideas, they denoted that eleventh-graders seemed to reconcentrate on acquiring L2 grammar thoroughly. For the rest of statements by Table 2, the respondents also claimed to have low stances on these items, so good writing skills require the writers to be good at L2 grammatical skills,

which is in line with other research findings [e.g., 18; 19; 20]. In general, teaching English at upper-secondary school level highly focuses on the tactics that learners are able to pass local and national examinations, which is reflected on the previous paper [6]. In practice, most of learners' writing in an English course basically develops writing skills because writing skills include many aspects of English such as vocabulary and grammatical rules. While doing writing skills, learners try to practice a particular language point, make a new language for later reference, or improve their grammar, punctuation, and mechanics skills. Similar to the other productive skill, writing refers to learners' ability to compose written text for communicative purposes. Aspects of accuracy (grammar, vocabulary, spelling) are considered as important in formal writing, which follows the conventions of a particular genre.

**Table 2. The perceptions of eleventh-graders towards grammar, punctuation, and mechanics skills**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
<b>Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics Skills</b>				
1. I can use grammar, punctuation, and mechanics well so my errors do not interfere with peoples' understanding of my ideas.	57	1.76	.515	very low
2. I can use correct word forms and parts of speech when I write.	57	2.51	.730	low
3. I can use correct basic sentence structure when I write.	57	2.28	.667	low
4. I can use a variety of sentence types when I write.	57	1.87	.721	low
5. I can use capital letters correctly when I write.	57	1.85	.766	low
6. I can spell correctly when I write.	57	1.95	.664	low
7. I can use hyphens correctly when I write. (-)	57	1.77	.525	very low
8. I can use underlining correctly when I write.	57	1.83	.725	low
9. I can use italics correctly when I write.	57	1.98	.519	low
10. I can use the various present tenses correctly when I write.	57	2.19	.688	low
11. I can use the various past tenses correctly when I write.	57	1.80	.775	very low
12. I can use the various future tenses correctly when I write.	57	2.13	.457	low
13. I can use modals correctly when I write.	57	1.78	.721	very low
14. I can use passive voice correctly when I write.	57	1.84	.486	low
15. I can use active voice correctly when I write.	57	2.31	.554	low
16. I can use subject-verb agreement correctly when I write.	57	1.73	.611	very low
17. I can use count and non-count nouns correctly when I write.	57	1.90	.726	low
18. I can use singular and plural nouns correctly when I write.	57	1.92	.457	low
19. I can use articles correctly when I write. (a, an, the)	57	1.74	.621	very low
20. I can use pronouns correctly when I write.	57	1.96	.776	low
21. I can use gerunds and infinitives correctly when I write. (e.g., running, to run)	57	2.15	.614	low
22. I can place adjectives and adverbs in the right place when I write.	57	2.27	.725	low
23. I can use commas correctly when I write.	57	2.32	.535	low
24. I can use colons correctly when I write. (:)	57	2.18	.557	low
25. I can use semicolons correctly when I write. (;)	57	2.12	.621	low
26. I can find the errors I make with grammar, punctuation, and mechanics.	57	2.15	.766	low
27. I can identify the types of grammar, punctuation, and mechanics errors I make.	57	2.55	.614	low
28. I can correctly fix the errors I make with grammar, punctuation, and mechanics.	57	2.10	.716	low

The aforementioned Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics skills refer to learners' abilities to use their understanding to write effectively basing on their accumulated knowledge about L2 language, Table 3 mentions the strategies learners employed to overcome the weakness at grammar, punctuation, and mechanics skills. As seen in Table 3, the respondents had low

viewpoints on using strategies to address the inabilities to use correct grammar, punctuation, and mechanics. Basing on the data onto Table 3, learner autonomy in acquiring L2 is not high when eleventh-graders tended to do little to improve their English competence, especially the writing skills.

**Table 3. The perceptions of eleventh-graders towards grammar, punctuation, and mechanics strategies**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
<b>Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics Strategies</b>				
1. I fix all kinds of grammar, punctuation, and mechanics errors at once.	57	2.38	.653	low
2. I focus on fixing my grammar, punctuation, and mechanics errors by error type (e.g., pronouns)	57	2.22	.511	low
3. I look beyond the sentence level when I fix my grammar, punctuation, and mechanics errors.	57	2.17	.586	low
4. I consult handbooks, handouts, dictionaries, and other resources to find rules that can help me to fix my grammar, punctuation, and mechanics errors.	57	2.45	.634	low
5. I ask my friends for help with finding and fixing my grammar, punctuation, and mechanics errors.	57	2.20	.526	low
6. I remember the kinds of errors I make with grammar, punctuation, and mechanics and use this information the next time I write.	57	2.11	.576	low
7. I look at good writing and notice how the writers use grammar, punctuation, and mechanics.	57	2.48	.557	low

Table 4 presents the difference between male and female eleventh-graders in regard to the perspectives towards writing English paragraphs. Regarding the research question to investigate the gender difference in terms of perceptions of written errors, Table 4 discloses that male and female respondents shared the similar viewpoints. In simple words, their standpoints were the same by looking at the *Sig.* values of the

Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances, which were all higher than the confidence level (.05). Similarly, the *Sig.* (2-tailed) values of the t-test for Equality of Means were also agreeable to those in Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances, which concluded that there were no disparities between genders towards the perceptions of writing English paragraphs.

**Table 4. The contrastive analysis of male and female respondents in perceive writing English paragraphs**

	Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances			t-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
General English Writing Skills	Equal variances assumed	.022	.882	-.346	55	.731
	Equal variances not assumed			-.345	51.053	.731
Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics Skills	Equal variances assumed	.108	.744	-.642	55	.523
	Equal variances not assumed			-.638	50.382	.526
Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics Strategies	Equal variances assumed	.002	.965	.484	55	.630
	Equal variances not assumed			.485	51.860	.630

## Conclusion

Based on the overall findings of the study, it can be concluded that high school students, typically eleventh-graders at Pham Ngu Lao high school are not good at writing English paragraphs because they are not specially trained how to write English paragraphs. Four categories of written errors, namely lexical errors, syntactic errors, Mechanical Errors, and Morphological Errors are greatly ignored and committed by the respondents. For the simple errors such as errors in subject-verb agreement, errors in the use of noun, verb, adjective, adverb, modal and copula, and even errors in spelling are also common among the respondents. Moreover, the respondents do not know well how to write English paragraphs by analyzing three writing tests. They are unable to comprehend basic structure and organization of paragraphs, which leads to the failure of cohesion, coherence, and unity. These weaknesses might spring from the orientation of educational policies, particularly change into testing and assessment format, which concentrates on multiple-choice tests. To some extent, it cannot deny the advantages of multiple-choice tests of covering a vast of knowledge and cognitive influences, learners have problems and difficulties conveying their ideas into academic presentation in verbal communication or in written communication. The limitation of regular training to write and writing practices results in learners' demotivation and restriction of creativity as well as fluency in expressing ideas in wording. The results from the questionnaire disclose that the respondents are not motivated to write and they see no pressure to improve their writing capabilities. The common written errors share the similarity of genders when they claim to undergo the same situations in writing English paragraphs.

## Implications

The study examined eleventh graders' common written errors and causes towards writing skills to find out comprehensive perspectives on difficulties that high school learners endure while trying to write an English paragraph. In light of the findings and the conclusions mentioned above, three main factors, namely learners, teachers, and foreign language teaching and learning orientation should formulate the following implication to possibly handle these problems.

- Although the curriculum is fixed, it should be adjusted and revised to prioritize improving learners' writing skills. It is necessary to consider spelling and grammatical concerns as integral and mandatory parts which require to be thoughtfully and intensively addressed to help learners progress in their writing performance. By being given more hours and attention to writing skills, learners can be guided to write with

correct grammar, mechanics, and structure of the English language.

- The school could organize some writing contests to motivate learners to improve their writing skills. Furthermore, workshops or training to strengthen and enrich teachers' English writing pedagogical practices should be carried out regularly so that they could apply it in their professional implementation to make writing skills more effective against their learners.

- Teachers of English should renovate their practical teaching of English writing by giving topics revolving around learners' interests and concerns and involving learners in writing activities such as self-editing, peer-blind correction, or reviewing classmates' paragraph writing. Teachers' follow-up written corrective feedback is of great importance to arouse learners' awareness in dealing with their persistent and recurrent common written errors.

- The process writing approach should be utilized by high school teachers of English to improve learners' process of writing that results in the successful development of writing skills. Although the process entails a lot of practice and effort, learners eventually master writing abilities when they become used to the process writing approach.

- To encourage learner autonomy in writing skills, high school students should be informed about the international or national exams which require learners to achieve a certain level of writing capability. They should be encouraged to expose authentic English materials to understand and acquire new approaches to what to write and how to write.

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