

A Study of English Writing Skills of Students at Khmer Buddhist High School of Tra Vinh Province in Vietnam

Thach Ly¹, Veerakarn Kanokkamalade² and Narongchai Pintrymool³

Faculty of Humanities, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand

Corresponding Author, Email: ¹ven.thachly@gmail.com

Retrieved: July 7, 2025; Revised: February 28, 2026; Accepted: February 28, 2026

Abstract

The research had the objectives to (1) investigate the English writing skills of students at Khmer Buddhist High School of Tra Vinh Province, Vietnam, and (2) analyse the proficiency of English writing skills of students at the same institution. A mixed-methods research design was employed to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data. The study involved 42 students studying English as a foreign language. Data were collected through structured questionnaires, student writing samples, and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS to generate descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis.

The results revealed that the English writing skills of the students were generally at a basic level of proficiency. A majority of students experienced difficulties with grammar accuracy (78%), paragraph organisation (72%), and vocabulary usage (65%). Analysis of writing samples indicated recurring grammatical errors, limited lexical range, and weaknesses in paragraph development and coherence. Interview findings showed that many students reported low confidence in writing, which was associated with limited exposure to structured writing instruction and insufficient feedback practices. Nevertheless, students demonstrated positive attitudes towards improving their writing skills when provided with guided instructional support.

The research suggested that systematic and structured writing instruction could contribute to enhancing writing proficiency within this educational context. This study added to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence on English writing proficiency among Khmer ethnic minority students in a Buddhist high school setting in Vietnam. The findings offered context-specific insights into EFL writing development in under-researched religious and multilingual educational environments.

Keywords: English Writing Skills; EFL Learners; Khmer Buddhist High School; Writing Challenges; Writing Instruction

Introduction

In today's globalised and knowledge-driven society, English writing proficiency plays a crucial role in academic achievement, career development, and international communication.



Among the four macro language skills, writing is widely regarded as one of the most complex and demanding skills for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Effective writing requires not only grammatical accuracy and appropriate vocabulary use but also coherence, organisation, and the ability to express ideas logically and clearly.

In the Vietnamese educational context, English has become increasingly important due to international integration and educational reforms. However, many EFL learners continue to encounter significant difficulties in developing writing proficiency. Previous studies have reported that Vietnamese students frequently struggle with grammatical accuracy, vocabulary development, paragraph organisation, and coherence in writing. Limited exposure to authentic English environments and insufficient structured writing instruction have been identified as contributing factors affecting learners' writing performance.

Although a growing body of research has examined English writing proficiency among Vietnamese EFL learners, limited attention has been given to students in specialised educational settings, particularly Buddhist high schools serving Khmer ethnic minority communities. These institutions operate within unique cultural, linguistic, and religious environments that may influence students' language learning experiences. The specific context of Khmer Buddhist High School in Tra Vinh Province represents an under-researched area in EFL writing studies.

Given this background, it is essential to investigate the English writing skills of students in this particular educational setting and to analyse their level of writing proficiency. Therefore, this research had the objectives to (1) investigate the English writing skills of students at Khmer Buddhist High School of Tra Vinh Province, Vietnam, and (2) analyse the proficiency of English writing skills of students at the same institution. By focusing on this context, the study aimed to provide empirical evidence that contributes to a better understanding of English writing development among Khmer ethnic minority students in Vietnam.

Objectives

1. To investigate the English writing skills of students at Khmer Buddhist High School of Tra Vinh Province, Vietnam.
2. To analyze the proficiency of English writing skills of students at Khmer Buddhist High School of Tra Vinh Province, Vietnam.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to obtain a comprehensive understanding of students' English writing skills and their level of proficiency. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data allowed for triangulation and enhanced the validity of the findings. Quantitative data provided measurable evidence of students' writing performance, while qualitative data offered deeper insights into their writing experiences and perceptions.

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 42 students enrolled at Khmer Buddhist High School of Tra Vinh Province, Vietnam. The students were studying English as a foreign language and represented different academic levels within the institution. Both monastic and lay students were included to ensure representation of the school's diverse learning population.

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who were actively engaged in English learning during the research period. This sampling approach ensured that the collected data reflected authentic writing performance within the specific educational context.

Research Instruments

Three research instruments were utilised to collect data:

1. Structured Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to assess students' self-perceived writing abilities and identify areas of difficulty in grammar, vocabulary, paragraph organisation, and coherence. The instrument included Likert-scale and multiple-choice items.

2. Student Writing Samples

Writing samples were collected through assigned writing tasks. These samples were analysed to evaluate grammatical accuracy, lexical range, sentence structure, paragraph development, and overall coherence.

3. Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 selected students to explore their writing experiences, confidence levels, and perceptions of writing instruction. The interviews provided qualitative data that complemented the quantitative findings.

All instruments were reviewed for clarity and content validity prior to data collection.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted between June and December 2024 at Khmer Buddhist High School of Tra Vinh Province. Permission was obtained from the school administration, and informed consent was secured from all participants to ensure ethical compliance.

First, questionnaires were distributed to all 42 participants. Upon completion, student writing samples were collected through assigned classroom writing tasks. Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 students selected to represent varying levels of writing proficiency. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to summarise students' writing proficiency levels and common areas of difficulty.

Qualitative data from writing samples were examined through content analysis to identify recurring patterns in grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, paragraph organisation, and



coherence. Interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis to identify emerging themes related to students' writing proficiency and learning experiences.

The combination of these analytical approaches provided a comprehensive evaluation of students' English writing skills in this educational context.

Results

Objective 1 The findings indicated that the English writing skills of students at Khmer Buddhist High School of Tra Vinh Province were generally limited across several core components. Data collected from structured questionnaires and analysis of student writing samples revealed consistent difficulties in grammar accuracy, paragraph organisation, vocabulary usage, sentence structure, and overall coherence.

Grammar accuracy was identified as the most significant challenge. A total of 78% of students demonstrated frequent errors, particularly in verb tense usage, subject-verb agreement, article usage, and sentence construction. Paragraph organisation was reported as problematic by 72% of students, especially in developing clear topic sentences and logically arranging supporting ideas. Vocabulary usage posed difficulties for 65% of participants, as many relied on repetitive word choices and exhibited a limited lexical range. Additionally, 59% of students struggled with sentence structure, and 53% encountered problems related to coherence and clarity. The findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Summary of Key Writing Challenges Faced by Students (N = 42)

Writing Component	Percentage of Students Struggling
Grammar	78%
Paragraph Organization	72%
Vocabulary Usage	65%
Sentence Structure	59%
Coherence & Clarity	53%

As shown in Table 1, grammar accuracy posed the most substantial challenge, followed by paragraph organisation and vocabulary usage. These deficiencies were consistently observed across student writing samples and reflected in questionnaire responses. Many students also reported low confidence in their writing ability, which they attributed to limited exposure to structured writing instruction and insufficient opportunities for guided practice.

Despite these challenges, students generally expressed positive attitudes toward learning English writing and demonstrated a willingness to improve their skills.

Objective 2 With regard to overall proficiency, the analysis of writing samples revealed that most students performed at a basic level, with noticeable variation across individuals. Writing compositions frequently lacked effective transitions, syntactic variety, and well-developed supporting details. Paragraphs were often underdeveloped, and ideas were sometimes presented without clear logical progression.

Interview data provided further insight into students' writing development. Several participants reported that their writing performance improved when teachers provided explicit instruction on paragraph structure, including guidance on constructing topic sentences, supporting details, and concluding sentences. Students indicated that corrective feedback helped them identify recurring grammatical errors and revise their work more effectively.

In addition, participants stated that structured writing prompts and model paragraphs assisted them in organising ideas more coherently. Some students mentioned that digital tools, such as grammar-checking applications, increased their awareness of language errors and encouraged independent revision. Peer collaboration was also identified as beneficial, as students reported learning new vocabulary, sentence patterns, and organisational strategies through group discussions and shared writing tasks.

Overall, although students' writing proficiency remained at a foundational level, the findings suggest that guided instruction, constructive feedback, and opportunities for revision contributed positively to incremental improvement in writing performance.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide important insights into English writing development among students at Khmer Buddhist High School of Tra Vinh Province, Vietnam. The results indicate that students' writing proficiency remains at a foundational level, with recurring difficulties in grammar accuracy, vocabulary usage, paragraph organisation, and coherence. These findings are consistent with previous research on EFL learners in Vietnam, which has reported similar challenges in mastering structural and organisational aspects of academic writing.

From a linguistic perspective, the high percentage of grammatical errors and limited lexical range suggests that students have not yet achieved sufficient control over core language structures necessary for effective written communication. Difficulties in paragraph organisation further indicate that students may lack familiarity with structured writing conventions, particularly in constructing topic sentences, supporting details, and coherent transitions between ideas.

The qualitative findings deepen this understanding by highlighting the role of instructional practices in shaping writing proficiency. Interview data revealed that students experienced noticeable improvement when provided with explicit instruction, corrective feedback, and opportunities for revision. These findings align with process-oriented approaches to writing instruction, which emphasise drafting, revising, and guided feedback as essential components of writing development. The data suggest that writing proficiency in this context is not solely determined by linguistic competence but is also influenced by the nature and consistency of instructional support.

Another significant insight emerging from the study concerns learner motivation. Despite facing considerable linguistic challenges, students demonstrated positive attitudes toward improving their writing skills. Their responsiveness to teacher feedback, structured prompts, digital tools, and collaborative learning activities indicates that motivation functions as a facilitating



factor in writing development. This suggests that pedagogical strategies that combine structured instruction with supportive learning environments may enhance both competence and confidence among learners.

The contribution of this study lies in its empirical examination of English writing proficiency within a religious and ethnically diverse educational setting that has received limited scholarly attention. By integrating quantitative and qualitative data, the research provides a context-sensitive understanding of how linguistic limitations, instructional practices, and learner attitudes interact within a Khmer Buddhist high school environment. The findings extend existing research on EFL writing by documenting the specific challenges and developmental patterns of ethnic minority students in Vietnam.

Overall, this study contributes to the broader body of knowledge on EFL writing by offering evidence from an under-researched population and highlighting the importance of structured instructional support in improving writing proficiency within multilingual and culturally distinctive educational contexts.

Conclusion

This study investigated the English writing skills and proficiency of students at Khmer Buddhist High School of Tra Vinh Province, Vietnam. The findings revealed that students' writing performance generally remained at a basic level, with prominent difficulties in grammar accuracy, paragraph organisation, vocabulary usage, and coherence. Both quantitative and qualitative data confirmed that linguistic limitations and instructional practices significantly influenced writing outcomes.

Despite these challenges, students demonstrated positive attitudes toward improving their writing skills, particularly when provided with structured guidance, corrective feedback, and opportunities for revision. These findings highlight the importance of systematic and process-oriented writing instruction in supporting EFL learners within multilingual and religious educational contexts.

By providing empirical evidence from an under-researched Khmer Buddhist school setting, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of English writing development among ethnic minority students in Vietnam. The results underscore the need for context-sensitive pedagogical approaches that integrate linguistic support, instructional structure, and learner motivation to enhance writing proficiency.

References

- Bereiter, C., & Scardamalia, M. (1987). *The psychology of written composition*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27–40.

- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J. D., & Christian, L. M. (2014). *Internet, phone, mail, and mixed-mode surveys: The tailored design method* (4th ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Flower, L., & Hayes, J. R. (1981). A cognitive process theory of writing. *College Composition and Communication*, 32(4), 365–387.
- Graham, S., & Hebert, M. (2010). The impact of writing and writing instruction on reading: A meta-analysis. *Harvard Educational Review*, 81(4), 710–744.
- Ngo, P. A., & Truong, T. N. (2023). Difficulties of Vietnamese students in learning academic writing. *International Journal of Asian Education*, 4(1), 65–72.
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2011). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
-