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EXPLORING LEARNERS' CHALLENGES IN IELTS WRITING TASK 2: A THEME-BASED INSTRUCTION METHOD AT A FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER IN HO CHI MINH CITY

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ABSTRACT

IELTS is widely popular in Vietnam thanks to its applicability and practical relevance. Writing Task 2 is considered the toughest of the four skills for learners. A study investigates the challenges Vietnamese EFL learners encountered in IELTS writing task 2 at a foreign language center in Ho Chi Minh City, mainly focusing on challenges of appropriate vocabulary choices and grammar structures. The mixed study methods included quantitative research with a questionnaire applied to collect data by discovering how barriers affect student writing task 2 and a qualitative method used to gain data from convenience samplings of interviews to explore learners' perceptions after completing their challenge treatment course with the pre-test and post-test through Theme-Based Instruction (TBI). The research findings showed that learners struggled with choosing the right words and gaining grammatical accuracy in their IELTS Writing Task 2 essays, providing practical implications for teachers and administrators to design effective pedagogical strategies to overcome these challenges and improve their learners' linguistic skills, suggesting further research, and showing some limitations.

KEYWORDS: linguistic challenges, vocabulary and grammar, Vietnamese EFL learners, IELTS Writing Task 2, theme-based instruction

INTRODUCTION

English has played an important role in exchanging educational, scientific, and socio-economic fields among nations worldwide. Since Vietnam's global integration and economic reforms of 1986, there has been a high demand for English language skills because of countless opportunities globally, specifically in international education, employment, and immigration (Doan & Hamid, 2019). Thus, English is taught nationwide in public or private schools, general English programs, or private language schools and centers. Accessing opportunities on the global stage is important when applying for scholarships for prestigious universities or high-paying positions with a multinational corporation. The IELTS is a test with international recognition that forms part of these pathways, especially the Writing Task 2 essay generation, and it requires cognitive and linguistic skills for this part of the test (Sun & Zhang, 2022).

Real-world English exposure in Vietnam (an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context), alongside the role of a relatively 'classroom-based' model of English use, contributes to poor performance in Writing Task 2 (WT2) as students deficient in metacognitive skills produce weakly cohesive sentences and a lack of vocabulary and accordingly coherence (Tikupasang et al., 2022; Tran et al., 2021; Vu & Peters, 2021). Linguistic obstacles also consist of grammatical deviance and spelling mistakes; non-linguistic obstacles consist of the impacts of test anxiety and low motivation on the processing of information to develop and organize ideas in an essay (Damayanti et al., 2023; Nguyen, 2021).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

IELTS writing task 2 involves writing “well-structured essays” in one “clearly coherent organization of ideas” within a 40-minute interval to be scored according to the four criteria of task response, coherence/cohesion, lexical resource, and grammatical range accuracy. Vietnamese EFL learners have language difficulties, such as a shortage of vocabulary and grammar errors that obstruct their ability to construct complex sentences and express ideas (Maamujav, 2021; Tikupasang et al., 2022). The differences in culture between English and Vietnamese contribute to the obstacle to following academic conventions, which leads to a decrease in essay quality (Nghị & Truong, 2023). TBI (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), grounded on content-based instruction, combines grammar and vocabulary items as part of the topic of instruction (e.g., technology, education), resulting in a meaningful learning experience, and treats these problems in a context of use. Research-based pre-/post-tests suggest that TBI is effective in terms of grammar accuracy and vocabulary usage, thereby validating the methodology proposed (Nhut, 2020)

Furthermore, non-linguistic barriers such as test anxiety, lack of motivation, and poor time management skills interfere with idea generation and organization (Lee, 2022), which is in line with the emphasis on psychological and instructional challenges in IELTS writing task 2. Cultural unfamiliarity with academic norms and the cognitive overload from second-language writing make students more vulnerable to producing rushed essays, as previously reported (Cao et al., 2025; Jiang & Kalyuga, 2022). TBI helps foster critical thinking and academic literacy by structuring lessons around themes relevant to the ESL curriculum and by reducing anxiety and increasing learning motivation and engaging content (Tran & Ngo, 2024). There has been little research into the specific challenges faced by Vietnamese ESL learners in the IELTS Writing Task 2 at foreign language centers, especially at a Foreign Language Center in Ho Chi Minh City, because a majority of IELTS learners at this center find it not easy to use appropriate word choice and grammar structures in their IELTS Writing Task 2 effectively; these challenges lead to their low band scores and poor quality of their writing.

Thus, this created a gap that this study attempts to bridge through a targeted focus on grammar and vocabulary to investigate challenges Vietnamese EFL students encountered in IELTS writing task 2 at this center, proposing Theme-Based Instruction (TBI) (Richards & Rodgers, 2014) to enhance

writing proficiency. It focuses on examining linguistic barriers, employing TBI's student-centered, real-world problem-solving approach to address these issues, and aiming to improve academic writing skills, and the results of this study are expected to inform curriculum development and instructional practices and ultimately improve the education and career aspirations of students (Tran et al., 2021).

Theme-based instruction improves learners' critical thinking and motivation, supports them to make progress in academic writing skills (Romani, 2019).

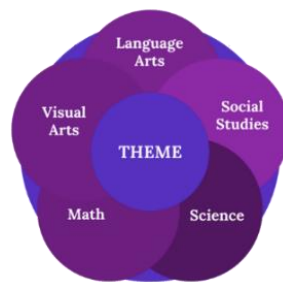


Figure 1: Thematic integration across disciplines

Theme-based instruction makes academic writing easier by engaging learners with significant topics and reducing their anxiety (Prezi, n.d.)



Figure 2: Advantages of theme-based instruction (TBI)

Research question 1: What are the writing challenges perceived by EFL students at a Foreign Language center in Ho Chi Minh City?

Research question 2: What are the underlying reasons for such challenges faced by EFL students at a Foreign Language center in Ho Chi Minh City?

Research question 3: How are these EFL student challenges solved at a Foreign Language center in Ho Chi Minh City?

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. *Research setting*

This research was conducted at a foreign language center in District 8, Ho Chi Minh City. This center was founded in 2015 and is well-equipped. It has been providing over 10 classes in every term with all kinds of English proficiency levels (from A1 to B2, IELTS, and TOEIC) for learners of all ages. The teachers of this center specialize in teaching courses of IELTS test preparation programs, communicative English, reinforcement of four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), business English, and extra-classroom weekend activities for its learners to improve their English communicative competence.

There were 15 participants, all 15 IELTS students of the IELTS writing preparation course from this center (9 males and 6 females), aged 13 to 19, with an English proficiency level of A1-A2; the average year of English learning is over 7 years. They were invited for a questionnaire, an interview, and an eight-week course of challenge treatment to gather data on challenges and their experiences in IELTS academic writing task 2 with their volunteer. In addition, they were promised anonymity and confidentiality of their identity information

3.2. *Instruments and data analysis*

In phase one, a 16-item questionnaire data of a five-point Likert Scale through Google Forms (Ho, 2024; Marrs et al., 2016; Rowe & Wood, 2008), and a pre-test for 15 participants, EFL learners of this center, to collect data by exploring their challenges in IELTS writing task 2.

In phase two, using Theme-Based Instruction (TBI) (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), brainstorming and thematic extension activities of vocabulary and grammar are used to tackle these challenges. TBI is a key example of student-centered pedagogy in English teaching, where learning and understanding contribute to solving their challenges. In addition, learners were introduced to the use of the Oxford Text Checker 5000 web to mark pre-test and post-test vocabulary and to teach topic-specific words to help them focus on academic words, be more aware of vocabulary levels, enhance lexical range and autonomy, and improve their writing performance, and the use of adapted IELTS band descriptors from the original grammar to mark the pre-test and post-test grammar.

In phase three, at the end of the invention course, learners did a post-test to explore what challenges they have already tackled and still needed to improve through the comparison of the pre-test and post-test results. Furthermore, the semi-structured interview (fixed and open-ended questions) towards an object (Karatsareas, 2022) was designed under expert guidance, focused on 5 EFL participants' consent to investigate learners' perceptions after completing the eight-week intervention course. To ensure validity and reliability, the questionnaire was designed through an expert consultation and a pilot questionnaire test with two learners before official use. The interview was carried out in Vietnamese for learners to be able to fully express their ideas, and the transcript was translated into English and cross-checked versions.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Phase One

4.1.1. Learners’ vocab and grammar challenges in IELTS Writing Task 2

Vocabulary challenges had a significant impact on learners’ performance in IELTS writing task 2. Over 50% of the learners often made errors in spelling, **countable/uncountable nouns, and irregular forms. 40% struggle with choosing appropriate topic-specific words**, the right word choice, and precise synonyms to avoid word repetition, and 26.7% strongly agreed on their mistakes of using **informal words**.

Table 1. The table of learners’ vocabulary challenge items

Statement	(1) strongly disagree	(2) disagree	(3) neutral	(4) agree	(5) strongly agree
Challenges that students face in IELTS writing task 2.					
Vocabulary challenges					
1.1. Right word choice	0	13.3%	20%	40%	26.7%
1.2. Word repetition	6.7%	0%	33.3%	40%	20%
1.3. right topic-specific words	0	6.7%	20%	40%	33.3%
1.4. Noun errors	0	13.3%	13.3%	20%	53.4%
1.5. Informal words	6.7%	13.3%	26.7%	26.7%	26.7%

4.1.2. Learners’ grammar challenges in IELTS writing task 2(IWT2)

60% of the learners had difficulty using **tenses, mixed conditional sentences, active and passive voice, articles, and determiners**. 46.7% had trouble using **appropriate subject-verb agreement, gerunds, infinitives, and relative clauses**, and 20% found **using complex & compound sentences** hard.

Table 2. Learners’ grammar challenges in IELTS Writing task 2

Statement	(1) strongly disagree	(2) disagree	(3) neutral	(4) agree	(5) strongly agree
Grammar challenges					
1.6. Complex & compound sentences	%0	0	60%	20%	20%
1.7. Subject-verb agreement, gerunds, and infinitives	%0	0	26.7%	46,7%	26.7%
1.8. Tenses, conditional sentences, active and passive voice.	%0	0	20%	20%	60%
1.9. Articles and determiners	%0	6.7%	0%	33.3%	60%
1.10. Relative clauses	6.7%	13.3%	6.7%	26.7%	46.7%

3.1.3. Reasons for facing challenges in IELTS Writing task 2

66.7% of learners attributed their vocabulary errors to **limited feedback on vocabulary usage**. 40% had **weak lexical knowledge of word choice** in their essays. 33.3% agreed on **insufficient practice**

with new and common IELTS words and exposure to academic or task-specific language, which reduced their writing performance.

Table 3. The table of vocabulary challenge reason items

Vocabulary challenge reason items	(1) Strongly Disagree	(2) Disagree	(3) Neutral	(4) Agree	(5) Strongly Agree
Not often using and reading new common IELT words	0%	6.7%	40%	33.3%	20%
No vocabulary corrective feedback	0%	6.7%	20%	66.7%	6.7%
Limited lexical knowledge.	0%	0%	20%	40%	40%

Furthermore, 46.7% of learners felt that **a little practice, weak revision, and a lack of feedback** prevent grammar use, and 40% agreed that **regular exercise and error correction** could decrease grammatical mistakes

Table 4. The table of grammar challenge reason items

Grammar challenge reason items	(1) Strongly Disagree	(2) Disagree	(3) Neutral	(4) Agree	(5) Strongly Agree
No grammar practice and error revision	0%	6.7%	20%	26.7%	46.7%
No writing essay practice	0%	6.7%	33.3%	40%	20%
No grammar corrective feedback	0%	0%	33.3%	46.7%	20.1%

4.2. Phase two

4.2.1. Pre-test, theme-based teaching solutions and post-test

Through the general average pre-test results, nearly 80% (191 words) of learners' vocabulary was at the A level, with only 14.4% (40 words) at A2-B1, indicating that the learners' lexical range was limited to the usage of common simple/basic words.

Taking examples of learners

LearnerA1's pre-test results

A1 used 285 words in the pre-test essay; 88% (250 words) of these words were used by A1→A2, and 10% (29 words) were at higher levels (B1→C1). A2 utilized 183 words in the pre-test.



Figure 3: A sample of the learner A1 pre-test results

Learner A2’s pre-test results essay, words A1→A2 comprised 81% (148 words), and 16% (31 words) belongs to advanced word levels (B1→C1).



Figure 4: A sample of the learner A2 pre-test results

Table 5. The table of learners’ pretest

Students’ name	A1		A2- B1	
A1	219	77%	50	18%
A2	128	70%	35	19%
A3	149	80%	29	16%
A4	197	82%	29	12%
A5	299	79%	49	13%
A6	336	81%	51	13%
A7	113	74%	32	21%
A8	154	77%	34	17%
A9	161	86%	11	6%
A10	267	79%	42	12%
A11	226	73%	54	18%
A12	102	80%	19	15%
A13	164	84%	19	10%
A14	134	73%	30	16%
A15	217	89%	24	10%
Average	191	80%	40	14.4%

4.2.2. Theme-based teaching solutions

To overcome these vocabulary and grammar challenges, an eight-week course of challenge treatment for a class of 15 IELTS learners was well-designed with carefully chosen key materials for tackling the vocabulary and grammar barriers the learners faced in IELTS writing task 2. The program followed a *theme-based instruction* (TBI), and the course focused on vocabulary and grammar points in IELTS writing task 2 to help learners improve their knowledge in writing task 2. Using the *TBI brainstorming and thematic extension activities* to teach vocabulary and grammar to tackle learners’ linguistic barriers because *TBI brainstorming* activities help learners link new words and grammar, provide many various contexts for vocabulary use, expand word knowledge, and improve learning engagement and critical thinking so that they can enhance their accuracy in grammar and word choice and **Thematic extension** activities support learners to have deeper practice, progressive development, and comprehension of key vocabulary and grammar; contextual reinforcement to help with words and grammar structures in significant settings; and skill integration to combine many language skills in the same topics. Furthermore, *the Oxford Text Checker 5000 web* was also used to teach *topic-specific words* to support them in knowing their frequency vocabulary levels and enhance their autonomy, writing performance, learning engagement, and lexical expansion. Every week concentrated on teaching specific aspects of the vocabulary of *countable/uncountable/informal/formal/irregular nouns, synonyms, topic-specific words*, and the grammar of *tenses, conditional sentences, adjective + prepositions, compound and complex sentences, gerunds, infinitives, bare verbs, relative clauses, verb agreement, and active and passive forms with reinforcement of targeted practice, model essays, and corrective feedback* to tackle their challenges in IWT2 performance

Taking learner A14 s' examples of joining brainstorming activities of theme-based instruction

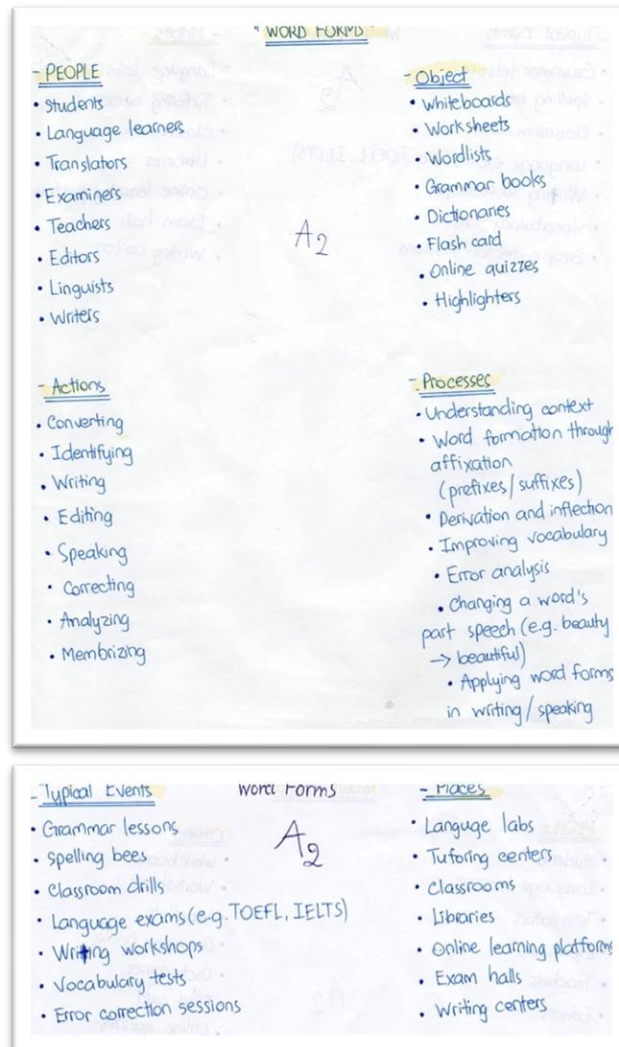


Figure 5. The TBI brainstorming word forms

Taking learner A2 s' examples of joining extension activities of theme-based instruction

Taking examples of these words						Taking examples of these words	
Root Word	Noun	Verb	Adjective	Adverb	Example Sentence		
run	run	run	running	run			
care	care / caregiver	care	careful	carefully			Show care when crossing / Be careful!
friend	friend	befriend	friendly	—			She is a good friend / The dog is very friendly.
move	movement	move	movable	—			The movement is slow / The desk is movable.
speak	speech	speak	—	—			Give a speech tomorrow / She can speak three languages.
hope	hope	hope	hopeful	hopefully			There is still hope / Hopefully, it won't rain.
inform	information	inform	informative	—			The information is correct / She will inform you.
rely	reliance	rely	reliable	reliably			I have reliance on her. He is very reliable.
describe	description	describe	descriptive	descriptively			The description was clear / He described the event.
teach	teaching	teach	teachable	—			The teaching was excellent / She loves to teach.
write	writing	write	written	—			The writing is neat / Please write your name here.

Figure 6: The TBI extended word forms

Taking learner A9 s' examples of joining brainstorming activities of theme-based instruction

Figure 7. The TBI brainstorming verb phrases

"WORD FORMS"	
<p><u>PEOPLE</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students • Language learners • Translators • Examiners • Teachers • Editors • Linguists • Writers 	<p><u>Object</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whiteboards • Worksheets • Wordlists • Grammar books • Dictionaries • Flash card • Online quizzes • Highlighters
<p><u>Actions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Converting • Identifying • Writing • Editing • Speaking • Correcting • Analyzing • Memorizing 	<p><u>Processes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding context • Word formation through affixation (prefixes/suffixes) • Derivation and inflection • Improving vocabulary • Error analysis • Changing a word's part speech (e.g. beauty → beautiful) • Applying word forms in writing/speaking

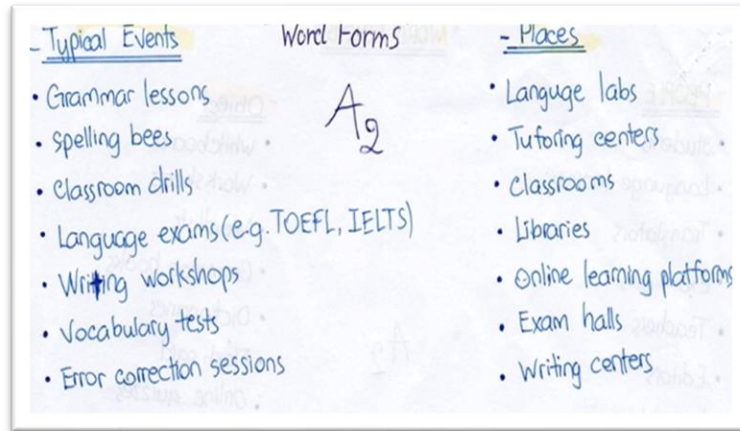
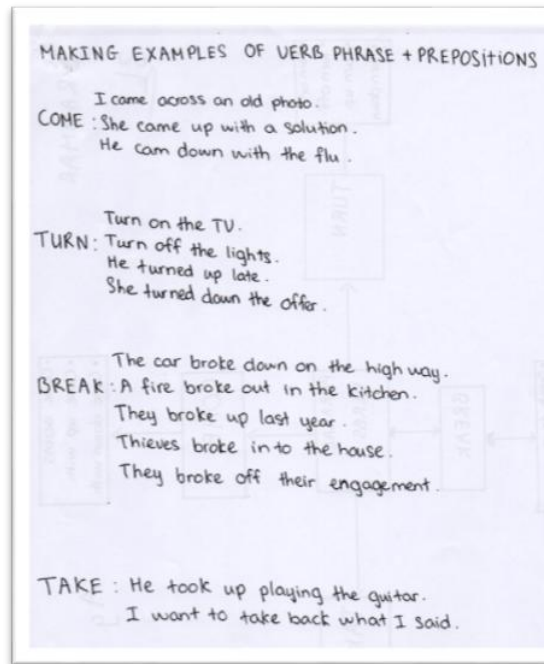
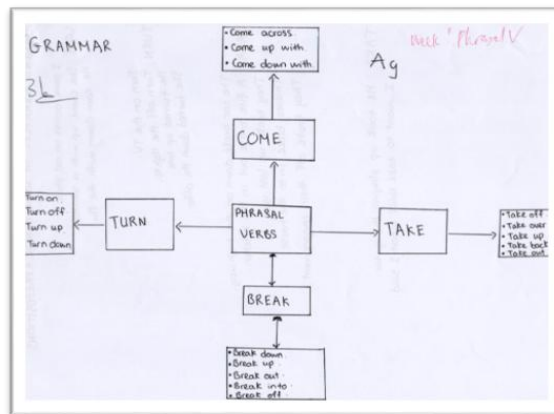
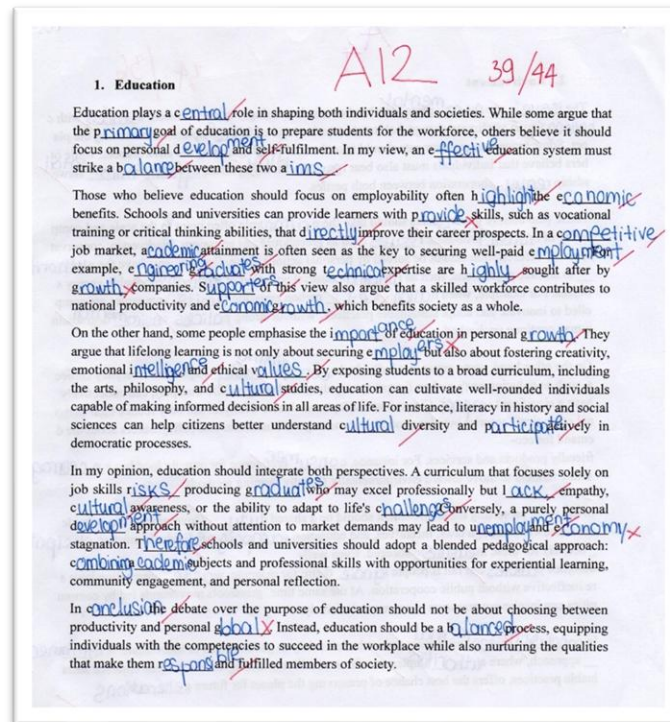


Figure 8. The TBI extended verb phrase



Taking learner A2 s' examples of joining Oxford Text Checker 5000 Web to learn topic-specific vocabulary

Figure 9. The exercises of filling the first letter of missing word in a passage



At the end of this course, the learners took a post-test to discover what aspects of vocabulary and grammar barriers they had already overcome and still needed to master through the pre-test and post-test results.

4.3. Phase three

Post-test: Post-test results showed notable progress: A1 word use reduced from 80% (191 words) to 50% (148 words), but A2-B1 word use increased considerably from 14.4% (34 words) to 23% (59 words). This 30% fell in basic vocabulary, and 10% rose in advanced levels, proving the effectiveness of theme-based instruction solutions of the pre-test and post-test to these challenges.

Taking example of learner A10's pretest and post-test results: Comparing word usage between the pre-test and post-test, the vocabulary number A1 dropped from 79% to 52% (267→130 words, with A2-B1 use rising slightly, 12% → 18% (42→46 words).



Figure 10: A sample of learner’A10’ pretest results



Figure 11: A sample of learner’A10’ post-test results

According to the pre-test and post-test results, learners made a notable progress in their vocabulary use. the most words in the pre-test, were used at the A1–A2 level, average 88.3%(190 words), but only 8.9% (21 words) of B1–C1 level Nevertheless, the proportion of basic words in the post-test reduced to 63.8% (178 words), but the use of higher-level words grew considerably up 30.3% (82 words).

Table 6. The table of pretest and post-test results

Name	PRE-TEST				POST-TEST			
	A1-A2		B1-C1		A1-A2		B1-C1	
A1	250	88%	29	10%	175	63%	87	31%
A2	148	81%	31	16%	190	68%	80	29%
A3	169	91%	14	8%	203	69%	78	37%
A4	220	92%	17	6%	183	66%	79	28%
A5	332	88%	33	9%	204	70%	79	29%
A6	274	90%	30	7%	173	59%	93	32%
A7	138	90%	10	7%	158	62%	73	27%
A8	176	88%	20	11%	178	63%	87	31%
A9	169	90%	10	6%	159	58%	88	32%
A10	150	88%	26	8%	150	60%	84	33%
A11	159	84%	36	12%	159	62%	77	31%
A12	113	89%	12	9%	188	66%	82	29%
A13	178	91%	8	5%	185	66%	78	28%
A14	144	78%	25	19%	192	65%	84	29%
A15	236	96%	7	3%	175	62%	86	31%
Average	190.4	88.3%	21.1	8.9%	178.1	63.8%	82.4	30.3%

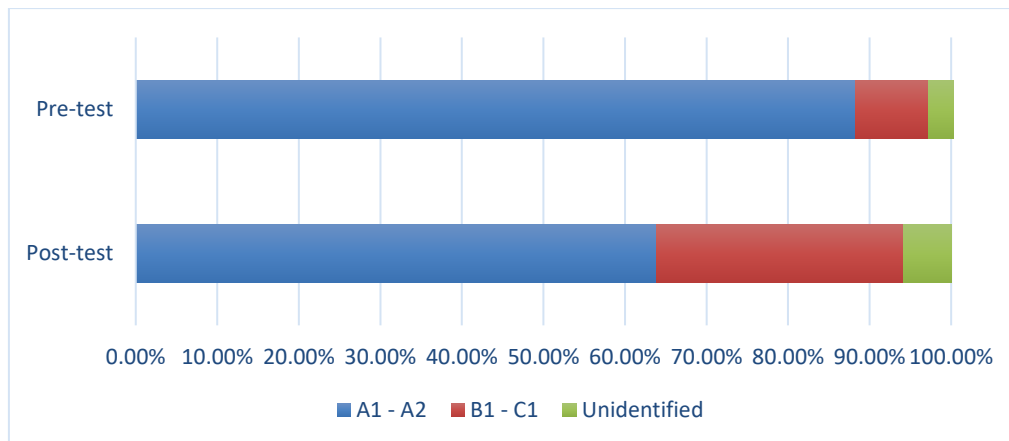


Figure 12: Average word count from pre-test to post-test

4.4. Students’ interview of the invention course

According to the general interview findings, the learners have made considerable progress in tackling vocabulary and grammar challenges in IWT2, but they still need their continued practice with the use of *synonyms, linking words, articles, adverbs, verb phrases, and special passive forms* for further enhancement in their IELTS writing task 2 performance.

Taking two learners’ transcription examples

[Learner A2 (Interview, 00:01:03; 00:01:59)] said “I have nearly overcome the lexical challenges. For example, now, I am more familiar with the *use of nouns* and make fewer noun errors, particularly with specific words and I can reduce errors of *active and passive forms, tenses, and relative clauses*”.

[Learner A3 (Interview, 00:01:40-00:03:00)] noted “ In terms of grammar and vocabulary, I have dealt with nearly all lexical difficulties, how to use nouns and reduce my noun errors, such as the mistakes of countable or uncountable and irregular nouns, and synonyms. I can limit my grammar errors such as the mistakes of subject-verb agreement, gerunds, and infinitives in complex or long sentences.”

Table 7. *The table of the interview data summary for 5 learners*

Tackled challenges	More practices
	Vocabulary
Targeted noun challenge items	synonyms, linking words
	Grammar
Targeted grammar challenge items	adverbs, verb phrases, and special passive forms, adjective+ prepositions

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. The comparison of the questionnaire findings with some previous studies

The challenges students face due to a lack of understanding of topic-specific vocabulary and the more general spelling errors related to countable and uncountable nouns sound very similar to results reported in other studies. For example, Nation (2022) found that vocabulary learning is a challenge among second language learners and results in miscommunication in academic contexts. Likewise, Nicolas & Critica (2024) reported that spelling errors, particularly with irregular nouns, detracted from writing clarity. However, one of the distinctions for this study is the emphasis on the unique challenges of irregular nouns and the study's exploration of how these issues specifically impact students' academic writing. It is not that other research does not recognize general vocabulary and spelling challenges (Nation, 2022; Nicolas & Critica, 2024), it is just that few studies actually focused on irregular nouns as part of their study's big issue.

The issues concerning making appropriate English word choices to build on ideas and avoiding repetition by using synonyms are also reflected in recent studies. Vietnamese IELTS learners often say how they struggle with lexically resource, especially under pressure, with IELTS Writing Task 2 (Nguyen et al.,2022). Choosing appropriate synonyms is difficult and often as a result of over using a synonym or not making varied word choices, this often results in repeated language -one which lacks both sophistication and clarity in essays (Wieben 2025; Khalil 2019). This research differs because it is specific to the context of synonym choice in IELTS essays and that this issue has not been covered in extensive literature. In this way, while there are previous studies that cover general vocabulary issues - discussing the lexical issues emerging around synonyms in the IELTS context provide a further layer into the more specific lexical aspects and difficulties students encounter.

The problems students now face in terms of selecting the correct tenses, using mixed conditional sentences, and recognizing active versus passive forms are in line with previous studies. Grammatical accuracy continues to be a major problem for many L2 learners, frequently resulting in unclear or ambiguous writing (Mao & Yao, 2024). Similarly, errors in tense use, especially any inconsistent or incorrect verb tense, can significantly hinder the clarity and coherence of academic writing (Fumero & Cowan, 2020). However, this study brings something new because we will examine the misuse of articles and determiners as an issue that has not been considered in previous studies. Thus, previous research has reviewed grammatical issues broadly, but we must now distinguish clarity in IELTS writing task from the difficulty of articles versus determiners and more general grammatical issues summaries and how it relates to student's difficulties.

The challenges of getting subject-verb agreement correct and using gerunds and infinitives in complex sentence structures confirm findings from our previous work that highlighted the challenges with sentence structure in academic writing. Complex sentence structures, including long sentences with multiple clauses and complex subordination, can significantly hinder clarity in students' writing, coherence in their writing, and thus academic readability for ESL writing (Zhang & Kang, 2022), while subject-verb agreement in particular, omissions, as well as missed or erroneous marking of singular or plural inflections (Pamzan et al., 2023), often interrupts meaning and clarity in academic writing. Our research expands previous investigations' conversation by specifically examining the challenges of constructing simple sentences with relative clauses, which limited previous literature attention. In other words, while previous research has situated the challenges of sentence complexity as important, our emphasis on the connectedness of sentences through relative clauses contributes to a broader discussion of students' important structural challenges that provide insights about the difficulties students face when writing.

Moreover, the challenges presented in this study regarding students' issues with IELTS Writing Task 2 show some similarity and some difference from previous research, the research included two open-ended questionnaire items. For instance, the incorrect application of vocabulary selection is in agreement with previous research that demonstrated sloppily selected words affect clarity (Wieben, 2025); however, the current research suggests that continual misapplication of vocabulary in student essays is a chronic issue that requires purposeful instruction. Even though previous research highlights the excessive use or incorrect application of linking words as a barrier to coherence, the current research examines how students' incorrect application of connectors in IELTS essays breaks down flow. General word form errors (wrong affixation or morphological substitution) have been verified to be commonplace among EFL learners (Vy et al., 2022) whether writing for high stakes or not. The underreported application of word for word translation from the learners native language notwithstanding. Unnecessary vocabulary synonym overuse, and awkward phrasing, are implied by the reports of exploiting linking words beyond necessity, and mismanaging vocabulary. Finally, even though word style appropriateness (e.g. formal vs informal register) and family confusion are rarely isolated; the results of the current study suggest that raising writing quality needs to incorporate.

In terms of grammatical issues in IELTS Writing Task 2, this study reaffirms prior research findings while also extending into some areas. Errors in comparative and superlative forms provide evidence to support findings from studies conducted by Tarigan (2021) that students often misform or misorder these structures. Similarly, run-on sentences, caused by missing punctuation and connectors, reflect Redalyc's (2023) finding that EFL writing is often characterized by weak sentence boundaries. Misplaced words and problematic verb phrases are further examples, observed by Pamzan et al. (2023), that may significantly obscure meaning. Other less-studied issues such as the order of adjectives, use of prepositions, and differences among conditional types (Arif, 2023), are not studied as commonly, and were displayed in this study as significant barriers to grammatical accuracy. Mother tongue interference, similar to findings in Yu (2024), continued to show evidence of influence in structural errors in part writing.

5.2. The IELLTS learners' current disadvantageous contexts at this center

Firstly, teachers' corrective feedback can provide learners with many benefits, such as recognizing and comprehending learner language mistakes of grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure misuse, and so on. It also supports learners to avoid repeating similar errors and, little by little, improve their accuracy and fluency in their essay writing. These are necessary for them to gain their desired band scores or higher band ones. In addition, through having thoughtful and consistent feedback from their teachers, learners are better equipped to meet the needs of the IELTS writing exam. However, the learners of this center do not have chances to receive much personal corrective feedback from their teachers in classes for examination preparations because the class time is limited. After finishing the learners' homework, they will receive the answer key for their homework and correct it by themselves. If any learners have their teachers give them personal feedback on their homework, the teachers will be willing to do it.

Secondly, if students learn common classes, not examination preparation classes, they will not be provided any homework on vocabulary and grammar to improve their language knowledge because teachers do not want to put pressure on their study, and always try their best to create a relaxing, engaging, and exciting environment for learners when they attend their classes. However, this is also a disadvantage for learners because they do not have opportunities to improve their weak areas of IELTS vocabulary and grammar that they need to overcome.

Thirdly, students cannot get access to read more IELTS model essays to take note of some good grammar structures, grammar points, and new words that are commonly used in IELTS essays, due to class time. Therefore, they cannot improve their vocabulary and grammar knowledge for their IELTS writing task 2

Fourthly, students seldom have chances to improve their grammar knowledge because the majority of learners at this center are mainly taught about communicative skills focused on speaking and listening

skills, and grammar structures are not given much attention. According to the new educational trend of English teaching and learning programs, speaking and listening skills are more focused on teaching to enhance learners' communicative language abilities in their daily life.

Last but not least, the exchanging process of turning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to English as a Second Language of the Vietnam Ministry of Education in Vietnamese context is an occurring issue. While most teachers are used to teach in EFL circumstances, involving in ESL could create burden in teaching and learning grammar and vocabulary. Therefore, solving ESL situations means to have engaging and communicative methods within the English environment. As a result, learners or teachers that get used to grammar-translation method; a traditional way of teaching in Vietnam for decades; will find it to comprehend or use the language practically.

In conclusion, it is necessary for teachers to encourage their learners to do their homework and regularly provide their corrective feedback on their homework for learners so that they can have more opportunities to enhance their vocabulary and grammar knowledge

6. CONCLUSION

The study findings will supply valuable insights for administrators and teachers at a foreign language center in Ho Chi Minh City to highlight areas that need improving in learners' preparation programs and effective feedback strategies, especially low-level students, such as those have limited vocabulary and grammar barriers. Teachers can have a deep sights of the specific challenges learners encounter in IWT2, which helps them improve their pedagogical strategies, different instructions, and effective feedback strategies for their students. Learners can have more opportunities to understand and solve common linguistic difficulties in IWT2. Nevertheless, this study also wears some limitations such as investigating only a group of 15 learners at a single center and suggests that future researchers should discuss more the development of applicable and practical curriculum and pedagogical methods for IELTS test preparation programs, and select a variety of participants with different language levels in several different learning environments such as universities, high schools, various foreign language centers, and institutions where IELTS test preparation programs are taught for learners, future research can supply a more nuanced and overall understanding of the challenges and give targeted solutions that benefit students, curriculum administrators, and teachers to refine instructional strategies in preparing for IELTS writing examinations.

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