

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Presented in Chapter 4, all of the data gathered was analysed by means of the statistical analysis as planned. In this chapter, the data was then concluded and discussed. At the end of the chapter, some recommendations were made for further studies. The information in this chapter was presented according to the objectives of the study.

Conclusions of the results

The results of this study were concluded according to the three objectives. They included 1) to find out the students' opinion on the instruction in writing English in English foundation courses; 2) to find out the students' preferred teaching methods for the instruction in writing English; and 3) to compare the demographic data of Silpakorn University first year students with their opinion on the instruction in writing English in English foundation courses. Details are presented below:

Objective 1: To find out the students' opinion on the instruction in writing English in English foundation courses

The samples were asked to give their opinions on several statements, in a rating scale, so that their opinion on the instruction in writing in the two courses could be measured. The opinion was also categorised into the following topics.

1. *The material.* All of the statements for this category were ranked at a high level of the rating scale. The mean for all statements was 3.71 (S.D. = .77). Following were the three top-ranked statements: "The topics are relevant to real life situations" was 3.94 (S.D. = .69); "I need more teaching aids or material to help me write" ($\bar{X} = 3.75$, S.D. = .86); and "The topic of each task is interesting" ($\bar{X} = 3.75$, S.D. = .68). For this variable, the samples ranked the following statement the least satisfied: "It is easy to follow steps in writing from the material" ($\bar{X} = 3.53$, S.D. = .77).

Likewise, the results from the interviews and the focus groups showed that the overall opinion on the material was positive. They said that the reading passages were helpful to generate ideas as they acted like guidelines or examples. On the other hand, students with middle and low levels of grades claimed that some tasks were too difficult to understand due to confusing directions and their lack of vocabulary.

Moreover, all of the interviewees agreed that the length of the material was appropriate, talking about a number of the reading passages and the exercises. However, some interviewees said that the exercises were not really useful because their teachers skipped them and rushed to finish the outline questions.

2. *The writing process.* The samples had the opinion on the writing process at a high level ($\bar{X} = 4.07$, S.D. = .78). They were the most satisfied with the following statement in this category: “I want my teacher to teach me from the very beginning, such as how to construct sentences, how to use conjunctions, etc” ($\bar{X} = 4.25$, S.D. = .88). The second and third places included the following statements: “By using the outline questions, I can brainstorm useful ideas to write” ($\bar{X} = 4.23$, S.D. = .69); and “The reading passages help me to generate ideas to write”, respectively. They also showed the lowest level of their opinion on the statement “The teaching method of writing in steps motivates me to write” ($\bar{X} = 3.67$, S.D. = .86).

Though the statistical data showed the samples’ opinion on the reading passages at a high level ($\bar{X} = 4.22$, S.D. = .67), there were two different opinions from the interviewees. The first group supported the reading passages, reasoning that the passages provided correct structures, word choice and useful ideas for them to start writing. The other pointed out some negative views. First, some students might only copy the passages as their writing work. Second, difficult grammar and content might hinder students from generating ideas to write. Finally, some topics were not personalised enough.

Furthermore, the statistical data seemed to match the results from the interviews in terms of other elements. All of the interviewees strongly agreed that the process writing was effective in helping them write, citing that they could realise their errors marked by their teachers. However, they were concerned that the process writing was not effective for low-graded students because they had no foundation English writing skills. They did not know how to write grammatical sentences. The fact that they were taught how to generate ideas by the process writing was useless as they could not generate a sentence.

3. *Feedback.* The samples had a high level of the opinion on feedback they received from their teachers during writing lessons of English I and II ($\bar{X} = 3.75$, S.D. = .85). Interestingly, the statement “I prefer a peer-review for my writing” had the lowest mean in this category. In fact, it was the lowest among all statements in this part of the survey questionnaire. It was at a medium level of the opinion ($\bar{X} = 3.10$, S.D. = .94). The top three places fell upon the following statements: “After my teacher’s checking, my writing skills show improvement” ($\bar{X} = 4.02$, S.D. = .78); “I prefer my teacher’s feedbacks to focus on content and organisation” ($\bar{X} = 3.96$, S.D. = .78); and “I prefer my teacher to explain the feedbacks to me face-to-face” ($\bar{X} = 3.89$, S.D. = .87).

The results from the interviews were similar to those mentioned above. Most interviewees revealed that teachers’ feedback helped them acknowledge errors concerning grammar, word choice and

expressions. They became more aware of mistakes when writing the next task. Students felt that their writing skills improved because of their capability of writing correct word choice, structure, expressions and coherence of the content. However, some interviewees suggested that face-to-face communication between teachers and students be conducted more often among all teachers. They said that feedback in written forms was not sufficient as they wanted to know how correct the mistakes as well.

The next aspect of feedbacks the researcher wanted to find out was the samples' preferred items, on which they wanted their teachers to focus. On the survey questionnaire, the samples were asked to write Number 1 – 8 (or 9). Following is the conclusion:

The order of the samples' favourite items, on which they would like their teachers to focus when giving feedback:

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| 1. Grammar (35.81%) | 6. Idioms (15.32%) |
| 2. Ideas and content (26.1%) | 7. Cohesive devices (28.38%) |
| 3. Organisation (24.1%) | 8. Punctuation (38.29%) |
| 4. Vocabulary (22.07%) | 9. Length of essays / formality of the |
| 5. Spelling (16.22%) | language (suggested by a few samples) |

The results above corresponded with those from the interviews, from which there were two groups of opinions. The first group wanted their teachers to focus on marking grammar and vocabulary. They wanted to learn how to write English grammatical sentences. The other group preferred content and ideas to be checked and emphasised, citing that it was hard to generate ideas to start the writing. This element was more important than any other elements because there were no right or wrong ideas. Students, therefore, were not afraid of making mistakes concerning ideas. The marks from content and ideas could also compensate with other mistakes concerning grammar or vocabulary.

4. *A number of tasks.* The samples showed their opinion on a number of tasks at a high level ($\bar{X} = 3.70$, S.D. = .86). The mean scores of the two statements "A number of tasks is appropriate" and "I want to have more writing exercises before I start writing an essay" were 3.84 (S.D. = .80) and 3.57 (S.D. = .93), respectively.

Similarly, the interviews were highly satisfied with a number of tasks, which were two for each term. Their reason was that in the English I course, students, who were freshmen, needed some time to adjust themselves in a new educational system. Two tasks were appropriate for beginners like them. Likewise, in the English II course, students were required to do more work in other courses they had to enroll. Therefore, it was suitable to remain the amount at two tasks.

5. *Timing*. The samples had a high level of their opinion on the timing variable ($\bar{X} = 3.88$, S.D. = .81). The statement “Setting clear deadlines is appropriate for learning” was ranked the highest in this category ($\bar{X} = 4.05$, S.D. = .76). The second and the third places were the following statements: “My teacher provides sufficient time for each step of the writing process” ($\bar{X} = 3.86$, S.D. = .83) and “The time given for completing each task is adequate” ($\bar{X} = 3.75$, S.D. = .86).

Again, the results from the survey questionnaire corresponded to those from the interviews. The interviewees said that deadlines for all steps were notified clearly, so it was easy to catch up. Only a few said that some teachers did not set up deadlines clearly. As a result, they could not meet the deadlines because they were not pushed hard enough to finish the tasks. When asked about deadlines for each step, their opinions split according to their grades. The first group, the A, C, C+ students, had no problem completing their tasks on time. Each step was approximately given a week to complete. On the other hand, the interviewees with low grades claimed that they did not have enough time to complete each task, citing they had other priorities from other subjects to do. They usually tried to finish writing an essay a day before a deadline. A student suggested that in case of late submission of work, marks should not have been subtracted. The reason was that it was really discouraging.

6. *Grading*. The samples’ opinion on the grading was at a high level ($\bar{X} = 3.84$, S.D. = .91). The statement “the criteria for grading has been notified to students” received the highest mean in this category ($\bar{X} = 4.25$, S.D. = .74). The statement “The points should be equally weighted among all elements: vocabulary, grammar, content and organisation” was ranked the second place with the mean at 3.71 (S.D. = .96). Finally, the statement “It is fair for my teacher to deduct points for late work” was ranked the lowest place in this category ($\bar{X} = 3.56$, S.D. = 1.04).

For this variable, the samples’ opinion from the survey questionnaire corresponded to that from the interviews. They reached a consensus on clear grading criteria being notified by class teachers. It was noticeable that all of the interviewees said that their teachers had the same grading standard, which was clear and fair to all students.

The survey questionnaire also asked the samples to share their opinion on the weight for the elements of writing: vocabulary, grammar, ideas and content, and organisation. They were asked to suggest their preferred weights if they did not agree with an equal weight adopted in the instruction in writing English of the English I and II courses. Only a few samples (8.33%) suggested their opinion on this topic. Following is their ideal weights:

Vocabulary	2 points
Grammar	2 points

Ideas and content	3 points
Organisation	3 points

The results from the interviews show similarity to the ideal weights mentioned above. If the interviewees were not satisfied with the equally weighted grading, some of them preferred to put more weight on content and ideas. The reason was that ideas depended on personal writers; therefore, they should not have been marked 'correct' or 'incorrect.' Others would like teachers to weigh more points for grammar because this was the most important element.

7. *Conclusion.* For the last statement, the researcher asked the samples to give their opinion on their confidence about writing English. The statement was "After learning how to write from English I and II courses, I am confident about writing English essays." The samples showed their opinion at this statement at a medium level ($\bar{X} = 3.36$, S.D. = .811). That means they were not really confident about writing English essays because the mean was at the middle of the rating scale.

The samples also added their comments on the instruction in teaching writing in the English I and II courses in an open-ended question on the survey questionnaire. A majority of them preferred their teachers to begin writing lessons with teaching basic grammar, vocabulary and structure for writing skills. They reasoned that many students had different background knowledge of English. This corresponded to the results from the interviews. Though students agreed with the instruction in the writing process, their lack of knowledge of a basic sentential level would obstruct the improving of their writing skills. Other suggestions of the samples and the interviewees were concluded below:

1. The following elements concerning writing skills should be taught or reviewed at the commencement of writing lessons: grammar, sentence structures, vocabulary, punctuation, transitional markers, etc. This also includes more writing exercises before writing an essay.
2. Both good and bad examples of writing should be presented to students, so that they may learn general mistakes or sensible sentences.
3. Reading passages prior to starting writing are useful. But, the level of difficulty should be for average students and there should be a glossary of new words concluded at the end of each passage, which students may use for their essays.
4. Teachers should construct a pleasant, friendly atmosphere. They should speak Thai when teaching writing English because the lesson is difficult enough.
5. All correction symbols, used by all teachers, should be notified to students.
6. After marking students' works, teachers should explain the errors face-to-face to students. They should also guide how to correct them as well.

7. Grammar points should not be focused when grading. In fact, points should not be a priority for students to focus. They should be activated to be able to generate ideas and write.

Objective 2: To find out the students' preferred teaching methods for the instruction in writing English

The samples revealed their preferred method of being taught English writing by putting Numbers 1 – 7 to show the order of seven methods of teaching: the text functions, comprising process or the process writing, the project-based writing, language structure, the content approach, the creative expression and the genre approach. The following is the ranking of their preferred methods of teaching writing:

1. Creative expression
2. Language structure
3. Composing process
4. Content
5. Genre
6. Text functions
7. Project-based writing

Surprisingly, despite their high level of opinion on the instruction in writing English, students seemed to prefer writing without being evaluated. The method of 'creative expression', therefore, became their first choice because it was defined that 'students are encouraged to express their thoughts through written texts **without assessment**. Students have freedom to write about anything they want' on the survey questionnaire. They gave a reason in the interviews as well, saying that they preferred the writing tasks not to carry any points. They might have been more motivated to write, accordingly.

The researcher had been thinking that the method of 'language structure' might have been students' favourite because both qualitative and quantitative data revealed that students wanted their teachers to begin with teaching grammar, sentence structures, vocabulary or mechanics.

Objective 3: To compare the demographic data of SU first year students with their opinion on the instruction in writing English in English foundation courses

The demographic data can be concluded below:

Majors and genders. The total amount of the samples was 444, including 305 Engineering students and 139 Education students. They were from seventeen majors. Nearly three quarters of the samples were female (62.39%), whereas 33.56% of the samples were male.

English I and II grades. The majority of the samples earned grades in the middle of the scale, namely B, C+ and C, which represented a normal distribution of grading in the English I course. The percentage points of these grades were 16.22%, 17.57% and 18.24%, respectively, with the last one gained by most of the samples. The English II grades were not included at the time the samples were asked to fill in the survey questionnaires. Therefore, their mid-term grades were divided up into eight ranges, which represented the eight grades: A, B+, B, C+, C, D+, D and F. Half of the samples earned the grades at a low end of the scale. Most of them (40.32%) earned 45 points for lower, which referred to an F grade. The second most (12.61%) earned between 45 to 48 points, which referred to a D grade.

Exposition to English language. Nearly all of the samples (96.85%) never stayed in a country, whose official language was English. For those who had this experience, most of the samples (2.25%) stayed for a short period, one to three months. Nearly half of the samples (43.47%) started their first English lesson in school at the kindergarten level. On the other hand, the second most of the samples (28.83%) started at Grade 4. Third, again about half of the samples (46.85%) never took a special course in a language school. For those who did, a majority of the samples (22.07%) spent less than three months learning in a language school, whereas the second most (17.57%) spent about a year or longer. Finally, a very large amount of the samples (86.04%) never took any writing courses outside SU. However, for those who took the course, 6.76% of the samples took an English writing course for a year or longer.

Then, the research compared the samples' opinion on the instruction in writing English in the two foundation courses and their demographic data. The opinion was divided into seven variables: material, the writing process, feedbacks, a number of tasks, timing, grading and the total opinion. The statistical analysis included the mean, the standard deviation, t-Test and F-test (ANOVA). The conclusion for each variable is presented below.

1. *The two faculties.* The Education students had the opinion different from that of the Engineering students at a significant level of .05 in the following variables: the writing process ($t=2.433$, $p=.015$), a number of tasks ($t=3.737$, $p=.000$), timing ($t=2.943$, $p=.003$) and grading ($t=2.384$, $p=.018$). Their total opinions were significantly different as well ($t=3.123$, $p=.002$).

2. *Majors.* The opinion concerning the following variables was different among different majors at a significant level of .05: the material ($F=2.283$, $p=.046$), the writing process ($F=3.115$, $p=.009$), a number of tasks ($F=4.260$, $p=.001$) and timing ($F=5.710$, $p=.000$).

3. *Genders*. At a significant level of .05, the male students had the different opinion concerning the following variables from the females: the material ($t=-3.327$, $p=.001$), the writing process ($t=-3.862$, $p=.000$), timing ($t=-2.388$, $p=.017$), grading ($t=-2.042$, $p=.042$). Their total opinion was also different at a significant level of .05 as well ($t=-3.235$, $p=.001$).

4. *English I grades*. The samples' English I grades had a statistical difference in the opinion concerning the following variables: the material ($F=2.766$, $p=.012$), the writing process ($F=2.548$, $p=.020$), grading ($F=2.312$, $p=.033$) and the total opinion ($F=2.929$, $p=.008$).

When analysed by means of the Multiple Comparisons, the results showed two interesting findings. The opinion, concerning the material, grading and the total opinion, of the D+ students was significantly different from that of the students who had earned higher grades (A, B+, B and C+). Moreover, the opinion, concerning the material, the writing process and the total opinion, of the C+ students was significantly different from that of the students who had earned lower grades (C, D+ and D).

5. *English II mid-term grades*. There was only a significant difference in this category. The opinion concerning the writing process showed a significant difference among the grade groups ($F=2.459$, $p=.045$).

When analysed by means of the Multiple Comparisons, the opinion concerning the writing process of the students who earned 45 points or lower showed a significant difference in that of those with 72 points or higher.

Interestingly, the findings of the comparisons in both English I and II grades showed one conclusion. Those who gained grades at the low grades might have a different opinion on the instruction in teaching writing in some variables, namely the material, grading and the writing process, from those who gained the top grades.

The abovementioned result was supported by results from the interviews. When asked about the difficulty level of the material, top-graded students agreed that the difficulty level was appropriate. However, they expressed their concerns over their low-graded classmates. These might have found reading passages difficult. They just copied the texts for their own writing or searched for more information from the Internet, which they ended up plagiarising them. Probably, these weak students might have started English courses in their schools late. The low-graded students themselves, on the other hand, admitted that they found reading passages difficult. It was, then, hard for them to follow further steps to complete writing tasks.

6. *Periods of stay in an English-speaking country and periods of taking an English course in other institutions*. There was no significant difference found in the samples' opinion when compared to different periods of stay in an English-speaking country and periods of taking an English course in other institutions.

Other than that, the samples also revealed their *problems in writing English*, putting Numbers 1 – 8 so as to show the order of the importance of problems they might have in writing English. The order could be categorised into three groups.

1. it was really obvious that most of the samples chose vocabulary and grammar as their most important problems. A majority of the samples (40.54%) ranked ‘not knowing many words’ Number 1. This figure also represented the highest percentage points in all rankings of this question.
2. The problems in the second category dealt with idioms and expressions, misspelling and transitional signals for coherence. Most of the samples ranked these topics in the middle of the order.
3. The samples ranked the topics about organisation, ideas and punctuation at the low end of the order.

To be fair, the survey questionnaire also provided a box saying ‘I do not have any problem in writing English’ for the samples to check; however, no one at all checked the box. All of them showed that they had some problems in writing English in one way or another.

Finally, the samples showed their *favourite tasks and topics* by checking in as many boxes of tasks or topics as they liked. The following is the conclusion of the results:

The order of the samples’ favourite tasks for writing English:

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|---|------------------------------------|
| 1. Journals (47.3%) | 6. Plays/short stories (13.74%) |
| 2. Essays (34.23%) | 7. Letters (12.61%) |
| 3. Conversations (34.23%) | 8. Poems (5.63%) |
| 4. Reports on their own interesting
topics or research (29.5%) | 9. Editorials (3.83%) |
| 5. Advertisements (16.89%) | 10. Songs (suggested by 3 samples) |

The order of the samples’ favourite topics for writing English:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Tourist attractions (46.17%) | 8. Jobs (22.75%) |
| 2. My family (40.09%) | 9. Hometowns (20.72%) |
| 3. Pets (38.29%) | 10. Sports (20.5%) |
| 4. Friends (38.06%) | 11. Environment (16.67%) |
| 5. Hobbies (34.0%) | 12. Social problems (7.4%) |
| 6. Food (33.11%) | 13. Politics (4.73%) |
| 7. Entertainment (30.63%) | 14. Games (suggested by a sample) |

The results corresponded to those from the interviews and the focus group. They also revealed that topics about personal information were suitable for students to practice writing English because they were easy and personalised. Like the results from the survey questionnaire, the interviewees preferred to write about their families, study, pets, sports, entertainment, food, future careers and music. However, it was surprising that the most favourite topic from the survey questionnaire was tourist attractions (46.17%), while a majority of the interviewees preferred to write about their personal information. They might have meant writing about the attractions in their hometowns or the ones they knew of better.

As for the favourite kind of writing tasks, most interviewees preferred journals and essays. The reason for the first was that they could write about their own stories, which neither required them to focus on grammar nor additional information to be searched outside classrooms. The second was chosen due to the interviewees' familiarity with in writing lessons in their English I and II courses.

Discussions of the results

Objective 1: To find out the students' opinion on the instruction in writing English in English foundation courses

1. *The material.* All of the statements for this category were ranked at a high level of the rating scale. Likewise, the results from the interviews and the focus groups showed that the overall opinion on the material was positive. They said that the reading passages were helpful to generate ideas as they acted like guidelines or examples (Tribble, 1997 : 114). On the other hand, students with middle and low levels of grades claimed that some tasks were too difficult to understand due to confusing directions and their lack of vocabulary. This might be solved by designing various levels of difficulty for diverse abilities of students (Ożarska, 2008 : 32), and also by seeking students real needs in writing (Tribble, 1997 : 42). They might need to develop their thinking skills when writing, or simply want to write a grammatically accurate essay.

Moreover, all of the interviewees agreed that the length of the material was appropriate, talking about a number of the reading passages and the exercises. However, some interviewees said that the exercises were not really useful because their teachers skipped them and rushed to finish answering questions for outlining.

2. *The writing process.* The samples had the opinion on the writing process at a high. They were the most satisfied with the following statement in this category: "I want my teacher to teach me from the very beginning, such as how to construct sentences, how to use conjunctions, etc." The second and third places included the following statements: "By using the outline questions, I can brainstorm useful ideas to write" and "The reading passages help me to generate ideas to write", respectively. This is because students felt engaged

when introduced to familiar topics. Moreover, this activated their schema or background knowledge so that they could generate some ideas to write about (Ruetten, 2003 : xvii).

They also showed the lowest level of their opinion on the statement “The teaching method of writing in steps motivates me to write.” Though the statistical data showed the samples’ opinion on the reading passages at a high level, there were two different opinions from the interviewees. The first group supported the reading passages, reasoning that the passages provided correct structures, word choice and useful ideas for them to start writing. The other pointed out some negative views. First, some students might only copy the passages as their writing work. Second, difficult grammar and content might hinder students from generating ideas to write. Finally, some topics were not personalised enough. Perhaps, what Veit & Gould (2004 : 40) propose in their book might explain these results. The students tended to imitate only the surface structure of texts. In fact, they should reread the text, activate their own ideas and write to interact with their readers. Perhaps, the students did not feel that the reading passages were helpful enough, nor did the instruction in writing in steps enable them to write better as they had expected, or perhaps the instruction itself did not engage students to generate the practice. That is why they still reflected problems with the reading passages.

Furthermore, the statistical data seemed to match the results from the interviews in terms of other elements. All of the interviewees strongly agreed that the process writing was effective in helping them write (Baker, 2005 : 5), citing that they could realise their errors marked by their teachers. However, they were concerned that the process writing was not effective for low-graded students because they had no foundation English writing skills (Hamp-Lyons, 1991 : 57; Sesnan, 2001 : 136). They did not know how to write grammatical sentences. The fact that they were taught how to generate ideas by the process writing was useless as they could not generate accurate sentences.

3. *Feedback*. The samples had a high level of the opinion on feedback they had received from their teachers during writing lessons of the English I and II courses . Interestingly, the statement “I prefer a peer-review for my writing” had the lowest mean in this category. In fact, it was the lowest among all statements in this part of the survey questionnaire. This obviously contradicted the propositions of Miller et al. (2008 : 447), Thongrin (2001 : 119) and OŻarska (2008 : 31) who maintained that students showed positive attitudes towards peer- and teacher-corrected writing. The latter even suggested each peer group focus checking on one element, on which Thongrin even gave a limitation, saying that the practice was time-consuming. This is in favour of the results from the present study’s interviews which revealed that all interviewees did not support peer revision, citing that they did not have enough abilities to check their classmates’ work.

The top three places fell upon the following statements: “After my teacher’s checking, my writing skills show improvement”; “I prefer my teacher’s feedback to focus on content and organisation”; and “I

prefer my teacher to explain the feedback to me face-to-face.” This was similar to the results from the interviews. Most interviewees revealed that teachers’ feedback helped them acknowledge errors concerning grammar, word choice and expressions (Henry & Roseberry, 2007 : 183). They became more aware of mistakes when writing the next task. Students felt that their writing skills improved because of their capability of writing correct word choice, structure, expressions and coherence of the content. However, some interviewees suggested that face-to-face communication between teachers and students be conducted more often among all teachers (Craswell, 2005 : 17; Hu, 2007 : 82). They said that feedback in written forms was not sufficient as they wanted to know how to correct the mistakes as well. This finding reaffirmed what Master (Belcher & Braine, 1995 : 183) concluded in his study: constant feedback and classroom discussions established consciousness of grammar elements. Therefore, more oral feedback is recommended to help improve students’ writing skills. Definitely, Suzuki (2008 : 209) would agree to the recommendation because verbal responses were focused on her study. The difference was that Suzuki studied self and peer revisions whereas the present study had adopted only teachers’ feedback. Though the samples did not really approve the peer review, verbal revisions by their peers might be useful to some extent because it was not as formal as written forms and weak students could gain benefits from the top ones.

Moreover, the next aspect of feedback the researcher wanted to find out was the samples’ preferred items, on which they wanted their teachers to focus. The following is the top three favourite items: grammar, ideas and content, and organisation.

The results above corresponded to those from the interviews, from which there were two groups of opinions. The first group wanted their teachers to focus on marking grammar and vocabulary (Chinawong, 2000 : 9; Kao-urai, 2003 : 153). They wanted to learn how to write English grammatical sentences, and they probably preferred having as a few errors in their writing as possible (Diab, 2006 : 12). The other group preferred content and ideas to be checked and emphasised (Langan, 2010 : 11; Tessema, 2005 : 27; Tribble, 1997 : 44; Vessakosol, 2001 : 178), citing that it was hard to generate ideas to start the writing. This element was more important than any other elements because there were no right or wrong ideas. Students, therefore, were not afraid of making mistakes concerning ideas. The marks from content and ideas could also compensate with other mistakes concerning grammar or vocabulary (Hamp-Lyons, 1991 : 20).

4. *A number of tasks.* The samples showed their opinion on a number of tasks at a high level. The top-two mean scores fell under the two statements “A number of tasks is appropriate” and “I want to have more writing exercises before I start writing an essay.” Similarly, the interviews were highly satisfied with a

number of tasks, which were two for each term. Their reason was that in the English I course, students, who were freshmen, needed some time to adjust themselves in a new educational system. Two tasks were appropriate for beginners like them. Likewise, in the English II course, students were required to do more work in other courses, in which they had to enroll. Therefore, it was suitable to remain the amount at two tasks. In fact, the number of tasks is not as important as all the steps in the process writing that provides an opportunity for students to practice. The more students practice writing, the more skillful they become. Writing is a skill, which one can learn to improve (Langan, 2010 : 10).

5. *Timing*. The samples had a high level of their opinion on the timing variable. The statement “Setting clear deadlines is appropriate for learning” was ranked the highest in this category. The second and the third places were the following statements: “My teacher provides sufficient time for each step of the writing process” and “The time given for completing each task is adequate.” Again, the results from the survey questionnaire corresponded to those from the interviews. The interviewees said that deadlines for all steps were notified clearly, so it was easy to catch up. Only a few said that some teachers did not set up deadlines clearly. As a result, they could not meet the deadlines because they were not pushed hard enough to finish the tasks (Langan, 2010 : 11). Definitely, teachers’ roles of a controller and an organiser are effective in assisting learners (Watkins, 2005 : 16). When asked about deadlines for each step, their opinions split according to their grades. The first group, the A, C, C+ students, had no problem completing their tasks on time. Each step was approximately given a week to complete. On the other hand, the interviewees with low grades claimed that they did not have enough time to complete each task, citing they had other priorities from other subjects to do. They usually tried to finish writing an essay a day before a deadline. According to Murray & Moore (2006 : 14 – 15) time constraints might not have accounted for this but it depended on how students planned to allot their time to the tasks provided that they had other responsibilities from other courses as well. When these students had low English proficiency, they had difficulties with English vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and discourse-level reading and writing strategies (Belcher & Braine, 1995 : 171). Probably, that was a reason for that they could not meet deadlines. A student suggested that in case of late submission of work, marks should not have been subtracted. The reason was that it was really discouraging. As OŹarska (2008 : 31) argues that time constraints might cause stress in students, the results specified that only those with low English competence were affected probably due to their lack of self-discipline. A solution for this problem was introduced by Hu (2007 : 77). A self-assessment form for students to check their progress might help build students’ awareness of the work they need to fulfill.

6. *Grading*. The samples’ opinion on the grading was at a high level. The statement “the criteria for grading has been notified to students” received the highest mean in this category. The statement “The points

should be equally weighted among all elements: vocabulary, grammar, content and organisation” was ranked the second place. The practice was supported by Schaefer (2008 : 473). He proposes the use of ‘Multi-faceted Rasch measurement’ (MFRM), of which each category was equally weighted.

For this variable, the samples’ opinion from the survey questionnaire corresponded to that from the interviews. They reached a consensus on clear grading criteria being notified by class teachers. It was noticeable that all of the interviewees said that their teachers had the same grading standard, which was clear and fair to all students. The finding of this study, however, was not similar to what Eckes (2008 : 158) found. He found that the variability and inconsistency in rating or grading are inevitable. A solution is to illustrate a clearest guideline to raters. In fact, the team teachers of the English I and II had been aware of that. We, therefore, had set up an orientation for all teachers, most of whom were part-time teachers, to ensure the same standard of grading. That seemed to be fruitful given the students’ opinion on the variable.

Next, the samples revealed their opinion on the weight for the elements of writing: vocabulary, grammar, ideas and content, and organisation. They were asked to suggest their preferred weights if they did not agree with an equal weight adopted in the instruction in writing English of the English I and II courses. Only a few samples (8.33%) suggested their opinion on this topic. The following is their ideal weights: vocabulary at 2 points; grammar at 2 points; ideas and content at 3 points and organisation at 3 points.

The results from the interviews show similarity to the ideal weights mentioned above. If the interviewees had not been satisfied with the equally weighted grading, some of them would have preferred to put more weight on ideas and content. The reason was that ideas depended on personal writers; as a result, they should not have been marked ‘correct’ or ‘incorrect.’ Coincidentally, Fein (Hamp-Lyons, 1991 : 20) hypothesised that organisation and content were compensating in the L2 students. When they were not confident in language use, they might want to have more weight on ideas and content so that the holistic essay scores might increase.

7. *Conclusion.* For the last statement, the researcher asked the samples to give their opinion on their confidence about writing English. The statement was “After learning how to write from English I and II courses, I am confident about writing English essays.” The samples showed their opinion on this statement at a medium level. That might mean that they were not really confident about writing English essays. On the contrary, Sangthong et al. (2003 : 57) found that their samples showed their satisfaction at a high level. They were more confident of writing. Probably, using portfolios as adopted in Sangthong’s study might account for students’ less anxiety when writing and more confidence in having ideas to write about.

The samples also added their comments on the instruction in teaching writing in the English I and II courses in an open-ended question on the survey questionnaire. A majority of them preferred their teachers to

begin writing lessons with teaching basic grammar, vocabulary and structure for writing skills (Chinokul, 2011 : 239). In fact, ‘students need an understanding of how words, sentences, and larger discourse structures can shape and express the meanings they want to convey.’ Many students had different background knowledge of English. This corresponded to the results from the interviews. Though students agreed with the instruction in the writing process, their lack of knowledge of a basic sentential level would obstruct the improving of their writing skills. This method of teaching writing, however, was criticised by Hyland (2003 : 5) as saying that it would hinder students from analysing real texts by themselves because they are exposed to certain patterns presented in short fragments. Moreover, students do not really communicate through writing but are trained to write with the most accurate language.

Other suggestions by the samples and the interviewees were concluded below:

1. The following elements concerning writing skills should be taught or reviewed at the commencement of writing lessons: grammar, sentence structures, vocabulary, punctuation, transitional markers, etc. This also includes more writing exercises before writing an essay (Kao-urai, 2003 : 153). The students, then, required teachers to apply language structure in teaching English writing to begin with (Hyland, 2003 : 3 – 4), which corresponded to Phinit-Akson’s proposition (2004 : 107) that functions and forms were an effective tool in writing English.
2. Both good and bad examples of writing should be presented to students, so that they may learn general mistakes or sensible sentences (Hu, 2007 : 82).
3. Reading passages prior to starting writing are useful (Veit & Gould, 2004 : 40). But, the level of difficulty should be for average students and there should be a glossary of new words concluded at the end of each passage (Ruetten, 2003 : xvii), which students may use for their essays.
4. Teachers should construct a pleasant, friendly atmosphere. They should speak Thai when teaching writing English because the lesson is difficult enough.
5. All correction symbols, used by all teachers, should be notified to students.
6. After marking students’ works, teachers should explain the errors face-to-face to students. They should also guide how to correct them as well.
7. Grammar points should not be focused when grading. In fact, students’ works should not be assessed at all because low points may discourage them to resume the further step. They should only be activated to be able to generate ideas and write. This suggestion did not, however, correspond to the concept presented by North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (2008). It said that students’ writing skills would not improve if their works were not assessed.

Objective 2: To find out the students' preferred teaching methods for the instruction in writing English

The samples revealed their preferred method of being taught English writing in the following order: Creative expression, Language structure, Composing process, Content, Genre, Text functions, Project-based writing.

Surprisingly, despite their high level of opinion on the instruction in writing English, students seemed to prefer writing without being evaluated. The method of 'creative expression' became their first choice because it was defined that 'students are encouraged to express their thoughts through written texts without assessment.' In the interviews, some interviewees said that they preferred the writing tasks not to carry any points. They might have been more motivated to write (Hyland, 2003 : 8 – 10). The idea was supported by Lipkewich (2008), who maintains 'with no corrections of language elements or writing rules, learners seem braver to write something.' Other than that, the results were supported by Sangthong et al. (2003 : 57), whose samples were free to choose any topic they wanted for their portfolios used as information for writing. The samples were also able to write freely at the final period of the experiment. Their achievement score was quite high.

The researcher had been thinking that the method of 'language structure' might have been students' favourite because both qualitative and quantitative data revealed that students wanted their teachers to begin with teaching grammar, sentence structures, vocabulary or mechanics. Sesnan (2001 : 141) explains that as soon as students are good at the mechanical aspects of language, they should be encouraged to use their own imagination to write creatively. However, a creatively-written essay can be obscured by bad grammar and spelling. Then arises a question 'Do teachers wish to allow their students to enjoy writing freely without checking or marking as they requested in order to boost their morale?' This perhaps may be answered in another future study.

Objective 3: To compare the demographic data of SU first year students with their opinion on the instruction in writing English in English foundation courses

Interestingly, the findings of the comparisons in both English I and II grades showed one conclusion. Those who earned low grades might have had a different opinion on the instruction in teaching writing in some variables, namely the material, grading and the writing process, from those who earned high grades. Similarly, Pollitt & Hutchinson (Hamp-Lyons, 1991 : 89) also found a significant difference between the top and low students, but in terms of the ability in choosing topics for writing, whereas Meejang (2000 : 91 – 92) found that the low and top students had a significant difference in adopting the writing strategies in the writing process.

The abovementioned result was supported by results from the interviews. When asked about the difficulty level of the material, top-graded students agreed that the difficulty level was appropriate. However, they expressed their concerns over their low-graded classmates. These might have found reading passages difficult. They just copied the texts for their own writing or searched for more information from the Internet, which they ended up plagiarising them (Hamp-Lyons, 1991 : 31). Probably, these weak students might have started English courses in their schools late. The low-graded students themselves, on the other hand, admitted that they found reading passages difficult. It was hard for them to follow further steps to complete writing tasks. This contradicts the concept of the content-based writing approach which enables teachers to solve the problem of students' different language competence (Hyland, 2003 : 15). However, the approach could solve the problem on condition that various amounts of reading passages can be given to students according to the levels of their abilities. The material in the foundation English I and II courses did not provide different levels of difficulty. That might have been the reason students did not really consent to the reading passages mentioned under the above topic Objective 2 the writing process.

As for the periods of stay in an English-speaking country and periods of taking an English course in other institutions, there was no significant difference found in the samples' opinion when compared to different periods of stay in an English-speaking country and periods of taking an English course in other institutions. After reviewing literature, the researcher did not find any study that compared the same variables. Nonetheless, the study by Miller et al. (2008) revealed the closest results: 'the year of writing did not affect quality or the length of the written text, or the total number of revisions made during the writing session' (p.442).

Moreover, as for problems in writing the samples revealed those which could be categorised into three groups. First, it was really obvious that most of the samples chose vocabulary and grammar as their most important problems (Meejang, 2000 : 92; Vessakosol, 2001 : 161). A majority of the samples ranked 'not knowing many words' Number 1. This figure also represented the highest percentage points in all rankings of this question. The problems in the second category dealt with idioms and expressions, misspelling and transitional signals for coherence. Most of the samples ranked these topics in the middle of the order. Finally, the samples ranked the topics about organisation, ideas and punctuation at the low end of the order. Students' problems in writing seemed similar to the results in Chalaysap's study (2005 : 23 – 24), which categorised their problems into five elements: content, organisation, vocabulary, language use and mechanics. Likewise, the students' problems in writing were universal as found in many Asian students studying overseas (Hamp-

Lyons, 1991 : 20). Pongpairoj (2002 : 95) even argues that specific syntactic, morphological and word usage components found as problems in English writing should be taught to students in order to reduce them. For example, Danvivath (2003 : 137) proposes to teach passive voice in the following order 1) simple present, 2) simple past, 3) simple present with modals, 4) present perfective and 5) simple past with modals.

To be fair, the survey questionnaire also provided a box saying 'I do not have any problem in writing English' for the samples to check; however, no one at all checked the box. All of them showed that they had some problems in writing English in one way or another. The reason might be the fact that writing is received as one of the most difficult language skills. It is also difficult to be taught due to its complex process. Students have to generate their ideas and communicate them onto written or concrete forms (Chinakul, 2011 : 224).

Finally, the samples also revealed their favourite tasks and topics for practicing writing English. The three most favourite tasks for writing English were journals, essays and conversations while the three most favourite topics were tourist attractions, my family and pets.

The results mentioned above corresponded to those from the interviews and the focus group. They also revealed that topics about personal information were suitable for students to practice writing English because they were easy and personalised (Fisher & Frey, 2004 : 10). Like the results from the survey questionnaire, the interviewees preferred to write about their families, study, pets, sports, entertainment, food, future careers and music. However, surprisingly the most favourite topic from the survey questionnaire was tourist attractions, while a majority of the interviewees preferred to write about their personal information. They might have meant writing about the attractions in their hometowns or the ones they knew of better. Hu (2007 : 82) argues though the instruction is acceptable, students still wish to suggest that fewer topics be assigned by teachers. Probably, they will become more motivating or confident to write about because it is the topic they chose by themselves.

As for the favourite kind of writing tasks, most interviewees preferred journals and essays. The reason for the first was that they could write about their own stories, which neither required them to focus on grammar nor additional information to be searched outside classrooms. Moreover, keeping a journal will develop students' habit of thinking on paper and how to generate ideas in the process of writing (Langan, 2010 : 13; Ruetten, 2003 : 26). Writing journals also promotes students' fluency, accuracy, confidence and positive opinion on using and studying English as they are exposed to English environment on condition that they are to write the journal everyday (Honsa & Ratanapinyowong, 2002 : 16). Another reason for the samples' favourite choice for journals might be the fact that they would probably feel secure once their work would not be evaluated. Teachers, however, need to check on what students' reflections on the lessons are

about. The second was chosen due to the interviewees' familiarity with in writing lessons in their English I and II courses.

In conclusion, the process writing helped raise awareness of language errors, about which students had long worried. Having been assisted by teachers, students could recognise their most frequent problems. Still, students with lower English proficiency struggled to accomplish each step of the process. They suggested that basic structure be taught before the commencement of writing essays. Keeping a journal could be also assigned to familiarise students with the habit of thinking, the practice of writing and the process of writing. Though the students showed their satisfaction towards the instruction in writing English in the foundation English I and II courses at a high level, they were not confident enough to write without teachers' assistance. One main cause might have been the fact that they were worried about being assessed as the results showed that they preferred to be taught to write freely without any evaluation from teachers—referring to the creative expression approach. Provided the conclusion of the results, the team teachers of the programme must come to a decision about which approach would meet their students' needs: either an approach, which basic sentential level is taught at the start, or another, which requires no assessment but urges students to write without any pressure.

Recommendations for further studies

According to the findings from this study, the researcher would like to express the following recommendations:

1. The team teachers at the TEFL section of the Faculty of Education should create lessons to develop students with lower English proficiency. This includes basic grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, punctuation and transitional markers. Hopefully, they would be confident enough to start writing English for whatever kind the task may be. Not only language skills should the teachers focus on, they should also stage a lesson to improve these students' self discipline or learning process, so that they need not to long for assistance from both teachers and classmates all the time.

2. The creative expression should be adopted for the instruction of the English foundation courses; however, a research study should be conducted to find out its effectiveness and students' opinion and achievement. The study is to also find out whether or not the assumption that students did not prefer being evaluated made by the present study was accurate.

3. In the light of students' opinion on the instruction, the process writing can be developed to suit the students in a certain context. An R&D study should be conducted after the team teachers improve the following element in the material: 1) kinds of tasks being more various; 2) topics being more personalised; and 3) the difficulty of reading passages being appropriate to students' various proficiency. The variety of feedback other than that from teachers could be implemented as well, such as self-revision and peer-revision, because many researchers argue that the practice can help improve students' writing skills. Teachers also need to communicate face-to-face to explain their markings. Furthermore, in case of many teachers for the same course, standardised guidelines should be imposed and they should all be trained to implement exactly the same instruction in their classrooms.