



A Study of Factors Affecting Writing Skills of Undergraduate Students in ENL 113 Class at Rangsit University

Kavisara Polpo and Vorapon Mahakaew*

Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rangsit University, Pathum Thani, Thailand

*Corresponding author, E-mail: Worapon.m@rsu.ac.th

Abstract

The objective of the study is to investigate the factors affecting writing skills of undergraduate students of Rangsit University. A number of the participants were two hundred; they studied in English Reading and Writing class (ENL 113) in term 1/2018 at Rangsit University. The instrument used to collect data was a questionnaire. The questionnaires were divided into four main parts: the general information; students' interest, ability in writing and awareness of writing skills; students' strategy and attitude toward writing in English; and factors causing students to have errors in writing. The data were analyzed by using frequency, percentages, and means. The findings of the study revealed that there were 3 out of 10 items rated high level of factors affecting English writing skills. The respondents reported that the errors were found to be vocabulary knowledge and active- passive voice. The respondents also realized that article usage was also the third factors affecting their English writing skills. These three factors made difficulties for them to create English writing tasks and they became nervous and worried as a result.

Keywords: *EFL learners, Writing communication, Students' strategies and attitude, Undergraduate students*

1. Introduction

Nowadays, most people around the world pay attention to English language as an international language. English is considered one of the most powerful keys to succeed in daily life. Many people use English with different purposes such as taking IELTS/TOEFL tests or applying for the jobs.

In Thailand, it cannot be denied that English is regarded significantly essential. English was included in the classroom and became more important in 1926 as it was required to be a primary subject in most schools beginning from the first grade. Moreover, the significance of English writing was elevated in 2006 since it was chosen to be one of the components of the national entrance examination (Glass, 2009).

Accordingly, English writing of EFL learners is very significant because it is one of the most complex skills if they want to altogether produce ideas, words, sentences, paragraph, and composition. The learners can become relatively frustrated when they do not have words or structures they need to express in writing.

However, one of the most difficult skills of the learners in Thailand is writing since it is proved to be hard to write efficiently in English. In other words, there are some concerns about the English writing of EFL learners. Foley (2005) claimed in his survey that English writing skills were considered to be below average. The insufficiency of writing skill of these learners was caused by little training of teachers of English, less practice of students, and less emphasize of English writing in university entrance examinations.

Moreover, Srisitanon (2009) also mentions that the main problem in English writing is grammar because Thais lack the ability in using correct grammar. It is hard for Thai people to transmit opinions or ideas with correct grammar. It is also believed that technical terms, slang, and idiomatic expressions with implied meanings are the obstacles for most Thai people in the use of writing communication.

In order to write sufficiently, learners must actively practice and emphasize the weak point instead of ignoring so that they could create writing task very well. Therefore, the researchers would be interested in investigating factors affecting writing skills of undergraduate students at Rangsit University.



2. Objectives

The objective of the study is to investigate factors affecting writing skills of undergraduate students at Rangsit University.

3. Materials and Methods

The participants in this study are two hundred students in English Reading and Writing class (ENL 113) at Rangsit University. This study applied purposive sampling; the main reason why these selected groups of students were asked to participate in the current study is because of their exposure to English and their level of English proficiency that is relatively satisfying. The questionnaires which were distributed returned 100%.

Two hundred students participating in ENL 113 (English Reading and Writing), out of which were male (86%) and female (57%). The majority of the respondents (58%) were 22-25 years old. Most of the respondents (73.5%) are fourth year students. The majority of the respondents (53%) are those who have been studying English more than ten years. Most of respondents have fair English writing proficiency (47%), Lastly, 65% of the respondents are those with the grade 2.00 – 2.99.

The data obtained from the distributed questionnaires were used to interpret, categorize, and complete the data which were as follows:

Part I: Background of the participants consisting of gender, age, studying year, English educational background, the level of English writing proficiency, and grade average. The data were analyzed in frequency and percentage.

Part II: This part aimed to examine students' interest, ability in writing and awareness of writing skills. After these categories were identified, the students were investigated through a series of close ended questions. The data were analyzed in frequency, percentage, and mean.

Part III: This part aimed to explore students' strategy and attitude toward writing in English. The data were analyzed in frequency, percentage, and mean.

Part IV: This part aimed to identify the current factors causing students to have errors in writing. After current problems were identified, the data were analyzed in frequency, percentage and mean.

4. Results

This section analyses the data collected according to the method applied in the present research: questionnaire. The questionnaire section analyses the data from the participants' responses.

4.1 General information of respondents

Table 1 Gender

Gender	Number of Students	Percentage
Male	86	43%
Female	114	57%
Total	200	100%

According to Table 1, most respondents were female (57%) and the rest were male (43%).

Table 2 Age

Age	Number of Students	Percentage
18-19 years old	7	3.5%
20 -21 years old	71	35.5%
22-25 years old	116	58%
More than 25 years old	6	3%
Total	200	100%

As shown in Table 2, most of the respondents (58%) are at the age of 22 - 25 years old, followed by the age of 20 – 21 years old (35.5%), the age of 18 - 19 years old (3.5%), and the age of 25 years old up (3%) respectively.

**Table 3** Year of study

Year of Study	Number of Students	Percentage
First year	6	3%
Second year	7	3.5%
Third year	40	20%
Fourth year	147	73.5%
Total	200	100%

According to Table 3, the results reveal that most of the respondents (73.5%) are fourth year students, followed by the third year students (20%), the second year students (3.5%), and the first year students (3%) respectively.

Table 4 English educational background

English Educational Background	Number of Students	Percentage
3-5 years	43	21.5%
5-10 years	51	25.5%
More than 10 years	106	53%
Total	200	100%

Table 4 exposes that most of the respondents (53%) are those who have been studying English more than 10 years, followed by those who have been studying English for 5 – 10 years (51%), and those who have been studying English for 3 - 5 years (43%).

Table 5 English writing proficiency

English Writing Proficiency	Number of Students	Percentage
Very good	5	2.5%
Good	23	11.5%
Fair	94	47%
Poor	61	30.5%
Very poor	17	8.5%
Total	200	100%

Table 5 describes that the majority of respondents have fair English writing proficiency (47%), followed by the respondents who have poor English writing proficiency (30.5%), the respondents who have good English writing proficiency (11.5%), the respondents who have very poor English writing proficiency (8.5%), and the respondents who have very good English writing proficiency (2.5%) respectively.

Table 6 Grade Average

Grade Average	Number of Students	Percentage
0.00-0.99	0	0%
1.00-1.99	3	1.5%
2.00-2.99	130	65%
3.00-4.00	67	33.5%
Total	200	100%

Table 6 shows that the majority of respondents are those with the grade of 2.00 – 2.99 (65%). The following majority of the group belonged to the grade of 3.00 – 4.00 (33.5%), followed by the grade 1.00 – 1.99 (1.5%) respectively. There are no respondents who indicate the grade of 0.00 – 0.99.



4.2 Respondents' interest, ability in writing and awareness of writing skills

Table 7 respondents' interest, ability in writing and awareness of writing skills

Statement	Strongly agree 5	Agree 4	Neutral 3	Disagree 2	Strongly disagree 1
1. I like an English writing activity.	9%	21.5%	54%	13%	2.5%
2. I wish to be a good writer.	14.5%	36.5%	29%	16.5%	3.5%
3. Writing skills are simple for me.	2.5%	17.5%	37%	33.5%	9.5%
4. I like to share knowledge and opinion with friends by using writing works.	3.5%	19.5%	47.5%	26%	3.5%
5. I think, a writing activity is essential and useful	21.5%	38.5%	33.5%	6.5%	0.5%
6. My language competence is used to create pieces of writing.	6.5%	17.5%	40%	29.5%	6.5%
7. While process writing being conducted in class, I was able to help friends.	5%	22%	43%	25%	5%
8. Writing skills are practiced by me via pair and work group, etc.	12.5%	27.5%	45.5%	13.5%	1%
9. I have an ability of accurate writing.	3.5%	16%	40.5%	36.5%	3.5%
10. I provide friends suggestions and information about writing techniques.	7%	13%	41%	34.5%	4.5%

According to the results presented in Table 7, the respondents agreed that there are three interests and abilities rated the most. The first of interest and ability in writing is "a writing activity is essential and useful" (21.5%). Second is "I wish to be a good writer" (14.5%). Third is "Writing skills are practiced by me via pair and work group" (12.5%). These are the most important results identified as respondents' interest, ability in writing with the mean of 3.76, 3.42, and 3.4. However, the respondents point out that writing skills are simple which is the lowest interest and ability in writing with the mean 2.7 (2.5%).

Table 8 Respondents' strategy and attitude toward writing in English

Statement	Very often 5	Often 4	Sometimes 3	Rarely 2	Never 1
1. I find more English grammar knowledge.	9.5%	27.5%	46%	15.5%	1.5%
2. I find more writing technique.	6.5%	30%	46.5%	16%	1%
3. I find more technical term knowledge.	12.5%	35%	40%	11.5%	1%
4. I spend more time when writing.	11%	41%	36%	9%	3%
5. I use both English and Thai when writing.	21.5%	38.5%	33.5%	6.5%	0.5%
6. According to my opinion, English is a fundamental skill everyone should have.	31.5%	33.5%	26.5%	6.5%	2%
7. According to my opinion, I feel unconfident when communicate by writing in English to communicate with my professors.	13%	37.5%	38%	10%	1.5%



8. According to my opinion, there are many situations at university that require written English.	15%	35%	45%	5%	0%
9. According to my opinion, nowadays written in English is one of the most important skills required in the university.	19.5%	43%	26.5%	9%	2%
10. According to my opinion, writing English to communicate within the university can cause communication breakdown.	11%	13%	41.5%	12.5%	7.5%

According to the result presented in Table 8, the only one strategy and attitude which the respondents indicated to be the highest level is “According to my opinion, English is a fundamental skill everyone should have” (31.5%) with the mean of 3.86. However, the respondents point out that “According to my opinion, writing English to communicate within the university can cause communication breakdown.” which is the lowest level of strategy and attitude toward writing in English with the mean 3.23 (11%).

Table 9 Factors causing students to have errors in writing

Statement	Very often 5	Often 4	Sometimes 3	Rarely 2	Never 1
1. Factor causing me to have an error in writing is Vocabulary knowledge.	31.5%	33.5%	26.5%	6.5%	2%
2. Factor causing me to have an error in writing is Spelling.	19.5%	43%	26.5%	9%	2%
3. Factor causing me to have an error in writing is Subject-Verb agreement.	15%	35%	45%	5%	0%
4. Factor causing me to have an error in writing is Active- Passive voice.	11%	41%	36%	9%	3%
5. Factor causing me to have an error in writing is Adjective usage.	6.5%	30%	46.5%	16%	1%
6. Factor causing me to have an error in writing is Adverb usage.	9.5%	27.5%	46.6%	15.5%	1.5%
7. Factor causing me to have an error in writing is Article usage (a, an, the).	13%	37.5%	38%	10%	1.5%
8. Factor causing me to have an error in writing is Preposition usage.	11%	13%	41.5%	12.5%	7.5%
9. Factor causing me to have an error in writing is Word order.	9.5%	29%	43.5 %	16.5%	1.5%
10. According to my opinion, writing English to communicate within the university can cause communication breakdown.	11%	13%	41.5%	12.5%	7.5%

According to the results, most of the respondents agree that there are three factors causing students to have errors in writing. First is “Factor causing me to have an error in writing is vocabulary knowledge” (31.5%) Second is “Factor causing me to have an error in writing is Spelling” (19.5%) Third is “Factor causing me to have an error in writing is Subject-Verb agreement” (15%) with the mean of 3.86, 3.69, and 3.6 respectively. However, the respondents believe that preposition usage and sentence errors are the lowest factors causing them to have errors in writing with the mean 3.23.



5. Conclusion and Discussions

This study investigated factors affecting writing skills of undergraduate students of Rangsit University. The respondents were asked to respond to the questionnaire to investigate interest and ability, strategy and attitude, and factors in English writing.

The results can be concluded that all of the respondents have a raising awareness of English writing. Moreover, the study found that the majority of respondents have a good attitude toward writing in English as they found it appropriate within English is a fundamental skill everyone should have. Many factors of affecting English writing skills were found, including “Vocabulary knowledge”, which the respondents considered a serious factor. Moreover, according to the results, most of respondents have encountered some factors when writing in English communication. However, they tried to find some strategy and to solve the problems and some of them tried to enhance their English skills by their interest and attitude.

According to the results presented above, the findings are discussed based on the first aspect which is students’ interest, ability in writing and awareness of writing skills. The results of Vu Thi Ngoc (2013) showed that a writing activity is essential and useful. Therefore, it means that the results of these two research studies are consistent. The second aspect is students’ strategy and attitude toward writing in English. The results of Warattha (2014) showed that writing English is a basic skill that everyone should have. So, it means that the results of these two research studies are not consistent. The last aspect is a factor causing students to have errors in writing. The result of Warattha (2014) showed that the strongest factor is time constraint. In other words, the results of these two research studies are not consistent.

In their perspective, nowadays, writing in English is one of the most important skills required in universities. They also agreed that many situations at university require them to write English. Moreover, they seemed to see how important English writing communication is. The findings in this study also agreed with the theory of Warattha (2014) that “English is one of the significant roles in AEC economic integration in 2015”. Nevertheless, English written communication is important as English has become one of the resources that businesses require to manage sufficiently to be competitive in the market.

Therefore, the results could be an advantage for the university to know the factors that are causing students to have errors in writing. The English major could use the results to develop English writing courses to serve the needs of learners so that the learners can improve their English writing skills more efficiently.

6. Acknowledgements

The researcher is indebted to Ajarn Vorapon Mahakaew for his commitment to earlier phases of the project.

7. References

- Joseph A. Foley. (2005). *EFL planing in Thailand: A case Study in language planning*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Georgetown University.
- Srisitanon, P. (2009). *Intercultural communication problems of Thai employees at precious shipping Public Company Limited (PSL)*. Unpublished Master’s research paper, Thammasat University, Language Institute, English for Careers.
- Tom Glass. 2009. Why Thais write to other Thais in English. *World Englishes*, 28 (4) (2009), pp. 532-543
- Vu Thi Ngoc, L. (2013). *Grammatical errors made by English major students at Haiphong Private University when speaking English and the solutions*. Hai Phong, Vietnam.
- Warattha, R. (2014). *Writing to communicate in the workplace: A case study at a multinational company in Thailand*. Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand.