

Attitude towards the instruction in writing English in an English foundation course *

ทัศนคติต่อวิธีสอนการเขียนภาษาอังกฤษในชั้นเรียนวิชาภาษาอังกฤษพื้นฐาน

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this study were 1) to find out the students' attitude towards 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 first year students with their attitude towards the instruction in writing English in English foundation courses. The sample was 444 students from the Faculties of Education and Engineering and Industrial Technology, at Silpakorn University located at Sanam Chadra Palace campus. The instruments were a survey questionnaire and an interview schedule. The results were concluded as follows. The respondents selected vocabulary and grammar as their most important problem in English writing. Moreover, their most favourite writing tasks and topics were journals and tourist attractions, respectively. Their attitude towards the instruction in writing English in English foundation courses was at a high level for all variables. The method of teaching English writing the respondents preferred the most was creative expression. As for the comparisons between the demographic data and their attitude, an outstanding difference was the grades earned from the previous English foundation courses and the attitude. It corresponded to the results from the interviews as well. Finally, it is suggested that writing lessons begin with teaching basic grammar, structure, vocabulary, punctuation and transitional markers.

บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์ดังนี้ 1) เพื่อศึกษาทัศนคติของนักศึกษาต่อวิธีสอนการเขียนภาษาอังกฤษในรายวิชาภาษาอังกฤษพื้นฐาน 2) เพื่อค้นหาวิธีสอนการเขียนภาษาอังกฤษที่นักศึกษาชอบ และ 3) เพื่อเปรียบเทียบข้อมูลส่วนตัวของนักศึกษากับทัศนคติของนักศึกษาต่อวิธีสอนการเขียนภาษาอังกฤษในรายวิชาภาษาอังกฤษพื้นฐาน กลุ่มตัวอย่างคือ นักศึกษาจำนวน 444 คนจากคณะศึกษาศาสตร์และคณะวิศวกรรมศาสตร์

* This article was compiled in order to publicise the findings of the research as requested by the Faculty of Education, the sponsor of this study.

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และเทคโนโลยีอุตสาหกรรม มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร วิทยาเขตพระราชวังสนามจันทร์ เครื่องมือวิจัยคือแบบสอบถามและรายการคำถามสัมภาษณ์ ผลการวิจัยมีดังนี้ กลุ่มตัวอย่างเลือกคำศัพท์และไวยากรณ์เป็นปัญหาเรื่องการเขียนภาษาอังกฤษอันดับแรก ลักษณะงานและหัวข้อที่ชอบมากที่สุดสำหรับการเขียนได้แก่ อนุทิน และสถานที่ท่องเที่ยว ตามลำดับ กลุ่มตัวอย่างแสดงทัศนคติต่อวิธีสอนการเขียนภาษาอังกฤษในรายวิชาภาษาอังกฤษพื้นฐานในระดับมากที่สุดทุกๆ ตัวแปร วิธีสอนการเขียนอันดับแรกที่นักศึกษาชอบที่สุดคือ การสอนการเขียนแบบอิสระ ในการเปรียบเทียบข้อมูลส่วนตัวกับทัศนคติ ความแตกต่างที่เด่นชัดคือ ระดับคะแนนที่ได้รับจากวิชาภาษาอังกฤษพื้นฐานก่อนนี้และทัศนคติต่อวิธีสอนการเขียนซึ่งสอดคล้องกับผลการสัมภาษณ์ด้วย กลุ่มตัวอย่างได้ให้ข้อเสนอแนะว่า บทเรียนการสอนเขียนควรเริ่มต้นจากการสอนไวยากรณ์ขั้นพื้นฐาน โครงสร้าง คำศัพท์ เครื่องหมายวรรคตอน เครื่องหมายบอกการเปลี่ยนแปลงข้อความ

Introduction

The globalisation era accounts for the widespread transmission of information. A tangible example of this phenomenon is the Internet, for which English language is a primary medium of communication. Many countries, including Thailand, have planned to prepare their people to use it in order to gain the most benefits in all fields. According to the 2008 Core Curriculum by Office of Academic and Education Standards, both elementary and secondary curriculums build up foundations of the four skills of English (Commission on Basic Education, 2009:252). However, many studies report failures in students' ability in using English after completing the whole sixteen year programme. Therefore, it is important to measure students' English ability and ways to improve it if the findings show dissatisfactory results (Chalaysap, 2005:3; Kumkao, 2004:13; Vessakosol, 2001:162).

The rationale of prioritising writing skills is due to their availability in terms of classroom practice. Whereas speaking needs a conversation partner, to practice writing is much easier because readers can be found everywhere, with print media being much more affordable than cassettes or radios. Other than that, writing helps develop speaking skills' (as cited in Kumkao, 2004:13). Writing tasks help students learn a way to communicate with others. Process writing, on which this study focused, also enables students to organise their writing because they have to write and revise their tasks until they can communicate in this form well. Most Thai students perform poorly in English writing skills, claimed to be the necessary ones for tertiary education (Chinawong, 2000:9). Moreover, Meejang (2000:82) concludes Thai students' problems in writing in areas of grammar, word choice, organisation, punctuation and structure and inability to portray meanings.

Foundation courses are essential for establishing basic knowledge, from which students develop more advanced academic attainment. Silpakorn University, therefore, has imposed a new scheme to standardise its foundation courses for all subjects. In the new

syllabi, writing skills are the focus of two courses: English for Everyday Use and English Skills Development. To develop the instruction in writing English of those courses, this study was conducted to gauge students' attitude towards the material and the instruction of two English foundation courses: English I and English II. Its results would be beneficial for both learners and instructors because they not only reflected the appropriateness and success of the instruction, but they also investigated the teaching methods students preferred. The results of this study could be applied by the teaching team for the faculties of Education and Engineering. Though the central method—process writing—was imposed by the committee, other elements, such as the material, the way to give feedback, timing and grading criteria, were needed to be detailed. Writing lessons would be instructed by any class teachers with the same method of teaching. The standard of teaching foundation courses would meet the university's scheme, accordingly. Hopefully, a modified version of writing material based on students' own contributions would make the English foundation courses rewarding ones.

Objectives

1. To find out the students' attitude towards the instruction in writing English in English foundation courses.
2. To find out the students' preferred teaching methods for the instruction in writing English.
3. To compare the demographic data of SU first year students with their attitude towards the instruction in writing English in English foundation courses.

Research procedures

In order to meet the objectives of the study, the researcher followed the procedures as shown below:

Step 1 Proposal and design: Since this study was sponsored by the Faculty of Education in Silpakorn University, the researcher was required to submit a proposal to seek for an approval from the faculty's research committee. Once the proposal was approved, the researcher reviewed all relevant literature, including books, governmental publications, websites and academic journals, in order to gain an insight into the field of teaching writing English as a foreign language. Subsequently, two research instruments were designed; the population and samples were determined; and the data collection and analysis were set up.

Step 2 Conduct of the research: In this step, the researcher started collecting data as planned. First of all, students in the sample were asked to fill in the survey questionnaire, and then the sample was selected again by means of the purposive sampling technique for an

interview. The technique was adopted because the researcher wanted representatives of various ability levels—ranging from A students to D students. The quantitative and qualitative data were analysed by means of the statistic and content analysis, respectively. The results were summarised and discussed later on by the researcher.

Step 3 Final report: The results and any other information gathered during the first and second steps were written in a report. It consisted of five chapters: an introduction, literature review, methodology, results and conclusions, discussions and recommendations. The report was submitted to the Faculty of Education's research committee, which proposed three readers to consider it. During the readers' consideration, the researcher was also required to publicise the report, either by presenting it in a symposium or by writing a research article for one of the faculty's academic journals.

Research methodology

1. *Sample.* The population was first year students who enrolled in the English II course and had passed the English I course in the 2010 academic year. They were students from the two faculties of Silpakorn University at Sanam Chandra Palace campus located in Nakorn Pathom: the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Engineering and Industrial Technology. The reason for selecting this population was that the TEFL section of the Faculty of Education, where the researcher was one of the teaching team members, was in charge of teaching English foundation courses for both faculties. In the end, 444 samples were selected by the simple random sampling technique.

2. *Instruments.* There were two instruments for this study. 1) A survey questionnaire: The survey consisted of three parts: the demographic data, the attitude towards the instruction in writing English in the English I and II courses and students' preferred method of being taught English writing. There was also an open-ended question to ask for additional comments from the respondents. However, this instrument was mainly used to gather quantitative data. 2) An interview schedule: The interview schedule consisted of fifteen questions which paralleled those in the survey questionnaire. It was used to gather qualitative data in both individual interviews and a focus group discussion.

Data collection

1. The researcher sent official letters to the deans of the two faculties in order to seek their approvals. The letters notified that the samples would reveal their opinions by following three procedures: filling in the survey questionnaires, being interviewed individually and participating in a focus group.

2. After the permission for the data collection was approved, the researcher contacted the teachers whose classes were selected and informed them of dates, times and places they could pick up the survey questionnaire. The instrument was placed at the Education Office because these teachers, some of whom were part-time teachers, regularly turned up to sign their names on their teaching days.

3. Next, the researcher picked up the survey questionnaire left at the office by the class teachers. According to the tight schedule, some class teachers expressed that they had their students complete the questionnaire out of class time. As mentioned earlier, the data collection had been conducted at the end of the second term in 2011, considered the 2010 academic year, hence the time constraint for class teachers.

Table 1. Number of returned surveys

Faculty	No of students	No of surveys given	No of surveys returned	Percentage of surveys returned
Education	387	155	139	35.92%
Engineering and Industrial Technology	1,416	452	305	21.54%
Total	1,803	607	444	24.63%

Table 1 shows the return rate of the survey given to the samples. As for the Faculty of Education, the percentage point of the surveys returned was high at 35.92%, much higher than expected. The Engineering students, on the other hand, returned 305 surveys, which was 21.54% of the total number. Finally, a number of 444 surveys were returned, which accounted for 24.63% of all students who enrolled in the English II course in the 2010 academic year. The researcher had anticipated that not all of the surveys given might be returned. The researcher did not ask the class teachers for collaboration in this step because the percent of surveys returned was acceptable enough for the sampling design which was 25%.

Results

The following tables show the results from the survey questionnaire. Due to space limit, only some of them were excerpted from the whole research report. The discussions, however, elaborated nearly all of the results.

Table 2. English I grades

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	A	62	13.96	14.00	14.00
	B+	46	10.36	10.38	24.38
	B	72	16.22	16.25	40.63
	C+	78	17.57	17.61	58.24
	C	81	18.24	18.28	76.52
	D+	70	15.77	15.80	92.33
	D	34	7.66	7.67	100.00
	Total	443	99.77	100.00	
Missing	System	1	.23		
Total		444	100.00		

Table 2 shows the respondents' grades in the English I course, which they earned in the previous term. A majority of the respondents gained the grades clustering in the middle of the scale, which referred to the grades B, C+ and C. A majority of the respondents (18.24%), however, had a C grade.

Table 3. English II mid-term grades

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	72 and higher	16	3.59	3.53	3.40
	67-71	24	5.41	5.49	8.81
	63-66	24	5.41	5.49	14.22
	58-62	50	11.26	11.44	25.48
	54-57	44	9.91	10.07	35.39
	49-53	44	9.91	10.07	45.30
	45-48	56	12.61	12.81	57.91
	lower than 45	179	40.32	40.96	98.23
	Total	437	98.42	100.00	100.00
Missing		7	1.58		
Total		444	100.00		

Table 3 shows that most of the respondents received the English II grades lower than 45 points. The figure was 179 students or 40.32%. On the other hand, the least respondents gained the top score, which was 72 points and higher. The figure was 16 students or 3.59%.

Table 4. Order of students' preferred method of being taught English writing

Ranking	Interval ranking 1		Interval ranking 2		Interval ranking 3	
	Method of teaching English writing	%	Method of teaching English writing	%	Method of teaching English writing	%
1	Creative expression (1)	25.68	Language structure (1)	19.59	Composing processes (1)	16.44
2	Content (1)	19.14	Genre (1)	17.79	Language structure (2)	17.34
3	Content (2)	18.24	Text functions (2)	15.54		
4	Text functions (1)	17.12	Composing processes (2)	15.99		
5	composing processes (2)	15.99	Text functions (2)	15.54		
6	Genre (2)	16.89	Project-based writing (2)	16.44		
7	Project-based writing (1)	32.66	Creative expression (2)	15.99		

Table 4 shows the conclusion of the method of teaching writing English the respondents preferred to be taught. Column 1 shows the ranking, into which the respondents put each method of teaching writing English. For the other columns, the researcher tried to illustrate the interval ranking. For example, there were three interval ranks that the majority of the respondents ranked number one: creative expression, language structure and composing processes. The percentage points referred to the number of the respondents and the numbers 1 and 2 in the parentheses referred to the most and second most respondents that chose each method. For example, most respondents ranked 'creative expression' number one whereas the second most ranked number seven.

Table 5. Multiple comparisons of the attitude and English I grade groups

Variable	English I Grade	Grades					
		A	B+	B	C+	C	D+
Material	B+	-.073					
	B	-.068	.005				
	C+	-.087	-.014	-.019			
	C	.010	.083	.078	.096		
	D+	.159*	.232*	.227*	.246*	.149*	
	D	.116	.189	.184	.203*	.107	.043
Writing	B+	-.031					
	B	-.045	-.014				
	C+	-.158	.127	-.113			
	C	.110	.141	.155	.268*		
	D+	.098	.129	.143	.257*	-.011	
	D	.095	.126	.140	.254*	-.014	-.003
Grading	B+	-.066					
	B	.057	-.123				
	C+	.039	.106	-.017			
	C	.241*	.308*	.185	.202*		
	D+	.226*	.292*	.169	.187	-.015	
	B+	-.066					
Total	B+	-.035					
	B	-.008	.027				
	C+	-.085	-.050	-.076			
	C	.089	.124	.098	.174*		
	D+	.141*	.176*	.149*	.226*	.051	
	D	.101	.136	.109	.186*	.012	-.040

According to Table 5, the D+ students showed that their attitude concerning the material variable had a significant difference from the A, B+, B, C+ students. Similarly, there was also a significant difference in the attitude concerning the material in the C+ students and the C, D+, D students.

The attitude concerning the writing process was significantly different between the C+ students and the C, D+, D students. The rest of them did not show any significant differences.

As for the grading variable, the C students showed that their attitude had a significant difference from the A, B+, C+ students. Other than that, the attitude of the D+ students was significantly different from that of the A, B+ students.

Finally, the D+ students showed a significant difference in their total attitude from the A, B+, B, C+, C students. Moreover, the C+ students showed a significant difference in their total attitude from the D+, D students. The rest of them did not show any significant differences.

Table 6. Multiple comparisons of the attitude and English II mid-term grade groups

English II midterm score	Mid-term grads			
	< 45	45-53	54-62	63-71
45-53 points	-.159*			
54-62 points	-.128	.031		
63-71 points	-.093	.066	.035	
72 and higher	-.289*	-.131	-.162	-.197

*significant difference of .05

According to Table 6, the students who earned 45 points or lower showed a significant difference in the attitude concerning the writing process as compared to those with 72 points or higher. The rest of the comparisons did not show any significant differences.

Discussions

Objective 1: To find out the students’ attitude towards the instruction in writing English in English foundation courses

Actually, the data collected for this objective was an attitudinal scale in Part 2 of the survey questionnaire. However, the demographic data in Part 1 was presented here as well because it was analysed for Objective 3 to be reported later. The results for this objective included Part 1 and Part 2 on the survey questionnaire. The results from individual interviews and a focus group were also concluded as well.

Part 1: Demographic data

1. *Majors and genders.* Of the 444 respondents, nearly three quarters of the samples were female (62.39%) and 33.56% of the samples were male.

2. *Problems in writing English.* The survey questionnaire asked respondents to put Numbers 1 – 8 in the order of the importance of problems they might have in writing English. The order could be categorised into three groups. First, it was really obvious that most chose vocabulary and grammar as their most important problems (Meejang, 2000:92; Vessakosol, 2001:161). The problems in the second category dealt with idioms and expressions, misspelling and transitional signals for coherence. 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). Pongpairaj (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 simple past with modals.

3. *Favourite tasks and topics.* The following is the order of the samples' three most favourite tasks for writing English: 1) Journals (47.3%), 2) Essays (34.23%), 3) Conversations (34.23%). 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. Though an instruction is acceptable, students still wish to suggest that fewer topics be assigned by teachers (Hu, 2007:82). Probably, they will become more motivating or confident to write about because it is the topic they chose by themselves.

Part 2: Attitude towards the instruction in writing English in the English I and II courses

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). Likewise, the results from the interviews and the focus groups showed that the overall attitude towards 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.

2. *The writing process.* Students' attitude towards the writing process was at a high level ($\bar{X} = 4.07$, S.D. = .78). Furthermore, the statistical data seemed to match the results from the interviews in terms of other elements. All of the interviewees strongly agreed that process writing was effective in helping them write, citing that they could realise their errors marked by their teachers. However, they were concerned that 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 a sentence.

3. *Feedback.* The sample had a high level of attitude towards 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. It was at a medium level of the attitude ($\bar{X} = 3.10$, S.D. = .94). This obviously contradicted the propositions of Miller et al. (2008:447), Thongrin (2001:119) and Ożarska (2008:31) who maintained that the 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 process was time-consuming. This is in favour of the results from the present study's interviews which revealed that all interviewees did not at all support this practice, citing that they did not have enough abilities to check their classmates' works.

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 (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 (Hu, 2007:82). They said that feedback in written form was insufficient 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.

4. *Timing*. The respondents had a high level of their attitude towards the timing variable ($\bar{X} = 3.88$, S.D. = .81). Again, the results from the survey questionnaire corresponded to those from the interviews. The interviewees said that deadlines for all steps were clear, 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. Definitely, teachers' roles as 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. 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). That was perhaps a reason 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 Ożarska (2008:31) argues that time constraints might cause stress in students, the results specified that only those with low English competence had the effects probably due to their lack of self-discipline. A solution for this problem was introduced by Hu (2007:77). A form for students to check their progress might help build students' awareness of the work they need to fulfill.

5. *Conclusion*. For the last statement, the researcher asked students 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." Attitude towards this statement was 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. In contrast, Sangthong et al. (2003:57) found that students' satisfaction was at a high level. They were more confident in writing. Probably, using portfolios as adopted in Sangthong's study might account for students' reduced anxiety when writing and more confidence in having ideas to write about.

Respondents 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. Other suggestions of the samples and the interviewees were concluded below:

1. The following element 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. 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 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 clarified to students.

6. After marking of 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 do 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

Part 3 of the survey questionnaire asked the samples to reveal their preferred method of being taught English writing. They were to put Numbers 1 – 7 in the blanks to show the order of seven methods of teaching. The following is the ranking of the preferred method of teaching writing: 1) Creative expression; 2) Language structure; 3) Composing process; 4) Content; 5) Genre; 6) Text functions; and 7) Project-based writing.

Surprisingly, despite their high level of attitude towards 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 students were free to choose any topic they wanted for their portfolios used as information for writing. They were also able to write freely at the final period of the experiment. Their achievement score was quite high.

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

The attitude 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 attitude concerning the writing process of the students who earned 45 points or lower showed a significant difference from 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 different attitudes towards the instruction in teaching writing in some variables, namely the material, grading and the writing process, from those who gained the top 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 above mentioned 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 (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, then, 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 be the reason students did not really consent to the reading passages mentioned under the above topic Objective 2 the writing process.

In conclusion, 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 also be 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 their worry about being assessed as the results showed that they preferred to be taught to write freely without any evaluation from teachers, which refers 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

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 of the task is. The teachers should 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. 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' attitude and achievement. Further study could 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' attitude towards the instruction, process writing can be developed to suit the students in a certain context. An R&D study should be conducted after the team teachers improved 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, where many teachers teach the same course, standardised guidelines should be imposed and they should all be trained to implement exactly the same instruction in their classrooms.

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