



## A Study of Second-Year English Major Students' Interests, Strategies, Attitudes, and Grammatical Errors towards Their Writing Skills

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### Abstract

The objective of the study is to investigate the second-year English major students' interests, strategies, attitudes, and grammatical errors towards their writing skills at Rangsit University. Ninety participants who enrolled in English Structure for Paragraph Writing (ENG 209) and Writing I (ENG 231) in term 1/2018 were purposively selected. For the data collection process, the research instrument used was a questionnaire, which was divided into four main parts: the general information; Learners' interest, ability in writing and awareness of writing skills; learners' strategy and attitude toward writing in English; and factors causing learners to have errors in writing. For the data analysis, frequency and percentages were employed in the study. The findings revealed that all of the respondents were interested in English writing as they found a writing activity is essential and useful. Besides, the majority of respondents know important strategies in writing English. It was also reported that vocabulary knowledge and sentence errors were among the highest factors affecting English writing skills. The respondents also realized that spelling held the third spot. These three factors are considered an obstacle for them to write in English, and it can make them lack confidence in themselves for writing.

**Keywords:** *EFL learners, Writing skills, Learners' strategies and attitude, Undergraduate learners*

### 1. Introduction

Due to the rising popularity of the English language as an international language, it seems that it is inevitable for people from any race or nationality not to learn it. A huge number of countries have been paying much attention to the instructions and ways to help their citizens improve their English skills. The formal instructions based on the approved theoretical framework and concepts have been introduced to language classrooms across the globe.

In reality, it is somewhat believed that speaking comes before writing. However, writing in English is important as English has become one of the resources that businesses need for the management to be competitive in the market. In addition, writing is unique and more formal than speech.

Writing in English is proved to be a major factor in learners' success. When mentioning success, in the academic world, these learners are expected to finish various writing work. Therefore, those who cannot perform well might contribute to failure.

Learning to write in English in Thailand also requires effective elements: choice of words, an organization in word order or sentence information, and cohesive composition of the sentence. Nevertheless, it is believed that English writing skills in Thailand are considered to be below average. Writing skills remain in part due to lack of training, practicing, emphasizing of both teachers and students. According to Graham and Perin (2007), it is stated that writers with weak skills might suffer from unsatisfactory grades, particularly in those writing courses determining writing as an assessment. For those who have studied English as a foreign language, when it comes to writing, it is often viewed as a skill that is hard to succeed.

In the pedagogical realm, cognition, language proficiency, writing proficiency, and affective variables are thought to be factors leading to writing success (Graham, Berninger & Fan, 2007; Graham & Perin, 2007; Hayes, 2000; Pajares, 2003). In addition, for both second language acquisition and writing skills development, a relationship between attitude and motivation is truly needed (Graham, Berninger & Fan, 2007; Tremblay & Gardner, 1995). As a consequence, it has been suggested that to help these learners more about their attitudes towards writing is concerned with modified writing instructions (Verma, 2005; Karahan, 2007; Denny, 2012; Mcleod, 2014) cited in Paker and Erarslan (2015). To improve language



skills, according to Klein (1986), they should be well motivated. Concerning the concept, two major alternatives are regarding learners' attitudes in a language learning environment. Firstly, for language acquisition, exposition plays a role where large amounts of input are necessary. Secondly, on the other hand, it is related to being open to the language according to Krashen (1987).

To elaborate, a vast number of factors that can affect the individual's writing achievement: cognitive, affective, or physical factors. This revolves around the most important affective factors affecting writing achievement which are attitude, defined by Graham et al. (2007) as the feeling: good or bad during the writing activity. Learners' writing attitudes are believed to affect writing achievement, and self-efficacy belief, regarded as another effective factor affecting writing achievement. It can be defined as "*people's judgments about their skills to organize and perform acts that are required to achieve certain types of performance*" or "*the concept of self-efficacy as the individual's own judgment, belief about himself/herself regarding the extent to which he/she will be successful in overcoming difficult situations to be confronted with in the future*" (Bandura, 1986; cited by Schunk, 1989; Senemoglu, 2005). In short, self-efficacy is considered relatively important in social cognitive theory that assumes that achievements are based on interactions between behaviors, personal factors, and environmental conditions (Schunk, 2003). According to Graham, Harris, Bartlett, Popadopolou & Santoro (2016), self-efficacy is a key concept for ensuring participation and learning.

A significant number of studies have focused on investigating learners' interests, strategies, attitudes, and grammatical errors towards their writing skills. For example, Jabali (2018) investigated whether the Palestinian EFL students feel any difference between expressing ideas while writing in English and Arabic. The researcher also explored what the Palestinian EFL students' attitudes and strategies towards writing in general are. In addition, Al-Khairy (2013) attempted to investigate Saudi English-major undergraduates studying at Taif University to identify Saudi English-major undergraduates' writing problems.

Thus, this study aims to investigate factors affecting the writing skills of undergraduate learners at Rangsit University. It is vital to explore the relationship between learners' language backgrounds and their writing experiences since it may provide insight into academic achievements, including bilingual speakers and language learners.

## 2. Objective

The purpose of the study is to investigate the second-year English major students' interests, strategies, attitudes, and grammatical errors towards their writing skills at Rangsit University.

## 3. Materials and Methods

### 3.1. Methodology

This research study adopted survey research designs. In quantitative research, the procedures in which investigators administer a survey to a sample to describe the attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of the population. In the study, a questionnaire was adopted to the context as the data collection tool to measure the second-year English major students' interest, strategies, attitude, and grammatical errors towards their writing skills. The survey also consisted of questions about feelings, behaviors regarding writing, and particular qualities related to writing anxiety. The two attitude aspects were in Gardner's work (2004). Besides, it was composed of the items regarding anxiety widely studied area of second language acquisition.

In the questionnaire, a 1-5 Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" was used to explore the interest, strategies, attitude, and grammatical errors towards their writing skills of the participants. The validity and reliability of the scale were tested after the piloting.

The research instrument was validated by three experts in the field of English teaching. Three validators were university lecturers with more than 20 years of experience in the English teaching field and one of them is a native speaker of English. Moreover, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 87.9; additionally, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the main study was .99.



### 3.2 Samples and Data Collection

Within the scope of this study, purposive sampling was applied. The groups of students asked to join the current study were selected based on their exposure to English and their level of English proficiency. For this study, there were ninety students in total ( $N = 90$ ). These students took ENG 209 (English Structure for Paragraph Writing) and ENG 231 (Writing I) at Rangsit University. Out of which, 34.44% were male and 65.56% were female. The questionnaires distributed were returned 100%. The majority of the respondents (47.78%) aged 20-21 years old, though all of the respondents (100%) were second-year learners. The majority of the respondents (58.89%) had been studying English for more than ten years, and most of them had fair English writing proficiency (63.33%). Lastly, 62.22% of the respondents are those having a grade of 3.00-4.00.

### 3.3 Data Analysis Procedures

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

Part I: The background of the participants consisted 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 the learners' interests, ability in writing, and awareness of writing skills. After these categories were identified, the learners were explored through a series of close-ended questions. The data were analyzed in frequency, percentage, and mean.

Part III: This part aimed to explore the learners' 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 the learners to have errors in writing. After current problems were identified, the data were analyzed in frequency, percentage, and mean. The collected data were analyzed by using SPSS 22.0 statistical program.

## 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 Learners	Percentage
Male	31	35%
Female	59	65%
Total	90	100%

Table 1 revealed most respondents were female (65%) and the rest were male (35%).

**Table 2** Age

Age	Number of Learners	Percentage
18-19 years old	37	41%
20 -21 years old	43	48%
22-25 years old	10	11%
More than 25 years old	0	0%
Total	90	100%

According to Table 2, most of the respondents (48%) aged between 20 - 21 years, followed by 18-19 years old (41%), and no participants aged more than 25 years old.

**Table 3** Year of study

Year of Study	Number of Learners	Percentage
First-year	0	0%
Second-year	90	100%
Third-year	0	0%
Fourth-year	0	0%
Total	90	100%

As shown in Table 3, the results revealed that all respondents were second-year learners (100%).

**Table 4** English educational background

English Educational Background	Number of Learners	Percentage
3-5 years	11	12%
5-10 years	26	29%
More than 10 years	53	59%
Total	90	100%

Table 4 presents that most of the respondents (59%) had been studying English for more than 10 years, followed by those who had been studying English for 5-10 years (29%), and those who had been studying English for 3-5 years (12%).

**Table 5** English writing proficiency

English Writing Proficiency	Number of Learners	Percentage
Very good	4	5%
Good	20	22%
Fair	57	63%
Poor	8	9%
Very poor	1	1%
Total	90	100%

Table 5 reveals that the majority of the respondents had fair English writing proficiency (63%), while only 1 respondent had very poor English writing proficiency (1%).

**Table 6** Grade average

Grade Average	Number of Learners	Percentage
0.00-0.99	0	0%
1.00-1.99	1	1.11%
2.00-2.99	33	36.67%
3.00-4.00	56	62.22%
Total	90	100%

Table 6 shows that the majority of the respondents had a grade of 3.00-4.00 (62.22%), followed by 2.00-2.99 (36.67%). No respondent indicated a grade of 1.00-1.99 or 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.	10%	51.1%	35.56%	3.33%	0%
2. I wish to be a good writer.	26.67%	34.44%	32.22%	6.67%	0%
3. Writing skills are simple for me.	5.56%	12.22%	54.44%	25.56%	2.22%
4. I like to share knowledge and opinion with friends by using writing works.	7.78%	42.22%	35.56%	14.44%	0%
5. I think, a writing activity is essential and useful	32.22%	41.11%	25.56%	1.11%	0%
6. My language competence is used to create pieces of writing.	7.78%	25.56%	38.89%	25.56%	2.22%
7. While process writing being conducted in class, I was able to help friends.	11.11%	28.89%	52.22%	7.78%	0%
8. Writing skills are practiced by me via pair and work group.	11.11%	41.11%	37.78%	8.89%	1.11%
9. I have an ability of accurate writing.	5.56%	20%	61.11%	13.33%	0%
10. I provide friends suggestions and information about writing techniques.	6.67%	31.11%	45.56%	15.56%	1.11%

As illustrated in Table 7, the respondents agreed that there are three interests and abilities rated the most. The most rated interest and ability in writing found is "a writing activity is essential and useful," which the respondents strongly agree (32.22%) and agree (41.11%). The second one is "I wish to be a good writer," which the respondents strongly agree (26.67%) and agree (34.44%). The third is "Writing skills are practiced by me via pair and workgroup," which the respondents strongly agree (11.11%) and agree (41.11%).

The results from Table 7 implied that writing is important and useful, but most of the respondents may feel that to improve their writing skills significantly, a writing activity ought to be designed to serve their needs and levels effectively.

**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.	18.89%	36.67%	38.89%	4.44%	1.11%
2. I find more writing technique.	11.1%	40%	42.22%	5.56%	1.11%
3. I find more technical term knowledge.	18.89%	43.33%	33.34%	4.44%	0%
4. I spend more time when writing.	12.22%	25.56%	51.11%	10%	1.1%
5. I use both English and Thai when writing.	20%	40%	34.44%	5.56%	0%
6. According to my opinion, English is a fundamental skill everyone should have.	43.34%	34.44%	21.11%	1.11%	0%
7. According to my opinion, I feel unconfident when communicate by writing in English to communicate with my professors.	20%	36.67%	30%	10%	3.33%
8. According to my opinion, there are many situations at university that require written English.	24.44%	44.44%	25.56%	5.56%	0%
9. According to my opinion, nowadays written in English is one of the most important skills required in the university.	37.78%	31.11%	31.11%	0%	0%
10. According to my opinion, writing English to communicate within the university can cause a communication breakdown.	13.33%	18.87%	43.33%	15.56%	8.89%

As shown in Table 8, the most rated strategy and attitude that the respondents indicated the highest level is "According to my opinion, English is a fundamental skill everyone should have," which the respondents use very often (43.34%) and often (34.44%). However, the respondents pointed out that "According to my opinion, writing English to communicate within the university can cause a communication breakdown" is the lowest level of strategy and attitude toward writing in English, which the respondents use very often (13.33%) and often (18.87%).

The results from Table 7 can be interpreted that most of the respondents had somewhat positive attitudes towards English in general, but they might feel if they were asked to write things in English instead of Thai, their writing skills would not meet the standard and could contribute to a communication breakdown.

**Table 9** Factors causing learners to have errors in writing

Statement	Very often 5	Often 4	Sometimes 3	Rarely 2	Never 1
1. Vocabulary knowledge	33.33%	35.56%	25.56%	4.44%	1.11%
2. Spelling	25.56%	26.67%	36.67%	8.88%	2.22%
3. Subject-Verb agreement	14.44%	33.34%	40%	8.89%	3.33%
4. Active- Passive voice	15.56%	34.44%	36.67%	8.89%	4.44%
5. Adjective usage	15.56%	40%	33.33%	7.78%	3.33%
6. Adverb usage	12.22%	35.56%	40%	8.89%	3.33%
7. Article usage (a, an, the)	14.45%	32.22%	42.22%	8.89%	2.22%
8. Preposition usage	12.22%	31.12%	41.11%	13.33%	2.22%
9. Word order	15.56%	30%	38.89%	12.22%	3.33%
10. Communication breakdown	25.56%	27.77%	40%	6.67%	0%

Table 9 exposed that most of the respondents agree that three factors could contribute to errors in writing. The most rated error found is "Vocabulary knowledge," which the respondents make very often (33.33%) and often (33.56%). The second-rated error is found to be "Sentence errors," which the



respondents make very often (25.56%) and often (26.67%). The third-rated error is found to be “Spelling,” which the respondents make very often (25.56%) and often (26.67%). However, the respondents believed that preposition usage and article usage are the lowest factors causing them to have errors in writing.

It can be explained according to the results from Table 9 that a significant number of respondents found that when it comes to writing assignments, they need to use more vocabulary than they think they have. Therefore, they could suffer from writing problems despite studying English since they were young; they might not have enough vocabulary knowledge to express what they would like to convey.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1. Conclusion and Discussions

The current study investigated factors affecting the writing skills of undergraduate learners of Rangsit University. The participants responded to the questionnaire to investigate interest and ability, strategy and attitude, and factors in English writing. Besides, the majority of the respondents knew important strategies in writing English and agreed that the highest factor causing them to have errors in English writing is “Vocabulary knowledge.”

The first aspect is learners’ interest, ability in writing, and awareness of writing skills. The results of the current study can be summarized that all of the respondents were interested in English writing as they found a writing activity is essential and useful. Therefore, the work of Jabali (2018) is worth being compared in this regard. The researcher examined whether the Palestinian EFL students feel any difference between expressing ideas while writing in English and Arabic. The results showed that writing is important and useful. It means that the results of these two research are consistent.

The second aspect is learners’ strategy and attitude towards writing in English. Also, the work of Jabali (2018) would be mentioned here again. The researcher investigated what the Palestinian EFL students’ attitudes towards writing in general are. The findings of Jabali revealed that students had positive attitudes towards writing, the various writing courses offered by the university, the textbooks and teaching methods used, and their writing skills and strategies. It means that the results of these two research studies are consistent.

The third aspect is a factor causing learners to have errors in writing. This study of Al-Khairi (2013) attempted to investigate Saudi English-major undergraduates studying at Taif University to identify Saudi English-major undergraduates’ writing problems. The results showed that the most factor is appropriate vocabulary. According to the results, many learners could suffer from a vast number of writing problems despite studying English since they were young; they still have problems in writing English. It means that the results of these two research studies are in line with one another in terms of the use of vocabulary.

To conclude, the results of this study have an emphasis on certain aspects concerning writing in English as a foreign language. Language instructors or professors may benefit from those results to enhance the writing skill when teaching foreign languages.

### 5.2. Limitations, Implications, and Recommendations for the Further Studies

The limitations of the study are that firstly, no comparison group was employed in this study. Thus, using a control group was strongly recommended for future studies.

For the implication criteria, the results of the study could benefit the readers interested in this research and the university to be aware of the factors causing learners to have errors in writing. Moreover, it can make the readers know how to improve themselves from the results of the study and the university can bring the results to develop their course for making their learners have more skills in English writing.

Based on the results and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made for further research.

1. The research data were collected from ninety respondents studying at Rangsit University. It is suggested to survey with other English major students in different universities. They may give different results from Rangsit University.



2. Further research should use inferential statistics to analyze the collected data to get more details of the results for conclusion.

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