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The Challenge of Teaching English Writing in Thailand: A Tri-ethnography of Thai University Lecturers

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ABSTRACT

Against a backdrop of increasing internationalization in higher education, students and teachers frequently move between learning-to-write and writing-to-learn. For example, in English as a foreign/second language (EFL/ESL) classrooms, learning-to-write would be a priority, whereas in English as a medium of instruction (EMI) classrooms, writing-to-learn may be a more appropriate goal. However, little is known about how teachers who move between such classrooms adjust their writing pedagogy as they do so. Accordingly, we bring together the views, beliefs, and experiences of three Thai university lecturers who teach across EFL, CLIL, and EMI platforms. Collectively, they serve as researchers/participants in the co-construction of joint autoethnographies on teaching English writing at Thai universities. Their emergent themes give valuable insights into how they navigate the complexities of moving between language and content concerns, expectations and realities, and idealism and pragmatism. Results also show how there is no one-size-fits-all approach for these researchers/ participants, and that both bottom-up and top-down constraints shape their actions and beliefs as writing teachers. Overall, by drawing on their combined experiences, we hope to raise awareness of the challenges placed upon English language teachers when teaching writing and provide useful guidance for those working in similar contexts.

Keywords: second language writing pedagogy, auto-ethnography of local teachers, EMI in Thailand, learning-to-write, English writing teachers

Introduction

With English firmly established as the global lingua franca, and universities worldwide jostling to maintain their foothold in an increasingly internationalized landscape, policy reformers in many developing countries continue to adopt English as the main foreign language of instruction. Pragmatically, this drive for internationalization means that many institutions are increasingly concerned with "recruiting as many international students as possible, attracting highly qualified staff from other countries, and projecting the power and influence of specific higher education institutions or systems globally" (Tight, 2021, p. 65). Against such a backdrop, long established English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) programs continue to run alongside an increasing number of English as medium of instruction (EMI) programs (Jampaklay et al., 2022; Thomas et al., 2023). In the context of Thailand—where our study is situated—EFL classes are mainly taught deductively, wherein students learn language features in a graded order, and they rarely use English outside the classroom. In CLIL classes, content and language are taught concurrently, wherein the goal is for students to develop both subject-matter knowledge and language proficiency/skills. In EMI classes, course outlines do not usually include learning objectives for language proficiency, thus there is often no official time allocation for language instruction, and assessment is mainly focused on content knowledge (Macaro et al., 2018). However, despite these seemingly clear distinctions—wherein EFL, CLIL, and EMI can be situated along a language-focused–content-focused continuum (see Rose et al., 2020)—at the classroom level, such programs often blend into one another as stakeholders bring with them varying beliefs, competencies, and backgrounds (Bowen & Nanni, 2021; Bowen et al., 2021).

This kind of hybridity has implications for the efficacy of English language teaching programs: On EMI programs, for example, many teachers may have insufficient levels of English to deal with EMI classes (Macaro et al., 2018) or inexperience with appropriate teaching practices (Hong & Basturkmen, 2020). Similarly, some teachers may be asked to teach complicated subject matter when they are primarily EFL/CLIL teachers (Bowen et al., 2021), or they may be confronted with EMI students who are ill equipped for immersive study through English (An et al., 2021). Fundamentally, in many internationalized departments, the boundaries between EFL, CLIL, and EMI programs are often not clearly delineated at the classroom level, yet teachers are expected to move seamlessly between them. These issues lead to important questions about how teachers in such contexts successfully position their beliefs and practices, as well as to how they navigate the practicalities of their roles. However, to the best of our knowledge, there have been very few studies into the "voices" of local Thai lecturers in this evolving context outside of Bowen et al. (2021), and no research into teachers' beliefs, challenges, and strategies with regard to a single aspect of teaching—in our case, writing.[1]

Accordingly, the current study contributes to bridging these gaps by bringing together the voices of three Thai English-language-writing lecturers, each from a major university in Bangkok: two government institutions and one private. All three lecturers teach across EFL, CLIL, and EMI platforms. Collectively, they serve as researchers/participants in the co-construction of joint autoethnographies on the state of writing instruction, practice, and policy at three large Thai universities. Through their co-constructed, written narratives, we probe complex phenomena and interrogate critical issues related to writing pedagogy in terms of their beliefs, challenges, and strategies. Their written narratives serve as a dialogic research site, wherein all three researchers/participants question each other's views and positions. Consequently, we build on an emerging area of duo/trio-ethnographic research dedicated to presenting juxtaposed narratives of two or more participants in dialogue (see Lowe & Lawrence, 2020). Such an approach not only highlights oft taken-for-granted hidden beliefs and practices, but also serves as a form of reflective

practice (Chien & Yang, 2019; Thomas et al., 2023), helping participants make sense of and further navigate the complexities of their professional lives (Norris, 2017).

Overall, we contribute to recent calls for investigations into situated practices from an ecological perspective (Bowen et al., 2021), as well as calls "to accord primacy to teachers as agentic professionals" (Tao & Gao, 2017, p. 346). In so doing, we contribute to the field of second language writing instruction by highlighting the authentic lived experiences of local English language teachers, and do so in light of the increasing internationalization of higher education (Tight, 2021). Moreover, we hope to highlight further the potential of joint ethnographies as a reflective learning tool for English language teachers and researchers, as well as a valuable way to explore/share teaching challenges, practices, and successes (see Rose & Montakantiwong, 2018).

Teaching English Writing in Thailand

In an overview of EFL writing research in Thailand, Chuenchaichon (2014) identified 48 published articles between 2004 and 2013, which she classified into second language (L2) writing errors, writing assessment, writing feedback, coherence in writing, online writing/new technologies in writing, genre-based writing instruction, approaches to teaching writing, written discourse analysis, and learning strategies. Since this review, new articles have been published largely in the same categories (e.g., Loan, 2019), yet there have been some additional areas of investigation. These include explorations into beliefs and practices surrounding plagiarism (Bowen & Nanni, 2021), written corrective feedback (Hopper & Bowen, forthcoming), writing pedagogy (McDonough & De Vleeschauwer, 2019), and giving feedback in online writing classes (Bowen, et al., 2022). Whilst these articles, and others like them, provide further valuable insights into EFL writing pedagogy in Thailand, they primarily focus on students' and teachers' challenges, strategies, and performance at the classroom level. Moreover, they do not investigate how the role of English language teachers (ELTs) is perhaps changing in light of the increasing presence of EMI programs in Thai universities.

Moreover, of the relatively few studies that have examined Thai EFL writing teachers' challenges and strategies at the university level, their findings are somewhat anecdotal, and their discussions lack depth. Ka-Kan-Dee and Kaur (2015), for example, investigated the strategy use of two in-service Thai university lecturers through semi-structured interviews and stimulated recalls. Their participants reported using strategies such as pair work, group discussions/debates, explanations, illustrations, and text analysis when teaching argumentative writing. However, participants' quotes were presented in a list like fashion with little interpretation or contextualization from the authors. Moreover, the paper's conclusion simply summarized the results and it was unclear what the implications, contributions, and limitations of the paper were. Likewise, in questioning three in-service Thai university teachers on their EFL writing pedagogies, Rakpa (2014) reports similarly generic and vague strategies, and once more, there is little critical engagement with her participants or findings. Similar conclusions are reached by Jantori et al. (2018), who examined the scoring methods of two non-Thai and two Thai EFL teachers from three universities. However, it was unclear how much experience these teachers had beyond "all of them had more than one year's experience in teaching writing at the university level." (p. 1252).

Other studies have examined larger populations of writing teachers in Thai universities and explored teachers' practices surrounding written corrective feedback (WCF; Wei & Cao, 2020), as well as their beliefs and attitudes on giving WCF in terms of feedback scope (focused/unfocused), strategy (direct/indirect), and focus (type of error being focused on) (Nanni & Black, 2017; Bowen & Hopper, forthcoming). Such studies emphasize gaps between teachers and students' beliefs on scope and type of WCF, as well as between beliefs and theory. They also highlight the difficulty of teaching writing in an education system that is predominantly teacher-centered and focused on grammatical accuracy (Sudsomboon, 2010), wherein assessment is of learning rather than for learning (Bowen & Hopper, forthcoming).

In terms of approaches to teaching English writing classes in Thailand, the process approach is evident in the set textbooks and curriculums of many Thai universities. The process approach focuses on specific activities that occur before, during, and after writing (Graves, 1983), especially, the benefits of activities such as goal setting (Graham & Harris, 2018), planning (Bennett et al., 2020), time-management (Rosário et al., 2017), revising (Bowen, 2019), and the use of (re)sources. However, due to the legacy of teacher-centred learning in Thailand (Sangnapaboworn, 2018), the nature of standardized written tests that bias grammar and surface-level features (Sudsomboon, 2010), and the lack of explicit focus on form in process approaches in general (Hyland, 2003), it appears that many EFL teachers in Thailand supplement the process approach by giving direct, comprehensive feedback on language errors and surface features (Nanni & Black, 2017; Hopper & Bowen, forthcoming). In other words, teachers often incorporate elements of a product-based approach to writing out of necessity.

Moreover, whilst some Thai institutions have tried implementing genre-based instruction, which considers the social context, communicative purpose, and audience of writing, its uptake has been slow (Chaisiri, 2010; 2018; Kongpetch, 2006; Krisanachinda, 2006). Furthermore, current theory has already edged toward a more eclectic approach to teaching writing, which some refer to as a process-genre approach (Deng et al., 2014) or design approach (Allen, 2018). However, to the best of our knowledge, neither of these have been implemented in any systematic way in Thailand, and as Racelis and Matsuda (2013) argue, the application of such approaches is difficult in L2 writing classes in general—especially EFL ones—due to a lack of existing literature for practitioners (cf. Bowen, 2023).

Fundamentally, teaching writing in Thailand is somewhat of a mixed affair, and this is reflected in a lack of research into the perspectives, beliefs, and practices of English language writing teachers in Thailand that take into account the following factors. First, Writing is situated, emergent, improvised, and mediated by social conventions, practices, and other texts—a sociocultural perspective on writing (Prior, 2006); second, writing is functionally oriented to specific situational exchanges—a socio-purposive viewpoint (Martin & Rose, 2008); third, increasingly diverse curriculums and student populations are found at the university level. Consequently, there is a real need for a more thorough understanding of how English language writing teachers in Thailand navigate the increasing complexity found in many university departments. Moreover, as noted by Rose and Motakantiwong (2018), "there is a dearth of published duoethnographies in Social Science research in general, and within Applied Linguistics in particular" (p. 91). Therefore, we seek to build upon this emerging line of research by exploring the beliefs and experiences of three Thai EFL university writing teachers. We use the following questions to organize and guide our discussion:

1. What are the perceptions of three Thai lecturers toward English writing pedagogy, practice, and policy in Thai universities?
2. What are the reported challenges and coping strategies in teaching English language writing classes in Thai universities that run EFL, EMI, and CLIL programs?

Method

The current study embodies a tri-ethnographic research design. Such a design uses the combined autoethnographies of three researchers/ participants to construct a research site where "two or more individuals give similar and different meanings to a common phenomenon" (Norris, 2017, p. 2). In this instance, the phenomena being jointly reflected upon are issues related to teaching English language writing in Thailand.

Although, there are no prescribed procedures to the methods of duo/tri-ethnographies—they vary between disciplines and are seen as evolving forms of inquiry (Breault, 2016)—we follow the central tenets of Norris (2017), which were developed from several seminal studies using the

approach. These tenets "serve as an outline of the types of researcher dispositions, principles, and foci required to undertake this work" (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p.12), and are listed as follows:

- Researcher's narratives are juxtaposed in relation to each other through dialogue. This is done to disrupt the typical nature of metanarratives, which are predominantly oriented toward a single authorial voice.
- Researchers challenge each other's interpretations of experiences and narratives, which opens a dialogic space for new interpretations and understandings.
- Researchers' differences are seen as critical dialogic spaces, whereby new understandings can emerge and develop in relation to shared phenomenon.
- Duo/tri-ethnographies should not follow set procedures as this runs the risk of prescriptivism.

Moreover, while most duo/tri-ethnographies use verbal exchanges as their main source of data (Lowe & Lawrence, 2020), we chose to follow an emerging trend for digitally authored texts as a means for co-constructing autoethnographies (e.g., Rose & Montakantiwong, 2018; Thomas et al., 2023). This afforded the three researchers/ participants ample time to construct their initial narratives, juxtapose their narratives on to each other's, and create a dialogic space through which they could (re)interpret their own narratives and those of their fellow researchers/participants.

Participants

The first researcher, Neil, reached out to the other three researchers to participate in the study. These three researchers/ participants, Pern, Maew, and Korn, are all Thai nationals for whom English was learnt as a L2, and all of whom were enrolled on an EMI PhD postgraduate program where Neil teaches classes. They were chosen for this study for several reasons. First, they represent mid-level instructors in terms of experience. Pern has eight years' experience teaching English writing in a large private university and a government university in the Bangkok area. He teaches first and second year writing classes (EFL), business communication (CLIL), and general business-related courses through English (EMI). Maew has nine years of experience in a large government university in Northern Thailand, and she has taught freshman EFL writing classes, a number of CLIL classes, and English literature and academic writing to English majors (EMI). Korn has five years' experience in a private university in the Bangkok area, and he frequently teaches freshman writing (EFL), a number of English for Specific purposes courses to both undergraduates and postgraduates, and business classes through English (CLIL). Second, all three have experience in working and studying at all levels of the Thai education system, which gives them a thorough insider (emic) perspective on the role of English language writing in Thai education. Third, they are representative of the vast majority of local Thai teachers, as they have not studied abroad nor have they had any in-depth training in how to teach writing. Fourth, given their current investments in postgraduate study and their interests in becoming academic researchers, they were ideal candidates for professional development through the kind of reflective practice afforded by autoethnographies. Finally, they all have experience in teaching EFL, CLIL, and EMI courses at the university level.

Neil, on the other hand, is a British national for whom English is his first language (L1). He took on the role of the "Other", adding an outsider (etic) perspective on Thai education, yet he also has extensive experience in teaching and researching L1 and L2 writing, having taught on EFL, CLIL, and EMI programs in Thailand and in Europe, giving him an emic perspective. He is also the author of an internationally published textbook on teaching writing to EFL/ESL undergraduates (Bowen, 2023), and has been a researcher/participant in two other autoethnographies related to ELT. His role was to observe the co-construction of the autoethnographies and to assist in the final analysis and write up of the paper.

Data Collection

We collected data over three months, from June to August 2022. After several group exchanges online, Pern, Maew, and Korn drafted their initial autoethnographies using a series of prompts as common themes (see Appendix). These prompts were a means to anchor their narratives to issues related to our research questions and included the following broad topics: origin stories; beliefs, challenges, and strategies related to teaching English language writing in Thailand; and issues of identity, agency, and personal development on English language teaching programs.

The original drafts ranged from 1,788–2,301 words long. Each draft was uploaded into a shared, online folder, where each of the three researchers/participants read and commented on each other's drafts, as well as responded to comments on their own drafts. Commenting was done through MS Word's reviewing function. Comments ranged in size from simple phrases to several paragraphs in length and included expressions of agreement (f = 27), disagreement (f = 7), questions (f = 80), follow-ups (f = 142), and lengthy discussions. This iterative process of posting and responding to comments continued until all four researchers agreed that the topics had been exhausted. This resulted in three co-constructed narratives composed of initial conceptualizations toward the topics (5,925 words) and subsequent challenges and reconceptualizations held in the comments (8,946 words). In total, 258 comments were made in the three documents: Pern = 82, Maew = 62, Korn = 114.

Data Coding and Analysis

The autoethnographies were first read without comments and then with comments (data familiarization). Using inductive content analysis as a shared method, we began recursively and iteratively examining the data with reference to beliefs (RQ1) and challenges and strategies (RQ2). We then used a two-step coding process for in-depth qualitative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This meant that each narrative and its accompanying comments were analysed with open codes to identify patterns or recurrent themes (axial codes) related to each of the research questions.

Results and Discussion

In what follows, we present the tri-ethnographies as aggregated dialogue (~65%) interspersed with running commentary/summary/ interpretation (~35%). This means that the researchers/participants' exact wordings have been used as much as possible, yet we have organized the dialogues according to key emergent themes under separate section headings.

Perceptions on English Writing Pedagogy, Practice, and Policy

Several key perceptions about writing pedagogy, practice, and policy arose in the autoethnographies. Here we outline the major themes across the three datasets.

The "Ideal" Writing Teacher and an Eclectic Approach to Teaching Writing

All three researchers/participants agreed that an "ideal" English writing teacher should understand L2 learners' writing problems and be able to use appropriate teaching strategies. For Maew, "showing and explaining transfer errors" and "scaffolding from a sentence level to more complex levels" are desirable abilities." She goes on the state that "a good writing teacher needs to be patient, open-minded, detail-oriented, and perspicuous …. The ability to explain complex grammar or structure can enhance students' writing performance." Pern, on the other hand believes that "a good writing teacher is also a good writer … a role model for L2 writing learners … the teacher should have a democratic attitude leaving a space for learners to feel empowered

to share their ideas." Korn, meanwhile, believes that "the good writing teacher should have extensive academic writing experience … they should be able to scaffold students." Ultimately, all three participants see the value in regulating student learning through experience and expertise, which bodes well for proponents of co-/other regulatory learning practices (e.g., Bowen & Thomas, 2022).

However, despite such overlapping beliefs, all three participants also experienced differences in how Thai and non-Thai university lecturers approached writing classes:

> **Maew:** Some semesters, Thai lecturers had to co-teach with a native English teacher [*sic*] … A problem arose due to differences between the teaching methods. Specifically, some Thai teachers felt less competent and lost confidence in their approaches when compared to the native teacher. We solved the problem by constructing a collaborative teaching approach, which included shared assessment methods.
> **Pern:** Our native teacher [*sic*] used the product-based approach, focusing on the writing outcome. Students could seek consultations to fix grammatical errors and shape ideas through the writing process … the Thai teacher paid attention to the writing process and finished with error correction.

While the researchers/participants do not mention it, the differing approaches they witnesses may just be an epiphenomenon of the teachers' respective proficiency levels. Indeed, there is mounting evidence that L2 proficiency can modulate feedback processes (Allen & Mills, 2016; Jantori, et al., 2018). Thus, it would not be surprising to see some teachers focusing more on processes and others on products; this is even illustrated in the researchers/participants own approaches to teaching writing:

> **Pern:** I normally start with a writing topic that is applicable to narrative, descriptive, or expository writing. The lesson then moves to brainstorming … normally via a balloon map. After brainstorming, students structure their paragraphs via an outline, including major and minor supporting sentences.
> **Maew:** I also teach students how to expand from a topic sentence that includes a controlling idea in different genres. You mentioned peer editing earlier, I don't use peer editing. For the first draft, I give them feedback by teaching editing. I mark grammatical mistakes, such as subject-verb agreement … I also give them feedback on organization. Before submitting the final draft, they see me individually if they need further explanations.
> **Pern:** So, is this a process-based approach? Can you elaborate? If not, what approach did you implement in your writing classroom?
> **Maew:** I believe that before they write, they should have a thesis statement and then expand upon the idea.
> **Korn**: After you have introduced the topics and instructions, do students come back to you to clarify instructions or rubrics?
> **Pern:** Generally, they come back to me to clarify the format or their writing ideas; they don't come back for explanations of rubrics or assessment criteria.
> **Korn**: The same here … And I do not use the process approach. I just follow what instructional guidelines say … but I really wish to know more about the process approach.

Pern, who works mainly on EMI programs, focuses on processes: "writing is actually not a matter of English language learning, but originating and elaborating organized ideas", he states. For Maew, who mainly teaches EFL students, the focus is on form and function: "sentence structure … before scaffolding to more complex levels: a paragraph and an essay level". Korn,

meanwhile, follows guidelines: "I consult a teacher's coursebook where there are already suggested instructional methods and activities" he notes, "I just add my ideas and exercises related to controversial issues." Such diverse approaches to teaching writing in Thailand are common (Jantori et al., 2018; Ka-Kan-Dee & Kaur, 2015; Loan, 2019; Rakpa, 2014), and as in previous studies' findings, the researchers/participants also made frequent references to pair work, group discussions/debates, explanations, illustrations, and text analysis as they moved between processes (focus-on-techniques/strategies), products (focus-on-form/accuracy), and text-types (focus-on-functions/genres).

A Disconnect between Expectation and Reality

All three researchers/participants mentioned the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and its role as a national English language standard in Thailand. Specifically, they questioned if such levels were being met by the time their students left university:

> **Maew:** Our students' English proficiency is not that high (most of them are A2 level on the CEFR), but we do expect them to write effectively at the sentence level.
> **Pern:** Same, Most of my students: are supposedly already at A2 level. The university expects them to be B1 after graduation. I don't know why there isn't an exit-exam.
> **Korn:** We have an exit exam and students need to be B1 before they graduate. However, this exam is not mandatory. Mostly, it is requested by faculties that want/need to know their students' English proficiency before graduating …
> **Maew:** For writing, most of the General English [EFL] students and even some of the English-majors [CLIL/EMI] seem to be lower than B1 when graduating. To get B2, they are expected to be able to write detailed texts on a variety of subjects, as well as synthesize and evaluate information and arguments. Ultimately, I think CEFR standards are not suitable for Thailand, and it's unfair to use it to classify Thai students' English proficiency levels.

As highlighted above, none of the researcher/participants believe that B1 writing proficiency level is attainable for all their students, let alone B2 level. Maew even suggests, "CEFR standards are not suitable for Thailand"—a sentiment echoed by other Thai-based scholars (Hiranburana, et al., 2017).

As well as a disconnection between language proficiency expectations and realities, the researchers/participants also commented on the expected use of English in classrooms and the reality of needing to code switch:

> **Maew:** The TQF1 [Thailand Qualification Framework level 1] specifies that English-majors be equivalent to C1 upon graduation, which is a challenge because the average proficiency of our students upon enrollment ranges from A2 to B2. Another concern is the use of EMI on courses like *Introduction to Literature* … many students ask me to explain content in Thai.
> **Pern:** I code switch between Thai and English even in my EMI class.
> **Maew:** Yes, it's unavoidable. For writing classes, I give them clear explanations and let them ask in Thai. Their English is not strong enough. So, code switching is used even though the course is specified as EMI.
> **Korn:** Especially when it comes to project instructions. I need to explain 100% in Thai or students will not understand fully. However, this does not happen when I teach higher-level students, such as medical or dental students.

The issue of how much English should be used in EMI classrooms is still a contentious one (Pun et al., 2022) and, as highlighted above, there is often a need to switch to the students' first language. This is further highlighted in another discussion regarding EFL and CLIL classes:

> **Korn:** Many students don't know how to construct proper sentences, so I try to scaffold and simplify the content. I do this by using the L1 (Thai) most of the time to ensure that students get what I mean.
> **Pern:** In your opinion, should we teach writing using L1, or both L1 and L2?
> **Korn:** If your students are at A2 or B1 level, it is better to use more L1, but if your students are at B2 level and beyond, then L2 80% and L1 20% are fine based on my experience.

It seems that the use of the L1, rather than a hindrance, is a necessity in some of the researchers/participants' writing classrooms. This is perhaps unsurprising given that Thailand's overall English proficiency is consistently low in worldwide rankings (EF Education First, 2022). For instance, in 2018, Thailand's average TOEIC score was 478, placing it 47 out of 49 countries (ETS, 2018), and its average IELTS score was 5.98 (IELTS, 2018)—with an average score of 5.5, the writing component scored the lowest.

Writing Skills Are Marginalized in Thai Curriculums

In the following exchange, the researchers/participants highlight that writing is only taught as a standalone course to CLIL/EMI students in their universities, with EFL students experiencing writing instruction alongside listening, speaking, and reading.

> **Korn:** In my department, there is no standalone-writing course—speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills are taught together in one course.
> **Pern:** I am quite lucky because I teach in the Business English Department, which has a standalone writing course.
> **Maew:** There is no standalone English writing subject at my university, except for English-major students.
> **Korn:** I only teach business email writing, but I feel happy about it because I can teach writing tips and techniques, as well as business content.

The extract above highlights how writing is prioritized in the three different contexts in various ways, each of which come with specific top-down policy mandates that often complicate teaching practices, as shown in the following exchange.

> **Pern:** The trend of English language learning in Thailand is focused more on English for Specific Purposes or ESP, which promotes English for communicative purposes.
> **Maew:** It should be like that. However, for our BA in English, content is emphasized, while for General Education and Business English programs communicative skills are emphasized over content. Yet, many English majors comment that they don't understand why they should learn literature and linguistics. They seem to desire more ESP courses, but we can't do anything since the TQF1 strictly specifies what courses should focus on.
> **Korn:** While our TQF1 focuses on communicative skills, writing seems to be marginalized for all English subjects at my university. This does not seem to correspond with the TQF's purpose. I feel

like students should study writing more. Pern, what about your Business English program?
Pern: I have proposed two writing courses, but they [the committee in charge of TQF compliance] commented that compulsory subjects should focus on content—Business English and Communication in particular. Therefore, an explicit focus on writing skills is only in elementary courses.

The above exchanges point out an inherent tension between students' desires/needs and policy recommendations (TQFs) in terms of balancing communicative skills (ESP) and general specific content knowledge. The TQF system was effectively an adaptation of a system already in place in the UK and Australia (Sinlarat, et al., 2009), yet numerous scholars have criticized its lack of flexibility and appropriateness, especially regarding the social sciences (Tamronglak, 2020). Moreover, if we also consider that CEFR levels are often included in TQF documentation as a reference point for English proficiency goals, there seems to be a double layering of perhaps inappropriate objectives for teachers/students to deal with.

Overall, the perceptions of these Thai lecturers to teaching English language writing were somewhat aligned regarding the characteristics of an "ideal" writing teacher and unrealistic top-down policy mandates. For example, they all questioned the levels that students were expected to achieve and the usefulness of TQF and CEFR objectives in achieving such levels. Moreover, they highlighted how such expectations are perhaps more difficult to achieve when writing takes a back seat to other skills. Perhaps most interestingly, they all approached writing pedagogy in different ways by shifting across a process–product cline that seemingly aligned with the students that they taught (i.e., EFL, CLIL, or EMI).

Reported Challenges and Coping Strategies

In this section, the participants share their perceptions (as persons who do not have ELT-based degrees but have become EFL teachers) toward the challenges of teaching English writing in Thai universities.

Lack of Institutional Support

We begin our discussion of a lack of institutional support from the perspective of psychological challenges.

Korn: Sometimes, I am not motivated to mark students' writing. It is a lot of work and effort to construct good feedback. It would be great if I could receive training in how to teach writing that included psychological strategies for staying focused and motivated when giving feedback.
Mareedayar: I agree. It is tiring work. In my case, I spent almost a week reviewing how to teach a basic essay step-by-step because I did not know where to start.
Pern: It is tough for me too. It seems that many local teachers like us lack experience and expertise in L2 writing instruction. It would be great if we were offered a short training course on teaching writing.

In the first instance, this exchange highlights the emotional toll of giving written feedback, which is often referred to as "exhausting and psychologically and emotionally draining" (Lee, 2019, p. 2) and leaves many teachers feeling disappointed and angry (Yu et al., 2021). In Thailand, many teachers are locally sourced, and thus for them there is the added challenge of giving comprehensive, content-driven feedback in a second language (Jantori et al., 2018). In the second instance, the comments above highlight a lack of institutional support for professional

development. One way to develop more rewarding techniques for giving feedback is through classroom inquiry (Loan, 2019), yet self-discovery for these researchers/participants seems to be confined to planning and teaching lessons, as highlighted in the following extract.

> **Maew**: The first time I taught argumentative essay writing was so stressful. I learned some things from my Masters, but I did not have much experience in writing argumentative essays, let alone teaching them. They [the course coordinators] just gave me the teaching material, and, yeah, I was speechless but had to accept it. I burned the midnight oil and learned what to teach my students. Luckily, I survived my first lesson. It would be wonderful if there were training.
> **Pern:** Yes, courses on how to teach English writing effectively should be provided.
> **Korn:** I also think that additional guidance on how to teach receptive skills courses should be offered at the same time, because such foundational skills can be bridged to productive skills such as speaking and writing.
> **Pern:** I agree. If possible, teacher training and receptive skills should be promoted simultaneously. Yet, I have not seen the four skills equally treated.
> **Maew:** Agree. Instead of training for assessment stuff, this kind of training is very important and needs to be provided … Luckily, I found a teacher guidebook providing instructions and teaching techniques. I followed them first and then studied by myself from other writing textbooks.

The three teachers all agree that training in receptive skills, such as reading and listening, should be offered because they can bridge to productive skills. More tellingly, however, there is little mention in their autoethnographies of assistance given by their departments or institutions, which aligns with the findings of Bowen et al. (2021), where English teachers at one large Thai university relied on their own initiative to develop requisite skills for teaching on English language courses.

Assessing Writing in a Fair and Equitable Way

The researchers/participants agreed that assessing writing was a difficult and time-consuming task, especially in courses that emphasize content over language:

> **Pern:** I think it is difficult for teachers to evaluate students' writing performances on a quantitative basis when it comes to content.
> **Maew:** I evaluate my students' ideas by considering how they logically organize ideas and support them. I look at overall ideas instead of quantifying individual features.
> **Korn:** Yes, quantitatively, it is hard to assess writing performance … Thus, as you both suggest, perhaps the solution is to make sure that students' ideas are logically organized, and the rubrics are clear.
> **Pern:** There is still a problem though, since writing courses consume a lot of time and effort when it comes to teaching preparation and evaluation.

The views expressed above accord with the primacy of bigger picture issues such as cohesion and cohesion of ideas and content rather than surface level features (see Bowen & Thomas, 2020). Moreover, the participants' views align with the findings of Hopper and Bowen (forthcoming), who surveyed 40 teachers on their preferred use of written feedback in another university in Thailand. They found that "the top two choices for teachers showed a greater concern for "bigger picture" issues" (p. 26), particularly organisation, ideas, and content. More interestingly,

though, the researchers/participants in the current study also referred to feedback via oral exchanges, where students could explain the purposes of sentences or paragraphs as elaborated in the following exchange.

> **Pern:** After a genre analysis task, the students start composing their first draft. This is followed by peer editing, revising, and teacher editing.
> **Korn:** What did you focus on? Grammar? Word choices?
> **Pern:** Most important are ideas. I try to avoid commenting on every grammatical error, as I'm aware of demotivating my students. However, often, there are so many grammatical mistakes that I cannot not understand what they have written; thus, I often need to ask my students to clarify points in person.
> **Maew:** I also consult with students on overall ideas, although I also mark papers using symbols such as s-v, vf (verb form), etc. and write an explanation why it's not correct.
> **Korn:** In my business email writing class, I correct students' papers through Google docs, which helps me autocorrect grammar mistakes, and I just put some short explanation why it is not correct. This saves me a lot of time.

In essence, switching between macro- and micro-level concerns highlights how the participants are comfortable moving away from localized (concrete) errors, such as grammar and spelling, and toward commentary on global errors, which is often not the case among lesser-experienced or lesser-qualified teachers (Jantori, et al., 2018; Junqueira & Payant, 2015). More interestingly, though, these teachers show a desire to move between giving direct (i.e., error correction) and indirect (metalinguistic) feedback, which accords with recent research into the flexible practices of many EFL writing teachers (Cheng & Zhang, 2021; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019).

Another point that the three researchers/participants agreed upon was the importance of two-way feedback in writing classrooms, as the following excerpt highlights.

> **Pern:** I think most Thai teachers are still not aware of the democratic way of consultation. They rarely permit students to defend arguments or language choices; most of their feedback is one-way correction.
> **Korn:** Right, I wanted to do two-way dialogues in my class, but I usually have 50–60 students in a class, plus task rubrics do not allow for two-way dialogue on final drafts, so democratic consultation is a bit impractical in my case.
> **Maew:** I agree that there should be democratic consultation. However, only a few students come and seek extra advice. I told my English-major students to come and get their feedback in person, and at the same time, they could express any disagreements on my marking. Only a few came.
> **Pern:** I think that even though the teacher tries to open the door for democratic consultation, Thai learners are still not familiar with it. One reason could be the power relationship between the teacher and the students.

In Thailand, a teacher is often regarded as a knowledge giver, and thus much education is still primarily transmission based. Indeed, many Thai students are afraid to voice their concerns, even when they think the teacher is wrong (Nguyen, 2011). Thus, while these researchers/participants see the value in "democratic dialogue", they also recognize that top-down constraints (i.e., class sizes, policy documents, and the legacy of a transmission-based education system) often make this feedback strategy impractical.

Overall, the researchers/participants demonstrated a keen awareness of the challenges in their writing classrooms and adapted flexible practices to suit their own individual contexts. Many

of their challenges overlapped and concerned a lack of institutional support for professional development, students' relatively low language proficiency levels, the emotional toll of giving detailed feedback, the difficulty in providing objective, quantifiable feedback, and the considerable investment they must make in learning text-types, genres, and even writing techniques. Moreover, the resultant coping strategies they employ seem to highlight a tension between teacher-centeredness and learner-centeredness, as well as language accuracy and content development. The first tension is perhaps not that surprising if we consider Sangnapaboworn's (2018) argument that even after two decades of implementation, only a relatively small percentage of Thai teachers has embraced the concept of a learner-centered classroom. The second tension, meanwhile, is perhaps related to (a) the fact that the Thai education system still favours an embedded assessment culture that is common in Southeast Asia, and (b) the primacy given to language over content (or vice versa) is often in flux for these teachers as they move between EFL, CLIL, and EMI.

Conclusion

With a small sample size, we acknowledge that generalizations cannot be drawn from our study. Nonetheless, we hope to have contributed to the field of teaching second language writing by exploring the complexities of moving between EFL, CLIL, and EMI roles, as well as expanding upon the dearth of studies that give a voice to the authentic lived experiences of local English language teachers.

Our first research question explored the perceptions of the three researchers/participants to teaching English language writing in Thai universities. Results showed somewhat of a disconnection between what they perceived as an "ideal" writing teacher and what they were able to do in their own classrooms. Specifically, they are constrained by a strict, top-down framework that focuses on a hodgepodge of content, skills, and perhaps unrealistic language goals, while their teaching practices are necessarily shaped through their own language proficiencies and lack of training in teaching writing. Nevertheless, they also highlighted several flexible working practices, including self-discovery, movement between writing products and processes, collaborative dialogues with students (including the use of their L1), and a keen awareness of the difficulties that their students face when learning to write in English. Consequently, we have highlighted how three relatively unexperienced and untrained English language teachers—who represent much of the workforce in this part of the world—position themselves and their teaching of English writing in light of complex, hybrid roles.

Our second research question investigated the reported challenges and coping strategies in teaching English language writing classes in Thai universities that run EFL, EMI, and CLIL programs. Through an exploration of the three researchers'/participants' autoethnographies, we witnessed the emergence of several challenges that were shared across all contexts: a lack of institutional support; students' relatively low language proficiency levels; the laborious nature of giving detailed feedback; and the need for objective measures of assessment. In this light, we have added further evidence to the eclectic nature of teaching English writing in Thailand, as well as contributed to calls that seek to recognize the pedagogical value of others' voices, especially those of local teachers who often go unheard when it comes to the internationalisation of higher education in Southeast Asia. Moreover, we hope to have further highlighted the potential for joint autoethnographies to share/explore teaching challenges, practices, and successes, as well as their potential to be reflective tools for those participating in such research.

There are a number of limitations to this study. First, although the researchers/participants were quite candid in their autoethnographies, the very nature of this project removed the possibility of anonymity; thus, we recognize that, in some instances, they may have shied away from giving socially undesirable answers. Second, we purposively selected a rather homogenous sample of Thai teachers in the hope that their autoethnographies would overlap to an extent. Thus, we recognize that our findings may be specific to this age group, experience level, and socioeconomic status—in Thailand, for example, older, more senior teachers are afforded a very high level of agency, thus

their opinions/practices may differ. As well as addressing any limitations, future studies may want to focus on multiple data collection tools, such as observations and policy document analysis, or perhaps consider an intervention-based study that addresses some of the concerns raised in this study.

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Endnotes

[1] We see writing as especially important, as most assessment in EMI and CLIL programs is done through writing, and numerous studies have shown how poor writing skills can negatively affect students' scores independently of content knowledge (Crossley, 2020).

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