

Comparative Analysis of Writing Skill in English and Thai

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Abstract

This study aims to conduct a comparative analysis of the English and Thai writing abilities of undergraduate students majoring in English-related programs. The collected data consists of the test papers written by the population of 100 students. This research highlights both differences and similarities found in writing skill between English and Thai test papers with respect to writing skill characteristics. Comparing essay and composition writing, the latter is with the lower score in this study. Moreover, the most observable finding in this study is syntax with the lowest rate characteristics for writing composition, either in English or Thai, across the employed sample. In conclusion, the findings of this study indicate that the students exhibit weaknesses in the syntactic aspects of English writing, which may be due to the educational planning or policies of their basic education providers or the related education provider center in which they are enrolled.

Keywords: *Writing skill, Thai language, Writing characteristics, English language*

Introduction

Proficiency in writing, particularly in a second language such as English, continues to present a significant challenge for university students in Thailand. This study aims to explore the linguistic factors that influence students' writing performance in both English and Thai. As background, writing is a key productive skill in language learning, employed to convey meaning through written symbols. It involves organizing ideas, adhering to language norms, and addressing the reader's needs. Writing is often described as a demanding cognitive task, requiring coordination of multiple components such as ideas, linguistic conventions, content, and motor skills, often involving working memory (Hermansson and Lindgren, 2020). This complexity makes it difficult to focus on all aspects at once. At the sentence level, these include control over contents, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, spelling, and letter formation. Beyond crafting individual sentences, a writer must effectively structure and integrate information into cohesive

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and coherent paragraphs and overall text. A more recent perspective on writing as a cognitive process is reflected in the work of Purdue University Global's Academic Success Center (2020), where writing is described as a multi-layered task that extends beyond mere transcription. The Science of Writing (2023) highlights the complexity of writing by underscoring the importance of cognitive planning and organizing, which directly supports coherent communication. At advanced stages, writing aims for refined expression through specialized vocabulary and polished structure. This process, as also noted by Purdue University Global's Academic Success Center (2020), supports the organization and development of thoughts and often stimulates the generation of new ideas, which highlights the cognitive complexity of writing.

Accordingly, writing can be viewed as a complex process requiring various skills, including mental, psychological, rhetorical, and critical abilities. It involves not only transferring ideas from mind to text but also generate deeper meaning and achieving clarity of expression; it demands conscious intellectual effort, which usually must be sustained over a considerable period of time. Moreover, responding to student writing is a demanding task, requiring significant time and intellectual effort, greatly influencing students' perceptions of their writing abilities. The Princeton Writing Program (2024) emphasizes the lasting impact of teacher feedback, noting that effective responses foster self-critical thinking and improvement. This reflects a broader pedagogical shift from punitive grading to constructive feedback aimed at enhancing the writing process. The studies indicate that employers highly value effective writing, as it is essential for clear communication in business operations, from drafting reports to collaborative teamwork. Where English is the primary language of exchange, strong English proficiency is associated with improved job success (Rana and Shaikh, 2024).

Students often perceive writing as one of the most challenging language skills, particularly in academic settings and examinations. Typically assigned as homework, writing is judged by teachers, prompting students to improve through independent learning. Many students treat English primarily as a tool for academic success rather than as a language to master. Educators have increasingly voiced concern over declining student writing abilities—a concern shared by this study. Therefore, the study aims to identify the specific linguistic factors influencing students' writing skills in both English and Thai.

Objectives of the study

University students often encounter various challenges when striving to enhance their English writing skills based on their backgrounds, proficiency levels, and specific course demands. Students majoring in English frequently face ongoing difficulties in enhancing their writing abilities. Common issues involve a restricted vocabulary range, grammatical and syntactic inaccuracies, and a lack of clarity in expressing ideas. Additionally, some students lack confidence in their writing abilities, leading to anxiety and procrastination, further impacting the quality of their work, due to cultural differences and language barriers, especially when adapting to academic writing norms. In light of these challenges, the current study is directed by the following objectives:

- 1) To investigate the English writing skill characteristics and weaknesses in the Thai students majoring in English.
- 2) To propose guidelines for improving the English writing skill characteristics in the Thai students majoring in English.

Conceptual Framework

Writing skills characteristics, which serve as evaluative criteria in this study, was classified as being either a discourse characteristic, a syntactic characteristic, or a lexical characteristic based on the framework established by Breland and Jones (1982). These classification, as illustrated in table 1 below, were applied to both English and Thai writing samples (if applicable in the Thai language).

Table 1. Writing Skills Characteristics as Criteria

Discourse Characteristics	Syntactic Characteristics	Lexical Characteristics
1. Statement of thesis (theme)	10. Pronoun usage	16. Level of diction
2. Overall organization	11. Subject-verb agreement	17. Range of vocabulary
3. Rhetorical strategy	12. Parallel structure	18. Precision of diction
4. Noteworthy ideas	13. Idiomatic usage	19. Figurative language
5. Supporting material	14. Punctuation	20. Spelling
6. Tone and attitude	15. Use of modifiers	
7. Paragraphing and transition		
8. Sentence variety		

Table 1. Writing Skills Characteristics as Criteria

Discourse Characteristics	Syntactic Characteristics	Lexical Characteristics
9. Sentence logic		

With respect to the scope of the study, considering a society of the students with strong knowledge in the Thai language, the sample has been selected from the senior students majoring in English in the faculty of Humanities during the first of the 2024 academic year in a university in Thailand. As illustrated in figure 1, the study begins with the collection of writing samples from these students, encompassing both English and Thai compositions. These writing samples are subjected to a detailed assessment, based on the Breland and Jones' criteria, 1982, conducted by qualified readers. The evaluation process involves analyzing the quality, structure, vocabulary usage, and clarity of ideas presented in the texts. The resulted findings based on the readers' evaluations for each language include common patterns of strengths and weaknesses observed in the students' English and Thai writing. Additionally, the study may uncover shared challenges or distinctive features unique to each language context. The collected findings are then subjected to data analysis using a combined methodological approach. This step focuses on writing skill characteristics, enabling the researcher to interpret and compare the linguistic and structural elements across both languages systematically. In conclusion, the analysis highlights the key linguistic factors affecting students' writing proficiency in English and Thai. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of interlingual influences and provide practical implications for language teaching and curriculum development.

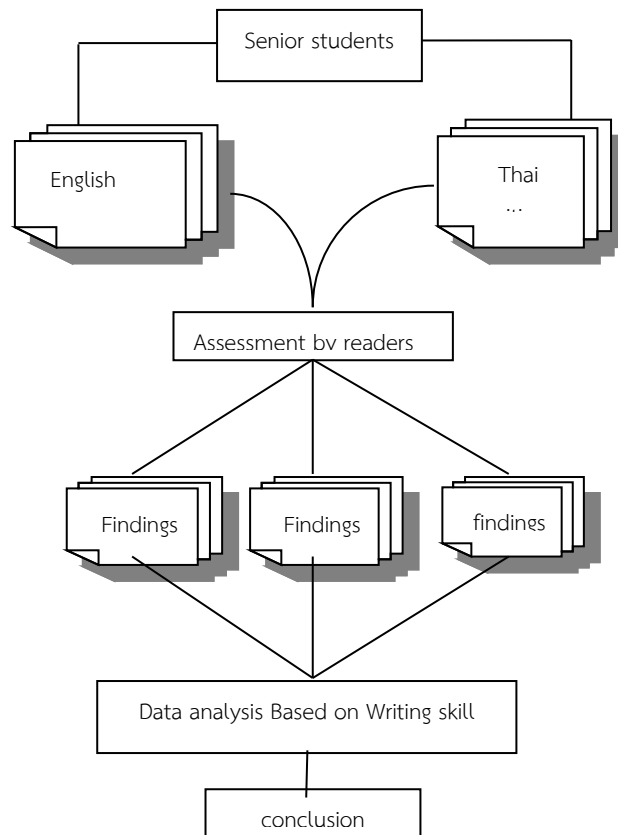


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

Literature Review

This research marks a departure from the conventional approaches found in the reviewed studies, which primarily relied on survey and experimental methods. Previous research predominantly emphasized the identification of students' weaknesses in writing skills through proficiency percentages and teacher motivation assessments, often falling short in pinpointing specific areas for improvement. The literature review provides a comprehensive overview of the existing research and scholarly work in the field, shedding light on the key themes, findings, and gaps that form the backdrop for this study. The study tried to review research reports and journal articles came out in the field of literature and language on writing skills. Among the notable works reviewed, the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data highlighted significant disparities in writing performance among students in various educational settings, emphasizing that students in private schools often outperform their peers in public

schools. Additionally, a recent PISA report (2022) noted that variations in reading and writing skills among 15-year-olds differ significantly based on the type of school attended, indicating that socioeconomic factors and educational environments play crucial roles in student achievement.

In a recent study investigating challenges in writing English academic essays, Seprianus A. Nenotek et al. (2022) identified significant difficulties faced by students across four key areas of academic writing: content, organization, discourse, and mechanics. The most prevalent issues, affecting 97% of students, were related to: 1) crafting a clear thesis statement, 2) connecting ideas coherently, 3) developing ideas effectively, 4) employing appropriate description and cause-effect or comparison-contrast structures, 5) composing a practical introduction, 6) formulating a strong topic sentence, and 7) using references accurately. A recent study by Suhaimi and Musdizal (2022) investigated the effectiveness of the Consciousness-Raising method in improving EFL students' writing skills in Indonesia. The research highlighted how this instructional approach not only enhanced students' writing structure and expression but also fostered greater independence in their writing processes. The findings indicate a positive correlation between the Consciousness-Raising method and improved writing proficiency among learners.

In their 2024 study, Michelle Mae D. Jimenez et al. explored the challenges college students encountered in academic writing at a school in Ozamiz City. The results identified five primary areas of difficulty: grammar and language usage, organizing information, accessing sufficient reliable sources, vocabulary challenges, and managing time constraints. The study concluded that students struggled with proper grammar and language use, structuring their writing coherently, locating relevant information, selecting appropriate vocabulary, and effectively managing their time during the writing process. Suharyat and Lusiana (2023) investigated the challenges associated with learning English through writing skills within the Cambridge Curriculum in Indonesia. The study's findings reveal that among the four language skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—the results for reading and writing did not meet expectations. With a maximum Cambridge English score of 6, the writing skill assessment yielded a score of 3, underscoring a need for English teacher qualifications to align with Cambridge standards. In another related study, Arihastha (2023) investigated the challenges faced by non-English major EFL learners at Mae Fah Luang University, Thailand, in argumentative writing, along with the factors contributing to these challenges. Analysis of the data revealed that most

students struggled with content (idea generation and development), grammar (tense accuracy and diverse sentence structures), organization (formulating claims, supporting evidence, and conclusions), vocabulary (limited lexicon and challenges with academic vocabulary), and mechanics (spelling, punctuation, and capitalization). Key contributing factors included limited practice time, unfamiliarity with topics, and inadequate pre-university writing instruction.

This research distinguishes itself from the studies reviewed in that the aforementioned works were primarily conducted using survey-based or experimental methodologies often presenting students' writing weaknesses through general proficiency percentages or attributing poor performance to a lack of teacher motivation. These studies, however, seldom identified specific areas in which students required targeted improvement. In contrast, this study adopts an action research approach, focusing on the development of students writing skills through a descriptive analysis of the frequency of different grammatical levels in essays or compositions, ultimately identifying the optimal starting point for effective writing instruction. To achieve these objectives and gain a deeper understanding of the approach, it is imperative to outline the methodology employed in this study.

Methodology

The selected main area in this study is the writing skill which involves three domains of discourse, syntactic and lexical characteristics based on the Breland and Jones' criteria, 1982. The assessment scores derived from the test papers provide a data population involving the writing skills.

- Data sample

For the data sample, a total of 100 senior Thai (and not international) students majoring in English were selected for this study, regardless of varieties in race, religion, or sex, targeting those enrolled in advanced writing courses at the senior level to ensure relevant language proficiency and writing experience. The sample size of 100 allows for basic statistical reliability and helps reduce the margin of error in descriptive statistics, making the findings more generalizable to the larger population of English majors within similar educational contexts. Although formal ethical approval was not required for this study, all ethical standards were observed, including securing informed consent, maintaining participant confidentiality, and following the university's general guidelines for research involving human subjects.

- **Research Tools**

In the initial phase of the study, written test papers by the students, in the Thai and English languages respectively, were employed as tools or instruments of collecting. The collected test papers were classified into three main groups: essay, composition, and comprehension + grammar, all in Thai and English languages. The inclusion of diverse test formats served to enhance the reliability and validity of the assessment and to support the findings resulted from the data in each group. Furthermore, the results obtained from the Thai test papers were employed as a comparative reference to assess the validity and reliability of the findings from the English papers. The study checked if the findings obtained from the English data test papers would be the same as the Thai data test papers.

- **Data Collection**

The texts written by the students and the scores resulting from the assessments were considered as the core data for analysis. In essay assessment, the students have been asked to write an opinion essay whether the opinion is supported with reasons and/or examples. For the composition assessment, the students have been asked to read a passage and describe it with their own words through variety of their sentences. In the comprehension section, the students have been asked to read a passage and answer the followed questions through multiple choices. For the grammar test, the students have been asked to find the correct answer, with respect to grammar, punctuation, and vocabulary. The scores resulted through the assessments done by the fluent and authorized Thai and English reviewers and readers have been considered as the data for the collection. The assessments were carried out by reviewers who were fluent in Thai or English and officially authorized by the School of Humanities, either as faculty members or appointed evaluators with expertise in language assessment. The characteristics of the writing skill (discourse, syntactic and lexical characteristics based on Breland & Jones, 1982) has been scored by the authorized reviewers and / or readers according to rating module of 1 to 5 representing: (1) Poor, (2) Fair, (3) Average, (4) Good and (5) Excellent.

- **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed characteristically with respect to discourse, syntax and lexicon applications, as mentioned above, respectively through statistical descriptive methodology. The collected test papers were classified into three main parts: essay, composition, and grammar together with comprehension tests, all in Thai and English. The study also conducted qualitative

survey attempting to discover as much information as possible by providing detailed descriptions of the phenomena rather than statistical calculations, through collaborating the numerical findings into a qualitative analysis.

Each test paper in this study was evaluated according to three predetermined criteria: discourse, syntactic, and lexical features. These criteria were assessed individually using a rating scale ranging from 1 to 5, corresponding to levels from poor to excellent. The frequency of each score among the students was recorded, and the mean score for each criterion was calculated across the sample within each category of test paper—namely, essay, composition, and comprehension with grammar. This procedure was applied to both Thai and English test papers, and the resulting data were subsequently compared to facilitate further analysis.

Findings And Discussion

According to the statistical analysis of the findings, both the English and Thai writings indicate some similarities in writing essay and writing composition (see Table 2 below). It has been found that essay writing ability, in both English and Thai, yielded higher scores (on the scale from 1 to 5), with scores of 2.795 for Thai and 1.897 for English, compared to composition writing ability, which scored 2.744 for Thai and 1.871 for English; while the resulted findings showed a significant difference in multiple choice tests between English and Thai test papers, which scored 4.722 for Thai and 1.869 for English.

Table 2. Comparison of Mean Scores between English and Thai Test Papers
(score 1 to 5)

Score	Thai	English
Essay (PI)	2.795	1.897
Composition (PII)	2.744	1.871
Grammar + comprehension (PIII)	4.722	1.869

The following bar chart (Figure 2), based on Table 2, indicates that the students were able to write essay better than composition, either in English or Thai, while their grammar and comprehension knowledge in Thai were considerably better than English.

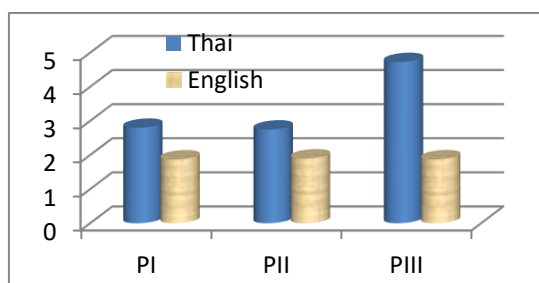


Figure 2. Comparison of Mean Scores between English and Thai Test Papers (score 1 to 5)

For better clarity, the data illustrated in a line chart (Figure 3) indicates that the knowledge of writing essay and composition are in the same level, with a difference that English knowledge is lower than Thais, across the sample, which is natural as their mother tongue is Thai. However, the line in the chart has found a sharp upward breaking compared to the steady curve related to English. It illustrates higher knowledge of the students in comprehension and grammar in Their native language, or in the other words, their knowledge has been continued as a steady curve showing low level of their knowledge in comprehension and grammar in English; and it has not followed the breaking curve in Thai writing.

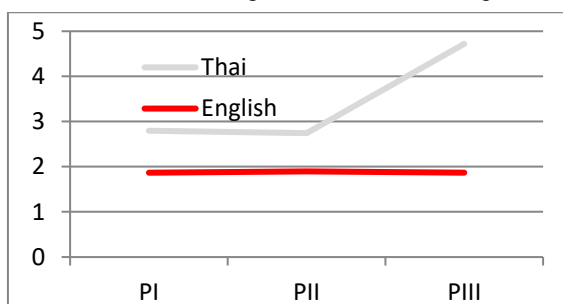


Figure 3. Comparison of Mean Scores between English and Thai Test Papers (score 1 to 5)

In a deeper investigation based on Breland & Jones' criteria (1982), and referring to the findings resulted from the tests in English and Thai writings, it indicates syntax with the lowest level among the writing skills characteristics based on Table 3, either in the English or Thai languages.

Table 3. Mean Scores in Composition Writing Characteristics (score 1 to 5)

Writing Characteristics	Thai	English
Discourse	2.889	1.815
Syntax	2.481	1.667
Lexicology	2.556	2

It means that the students under this study across three main test groups of essay, composition, and comprehension + grammar, were generally weak in pronoun usage, subject-verb agreement, parallel structure, idiomatic usage, punctuation, and use of modifiers (the characteristics of syntactical criterion). The following line chart (Figure 4) provides the reader with the mentioned similarity very clear.

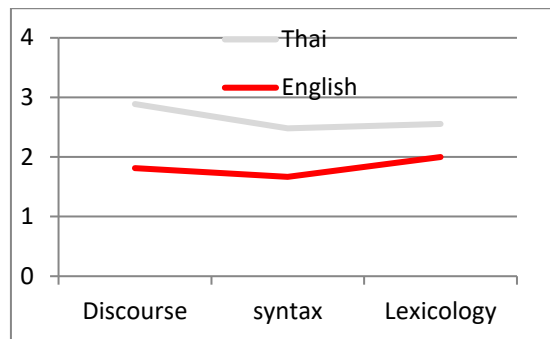


Figure 4. Comparison of English and Thai Composition Writing Characteristics in the students (score 1 to 5)

Accordingly, syntax is distinguished by the lowest point of the line graph in both the English and the Thai language assessments, with this difference that its level in Thai is higher than English. These two curves illustrate parallel coordinates from which it is observed that the findings resulted from the assessment of the writing skills in the Thai language may confirm and validate the same in the English language, through the sample of this study. The results compare writing skills in English and Thai regardless of benchmarking the students' performance against any external standards or norms.

It illustrates that low level in syntax is the main factor to lower the level of writing skills in composition, either in the English or Thai languages. The low mean scores in English writing skill, generally, and the lower scores in writing composition, partially, and also the lowest scores in syntactic characteristics of writing skill, specifically, for the chosen students who were studying in English-related majors, highlight a serious application or modification of a teaching/learning system or method during the academic semesters.

Furthermore, this study provides the education researchers with the knowledge of teaching English methods and the related problems for Thai speakers, helping them find the appropriate methods or approaches. From the previous discussions, it indicates that for the practical purposes of learning planning, language must be combined with the updated science

and technology planning. In language planning areas, in particular, all learning developers and subject field specialists have a key role, and they should be made aware of their responsibilities.

With respect to the literature review discussed above in which English writing skill has been illustrated as a typical problem among the university students, this study is indeed considered as a step into recognizing the hidden problem areas of writing English ability which may fill the gap detected in the previous researches. Presenting descriptions of the writing skill abilities of such students in the English and the Thai language comparatively, together with furnishing linguists and researchers with knowledge of writing skill characteristics is considered as preliminary step to deal with the challenges in teaching and learning a second/foreign language process. Here are some examples illustrating grammar and syntax errors commonly made by Thai students in English writing:

Original Sentence:

‘Many Thai tourists goes to the beautiful beaches in Phuket, and they was enjoying the sunshine.’

Explanation of Errors:

- a. *Subject-Verb Agreement:* In the sentence, ‘Many Thai tourists goes’ is incorrect as ‘goes’ is the third-person singular form of the verb ‘go,’ but ‘Many Thai tourists’ is a plural subject. The correct form should be ‘Many Thai tourists go.’
- b. *Verb Tense Consistency:* There is a tense inconsistency in the sentence. ‘goes’ is in the present tense, while ‘was enjoying’ is in the past continuous tense. To maintain tense consistency, you could use either present or past tense throughout the sentence. For example, you could write, ‘Many Thai tourists go to the beautiful beaches in Phuket, and they enjoy the sunshine.’
- c. *Sentence Clarity:* The sentence lacks clarity due to the combination of present and past tenses. Its essential to make sure that the timeline of actions is clear to the reader.
- d. *Corrected Sentence:* ‘Many Thai tourists go to the beautiful beaches in Phuket, and they enjoy the sunshine.’

Also, here’s an example illustrating vocabulary and word choice issues often encountered by Thai students in English writing:

Original Sentence:

‘The restaurant had a very enormous menu with a lot of big food choices, and I was so starving that I ordered a gigantic pizza with lots of cheese and tomato sauce on top.’

Explanation of Errors:

- a. *Limited Vocabulary:* The sentence uses repetitive adjectives like ‘very enormous,’ ‘big,’ and ‘gigantic,’ which can make the writing less engaging and imprecise. This repetition indicates a limited vocabulary.
- b. *Word Choice:* While the employed words are not necessarily incorrect, they could be replaced with more precise or varied vocabulary to improve the quality of the writing. For example, ‘enormous’ and ‘gigantic’ are synonyms, and using both in the same sentence is redundant.
- c. *Idiomatic Expressions:* The phrase ‘I was so starving’ is not a common English expression. Instead, native English speakers would typically say ‘I was very hungry’ or ‘I was starving.’
- d. *Corrected Sentence:* ‘The restaurant offered an extensive menu with a wide range of food options, and I was extremely hungry, so I ordered a large pizza with plenty of cheese and tomato sauce on top.’

The findings of the study have unveiled a significant issue that students enrolled in English-related majors at the university typically exhibit moderately proficient writing skills in English. This revelation prompts us to consider several potential problems or reasons behind the writing skill deficiencies, and they can be explained as follows:

(1) Problem with the students:

This implies that the issue could originate from the students themselves. They might face challenges in acquiring and applying English writing skills, possibly due to factors such as prior education, motivation, or individual abilities.

(2) Problem with the education provider:

It may be systemic issues within the institution that need addressing.

a. Problem with the education system:

Within the broader education system, there might be shortcomings that affect students' English writing skills. These could relate to curriculum design, evaluation methods, or policies that hinder effective writing instruction.

I. Problem with the student recruiting system: This subcategory points to the possibility that the university admission process may not adequately assess the incoming

students English writing abilities. Consequently, students with inadequate proficiency levels may be admitted.

II. Problem with the teaching schedule or curriculum planning: Within the university, there could be issues with courses structures or the content of the curriculum. It might be the case that the teaching schedule doesn't allow sufficient time for developing writing skills, or the curriculum lacks effective writing instruction.

b. Problem with the lecturers:

This subcategory implies that the faculty or instructors at the university could be contributing to the students' writing problems. It might involve their teaching methods, qualifications, or level of engagement with students in the classroom.

Recommendations and suggestions

As a pathology of EFL/ESL teaching or learning approach for the university students, this research focused on a learning skills which is writing skill. The students, researchers, linguists, and education developers are recommended to do further investigations in other skills (reading, speaking, and listening) of learning/teaching a foreign language, especially English, for finding more comprehensive or effective results. Accordingly, recommendations derived from the findings of this study may include: 1) Suggestions for applying the research findings in practice, and 2) Recommendations for future research on the discussed key issues.

Conclusion

The implication of the findings contributes to the understanding of students writing difficulties; and the information obtained enable lecturers to help them in developing substantive knowledge of the writing process to produce effective writing. Therefore, this probable problem will be improved through appropriate extracurricular programs by the university through focusing on syntax errors in writing skill. On the other hand, there might be a problem with recruiting the students for these majors that must be seriously considered by the faculty academic board. The board must employ an appropriate system for recruiting or attracting the students of English majors through adopting an English placement test, together with remedial training programs, before the first semester; or to modify the teaching approach.

It is evident that the pedagogical system employed by the education provider for recruiting English major students and the teaching approach used within their programs require

significant attention and revision. The implications of such issues extend beyond the classroom and could potentially have a profound impact on students' future lives and career prospects. This research aims to shed light on these concerns, particularly from the perspective of writing skills in the context of both the Thai and English languages.

In essence, the outcomes of this research point to an urgent need for educational reforms within the English-related majors at the institution. By reassessing the student recruitment process, enhancing the teaching methods and curriculum planning, and providing support and training for lecturers, the institution can better align its educational objectives with the needs and expectations of its students. Ultimately, this effort will not only improve the students' writing skills but also equip them with the essential tools for success in their future careers, reinforcing the idea that education is a transformative force with the potential to change lives.

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