

Analysis of Thai EFL University Students' Needs in Learning English Paragraph Writing

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Abstract

This quantitative study investigated needs in learning English paragraph writing of 320 students of the Management Sciences Faculty at a Thai public university. A questionnaire was used to collect data about students' learning of English, ability in English paragraph writing, needs in learning English paragraph writing, and preferred styles of learning English paragraph writing. The overall findings revealed that the students were less proficient in writing. Most students had never taken English writing courses. They thought that English paragraph writing was difficult but necessary. Their writing skills were at the moderate level such as using right punctuation and spelling. They had fair understanding of English paragraph writing such as what a paragraph is, how to write an illustration, and components of a paragraph. They would learn English paragraph writing for future work. In learning English paragraph writing, most students preferred to learn to write a description, to be assessed as passed or unpassed, to have 30 students in a class, and to have vocabulary drills. They wanted a three-hour class to be divided into a 90-minute lecture and a 90-minute writing practice. The study suggested that Thai students must learn to write in English since elementary schools. The assessment needs to be revised to motivate Thai students to learn English writing.

Keywords: EFL, English writing, L2 writing, needs analysis, paragraph writing

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Background and Signification of the Research Problem

Students cannot deny that English writing is the necessary skill for them to learn. Graham (2008) denoted that written tests or reports are the tool that teachers use to evaluate students' class performance. Students need to apply writing skills when they learn in content classes. The National Commission on Writing (NCOW) (2004, 2005 as cited in Graham, 2008) asserted an increasing requirement of the writing ability. One must be able to write reports, documents, and others in order to get employed or promoted.

Thai students find English writing difficult for writing involves reading comprehension, analytical skills, and writing skills such as idea organization, grammar, mechanics, and spelling (Potter, 2020). In schools, Thai students are used to rote learning; they tend to memorize or copy what teachers tell them. Since they do not have enough writing practices, they are not confident to write. Graham (2008, 2019) exposed that learning English writing is not successful due to inadequate time. Students are mostly assigned to write short answers instead of longer texts, paragraphs, essays, or compositions.

Past studies indicated difficulties of Thai teachers and students in EFL writing. Dueraman (2015) noted that although Thai students have learned English for at least 10 years at primary and secondary schools, they have never learned to write in English. In Thai universities, non-English major students are required to learn only three basic English courses which does not include writing. Rodsawang (2017) found writing problems of Thai EFL students such as writing styles, grammar, vocabulary, and practicing hours. Meanwhile, Ariyanti and Fitriana (2017) detected problems of English major students in writing English compositions such as grammar, cohesion and coherence, paragraph organization, vocabulary, and misspelling. Nguyen and Suwannabubpha (2021) denoted that in learning EFL writing, Thai students lacked knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Teachers had no language and educative skills in teaching writing. Others included time constraints, scarce resources, and low motivation.

Likewise, the researcher has underwent the problems in teaching English paragraph writing to non-English major students of the Management Sciences Faculty at a Thai public university. The students are required to take three basic English subjects. If they are exempt from any of these, they will choose other general subjects such as English Listening & Speaking, English Reading, and English Paragraph Writing. However, the teaching of the English Paragraph Writing course has never been successful. Few students are eager to learn English paragraph writing.

With a few students enrolling the course, the writing class has to be closed. Most students take other subjects to get better grades for English paragraph writing is difficult for them. Students consequently have difficulties in English writing when they get a job.

To overcome the aforesaid pending problems, the researcher realized the necessity to analyze students' needs in learning English paragraph writing. Hyland (2003) stated that teachers need to know what their learners' needs are. Needs analysis is the method in which learners' learning needs are collected and analyzed to develop an effective course. Richard (2001) proposed that not all learners have positive attitude toward the course, and not all of them have right skills required in the course. Teachers need to make learners know and understand the objectives and teaching methods of the course. Needs analysis is the basis to develop the appropriate course that will respond to learners' needs of learning.

In this study, needs analysis was used to collect information about students' learning of English, ability in English paragraph writing, needs in learning English paragraph writing, and preferred styles of learning English paragraph writing. With the research outcomes, the researcher will know the students' needs, wants, and lacks in learning English paragraph writing and be able to develop the effective English paragraph writing course to meet the students' learning needs. Meanwhile, the students are anticipated to perceive the importance and objectives of learning English paragraph writing.

Research Objective

The research aimed to investigate students' learning of English, ability in English paragraph writing, needs in learning English paragraph writing, and preferred styles of learning English paragraph writing.

Scope of Research

The study focused on the first-year students of the Management Sciences Faculty at a Thai public university. In the first term of the 2023 academic year, the students took the basic English courses required by the university. Thus, the research investigated the students' needs in learning English paragraph writing which is one of their elective subjects after the basic English courses.

Literature Review

1. Needs Analysis

West (1994) stated that in developing a language curriculum, it is important to analyze learners' learning needs to develop an appropriate course syllabus, course structure, teaching methods, teaching materials, and course assessment. Needs analysis gives teachers necessary information about learners in learning a language such as proficiency levels, learning purposes, present problems, frequency of the language usage, and preferred teaching activities. Teachers use the information from the needs analysis to evaluate a present course, plan for a future program, prepare tests and assessment methods, choose right teaching methods, make a course syllabus, develop teaching materials, and others (Richards, 2001).

Hyland (2006) noted that needs analysis is the way in which learners' information is collected, evaluated, and used to set up a course. The information includes learners' needs, lacks, and wants; language ability; learning purposes; and preferred teaching and learning methods. In learning learners' needs, both present situation analysis and target situation analysis are used. The present situation analysis informs learners' present abilities, wants, learning experiences, language skills, and perceptions. The target situation analysis advises future roles, language skills, and knowledge that learners need to function efficiently in a particular field of work.

According to Richards (2001), learners' needs must be analyzed in teaching a language because not all learners have positive attitudes toward a course. Their views of the course are not the same as teachers'. Not all of them have the skills required by the course. Each learner has different motivations to take the course. The success of teaching depends on learners' learning styles. Teachers must make them understand about the course objectives, course structures, and teaching methods. The most common instrument used to collect and analyze learners' needs in learning a language is a questionnaire.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) noted that in teaching a language, course contents can be developed and practiced if learners' information is known such as their knowledge, skills, motivation, and learning situation. John Munby's Communication Needs Processor (CNP) (1978, as cited in Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) provided questions on communication variables used to analyze learners' target needs and learning needs. Target needs are what learners must know to perform effectively in a particular context while learning needs are what learners need to learn to use a language. For instance, a businessperson must know how to write business letters and

communicate effectively in a meeting, so he needs to learn and understand linguistic features used in business.

2. Learning and Teaching Writing Skills

The importance of writing was stated in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) led by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers (2010, as cited in Harris, Graham, & Laud, 2013). The standards proclaim the acquirement of basic writing skills such as handwriting and spelling and the usage of writing in explaining, informing, persuading, building knowledge, and easing learning of other subjects.

Graham (2008) proposed that since writing is a complex skill, students must learn and put much effort and time to write effectively. In schools, most English writing assignments are in short answers instead of longer texts, paragraphs, or essays. In class where assessment is on written tests, students who can write well will get good grades. The writing skill can support students in learning content classes such as history and science. The National Commission on Writing (2004, 2005, as cited in Graham, 2008) noted necessities of writing skills for employment and promotion. Students who do not write well will have difficulties when working.

Previous studies showed writing problems of Thai EFL students. In Rodsawang (2017), students had writing problems about grammar uses, lexical issues, writing styles, and practicing hours. Their essays were mostly short, undeveloped, lexically limited, less cohesive, and less fluent. Supporting details were rarely found in their works. Seensangworn (2017) found writing problems in written paragraphs of Thai EFL university students. The non-English major students had the problems about content and ideas, language use, ideas development, and organizational pattern more than the English major students. Sundrarajun (2020) detected problems of Thai students in the Business Article Writing course. They had inadequate grammar knowledge, so they could not write well. They had less experience in writing in different genres and styles. Similarly, Nguyen and Suwannabubpha (2021) found that Thai students lacked knowledge of grammar and vocabulary in EFL writing.

Potter (2020) stated his views about teaching writing to Thai students. Writing involves not only writing skills (such as idea organization, grammar, mechanics, and spelling), but also reading comprehension and analytical skills. Thai students find learning writing difficult since they are used to rote learning in which teachers assign them materials to copy or memorize. Writing is a process of steps which involve writing practices. To have confidence in writing, Thai students

must be taught through an intensive English curriculum and do writing activities. Harris et al. (2013) suggested that students must develop their writing skills from elementary schools to universities.

Hyland (2003) noted that linguistic, social, and psychological factors are the reasons for differences in learners' language learning. Learners' learning backgrounds and personalities can result to effectiveness of their language learning. Expressions of inappropriate or incorrect English are due to learners' linguistic problems in vocabulary and grammar. Awareness of learners' preferred learning styles will result to appropriate methods of teaching.

3. Past Studies

Kareviati, Yugafiati and Resmini (2020) examined students' needs in order to design a course book for the Writing for General Communication subject. The results showed that most students had bad grammar and limited vocabulary. They had no confidence to write and were different in educational experience, first language, interest, cultural background, and purpose in learning English writing. They wanted to learn tenses, kinds of text, generic structure, and punctuation. They had problems with adverbs, adjectives, nouns, and verbs. Most students agreed that learning English writing is very important although they did not like writing.

Vongvilay, Kartika and Laila (2020) studied students' needs in learning English writing skills. To write well, the students reported writing sentences correctly as their first need, followed by developing ideas and writing well-structured paragraphs. In learning English writing, they mostly preferred the topic about health due to their background school in health, nursing, and pharmacy programs. In terms of the learning styles, they mostly preferred to perform writing activities in small group. To write efficiently, they needed to improve their idea expansion and words organization.

Ma'rufah, Muflihah and Awaliyah (2021) analyzed the present situation, the target situation, and the learning needs of students for the writing course in the upcoming semester. In terms of the present situation, most students had never taken an English course. Their English was at the intermediate level, and their level of writing ability was fair. In terms of the target situation, most students needed to improve their grammar, followed by writing skill. Their purposes in learning English were to be a lecturer, a translator, and a tourism guide. The students realized the importance of the writing skill to achieve the academic purposes. Most students preferred to learn in the classroom

with no more than 30 students. In terms of the learning needs, they enjoyed learning writing through discussion and presentation. They preferred to do an individual writing task rather than a pair or group work. Hand-out, textbook, and authentic materials were the most important learning resources for them. They thought that mechanics was the most important aspect in evaluating their writing.

The above studies examined Indonesian students' needs in learning English writing skills. This research used needs analysis to investigate needs of Thai EFL university students in learning English paragraph writing.

Research Methodology

1. Population and Sample

The population included 1,200 first-year students of the Management Sciences Faculty at a Thai public university. In the first term of the 2023 academic year, these students took the basic English courses which are compulsory. English Paragraph Writing is one of their elective subjects after the compulsory subjects.

In the study, Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table was used to calculate the sample size at a 95% confidence level. The amount of the sample was added up at 10 percent to substitute for incomplete questionnaires or withdrawal from the study. The sample of the study involved 320 first-year students of the Management Sciences Faculty at a Thai public university. In the research, a simple random sampling was used to select the sample of 320 students who were 18 years old or above.

2. Collection of the Data

The research instrument was a questionnaire containing 4 parts: students' learning of English, ability in English paragraph writing, needs in learning English paragraph writing, and preferred styles of learning English paragraph writing.

For anonymity of research participants, the researcher had her research assistants distribute the QR code of a questionnaire to collect data from the sample of 320 first-year students. In the questionnaire, the sample students were asked for a consent to participate in the study.

3. Analysis of the Data

The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics in the SPSS program. The frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation of students' learning of English, ability in English paragraph writing, needs in learning English paragraph writing, and preferred styles of learning English paragraph writing were calculated and reported.

4. Accuracy of the Data

For the validity of the questionnaire, the index of item-objective congruence (IOC) test was examined by three English experts. The pilot study was then conducted with 32 students to test for the questionnaire's reliability. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .938 and .963 indicated the reliability of the questionnaire in collecting data for the study.

Results

1. Students' Data and English Learning

The survey indicated that most students studied in the field of International Business (22.81%), followed by Accounting (21.56%), Finance and Investment (16.56%), Hospitality Industry Management (15.63%), Management (15.0%), Logistics Management (4.38%), and Digital Marketing and Branding (4.06%), respectively.

In the first term of the 2023 academic year, most students learned 01355101 English for Everyday Life (78.13%), followed by 01355102 English for University Life (19.06%) and 01355103 English for Job Opportunities (2.81%), consecutively. Their general points average of English was mostly 3.51–4.00 (35.0%), followed by 3.01–3.50 (30.0%), 2.51–3.00 (20.0%), 2.01–2.50 (9.06%), 1.51–2.00 (3.44%), and 1.00–1.50 (2.50%), respectively.

According to Table 1, the overall findings revealed that students were more proficient in reading and listening skills. They were less proficient in speaking and writing skills. Most of the students (70.94%) had never learned English writing. Some of them (29.06%) had taken writing courses such as Reading & Writing, Paragraph Writing, English Writing, and Essay Writing.

Table 1: Proficiency of English Skills N=320

English Skill	\bar{X}	SD.
Reading	2.74	1.15
Listening	2.62	1.07
Speaking	2.38	1.02
Writing	2.26	1.17

Mean Scores: 1.00-1.75=least proficient, 1.76-2.50=less proficient, 2.51-3.25=more proficient, 3.26-4.00=most proficient

2. Ability in English Paragraph Writing

The findings uncovered that many of the students (63.13%) liked English writing while the rest of them (36.87%) didn't. Ninety percent of the students agreed that English paragraph writing was the necessary skill.

With the overall mean scores ($\bar{X}=3.60$), students thought that English paragraph writing was hard. They reported that their ability in English paragraph writing was mostly poor ($\bar{X}=2.56$).

Table 2: Levels of Writing Skills N=320

Writing Skill	\bar{X}	SD.
Using correct punctuation	3.28	0.82
Using correct spelling	3.21	0.82
Revising your writing	3.11	0.81
Editing your writing mistakes	3.11	0.82
Structuring sentences	3.10	0.68
Linking sentences	3.06	0.67
Using appropriate vocabulary	3.04	0.70
Expressing ideas	2.98	0.80
Organizing a paragraph	2.98	0.70
Using appropriate styles	2.94	0.70
Developing ideas	2.92	0.79
Using appropriate grammar	2.69	0.72

Mean Scores: 1.00-1.80=very poor, 1.81-2.60=poor, 2.61-3.40=fair, 3.41-4.20=good, 4.21-5.00=excellent

As shown in Table 2, the overall mean scores showed that students' writing skills were fair. The writing skills included using correct punctuation, using correct spelling, revising writing, editing writing mistakes, structuring sentences, linking sentences, using appropriate vocabulary, expressing ideas, organizing a paragraph, using appropriate styles, developing ideas, and using appropriate grammar, respectively.

Referring to Table 3, the overall mean scores revealed that students had moderate understanding of English paragraph writing which included: What is writing?, How to write an illustration, Components of a paragraph, What is a paragraph?, How to write a narration, Features of a good paragraph, Steps in writing a paragraph, How to write a description, How to write a classification, and How to write a process, respectively.

Table 3: Understanding of English Paragraph Writing N=320

Writing Topic	X	SD.
What is writing?	3.11	0.74
How to write an illustration	3.05	0.82
Components of a paragraph	3.00	0.76
What is a paragraph?	2.97	0.71
How to write a narration	2.97	0.75
Features of a good paragraph	2.93	0.70
Steps in writing a paragraph	2.93	0.74
How to write a description	2.93	0.75
How to write a classification	2.90	0.75
How to write a process	2.87	0.71

Mean Scores: 1.00-1.80=very poor, 1.81-2.60=poor, 2.61-3.40=fair, 3.41-4.20=good, 4.21-5.00=excellent

3. Needs in Learning English Paragraph Writing

Most students (72.50%) would take the English Paragraph Writing course while the rest of them (27.50%) wouldn't due to some reasons such as they are not certain; they want to learn other English skills; they are not good at writing; and they do not want to get F.

According to Table 4, the findings disclosed six reasons why students would learn English paragraph writing. The most important reason was for future work, followed by to know a writing process, to use proper grammar, to use proper vocabulary, to use proper writing styles,

and to be able to write sentences, consecutively.

Table 4: Reasons in Learning English Paragraph Writing N=320

Reason	Yes	%
For future work	265	82.80
To know a writing process	203	63.40
To use proper grammar	188	58.80
To use proper vocabulary	179	55.90
To use proper writing styles	179	55.90
To be able to write sentences	173	54.10

Based on Table 5, there were five topics that most students would like to learn in the English paragraph writing course. They included: How to write a description, How to write a narration, Features of a good paragraph, How to write a process, and What is writing?, respectively.

Table 5: Topics in Learning English Paragraph Writing N=320

Topic	Yes	%
How to write a description	210	65.60
How to write a narration	209	65.30
Features of a good paragraph	165	51.60
How to write a process	165	51.60
What is writing?	161	50.30

4. Preferred Styles of Learning English Paragraph Writing

Most students (84.69%) thought that the English Paragraph Writing subject should be learned. The rest of them (15.31%) did not think so due to some reasons such as it should be an elective subject; they are not interested in writing; writing is not an important subject; it can affect their grades; and they hardly write.

Almost fifty-six percent of the students wanted to be assessed in the English Paragraph Writing course as passed or unpassed rather than A to F.

In each 3-hour class, most students wanted the timing of lecture and writing activity to be 90 minutes/90 minutes (54.38%), followed by 60 minutes/120 minutes (34.06%), and 120 minutes/60 minutes (11.56%), respectively.

Students mostly preferred to have 30 students in each class (55.0%), followed by 20 students

(21.25%), 25 students (8.75%), others (6.25%), 15 students (4.69%), and 10 students (4.06%), consecutively.

According to Table 6, students reported five wants in learning the English Paragraph Writing subject: vocabulary drills, writing models, supplementary handouts, writing exercises, and the key textbook, respectively.

Table 6: Wants in Learning the English Paragraph Writing Course N=320

Statement	Yes	%
There should be some vocabulary drills.	225	70.30
There should be writing models.	223	69.70
There should be supplementary handouts.	206	64.40
There should be writing exercises.	203	63.40
There should be the key textbook.	163	50.90

Discussion

The needs analysis of the study provided useful information about present ability, needs, and wants in learning English paragraph writing of the first-year students at the Faculty of Management Sciences in a Thai public university. For instance, students were less proficient in English writing. They had never learned English writing since the primary schools. Although English paragraph writing was hard, they agreed that it was necessary for them. They reported their wants for course contents, teaching materials, and a class size in learning English paragraph writing. The learning assessment they preferred was passed or unpassed rather than A to F. With these findings, writing lecturers and the researcher are able to know and understand more about the students' needs and wants in learning English paragraph writing. The writing lecturers and the research can also use the information in developing an appropriate course syllabus of the English Paragraph Writing subject that will meet the students' needs and wants. According to scholars such as Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Richards (2001), and Hyland (2006), needs analysis is the way in which teachers can collect information about their learners such as language ability, reasons for learning a course, and preferred teaching methods. The teachers can use the information in evaluating a present English writing course, planning for a future writing course, preparing tests and assessment methods, choosing suitable teaching methods, making a course syllabus, developing teaching materials, etc. to meet the students' needs and wants.

However, the outcomes of the study indicated that students neglected three main points of

paragraph writing, i.e., meaning of a paragraph, components of a paragraph, and steps in writing a paragraph. They did not want to do writing exercises whether be individually, in pair, or in group. Since the students had never taken English writing courses, these findings could infer that the students do not really understand about English paragraph writing. Therefore, writing lecturers and the researcher must make them know that the three main points are basic knowledge of English paragraph writing. The students must also know the necessity of doing writing exercises in order to develop their writing skills. Conforming to Hyland (2006), needs analysis is the way in which teachers learn what their learners know and do not know. Richards (2001) noted that in teaching a language, learners' needs must be analyzed for not all of them have positive attitudes toward the course. Their views of the course are different from teachers'. Not all of the learners have the skills that the course requires. Thus, after knowing what the students need, want, and lack in learning English paragraph writing, writing lecturers and the researcher must make them know and understand objectives and structures of the English paragraph writing course.

The findings of the study disclosed that most students had never learned English writing. This could presume that English writing is not a required subject in both elementary and secondary schools. So, it is not surprising that English paragraph writing is difficult for the students. This is in contrast with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) led by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers (2010, as cited in Harris et al., 2013) in which students are expected to learn writing from kindergarten through high schools. According to the National Commission on Writing (2004, 2005, as cited in Graham, 2008), students must learn to write for writing is a requirement for employment and promotion. Therefore, Thai students must develop their English writing skills from elementary schools to universities.

The overall results revealed that students had both positive and negative perceptions of English paragraph writing. Some realized the necessity of English writing for future work. Some did not want to take the English Paragraph Writing subject because they did not want to get low grades. This could infer that perception is the important factor to the students' motivation in learning English paragraph writing. If the students have positive attitude towards English writing, they will likely take the English Paragraph Writing subject. Thus, changing the students' attitude from negative to positive is tough but worthwhile for writing lecturers and the research. Ni' mah, Kadarisman, and Suryati (2016) stated that there were correlations between students' writing

attitude, writing anxiety, and writing achievement. The students with low anxiety had better writing achievement than those with high anxiety. Those with positive writing attitude perceived the importance of English and had interest in English writing. Those with negative attitude thought that English writing was difficult. The students with low anxiety were good at grammar and vocabulary and had positive thinking in writing. Those with high anxiety were afraid to make mistakes and were not good at English. Similarly, Setyowati and Sukmawan (2016) uncovered that students with negative writing attitude viewed English writing as difficult and stressful. Those with positive attitude thought that English writing was fun, interesting, and challenging. Meanwhile, Rosdiana (2019) found that students with moderate writing attitude perceived that English writing was hard and stressful. Those with high attitude viewed English writing as interesting and challenging.

Conclusion

This research investigated needs and wants in learning English paragraph writing of the first-year students at the Management Sciences Faculty in a Thai public university. The findings revealed that the students' English writing ability was at the moderate level. They had no experience in learning English writing, but they agreed that English paragraph writing was a necessary skill. They wanted to learn English paragraph writing and to be assessed as passed or unpassed in the course. The students had partial understanding of paragraph writing, so writing lecturers and the researcher must make them know and understand course structures of English paragraph writing.

Suggestions

In the study, students were found to have negative perception of English paragraph writing. To solve the problem, the students should be fostered an appreciation for English writing. They should be taught to write in English little by little in all school levels in order for them to be familiar with English writing. This will make the students realize the importance of learning English paragraph writing.

To solve the problem of student' writing anxiety, writing teachers, administrators, and policy makers of Thai schools and universities should consider reforming the grading of English writing subjects. Instead of A to F, the course assessment should be passed or unpassed to lessen the students' fear in writing and making writing mistakes. The students will be motivated to learn more English writing since they do not have to worry about their grades.

Writing teachers, administrators of Thai schools and universities, and educators of the Thai government should realize the importance of English writing and take serious actions in acquiring Thai students to learn to write English sentences, paragraphs, and essays. Much effort and time are needed in teaching and learning. However, development and improvement of the students' writing skills are worthwhile to both the teachers and the students.

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