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Examining Academic Writing Proficiency and Self-perception among Non-English Major Students in a Thai Regional University

Arnon Chaisuriya [1]* , Pongsatean Luengalongkot [2]

[1] *School of Foreign Languages, Institute of Social Technology, Suranaree University of Technology, Nakhon Ratchasima 30000, Thailand*

[2] *Faculty of Political Science and Law, Burapha University, Chonburi 20131, Thailand*

ABSTRACT

In an English for academic purposes (ESP) course at a Thai regional university, evaluations primarily consist of multiple-choice exams. This approach can put students at a disadvantage when facing international standardized exams with essay writing. Therefore, this mixed methods research examined whether non-English majors at a regional university were adequately prepared for academic writing tasks and to analyse their self-perception regarding writing proficiency and needs. The participants comprised 166 sophomores and juniors enrolled in two ESP classes. They were tasked with writing an essay like those in the IELTS. Subsequently, a questionnaire was administered to gauge their perceptions of their performance. The results from the questionnaires showed that students lacked confidence in their own writing abilities. They felt that their abilities to write seemed insufficient for standardized English exams and expressed a need for a course on academic English writing, given that their future careers would require proficient English writing abilities. The results of comparing perceptions of readiness in essay writing show that students who obtained an A grade for this ESP course had more confidence only in reading prompts and writing a topic sentence than those who received a B, a C, and a D. Moreover, the results from essay grading corroborated that assessing students with multiple-choice exams might not be adequate for measuring proficiency in essay writing. Thai regional university students would benefit from an evaluation scheme that incorporates essay composing to gain more understanding and writing experiences.

*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Arnon Chaisuriya, School of Foreign Languages, Institute of Social Technology, Suranaree University of Technology, Nakhon Ratchasima 30000, Thailand; Email: arnon.c@sut.ac.th

1. Introduction

English proficiency of Thai university graduates remains unsatisfactory because, indicated in several studies, most Thai undergraduates possess the proficiency level of about A1 or A2 in the CEFR Scale[1–3]. Therefore, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation issued a directive for higher education institutes' administrators to create a system capable of increasing undergraduates' English competency. The directives mandate that students in associate degree programs achieve the CEFR level of B1. Students in a bachelor's degree program attain the level of B2, and those studying in a postgraduate program pass at least the C1 level. Many university administrators have agreed and set up mechanisms such as remedial courses and exit exams to boost undergraduate students' awareness and adeptness. English matters to Thailand because it is the language of international relations, knowledge, trade, digital communication, and leisure, according to Talerngsi[4]. Being able to use it increases ones' chances of getting a job in transnational corporations domestically or overseas, as it is globally recognized as the leading commercial medium in the worldwide labour force[5]. In addition, Thai college students "subscribe to the notion of English as a tool for personal economic advancement"[6]. Therefore, the authorities responsible for educating people who are entering the workforce want to equip undergraduates with this language. Another reason is that tourism and exports are the national economic development engines; thus, competency in English is truly indispensable for Thai individuals, as the number of tourists has increased sharply to 35 million in 2024[7]. The government has facilitated diplomatic protocols by waiving visas for citizens of many countries. Hence, the influx of foreign visitors has been incessant. English language communication is truly inevitable and can facilitate tourism and international trade. If Thai undergraduates do not develop their proficiency sufficiently, they are likely to lose opportunities to enjoy the benefits from the tourism industry and global commerce.

Since Thai university undergraduates still possess unsatisfactory skills in English, many research studies have been conducted to find out the causes of this educational deficit. For example, Chanaroke and Niemprapan[8], stated that language teaching and English language aptitude in Thailand, being at a quite basic level, was due to teachers' large teaching load which caused their teaching approaches to be memorizing words, explaining grammar and teaching English using Thai as the medium of instruction. In addition, classrooms that are not student-centered, with less-autonomous learning, etc. are not as effective. Santiwatthanasiri[9] found that fear of making mistakes, anxiety and limited experience in an English environment and inadequate teacher supports were factors that caused Thai university students to have difficulties in speaking and communicating effectively in their real lives. Polrak[10] found that there have been several demotivating factors that caused unsuccessful learning. Study methods were the most influential factors. That is, instructions that focused mainly on grammar, lessons that were exam-oriented, and environments that were non-communicative had impeded the development of English proficiency. Some studies examined students' motivation and mindset. They found that students had growth mindset[11]. However, it usually takes more than motivation to succeed in learning language, according to Gyamfi and Lai[12] who investigated Thai English major students' grit.

Thai educators have also been trying to make a difference in teaching and learning English. For example, to increase effectiveness, a great number of instructors turned to technology as a tool to assist language learning. The integration of technology in English language teaching has gained prominence in Thailand. Educators have explored key results on how technology utilization for English teaching in Thailand yields effectiveness, challenges, and future directions. Currently there is a growing adoption of Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) in Thai classrooms. For instance, Suppasetseree, Kumdee, and Minh[13] demonstrated that the use of multimedia tools, such as audio materials hosted on e-learning platforms accessible via mobile devices, significantly improved students' listening skills and learning engagement. The amalgamation of innovations provided engaging as well as synergistic environments, bringing about expedition for students to grasp complex English lan-

guage concepts. Interactive tools like Kahoot, Flipgrid, and Quizlet fostered greater vocabulary retention and student engagement[14]. Video-based learning platforms, such as YouTube, were particularly effective in teaching listening and speaking skills[15]. These studies underscore the need for schools and institutions to incorporate user-friendly and accessible technological tools to support language learning. Also, with the rise of smartphone penetration in Thailand, Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has become an area of interest. Research by Kaosayapandhu[16] showed that mobile applications like Duolingo allowed students to practice English anytime, fostering a sense of autonomy in learning. Additionally, Line (a popular messaging app in Thailand) has been creatively adapted for language learning through group discussions and vocabulary challenges[17].

In terms of online learning, Thailand's education sector has progressively embraced online learning platforms such as Moodle, Google Classroom, and Zoom for English teaching. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this trend. According to a study by Bersamin et al.[18], blended learning that combined onsite teaching and online modules enhanced students' reading comprehension skills. Another current trend is gamification, or the application of game elements in education, which has been explored in Thai English classrooms. A study by Vathanalaoha[19] reveal that gamified learning through platforms like Winner English Platform or WEP enhanced students' attitude and learning development. Games fostered a competitive yet collaborative atmosphere, improving speaking and vocabulary skills. Students were more willing to participate and less apprehensive about making mistakes. Moreover, gamification can assist classrooms where teachers have to teach many subjects. They can just work as a mediator and let students learn from the games. Boonmoh, Jumpakate, and Karpklon[20] found that instructors knew about technical gears and used know-how to ease their teaching and learning. Kahoot was the most used application in the classrooms. The use of technology was inspired by numerous features: students' inspiration, real-world integration, students' understanding, teachers' self-improvement, time and conditions.

Despite the proliferation of technology and its potential for language learning, Thai students continue to face challenges in achieving high levels of English proficiency. The results of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) which is an internationally standardized evaluation of English ability, widely used among academic, professional, and immigration arenas shows that Thai test takers consistently score lower compared to global averages. As reported by IELTS.org, native Thai speakers scored on the average of 6.4 in listening, 6.2 in reading, 5.8 in writing, and 5.9 in speaking[21]. This means that from among approximately 35,000 test takers, over half of them could not pass the standard that enables them to study abroad[22]. In addition, The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) which provides a standardized benchmark for verbal proficiency indicates that Thai students consistently score low on this scale as well. Despite English being a compulsory subject in Thailand's education system, the CEFR levels of most Thai students fall below global averages, with many struggling to achieve even the A2 or B1 levels even though a recent government policy wants bachelor's degree students in Thai universities to achieve a minimum B2 level to graduate[1–3].

The IELTS score report mentioned above shows that Thai test takers have difficulties with writing which is the focus of this study. They need to have more than the average 5.9. Moreover, to achieve a B2 level in the CEFR, writing skills is essential. Therefore, urgent resolutions to this dilemma are necessary because English users at B2 level must demonstrate the abilities to produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to his or her field of interest. This means the undergraduate students must be able to write about familiar topics, but also extend to less common ones within their area of expertise. Moreover, students must express viewpoints on topical issues giving the advantages and disadvantages of different options. They must be able to present arguments, analyse different perspectives, and provide balanced discussions. Specifically, they must be able to write clear, detailed texts on a variety of subjects. This includes essays, reports, articles, and letters. Students should be able to write an essay or report which develops an argument systematically with appropriate reasoning highlighting significant points. They must know how to structure their writing logically, present evidence, and draw conclusions. In terms of language use, students must be able to use a range of vocabulary and grammatical structures with a good degree of accuracy as well as more complex grammar and vocabulary, demonstrating and elucidating comprehension. Appropriate

cohesive devices must be utilized to link ideas and create coherent text. Linking words and phrases are used to connect sentences and paragraphs smoothly. Students must also be able to adapt writing styles to suit different purposes and audiences with tone and language depending on the task and to whom they are writing[23]. However, these competencies are still a big problem for many university students in Thailand. Therefore, this study was conducted in order to examine readiness for writing an English essay among undergraduate students in a Thai university located in the Northeast of Thailand.

This research was a part of an effort to increase Thai university's students' English proficiency. It focused on examining students' opinion on their readiness for writing essays which is a crucial task in achieving the B2 level in the CEFR scale. The research question was whether Thai university students in a regional university perceived themselves as ready for essay writing or not. The other research question was whether the students want to study essay writing as a part of the university requirement or not. By looking at the self-perception of their readiness and the needs of an essay writing course, the researcher explored the complex interplay of factors contributing to designing appropriate writing instructional materials and approaches that can lead to improvement in Thai university students' writing skills.

It's indispensable to analyse Thai university students' opinion on readiness for B2-level essay writing because it directly addresses the effectiveness of educational efforts and the students' future success. The research tried to align with the national policy as mentioned in the previous section, achieving B2 which is a graduation requirement. Thus, surveys and examining students' opinion help determine if current curricula and teaching methods are adequately preparing students to meet this national standard or not. The information gained from the survey is vital for policy adjustments and resource allocation because, at the moment, students are assessed by a multiple-choice exam which may not reflect their writing ability. If students felt that they are not ready for the essay writing but want to study, more resources such as budget, personnel, and facilities may be provided. In addition, this research identified gaps in learning. Surveys can pinpoint specific writing skills where students were falling short. This allows educators to target instruction and provide focused support in areas like reading and understanding

prompts, organization, grammar, vocabulary, sentence complexity etc. Furthermore, it informs curriculum development. By understanding students' strengths and weaknesses, universities can tailor the English courses to better meet students' needs. This can lead to more effective course design, relevant materials, and appropriate assessment strategies. This research did not survey only student's skills but also their needs. This can help enhance student support. Identifying common challenges allows universities to develop appropriate support systems, such as writing centers, workshops, or online resources. This ensures students have access to the help they need to improve their writing skills. In essence, surveying Thai university students' readiness for B2 writing is a crucial step in ensuring that they receive the necessary support and instruction to meet national standards and achieve their full potential. It provides valuable data for informed decision-making and continuous improvement in English language education.

2. Literature Review

English writing has gained considerable attention from scholars in Thailand. For instance, Pongsuvajchakul[24] investigated needs in learning English paragraph writing at a Thai public university. The results obtained via questionnaire indicate that they had fair understanding of English paragraph reading but were less proficient in writing. The researcher concluded that a great number of Thai students lack writing skills, and they should be taught since elementary school. In addition, English course assessment should be revised to motivate learners to write fluently in English. In order to examine the connections between English writing performance, writing self-efficacy, and writing anxiety, De Vleeshawer[25] studied 813 first- and second-year undergraduate Thai English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. In addition to completing self-efficacy and anxiety questionnaires, the students produced an opinion essay by themselves. EFL teachers used an analytical rubric to assess their texts. According to Pearson correlations, writing performance and self-efficacy were positively indicated, while writing performance and anxiety were negatively determined. Anxiety and self-efficacy were also negatively correlated. It is suggested that implications be made for future pedagogical studies that consider the variables of learners when analysing writ-

ing performance. Students are likely to be more motivated to write and have less fear once they have developed self-efficacy, which comes from mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and physiological and affective states. Prapobratanakul[26] examined the perceived problems in English-language academic writing faced by Thai EFL undergraduate engineering students and the solutions they utilized to address these challenges. The data were gathered from third-year Thai EFL undergraduate engineering students via a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview modified from Hyland[27] and Lin and Morrison[28]. The findings indicated that vocabulary, grammar, and structure constituted the most difficult elements at the sentence level for students. They identified summarizing and paraphrasing academic sources, as well as constructing a coherent argument, as the most problematic elements of academic writings in English at the paragraph level. Instructors' feedback was identified as the most effective technique. Students were more inclined to seek online assistance when faced with challenges in English language academic writing skills.

The self-perception of Thai students' English writing proficiency has also been studied quite extensively. Findings reveal notable patterns and disparities in their abilities across various aspects of writing, as well as underlying factors influencing their proficiency. For example, Ka-kan-dee and Kaur[29] utilized think-aloud procedures to discern the challenges encountered by Thai EFL English major students in composing argumentative essays. The study's findings indicated that students expressed challenges in vocabulary, grammatical structure, substantiating arguments, structuring argumentative essays, time limitations, organizing ideas, meeting task requirements, comprehending questions, first language transfer and translation, and composing thesis statements. This study presents valuable insights into the writing issues encountered by Thai tertiary students and provides a comprehensive account of the challenges faced by learners in public universities in Thailand. Meanwhile, Suwannarak[30] explored how Thai adult learners self-evaluated their English writing performance in connection to the instructor's evaluation and what the students and the teacher experienced from the evaluation practice. The participants consisted of 32 Thai graduate students and a Thai English language instructor from an EFL writing course. The data were gathered via student self-evaluations, teacher evaluations, writing assign-

ments, and individual interviews. The qualitative data were analysed alongside the quantitative data to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the subject being examined. The results indicated that the adult learners were capable of self-assessing their writing performance. The objectives outlined in the course syllabus regarding student engagement in the writing process and the assessment of their writing was pragmatic, and the students were cognizant of their performance levels.

The aforementioned studies show that access to students' self-evaluations provided the teacher with valuable insights for assessing their academic performance. This research underscored the significance of students' self-evaluation as a legitimate and valuable source of information for enhancing EFL writing instruction and fostering student autonomy and lifelong learning.

From the prior research, self-perception of students' English writing proficiency garnered from questionnaires and interviews provided valuable insights into their background, keenness, challenges, and areas for improvement. The reported findings reveal notable patterns and disparities in their abilities across various aspects of writing, as well as underlying factors influencing their proficiency. However, in this study, the focus is on readiness for writing essays which could lead to students achieving a B2 level.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research Designs

This was a mixed methods research protocol which combined an experiment and a questionnaire. In the experiment, the researcher administered a mock writing test which was similar to the IELTS. The participants had a chance to read the prompt and write two essays. The purpose of this experiment was to let the participants face a writing requirement and go through the experience of writing an essay as a part of the standardized exam. After the students were given 30 minutes to write, their answer sheets were collected. Then they were immediately asked to fill out a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of questions that elicited their perception of their readiness for writing the essay. The Likert's scale on the questionnaire was between 1 and 4. 1 meant totally not ready and 4 meant totally ready. The cut point of the questionnaire is as follow 1.00 to 1.75 meant totally not

ready. 1.76 to 2.50 meant not ready. 2.51 to 3.25 indicated ready. Finally, 3.26 to 4.00 means totally ready.

3.2. The Participants

The data was collected from 166 college students who were enrolled in an English for academic purposes course. Approximately 55% of the participants were studying in the engineering majors. 28% were from public health field. There were a few students from agricultural technology (3.2%). The number of students from science majors (6.8%) and digital technology majors (6.3%) were quite equal. The least number were those from social technology majors such as management (2.6%). Basically, this sample group represent the students in the university well because the majority of them were engineering undergraduates. For the general background, in many Thai universities, students have typically undergone at least 12 years of English language instruction from primary through secondary school, as mandated by the Basic Education Core Curriculum. However, the effectiveness of this long exposure varies significantly. Research consistently indicates that despite the years spent learning English, the overall proficiency of Thai university students often falls below expectations for higher education and the demands of a globalized world[31].

3.3. Data Analysis

In this research, there were three major focuses. First, the participants' perceptions of their essay writing readiness were examined. The data obtained from the questionnaire were analysed and reported using mean and standard deviation. Second, their self-perceptions were compared among participants who performed differently in the English for academic purposes course. They were grouped into four different levels, namely those who obtained an A, a B, a C, and a D. The sample members' proficiencies are the independent variables that can be used to find out their needs and differences in readiness to write B2 essays. The objective of comparing their perception was to find out whether each level of proficiency shows similar or different perceptions. The comparison was done by using Kruskal-Wallis tests.

4. Results

The result section consists of four main reports. The

first report is a table displaying participants' perceptions on their readiness for essay writing. This information is presented in the form of mean scores and standard deviations as well as the meaning of the mean scores. The second report is the comparison of the perceptions among four groups of the participants which were divided by the grades they received. The third subsection is the table showing the level of writing needs. The last report is on the comments and opinion regarding the essays.

As can be seen in **Table 1**, all participants disagreed that they could do the task deemed necessary for writing a good essay. Among these 10 items, they were least confident in grammar which shows the mean of only 1.95 out of 4. For the highest mean, they almost agreed that they could read and understand the prompt quickly, but the mean of 2.49 is still below the cut point of 2.50. Overall, this table indicates that the samples are not ready to write an essay for a standardized exam.

Table 1. Self-perceptions on Essay Writing Readiness.

Statements	N	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
I can read and understand the prompt quickly.	166	2.49	0.694	Not ready
I can brainstorm the contents in a short time.	165	2.12	0.687	Not ready
I have sufficient vocabulary to write a good essay.	166	2.18	0.647	Not ready
I can write grammatically correct sentences.	166	1.95	0.611	Not ready
I can write a good introduction of an essay.	165	2.12	0.682	Not ready
I know how to write a topic sentence.	165	2.26	0.708	Not ready
I am able to write supporting sentences.	165	2.24	0.710	Not ready
I can use markers, phrases, clauses correctly.	166	2.09	0.671	Not ready
I can write a good concluding paragraph.	166	2.21	0.705	Not ready
I can revise and edit an essay.	166	2.31	0.755	Not ready

The second data report involves the comparison of the self-perception among different levels of English backgrounds. The backgrounds were defined by the grades that they received. Among 166 students, 44 of them received a D. 53 students obtained a C. There were 42 B's, and 27 A's. Since the numbers of participants in each group were quite different, a non-parametric statistical analysis, namely the Kruskal Wallis H Test was used to compare their perceptions.

It was found that among the 10 items, only the perceptions on reading prompt and writing a topic sentence were different among the groups. As can be seen in **Table 2**, a Kruskal-Wallis test was performed on the perceptions on ability to read and understand prompts before starting to write an essay of the four groups (A, B, C, and D). The difference between the rank totals of 120.98(A), 80.88(B), 77.64 (C), and 70.06 (D) were significant, $H(3, \text{n-}166) = 25.184, p = 0.001$.

Table 2. Kruskal-Wallis Test of Perceptions on Reading Prompts.

Factor	Statistic	df	p
Group	25.184	3	<0.001**

** The mean ranks difference is significant at the 0.01 level.

According to **Table 3**, the post-hoc analysis shows that students who received an A perceived their ability in reading and understanding prompts significantly higher than those who obtained a B, a C, and a D.

Table 3. Post Hoc Comparisons of Perceptions on Reading and Understanding Prompts.

Groups		Mean Difference	SE	df	t	p_{tukey}
D	C	−0.123	0.131	162	−0.946	0.780
	B	−0.156	0.138	162	−1.129	0.672
	A	−0.838	0.156	162	−5.358	<0.001
C	B	−0.032	0.132	162	−0.245	0.995
	A	−0.715	0.151	162	−4.724	<0.001
B	A	−0.683	0.158	162	−4.323	<0.001

Note: *p*-value adjusted for comparing a family of 4 estimates.

As show in **Table 4**, a Kruskal-Wallis test was performed on the perceptions on writing a topic sentence for an essay of the four groups (A, B, C, and D). The difference between the rank totals of 101.56(A), 88.96(B), 76.90 (C), and 73.41 (D) were significant, H(3, n-165) = 8.861, p = 0.031.

Table 4. Kruskal-Wallis Test of the Perceptions on Writing a Topic Sentence.

Factor	Statistic	df	p
Group	8.861	3	0.031*

* The mean ranks difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

According to **Table 5**, the post-hoc analysis shows that students who received an A perceived their ability in reading and understanding prompts significantly higher than those who obtained a C, and a D. However, perceptions of those who got an A was not different from those with a B.

Table 5. Post Hoc Comparisons of Perceptions on Writing Topic Sentences.

Groups		Mean Difference	SE	df	t	p_{tukey}
D	C	−0.037	0.141	161	−0.264	0.994
	B	−0.252	0.150	161	−1.677	0.339
	A	−0.479	0.169	161	−2.828	0.027
C	B	−0.215	0.144	161	−1.492	0.445
	A	−0.442	0.164	161	−2.697	0.038
B	A	−0.227	0.172	161	−1.321	0.551

Note: *p*-value adjusted for comparing a family of 4 estimates.

In **Table 6**, the descriptive data related to the participants' need is presented. Most respondents agreed that the university should require students to study essay writing. In addition, they agreed that they were interested and want to develop essay writing skills the most. Another notable data that emerged was that quite a lot of participants wanted to work in organizations where English writing is used (mean = 2.90).

Table 6. Needs of Essay Writing Course.

Statements	N	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
Students should be required to study essay writing.	166	2.87	0.755	Agreed
I am interested and want to develop essay writing skills	166	3.24	0.653	Agreed
I can provide time to practice essay writing regularly.	164	2.55	0.629	Agreed
I want to write essays for the IELTS or the TOEFL.	166	2.58	0.813	Agreed
I want to pursue graduate studies which needs writing.	165	2.70	0.811	Agreed
I hope to work in organizations that use English writing.	165	2.90	0.747	Agreed

The last part of the result section presents the excerpts (Ex) from student's writing. After students were tasked to write an essay on the following prompt "I nnovation is often driven by the pursuit of profit and economic growth. However, some argue that it should prioritize addressing social and environmental issues. Discuss both sides and give your own opinion", their answer sheets were collected and analysed. The followings are examples of their writing.

"Pursuit of profit for me, I think it's a good result and can make the economy grow. For the economy to grow It is caused by many factors such as cost price, product quality etc." (Ex 1)

"In my opinion, While the pursuit of profit and economic growth is a powerful driven of innovation, it is crucial to balance this with social and environment considerations." (Ex 2)

"Of course, This is common companies must be pursuit of profit but they don't think about environment so that got many issues and need to help quickly but However Innovation create money and make economic growth too much that make this is crazy and in the future this is gonna be main salary in the country." (Ex 3)

"We need to change the new prime minister and develop better houses on the road. Building a motorway should be completed faster than this, removing the older generation who only think the same way, but the easiest thing is to change yourself." (Ex 4)

"Since the world become to industrial revolution age there has been the pursuit of profit and economic growth.

There are many thing changing everything is easy and ran buy money.

However everything has its pros and cons. Still I prey to GOD that people can stop" (Ex 5)

The above examples represent the majority of the essays that the students wrote. Although a few students could compose well, their writing lacked many characteristics of a good essay, such as topic sentences, support, coherence and cohesion, etc. The Example 1 to Example 5 show that students truly lacked experience in essay writing. They tried their best to give their opinions, but most of them did not have sufficient supports and the ideas were not sufficiently developed. These essays would not get positive attention from the examiners if they submitted them on the IELTS or TOEFL.

5. Discussion

This research yielded many interesting results. For example, it was found that students in a regional university who do not study in the English major generally had insufficient skills for writing an essay, at least from their own perceptions of their proficiency. This was consistent with the results found by Pongsuvajchakul (2023)[24]. Therefore, it is a huge gap between what is expected of them and what they have been educated to do. While the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation desires the graduates to obtain the English proficiency of B2 in the CEFR, the English instructions and learning might have been limited to only basic English albeit the progress is moving in the same direction. A great number of students in the region seem to study English only for passing the exams. They don't write academically. When they enter college, many universities still have not made essay writing a requirement for non-English major undergraduates. Therefore, those who plan to study abroad commonly have to enrol in a private language school by themselves if they wish to learn this important and considered advanced skills.

The results which illustrated that students in all levels of backgrounds perceived their readiness similarly in the fundamental tasks such as brainstorming the contents; using sufficient vocabulary; writing grammatically correct sentences; creating a good introduction of an essay; supporting the topic sentences effectively; using markers, phrases, clauses correctly; concluding the essay well, and flawlessly revising and editing the essay was aligned with the research of Prapobratanakul (2024)[26] who had found that vocabulary, grammar, and structure constituted the most difficult elements at the sentence level for students. This denotes that even though many students achieved their goals in receiving the highest grade, their writing skills remain akin to others' who gained lower grades. In the present study, students who obtained an A could read and understand the prompt more rapidly than those who obtained lower grades. They also could write better topic sentences; however, they still need to improve many other skills that prepare them well for achieving the B2.

In terms of needs, most respondents agreed that the university should require them to study English writing. They were interested and wanted to develop writing skills. They could provide time to practice writing. These findings were similar to the research results of Pongsuvajchakul (2023)[24] which discovered that Thai students wanted to study paragraph writing in the university, but the assessment should be Passed or Unpassed rather than A to F. Students also preferred to study for 90 minutes per session and wanted to limit the class size to only 30 students per class. In the present research, participants' needs implied that they were motivated to enhance their English proficiency so that in the future they might take the IELTs or TOEFL and apply for a graduate program which needs English writing. They also wanted to increase their writing competency so that they may work for an organization that uses English. Thus, it is imperative that authority responsible for designing the courses offer and deliver the lessons meritoriously. The writing course offered

may be online or onsite depending on the availability and convenience of the learners.

A small number of pupils demonstrated well-developed material and organization, although their arrangement was illogical. When students' writing was analyzed, many issues arose. For example, the response did not cover all the requirements of the task appropriately, relevantly and sufficiently. There was a lack of ability in the selection, presentation, and illustration of key characteristics. When the essays' contents were too brief, using them was nearly impossible. These poorly written essays show that students need to be taught to thoroughly address every aspect of the assignment and provide a well-developed, fully extended, and well-supported viewpoint in response to the question. Furthermore, it is necessary to teach the undergraduates how to effectively handle paragraphing and use cohesiveness in a way that does not draw notice. In terms of lexical resources, they have not exhibited a large vocabulary with a very sophisticated and natural control of word usage. For grammar and accuracy, they did not employ a variety of structures with complete flexibility and precision. Although seldom, small mistakes should appear, capitalization, using plural, and punctuation errors are obvious. In summary, the writing works of non-English major undergraduates in a regional university are still far from what is expected in the band descriptors.

6. Conclusions

This study sheds light on a critical issue in Thailand's higher education landscape—academic writing proficiency among non-English major students at a regional university. Despite ongoing national efforts to elevate English competency levels to meet international standards such as CEFR B2 and higher, many students still struggle with the writing skills essential for academic and professional success. The findings of this research emphasize that current assessment methods, primarily reliant on multiple-choice formats, inadequately reflect students' true writing abilities and do not prepare them for high-stakes tests like IELTS, where essay writing is a core component.

The students' own perceptions further underscore the issue. The majority of them lacked confidence in their writing skills and recognized the need for more structured academic writing instruction. Those who achieved higher grades in the course displayed marginally more confidence but still fell short of exhibiting the comprehensive writing proficiency expected at the B2 level. This divide suggests a need for curricular reforms that prioritize practical, output-based tasks such as essay composition, rather than passive input-focused assessments. Writing practice must be interwoven into the curriculum with consistent feedback, scaffolding, and authentic contexts to help students internalize the writing process.

The significance of this study is diverse. Firstly, it aligns with national educational policies and labour market demands, reinforcing that English—especially academic writing—is a gateway to career mobility and international engagement. Secondly, it provides empirical evidence supporting the inclusion of an academic writing course as a mandatory component of undergraduate programs, particularly for non-English majors. Equipping students with writing competencies not only fulfils policy mandates but also empowers them to compete on a global stage.

Finally, this study highlights the importance of listening to student voices when designing instructional interventions. The data clearly show that students are aware of their limitations and express a strong desire for improvement. This willingness presents an opportunity for educators and administrators to develop responsive programs that foster confidence, reduce anxiety, and build sustainable writing habits. In moving forward, educational stakeholders must integrate pedagogical innovations, such as online lessons, process writing, genre-based instructions, and formative assessment, to bridge the gap between students' current abilities and the national proficiency expectations. Only by doing so can Thai universities produce graduates who are truly prepared for the demands of a globalized workforce and academic community.

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