

Perceived Writing Difficulties and Solutions in Academic English Writing among Thai EFL Learners

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Abstract

This study investigated what difficulties Thai university students have when writing in academic English and explored the methods they use to overcome these challenges. Fifty-four fourth-year students were asked to fill out a questionnaire to see what common writing issues they faced, and eight selected students participated in small groups to share more about their experiences and how they coped with these problems. To reveal the students' writing problems, descriptive statistics were used to analyze quantitative data using mean scores, standard deviations, and percentages, and qualitative data were grouped with similar ideas from the semi-structured interviews. The results show that the students struggled mainly with two main areas: 1) emotional barriers, such as low confidence and lack of motivation ($\bar{X}=3.67$, $S.D.=0.61$), and 2) language problems, such as grammatical errors ($\bar{X}=3.50$, $S.D.=0.53$). Thus, the majority of students used different techniques to deal with these challenges, such as creating a supportive writing environment, working in groups, and using online tools to check their grammar.

Keyword: Academic English Writing; Writing Difficulties; Solutions; Thai EFL Learners

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การรับรู้ปัญหาและแนวทางแก้ไขในการเขียนภาษาอังกฤษเชิงวิชาการของผู้เรียนชาวไทยที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ

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บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษานี้สำรวจถึงอุปสรรคที่นักศึกษาในมหาวิทยาลัยของไทยเผชิญเมื่อเขียนภาษาอังกฤษเชิงวิชาการและสำรวจวิธีการที่พวกรู้ใช้ในการแก้ไขปัญหาเหล่านี้ โดยให้นักศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 4 จำนวน 54 คน กรอกแบบสอบถามเพื่อทราบข้อมูลว่าเผชิญปัญหาใดบ้างในการเขียน และนักศึกษา 8 คนที่ถูกเลือกเข้าร่วมกลุ่มย่อยเพื่อแบ่งปันประสบการณ์ของตนเองเพิ่มเติมและวิธีที่พวกรู้มือกับปัญหาเหล่านี้ ในการปิดเผยแพร่ปัญหาการเขียนของนักศึกษาได้ใช้สถิติเชิงพรรณนาเพื่อวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงปริมาณโดยใช้ค่าแนะนำเฉลี่ย ส่วนเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐาน และอัตราเร้อยล และข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพถูกจัดกลุ่มโดยใช้แนวคิดที่คล้ายคลึงกันจากการสัมภาษณ์แบบกึ่งโครงสร้าง ผลการวิจัยแสดงให้เห็นว่า นักศึกษาประสบปัญหาหลัก ๆ 2 ด้าน ได้แก่ 1) อุปสรรคทางอารมณ์ เช่น ความมั่นใจต่ำ และขาดแรงจูงใจ ($\bar{X}=3.67$, $S.D.=0.61$) และ 2) ปัญหาด้านภาษา เช่น ข้อผิดพลาดทางไวยากรณ์ ($\bar{X}=3.50$, $S.D.=0.53$) ดังนั้น นักศึกษาส่วนใหญ่จึงใช้เทคนิคต่าง ๆ เพื่อรับมือกับอุปสรรคเหล่านี้ เช่น การสร้างสภาพแวดล้อมที่เอื้อต่อการเขียน การทำงานเป็นกลุ่ม และการใช้เครื่องมือออนไลน์เพื่อตรวจสอบไวยากรณ์ของตนเอง

คำสำคัญ: การเขียนภาษาอังกฤษเชิงวิชาการ; ปัญหาในการเขียน; แนวทางแก้ไข; ผู้เรียนชาวไทยที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ

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Introduction

English language proficiency is important for students because it actively engages in the global community and meets the demands of the modern economy. English serves as a lingua franca in various kinds of jobs, such as international business, diplomacy, science, and technology. Therefore, mastering this language opens doors to diverse opportunities and connections worldwide. This leads to many schools in Thailand seeming to focus more on teaching English to students due to curriculum changes in reforming teaching and learning English that are relevant to the world trends, and designed to be pertinent to the concept of “World Englishes.” To help Thai students improve their English proficiency in four skills, English has been made a compulsory foreign language taught at all educational levels.

In Thailand, aligning education policies with the global demand for English proficiency is vital. Whilst English language acquisition is a priority and requires mastering specific skills, such as writing, it is a significant challenge that many EFL students and teachers face nowadays Defazio et al. (2010). The ability to write well requires not only knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but also being able to share complicated ideas effectively across different contexts, such as making strong arguments and interacting clearly in a variety of settings. It cannot be denied that effective writing is deeply connected to cognitive thinking, which involves planning ideas, evaluating data, and making connections, including presenting ideas logically and coherently. It is true that many university students face English writing challenges in expressing ideas clearly and assessing their work effectively. Defazio et al. (2010) define effective writing as a skill that involves learning comprehension, application, and synthesis of new knowledge. It is acknowledged that teaching and learning how to write in English as a second or a foreign language is not easy. Therefore, educators must thoroughly grasp the specific challenges students encounter in academic English writing, which is the formal style prevalent in academic and research settings. It requires a specific set of conventions, language, and structure that differentiate it from other forms of writing.

Research Objectives

Objectives of the present study were as follows:

1. To investigate writing difficulties encountered by Thai EFL learners in academic English writing.
2. To explore students' perspectives regarding potential solutions or techniques to overcome these writing difficulties.

Literature Review

Learners and teachers face various challenges and issues in second language (L2) writing that can impact the learning process. Myles (2002) states that “the ability to write well is not a naturally acquired skill; it is usually learned or culturally transmitted as a set of practices in formal instructional settings or other environments.” It is true that many writers, even those with advanced skills, struggle with academic writing.

As we know, writing is a complex process that involves organizing thoughts and ideas into structured and logically arranged ideas. To write well, writers must possess language proficiency, organize ideas using appropriate grammar and vocabulary, and convey information effectively. In addition, creativity, critical thinking, and paying close attention to detail are necessary not only for writers but also for the intended audience to understand writing content. Therefore, the nature of writing encompasses metacognitive, cognitive, affective, and linguistic skills.

In the study of academic English writing, many students encounter a variety of difficulties that can be categorized into four key areas: 1) metacognitive, 2) cognitive, 3) affective, and 4) linguistic challenges. According to Graham et al. (2005) and Schoonen et al. (2003), metacognitive challenges involve the writer’s ability to recognize and regulate their thinking processes during writing, which is crucial for task management and self-monitoring. Cognitive difficulties pertain to the mental processes involved in organizing and expressing thoughts effectively, including the ability to structure ideas logically, as identified by Flower and Hayes (1981). Another component is affective factors that can significantly impact the writing process in aspects of emotional and attitudinal influences (Erkan & Saban, 2011; Sabti et al., 2019; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). These factors commonly focus on anxiety, lack of motivation, or low self-confidence. Lastly, linguistic challenges focus on language elements like grammar, vocabulary, and syntax, which are necessary for clear and effective communication, as highlighted by Crossley (2020). These four types of difficulties collectively emphasize the complexity of academic English writing for learners. All these factors can impede students’ writing performance.

According to Bulqiyah et al. (2021), essay writing difficulties commonly center on challenges associated with vocabulary and grammar. The results highlighted these issues, attributing the students’ writing problems to their emotional state, including self-confidence, anxiety, and lack of practice in essay writing, often attributed to the students’ motivation. Meanwhile, cognitive difficulties are observed in establishing a writing perspective, language transfer, and the overall writing process, and linguistic competence issues arise in lexico-grammar, vocabulary usage, and essay structure.

Mustafa et al. (2022) focus on challenges in academic writing for undergraduate students in English as a second or a foreign language in Oman. The findings indicated that most students faced primary hurdles, such as restricted vocabulary and a limited grasp of grammatical structures. Moreover, challenges included difficulty comprehending texts and summarizing and paraphrasing. Thus, providing ample practice opportunities with constructive feedback and extensive reading before writing was crucial to developing students' writing skills. Husna (2017) explored students' proficiency in writing descriptive texts. The results showed that most students faced difficulties in organizing and developing their ideas, while some also struggled with using vocabulary appropriately.

In addition to the previously mentioned challenges, many students still struggled with seven specific issues in their writing course. These included poor organization and illogical sequencing, inappropriate word choices, grammatical errors, spelling mistakes, confusion with supporting ideas, punctuation issues, and incorrect capitalization (Habibi et al., 2017). In Huy's (2015) study, he explored the challenges affecting the development of writing skills among Vietnamese students. The research identified six main obstacles to their writing difficulties: ineffective vocabulary learning methods, limited grammar instruction time, disinterest in writing topics, insufficient opportunities for correction, a lack of diverse learning materials, and inadequate practice time for writing skills in school. It was concluded that L2 students' writing difficulties may be due to language deficiencies and insufficient writing practice. However, it is suggested that these issues are more likely caused by a lack of language proficiency rather than inadequate writing practice, particularly for learners at low levels of L2 writing proficiency.

Table 1 summarizes the four key types of writing difficulties encountered by EFL learners in academic English writing as identified by various studies, grouped by metacognitive, cognitive, affective, and linguistic aspects.

Table 1. Difficulties encountered in academic English writing

Categories	Writing Difficulties	Previous Studies
1. Metacognitive	- Limited ability to structure essays	(Bulqiyah et al., 2021)
	- Supporting ideas confusions	(Habibi et al., 2017)
	- Poor organization/illogical sequence	
	- Lack of focus on writing development due to time limitations	(Huy, 2015)
2. Cognitive	- Poor reading comprehension	(Mustafa et al., 2022)
	- Difficulties in summarizing and paraphrasing	
	- Transferring ideas between languages	(Bulqiyah et al., 2021)
	- Lack of writing process awareness	
	- Lack of generating ideas	
	- Poor organization/illogical sequence	(Habibi et al., 2017)
	- Difficulties in organizing and developing their ideas	(Husna, 2017)

Table 1 Continued.

Categories	Writing Difficulties	Previous Studies
3. Affective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of interest in writing - Lack of self-confidence - Anxiety about writing - Lack of motivation 	(Bulqiyah et al., 2021)
4. Linguistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited vocabulary and grammar range - Problems with word choice - Grammatical errors 	(Mustafa et al., 2022; Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Habibi et al., 2017)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Morphology, syntax, and semantics errors 	(Bulqiyah et al., 2021)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spelling issues - Punctuation errors - Capitalization errors 	(Habibi et al., 2017)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Difficulties with cohesion and coherence 	(Husna, 2017)

At the tertiary level, academic L2 writing is considered a necessary language skill for all students. It requires writers to adopt a formal style that meets the expectations of scholarly communication. Silva (1993) mentions, “There also seems to be a clear need for more extensive treatment of textual concerns... It may also be necessary for L2 writing teachers to work to enhance their writers’ grammatical and lexical resources.” This enhancement enables students to develop a more advanced ability to construct academic texts in terms of sentence structure and an appropriate vocabulary to maintain a clear and logical structure and adhere to citation and referencing conventions. The tone should be objective, avoiding slang words and informal language.

Enhancing proficiency in academic writing, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), holds significant importance for five main reasons. Firstly, proficient academic writing is a fundamental skill needed for success in educational settings because it helps students communicate complex ideas more effectively. Secondly, these academic writing skills improve students’ performance in assessments and contribute to overall academic success. In addition, the ability to write clearly and persuasively in a second language is a valuable skill for career opportunities and helps with communication in various fields. Furthermore, improved writing skills help develop critical thinking and analytical abilities. This allows individuals to engage more deeply with academic content. Lastly, developing EFL writing skills in academic settings is a key investment in educational and professional success because it helps individuals express their thoughts clearly and engage meaningfully in a different language and in academic situations. Therefore, a combination of effective methods can address various parts of the writing process.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of this study, detailing the interactions among challenges faced by Thai EFL learners in academic English writing, approaches or techniques utilized to overcome these challenges, and their consequent influence on English writing proficiency.

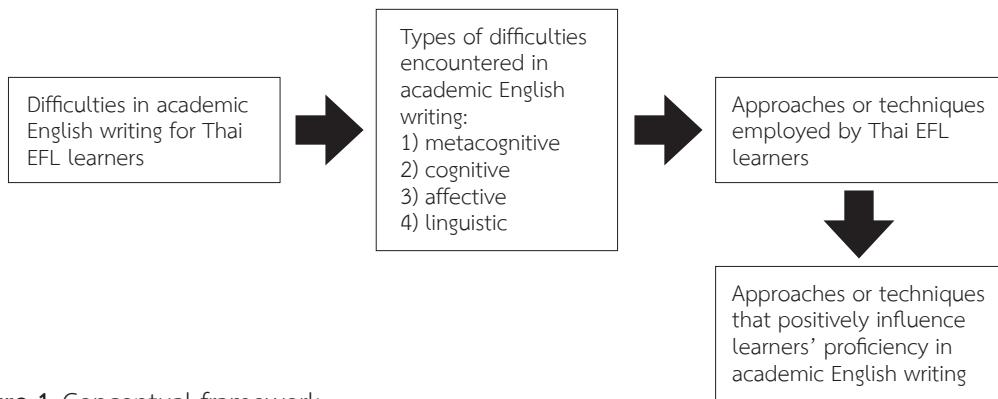


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Research Methodology

1. Participants

The research participants were fifty-four fourth-year undergraduate students enrolled in the Business English program at a government university in southern Thailand. The group consisted of 11 males (20.4%) and 43 females (79.6%) with ages 21 years old (9.3%, n=5), 22 years old (85.2%, n=46), and 23 years old (5.6%, n=3). These students had taken academic English writing courses for at least two years and had studied abroad in Malaysia for one year. They were chosen to participate in this study because they had developed foundational skills in English writing for various writing tasks and had completed academic English writing courses. They developed academic writing skills through consistent practice in their coursework and exams across different English subjects, including experience in writing research articles. They also passed the PSU English Skills Test, with most achieving a B1-B2 level, while their scores were not less than 56, following PSU standardized criteria. Therefore, their English proficiency can be considered equivalent to an intermediate level, having improved both before and after their study abroad experience in Malaysia.

2. Research Instruments

The mixed-methods research design included a questionnaire with closed-ended questions for all fifty-four participants, along with semi-structured interviews conducted with eight students. The closed-ended questions gathered specific

information about academic writing difficulties using a 5-point Likert scale. The Likert scale used to rate responses ranged from 1, “strongly disagree,” to 5, “strongly agree”. The questionnaire was validated by three TESOL lecturers to confirm content validity. It was also piloted, and Cronbach’s Alpha reliability result was 0.731, indicating the questions are reliable. Fraenkel et al. (2011) state that a reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher indicates a satisfactory level of reliability. Moreover, thorough in-depth interviews conducted in Thai provided comprehensive qualitative insights into the participants’ perspectives on their strategies to address writing challenges, including the impact on their English writing proficiency. These conversations were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English for analysis.

3. Data Collection

Two activities were carried out during the data collection stage at the end of the first semester of the academic year 2023. First, questionnaires were distributed to fifty-four fourth-year students, these taking about 20 minutes to complete. Second, eight students were selected for interviews based on their questionnaire responses, specifically chosen to represent a range of writing difficulties and techniques used. The student interviews were conducted after they completed the questionnaires to identify their main challenges in academic English writing and the techniques they used to overcome these issues. Each interview lasted about 5-10 minutes.

4. Data Analysis

Data from closed-ended questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics to calculate mean scores, standard deviations, and percentages.

As for the approach to interpreting the data, the mean scores were explained as follows:

“Strongly Agree” corresponds to a value between 4.21 and 5.00

“Agree” corresponds to a value between 3.41 and 4.20

“Neither Agree nor Disagree” corresponds to a value between 2.61 and 3.40

“Disagree” corresponds to a value between 1.81 and 2.60

“Strongly Disagree” corresponds to a value between 1.00 and 1.80

Data from semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis by grouping recurring themes, providing insight into students’ strategies for addressing writing challenges.

Ethical Considerations

In two groups of students, fifty-four fourth-year students in the Business English program who were willing to participate in the study signed a consent form before

participating. The questionnaires were distributed to them to gather detailed information about their English writing difficulties. After receiving the questionnaires, the researcher analyzed the data. Then, the selected student participants in each interview group also signed consent forms for the interview stage. They were chosen based on the English writing difficulties that impact their writing proficiency.

Results

This section focuses on presenting the findings and interpretations derived from the data collected in this study, addressing research question 1: 'What writing problems or challenges do students encounter in their academic English writing?'

Questionnaire Results on Academic English Writing Difficulties

Table 2 summarizes the results of closed-ended questions regarding the students' perceptions of problems encountered in academic English writing.

Table 2. Comparison of overall mean scores and standard deviations of perceived difficulties in academic English writing

Types of Writing Difficulties	Total Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Affective	3.67	0.61	Agree
Linguistic	3.50	0.53	Agree
Cognitive	3.35	0.44	Neither Agree nor Disagree
Metacognitive	3.34	0.72	Neither Agree nor Disagree

In Table 1, the average score for the difficulties that the majority of students faced in their affective aspects of academic English writing was $\bar{X}=3.67$, S.D.=0.61. This indicates that they generally agreed on facing emotional challenges. Most of them also agreed that they experienced language problems ($\bar{X}=3.50$, S.D.=0.53). In contrast, some felt uncertain about facing challenges in cognitive aspects ($\bar{X}=3.35$, S.D.=0.44) and metacognitive aspects ($\bar{X}=3.34$, S.D.=0.72). The results show that most students primarily struggled with two main problems related to affective and linguistic aspects.

Table 3. Mean scores and levels of agreement on affective issues in academic English writing

Difficulties in Academic English Writing	Mean	Level of Agreement (%)					
		SA (5)	A (4)	N/NA (3)	D (2)	S.D. (1)	
Affective							
Motivation and Confidence							
1. I lack confidence in expressing ideas in my writing.	3.94	29.6	42.6	22.2	3.7	1.9	
2. I lack motivation to improve my academic writing skills.	3.72	24.1	44.4	20.4	5.6	5.6	

Table 3 Continued.

Difficulties in Academic English Writing	Mean	Level of Agreement (%)				
		SA (5)	A (4)	N/NA (3)	D (2)	S.D. (1)
3. I am not interested in taking academic English writing courses because of my limited proficiency in the language.	3.50	14.8	33.3	38.9	13	0
Anxiety and Frustration						
1. My struggle with writing assignments makes my overall learning experience less enjoyable.	3.66	18.5	44.4	24.1	11.1	1.9
2. I have experienced anxiety or fear specifically related to the act of writing.	3.63	16.7	50	18.5	9.3	5.6
3. I often feel anxious about academic writing assignments.	3.59	22.2	33.3	27.8	14.8	1.9
4. I have a problem focusing on writing assignments if the topic does not interest me.	3.28	3.7	37	46.3	9.3	3.7

Based on the data presented in Table 3, it is seen that most of the students faced difficulties in academic writing due to lacking self-confidence in expressing ideas ($\bar{X}=3.94$) and lacking motivation to improve academic English writing ($\bar{X}=3.72$). In addition, they realized that the difficulty in writing assignments affected the learning experience making it feel less enjoyable ($\bar{X}=3.66$). The issues mentioned above had a negative impact on the students' learning abilities. This led to anxiety and fear in academic English writing ($\bar{X}=3.63$). They specifically expressed concern about writing assignments ($\bar{X}=3.59$). Moreover, they felt the need for greater motivation to enroll in academic English writing courses, largely due to their limited proficiency in the language ($\bar{X}=3.50$). This lack of proficiency contributed to their feelings of anxiety and reluctance, further hindering their ability to improve. Another factor contributing to their anxiety was the uninteresting topic of writing ($\bar{X}=3.28$).

Table 4. Mean scores and levels of agreement on linguistic issues in academic English writing

Difficulties in Academic English Writing	Mean	Level of Agreement (%)					
		SA (5)	A (4)	N/NA (3)	D (2)	S.D. (1)	
Linguistic							
Grammar							
1. I find it confusing to use prepositions correctly.	3.90	24.1	44.4	29.6	1.9	0	
2. I am confused about the proper use of word classes.	3.89	25.9	40.7	29.6	3.7	0	
3. I have difficulty ensuring that subjects and verbs agree in my sentences.	3.87	25.9	38.9	31.5	3.7	0	
4. I frequently face problems using correct tenses in my academic writing.	3.78	22.2	38.9	33.3	5.6	0	
5. I am unclear about how to use adverbs properly.	3.78	22.2	38.9	33.3	5.6	0	

Table 4 Continued.

Difficulties in Academic English Writing	Mean	Level of Agreement (%)				
		SA (5)	A (4)	N/NA (3)	D (2)	S.D. (1)
6. I frequently compose incomplete sentences lacking a noun, verb, or both.	3.74	14.8	53.7	22.2	9.3	0
7. I am uncertain about the word order of adjectives.	3.72	14.8	46.3	35.2	3.7	0
Mechanics: Spelling, Punctuation, Capitalization						
1. I do not know the rules for using capitalization.	3.48	16.7	35.2	27.8	20.4	0
2. I frequently neglect to capitalize the first letter when starting a new sentence.	3.39	14.8	24.1	46.3	14.8	0
3. I am often confused about the use of punctuation marks.	3.24	9.3	37	25.9	24.1	3.7
4. I commonly construct sentences without proper punctuation, lacking full stops or independent clauses.	3.24	9.3	35.2	29.6	22.2	3.7
5. I take time to recall the exact spelling.	2.93	5.6	27.8	27.8	31.5	7.4
6. I have difficulty spelling words, especially new ones, correctly.	2.48	3.7	18.5	18.5	40.7	18.5

Two main writing problems were grammar and mechanics (spelling, punctuation, and capitalization) presented as linguistic challenges in Table 4. The results showed that most of the students had difficulties with grammar concepts, such as prepositions ($\bar{X}=3.90$), word classes ($\bar{X}=3.89$), subject-verb agreement ($\bar{X}=3.87$), tenses ($\bar{X}=3.78$), adverbs ($\bar{X}=3.78$), incomplete sentences: lacking a noun, verb, or both ($\bar{X}=3.74$), and the word order of adjectives ($\bar{X}=3.72$). However, they had little difficulty in spelling words correctly ($\bar{X}=2.48$) and recalling the exact spellings ($\bar{X}=2.93$). It can be seen that they encountered significant challenges using mechanics such as capitalization and punctuation marks.

Table 5. Mean scores and levels of agreement on cognitive issues in academic English writing

Difficulties in Academic English Writing	Mean	Level of Agreement (%)				
		SA (5)	A (4)	N/NA (3)	D (2)	S.D. (1)
Cognitive						
1. I struggle with developing supporting sentences.	3.56	13	44.4	27.8	14.8	0
2. I struggle to maintain proper academic language and tone.	3.48	11.1	38.9	37	13	0
3. I struggle to write a strong concluding sentence.	3.46	9.3	40.7	37	13	0
4. I struggle to develop a coherent and well-organized structure for my academic writing.	3.43	0	53.7	35.2	11.1	0
5. I struggle to use different words to express similar meanings.	3.43	11.1	38.9	31.5	18.5	0
6. I struggle to select appropriate vocabulary, including using idiomatic expressions accurately.	3.41	7.4	42.6	33.3	16.7	0

Table 5 Continued.

Difficulties in Academic English Writing	Mean	Level of Agreement (%)				
		SA (5)	A (4)	N/NA (3)	D (2)	S.D. (1)
7. I struggle to summarize ideas.	3.39	9.3	27.8	57.4	3.7	1.9
8. I struggle with using transitions to connect paragraphs.	3.26	14.8	27.8	31.5	20.4	5.6
9. I struggle with using coordinating and subordinating conjunctions in sentence writing.	3.26	5.6	33.3	42.6	18.5	0
10. I need help finding and utilizing relevant information.	3.20	1.9	35.2	44.4	18.5	0
11. I struggle to paraphrase ideas.	3.19	9.3	25.9	42.6	18.5	3.7
12. I struggle to develop a thesis statement.	3.17	13	31.5	25.9	18.5	11.1

Table 5 summarizes the feedback received from the students regarding the difficulties they faced in academic English writing. The difficulties were classified into two main aspects: cognitive and idea development, as well as vocabulary and language usage. Most of the students found it challenging to develop supporting sentences ($\bar{X}=3.56$) and to use proper academic language and tone ($\bar{X}=3.48$). They also expressed a need for assistance in creating a strong concluding sentence for their academic English writing ($\bar{X}=3.46$). Additionally, most of them encountered difficulties in developing a coherent and well-organized structure, including using different words to express similar meanings ($\bar{X}=3.43$). They also had trouble selecting appropriate vocabulary, including using idiomatic expressions accurately ($\bar{X}=3.41$), summarizing ideas ($\bar{X}=3.39$), and using transitions, coordinating, and subordinating conjunctions ($\bar{X}=3.26$). It is noteworthy that most of the students seemed to have fewer difficulties in developing a thesis statement ($\bar{X}=3.17$), paraphrasing ideas ($\bar{X}=3.19$), and finding and utilizing relevant information ($\bar{X}=3.20$), which are crucial in writing.

Table 6. Mean scores and levels of agreement on metacognitive issues in academic English writing

Difficulties in Academic English Writing	Mean	Level of Agreement (%)				
		SA (5)	A (4)	N/NA (3)	D (2)	S.D. (1)
Metacognitive						
1. I struggle with managing my time effectively, which often leads to rushed and low-quality writing.	3.52	16.7	37	31.5	11.1	3.7
2. I struggle to create a clear structure when writing, resulting in disorganization and incoherence.	3.43	7.4	42.6	37	11.1	1.9
3. I struggle to set clear objectives for my academic writing, causing frustration and inefficiency.	3.39	13	27.8	51.9	0	7.4
4. I struggle to identify my writing's target audience and purpose, which affects tone, style, and content.	3.33	13	42.6	16.7	20.4	7.4

Table 6 Continued.

Difficulties in Academic English Writing	Mean	Level of Agreement (%)				
		SA (5)	A (4)	N/NA (3)	D (2)	S.D. (1)
5. I may not effectively monitor my progress or reflect on my writing process, missing opportunities for improvement.	3.31	11.1	29.6	42.6	13	3.7
6. I struggle with revising my writing, which makes it difficult to identify and address weaknesses.	3.24	11.1	25.9	42.6	16.7	3.7
7. I have a limited understanding and application of writing strategies.	3.18	7.4	33.3	37	14.8	7.4

Regarding the metacognitive issues in Table 6, most of the students faced obstacles in the pre-writing and planning stages, particularly in managing time when writing in academic English ($\bar{X}=3.52$). They had difficulties organizing their thoughts and needed help structuring and outlining ideas before beginning to write ($\bar{X}=3.43$). At the same time, they struggled to establish clear goals for academic writing ($\bar{X}=3.39$), which implied a potential lack of direction and purpose in their writing efforts. In contrast, some had limited proficiency in understanding and using writing strategies for academic English writing ($\bar{X}=3.18$).

Findings from Semi-structured Interviews on Potential Solutions

To answer research question 2, 'What approaches or techniques do students use to improve their academic English writing skills when they face writing difficulties?' interviews were used to collect data and gain insights.

After interviewing eight students, it was found that they encountered various writing difficulties. They provided insights into approaches and techniques for overcoming these challenges, which were categorized into four main themes related to the writing difficulties.

Table 7. Students' opinions on techniques for overcoming academic English writing difficulties

Approaches or Techniques	Writing Difficulties
1. Creating a positive writing environment	Affective
2. Working in groups: group discussions and collaborative group assignments	Affective
3. Online language support: vocabulary-building exercises, grammar drills, reading materials	Linguistic
4. Online writing tools: grammar checking and getting consultations for generating ideas, explanations or clarifications, language translation, and content assistance	Linguistic
5. Brainstorming and outlining	Metacognitive
6. Using self-assessment or peer feedback	Metacognitive
7. Using writing models from lecturers	Cognitive

The results of approaches or techniques displayed in Table 7 show the methods that the students utilized to improve their academic English writing skills when confronted with difficulties. These techniques have the potential to influence the students' proficiency in academic English writing.

Eight respondents identified several key techniques for overcoming writing difficulties. Six of them stated that creating a positive writing environment through group activities could raise their motivation and reduce writing anxiety. Four respondents said that using online language support tools for vocabulary-building exercises, grammar drills, and accessing various reading materials, along with obtaining ideas and explanations, especially from grammar-checking tools like QuillBot and Grammarly, was beneficial for enhancing their writing. Some also used Google Translate for translations. Two respondents felt that brainstorming and outlining were necessary for organizing thoughts before their writing. One respondent mentioned that self-assessment and peer feedback could improve her writing. Furthermore, two respondents used writing models from lecturers saying this was a helpful strategy as it allowed them to grasp effective writing structures and styles.

Table 8. Interviews on techniques to overcome academic English writing challenges

Writing Challenges	Students' Opinions
1. Affective Issues	<p>“A positive environment in the classroom helps me feel more comfortable in writing.” [Respondents 1 & 3]</p> <p>“I feel more motivated and less stressed about my writing when the class environment is good.” [Respondents 5 & 6]</p> <p>“I learn something new when working in a group, such as getting ideas, sharing thoughts, and collaborating in group discussions to improve my writing.” [Respondents 7 & 8]</p>
2. Linguistic Issues	<p>“Online tools are incredibly helpful. I rely on them to check my grammar, expand my vocabulary, and occasionally translate phrases. They really simplify my writing process.” [Respondent 1]</p> <p>“I prefer using QuillBot and Grammarly to check my grammar. [Respondent 2]</p> <p>“I use translation tools: Google Translate when I'm uncertain about specific phrases. Sometimes, I write in Thai first and then translate it into English to make sure the meaning is clear.” [Respondents 2 & 4]</p> <p>“Whenever I'm unsure how to begin a paragraph or an essay, or if I need some ideas, I look to online tools for explanations.” [Respondent 8]</p>
3. Metacognitive Issues	<p>“Brainstorming and making outlines really help me put my ideas down before I begin writing.” [Respondents 1 & 6]</p> <p>“Peer feedback and self-assessment help me in reducing some writing errors and improve my writing skills.” [Respondent 7]</p>
4. Cognitive Issues	<p>“I frequently look at the writing samples my lecturers provided. They illustrate what a well-structured paragraph or essay should look like and guide me in creating my own.” [Respondents 5 & 6]</p>

These practical techniques could help the students improve their academic English writing skills while addressing various challenges, such as affective, linguistic, metacognitive, and cognitive difficulties.

Discussion and Conclusion

This section highlights significant insights into the writing difficulties faced by Thai EFL learners and the techniques they employed to overcome these challenges. It addresses the results in relation to the research objectives, focusing on two main issues.

1. Writing difficulties encountered by Thai EFL learners in academic English writing

The findings revealed that the majority of students encountered writing difficulties, especially in affective and linguistic aspects. In addition, they had fewer difficulties in cognitive and metacognitive areas. The primary affective challenges came from low self-confidence and heightened anxiety, which negatively impacted their writing abilities. The emotional issues may arise from a lack of collaborative learning and a non-supportive environment to raise motivation. It can be said that without regular group interaction and constructive feedback, the students may find it difficult to develop the confidence needed for effective writing.

In terms of linguistic challenges, the results showed that many students struggled with grammar in academic English writing. These issues may have arisen from insufficient language practice and limited opportunities to develop a deeper contextual understanding of grammar rules. Therefore, they used online writing tools for improving their writing. However, an over-reliance on technology can cause language problems. Even though these technological tools provide convenience, they may decrease students' active engagement with the writing process, leading to a decline in their grammar proficiency. Alhusban (2016) supports this view, stating that students who heavily depend on technology tend to experience a deterioration in their ability to generate well-structured and thoughtfully written work, as reliance on digital aids diminishes their ability for independent critical thinking.

Overall, the study confirms that both emotional and language difficulties significantly hinder students' performance in academic English writing. These findings suggest the need for more group-based learning and a focus on building linguistic competence through active engagement rather than passive reliance on technology.

2. Students' perspectives on solutions and techniques to overcome writing difficulties

The study also explored students' perspectives on potential solutions and techniques to overcome these writing difficulties. The students identified various strategies that were effective in addressing their difficulties. They identified metacognitive techniques as key tools for organizing their thoughts and improving their writing structure, such as brainstorming and outlining. In addition, self-assessment and peer

feedback were recognized as essential techniques for refining their work and gaining new perspectives. Herman (2019) highlighted the effectiveness of collaborative techniques in enhancing students' writing proficiency, such as group work and creative writing activities. This study found that group discussions and collaborative writing assignments helped students create a positive writing environment and reduced anxiety. This platform allowed students to share ideas and build confidence, boosting interest and involvement in writing tasks as Herman's findings suggested. Furthermore, the use of writing models and online resources for grammar checks and vocabulary building could help the students develop their cognitive and linguistic skills. Therefore, Thai EFL teachers should be trained on how to use appropriate technological tools in writing tasks to better support students in developing their academic English writing skills by a combination of metacognitive, cognitive, affective, and linguistic strategies in overcoming writing difficulties.

Recommendations

To effectively address academic English writing challenges among Thai EFL learners, university-level teachers in Thailand should integrate both cognitive and metacognitive strategies into comprehensive writing support in order to guide students in planning their writing with clear outlines and a strong understanding of the audience and purpose. Moreover, teachers should focus on improving sentence structure and promoting revision through peer feedback, self-assessment, and thorough proofreading. Providing instruction in specific academic writing techniques, such as brainstorming and outlining, should also be emphasized to foster metacognitive skills. At the same time, creating a supportive classroom environment and offering targeted linguistic instruction in grammar will help reduce anxiety and develop learners' writing performance.

Further research should explore the impact of collaborative learning on students' writing development, particularly its role in reducing anxiety and enhancing motivation. Investigating students' reliance on online writing tools, such as grammar checkers, could offer insights into how these tools affect their writing proficiency and independent thinking. Finally, studies focusing on the effectiveness of metacognitive strategy training, including self-assessment and reflection, could help identify techniques that enable learners to manage and overcome writing challenges more efficiently.

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