

Bridging Gaps in English Writing: Syntactic, Lexical, Discourse, and Cognitive Challenges among Thai University Students

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ABSTRACT

Writing in English is widely regarded as the most demanding communicative ability among Thai undergraduates because it requires simultaneous control of grammar, lexis, rhetorical organization, and content, while also mobilizing the cognitive processes used in listening, reading, and speaking. To identify how this competence can be strengthened, the present quantitative study investigated eighty students whose degree programmes are delivered exclusively in English, making them an appropriate cohort for analysing difficulties in four domains: (1) syntactic competence, (2) lexical competence, (3) discourse competence, and (4) cognitive competence. Descriptive statistics, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and Pearson correlation were applied. Self-assessment data revealed strong positive correlations among all competence indicators on both ANOVA and Pearson tests, suggesting that perceived proficiency in one domain is closely linked to proficiency in the others. Reported writing challenges similarly showed significant interrelationships through Pearson analysis, yet ANOVA detected no significant group differences, indicating wide individual variation. When overall self-assessed competence was correlated with overall perceived challenges, the Pearson coefficient showed no meaningful relationship, implying that students who feel highly competent may still experience specific obstacles, and vice versa. These findings highlight the need to reassess and refine pedagogical approaches to English writing for Thai university learners, with targeted, domain-specific support aimed at integrating syntactic, lexical, discourse, and cognitive skills to foster balanced, sustainable growth in academic writing performance. Therefore, curriculum designers, language teachers, and policymakers should collaborate in developing adaptive writing curricula informed by data-driven insights.



Introduction

English has emerged as great marketable skill among Thais living in Thailand and it has become imperative to achieve academic achievement, career advancement, and economic growth. In relation, EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI, 2023) placed Thailand as its 101st out of 113 participating countries and categorized it under “very low proficiency,” for achieving EF EPI score of 416 which generally means that English proficiency is limited to simply introduce oneself by its name, age, and country of origin; understand simple signs; and can give basic directions to foreign visitors which can be attributed to limited exposure to English language environment like inadequate opportunities to practice or develop English. In addition, the rating also describes that there is a struggle with higher-order language skills required for academic and professional success among Thais. In relation to English First’s ranking, Tantiwich and Sinwongsuwat (2021) asserted that proficiency of English in Thailand remains at the level of basic users, or A2 under the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Nguyen and Suwannabubpha (2021) described that the current state of English education in Thailand reflects outmoded grammar-translation, rote-memorization and teacher-centered methods, however, the practice of learner-centered in most Thai classrooms have not been well-provided to Thai students due to some reasons like complacency on traditional teaching methods. Additionally, the lack of adequate resources for teachers to promote student autonomy and personalized learning to create an environment conducive to learner-centered education are not prioritized because the emphasis is highlighted on standardized testing and academic performance that draws attention to traditional or lecture-based teaching pedagogy rather than fostering interactive and student-driven learning experience. This observation was also aligned to the findings of Young (2021) that despite multiple educational reforms implemented in Thailand, most Thai students still lack the English competence needed to compete globally; though various reasons have been proposed to improve Thailand’s weak ranking in English, however, only few have considered looking beyond classroom concerns.

Pongsukvajchakul (2023) expressed that although Thais have learned English for at least ten (10) years in their basic education, yet they have never fully developed skills in English writing which was evident among Thai university students, and to most of them, English writing is difficult because it involves reading comprehension, analytical skills, and writing skills to demonstrate their ability to transform their thoughts into words that convey a message. The said difficulty in English writing is evident among Thai university students’ writing styles, grammar, vocabulary, and practicing hours.

Evidently, students with lack of writing skills find English writing challenging in formulating concepts and simplifying complex ideas to produce well-written narrative that includes considerable vocabulary knowledge and solid grasp of grammatical principles. Rao (2017) highlighted that language structure, vocabulary, grammar, and coherence were some of the challenges that students often experienced in academic writing along English as a Foreign Language. This however is related to outdated teaching techniques that did not understand the needs and interests of the students. Hinnon (2014) expounded that to write an effective narrative in English, it is important for Thai university students to acknowledge their weak points and strive achieving improvement along with suitable teaching pedagogy and activities that would enhance their writing ability because it was observed that many

Thai university students lack metacognitive awareness of their weaknesses that prevent them from improving autonomously.

Arihata (2023) also stated that Thai university students struggle most with grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and argument development. Additionally, Woodeson et al. (2023) found English writing challenges that hinder Thai university students to produce better quality English writing were vocabulary, grammatical patterns, parts of speech, affixes, spelling, word meaning, use of idioms, incorrect word order, weak thesis statement, weak paragraph organization, and unfamiliarity with academic conventions. Hence, Srisawat and Poonpon (2023) highlighted the features to be considered in any academic writing and namely, topic development, organization, grammar, and vocabulary. Topic development for instance deals with the complete composition of the academic writing that must have a strong claim or position on what it is all about; provided sufficient details; the train of thoughts and ideas is clear by effectively addressing the topic and all points are fully elaborated; the paragraphs are well-developed and have appropriate and sufficient explanations and exemplifications.

In terms of organization, the academic writing exhibits organization through introductory, body, and concluding paragraphs; it also displays unity and coherence overall. About the grammar aspect, the academic writing must exhibit a wide range of complex structures; free from grammatical errors as well as grammatical errors that can cause great confusion to readers. Lastly, vocabulary use that deals with the application of academic or sophisticated vocabulary; it is also expected that the academic writing observes word order, capitalization, spelling, avoidance of contractions, and among other writing conventions that must be practiced to achieve well-written academic writing in English.

On the other hand, Sharma et al. (2016) highlighted that self-assessment is an essential learning element because it identifies the strengths and weaknesses that should be maintained or enhanced of the students to achieve lifelong learning. In relation to writing skills development, Dhanarattigannon and Thienpermpool (2022), Herayati (2020) and Mak and Wong (2017) emphasized that self-assessment in writing skills has a profound influence on the improvement of the writing performance of students because it brings awareness to students in the likes of writing perception, writing process, and writing performance promotes analytical and decision-making abilities.

The urgency of this study lies in its potential to bridge the gap between Thailand's English proficiency ranking and global standards. As Thailand is pushing its way to a stronger global market integration, it requires to have a pool of workforce that is proficient in English particularly in academic and professional writing. In addition, students who aim for international scholarships, exchange programs, and better paying careers in international companies must demonstrate strong English writing skills.

Considering also that most Thais remain in CEFR A2 level (basic user) and they have difficulty in producing well-structured, grammatically sound, and logically coherent academic texts. A key contributing factor to Thailand's stark disparity on having "very low proficiency" rating is its teachers' reliance on outmoded teaching methods, traditional grammar-translation, rote memorization techniques, overemphasis on standard testing, and lack of sufficient practice in structured writing tasks due to limited classroom focus on analytical writing composition, thesis development, critical analysis, and learner-centered instruction that equipped Thai university students with limited exposure to structured writing practice which make them unprepared for the demands of academic English writing. Though

the existing studies highlighted the common struggles of Thai students like difficulty in grammar, vocabulary, and organization but few provided actionable and student-centered solutions based on self-assessment and challenges data.

This study identifies the specific weaknesses of Thai university students on syntactic competence (knowledge on grammar and sentence structure) that dealt on students' grasp of grammar and their ability to construct well-formed sentences to convey ideas to their audience; lexical competence (knowledge on vocabulary and word choice) which revolved on how students use appropriate vocabulary and meaning on their writing; discourse competence (knowledge on organization and structure) that looked on how students organized their writing tasks considering the narrative's logical flow of ideas and coherence; and cognitive competence (content development) which is related to the breadth (scope) and depth (understanding) in providing sufficient details that significantly gives the narrative an overall impact of cogency to its readers.

Furthermore, this study does not only identify English writing obstacles but it also provides data-driven teaching pedagogy to assist Thai university students on overcoming the obstacles. Hence, without intervention, these deficiencies will continue to limit Thai university students' academic and career paths on becoming a workforce capable of competing in an English-dominant global market.

Overall, the novelty of this study is utilizing an integrated assessment across four essential indicators: syntactic, lexical, discourse, and cognitive competencies. Unlike previous research that looked on each area separately, this study analyzed the interconnectedness of each indicator on English writing proficiency. This study provided a novel approach on writing pedagogy in the Thai context that would empower Thai university students to recognize, acknowledge, and address their English writing challenges to bridge the gaps between theoretical knowledge and English writing proficiency offering sustainable learning habits and scalable solutions that contribute to Thailand's goal of enhancing global competitiveness, academic excellence, and workforce readiness.

Method

This study utilized quantitative research design specifically the correlational research approach. Creswell (2013) defined it as research that identifies relationships between two or more variables involving data collection on multiple variables using statistical analysis. This study was conducted at an international college of one state university in the northern part of Thailand. Additionally, this study sought consent to all participants after discussing to them the study's objectives and this was participated by a total of 80 Thai university students who attended and completed at least one writing course in English at the university and met the specific inclusion criteria necessary to address the research objectives. The respondents were the entirety of the population who use English in the pursuit of their academic degree, and thus making them a relevant group to the challenges of English writing. With the goal of providing better academic English writing competence to Thai university students, the emphasis of this study was on the students who are in an international program and had a direct experience on attending at least one (1) English writing course at the locale of the study to ensure that their responses reflect their self-assessment and real struggles in an English as medium of instruction environment.

The survey questionnaire got two parts. Part 1 dealt with self-assessment of respondents regarding the four (4) indicators namely: (1) syntactic competence with ten (10) question items; (2) lexical competence with nine (9) question items; (3) discourse competence with ten (10) question items; and (4) cognitive competence with nine (9) question items. Part 2 dealt with the challenges of (1) syntactic competence with nine (9) question items; (2) lexical competence with seven (7) question items; (3) discourse competence with seven (7) question items; and (4) cognitive competence with ten (10) question items. Both parts utilized five-point Likert scale. The research instrument was pilot-tested to seventeen (17) students who voluntarily participated in the pilot testing and its result was analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha achieving result for self-assessment at .829 interpreted as "very reliable," and a result of .919 for challenges achieving the same verbal interpretation, "very reliable." All volunteered students had provided consent.

The pooling of volunteer respondents in this study started with setting an appointment to the prospective respondents for the first meeting through their class advisers and class representatives and the researcher introduced details about this study highlighting its benefits to the teaching of writing; and that being a volunteer respondent in this study would be a great contribution to the knowledge economy of literature on writing development in English. The nature of the research was clearly explained to all prospective respondents and all questions were entertained and answered clearly and thoroughly. It was made clear that only the students who are willing to volunteer as a respondent for this study will be considered as the research's respondents. After the first meeting, another set of date was set for the second meeting for the distribution of the questionnaires and its collection date. At the second meeting, the researcher distributed the survey questionnaire to all students and it was made clear that only the students who are willing to volunteer as a respondent for this study will be considered as the research's respondents. All of the prospective respondents were informed about this study without using any influence to coerce, threat, intimidate, or persuade. The decision of joining as volunteer respondent was one's own volition. All were also informed the date, time, and location of the drop box for the collection of the questionnaires.

The study data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. The statistical analysis utilized in this study were descriptive statistics in getting the frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation; and Pearson correlation analysis to calculate the correlations for (self-assessment English writing competence and English writing challenges) or examine the linear relationships between indicators particularly on the self-assessment of Thai university students and English writing across the four indicators: syntactic, lexical, discourse, and cognitive. Additionally, a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to examine the differences in means across the indicators

Results and Discussion

Results

The self-assessment of students in English writing across (1) syntactic competence; (2) lexical competence; (3) discourse competence; and (4) cognitive competence indicated a moderate level of understanding and ability but not adequate as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Overall Report of Self-Assessment on English Writing

Overall Result	Syntactic Competence	Lexical Competence	Discourse Competence	Cognitive Competence
Mean	3.2950	3.0889	3.2287	3.2280
Std. Deviation	.64118	.6302	.50871	.53807

Source: processed data (2025)

Table 1 shows the mean scores of all the indicators and among them, lexical competence got the lowest mean. Along lexical competence, utilizing synonyms, antonyms, and idiomatic expressions ($\bar{x} = 2.80$) and recognizing and correcting inappropriate vocabulary ($\bar{x} = 2.80$) shared the lowest means. On syntactic competence, the respondents got low on using different tenses in academic writing ($\bar{x} = 2.99$) and recognizing and editing simple to complex errors in writing ($\bar{x} = 2.99$). In terms of discourse competence, respondents identified that using transitional words and phrases to enhance the flow and coherence of their written work ($\bar{x} = 3.09$), recognizing and addressing weaknesses in the organization and structure of their writing during the revision process ($\bar{x} = 3.13$), and maintaining a consistent and appropriate tone, style, and voice throughout their writing ($\bar{x} = 3.14$) received lower means among question items. On cognitive competence, respondents self-assessed rating got the lowest on integrating diverse sources and viewpoints to enrich the content of their writing ($\bar{x} = 3.09$) and on maintaining focus and relevance throughout their writing ($\bar{x} = 3.09$). Overall, the results of self-assessment on English writing indicated that respondents possessed a moderate understanding and ability in English writing but not adequate across all indicators. To gain a deeper understanding on how these writing indicators relate to one another, a two-tailed Pearson analysis test was utilized to provide a fuller understanding of the relationships between variables and identify any significant relationship as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2
Overall Pearson Correlation Results of English Writing Self-Assessment Indicators

		Syntactic Competence	Lexical Competence	Discourse Competence	Cognitive Competence
Syntactic Competence	Pearson	1	.746**	.567**	.669**
	Correlation				
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
Lexical Competence	N	80	80	80	80
	Pearson	.746**	1	.637**	.688**
	Correlation				
Discourse Competence	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	80	80	80	80
	Pearson	.567**	.637**	1	.669**
Cognitive Competence	Correlation				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	80	80	80	80

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: processed data (2025)

Table 2 shows the respondents' self-assessed indicators in English writing. The Pearson matrix revealed statistically significant positive correlations among all four English writing indicators: (1) syntactic competence; (2) lexical competence; (3) discourse competence; and (4) cognitive competence. The highest correlation was found between syntactic competence and lexical competence ($r = .746$, $p < .01$), followed closely by lexical competence and cognitive competence ($r = .688$, $p < .01$). Discourse competence showed a moderate positive correlation with syntactic competence ($r = .567$, $p < .01$), lexical competence ($r = .637$, $p < .01$). Similarly, cognitive competence was moderately correlated with syntactic competence ($r = .669$, $p < .01$). All correlations were significant at 0.01 level indicating strong interrelationships among the self-assessed indicators of English writing.

Following the Pearson correlation analysis, ANOVA was performed to further examine the differences of self-assessed English writing indicators to determine if there are significant differences exist among indicators. The four key indicators in the self-assessed English writing were analyzed: (1) syntactic competence; (2) lexical competence; (3) discourse competence; and (4) cognitive competence. For each English writing indicator, ANOVA provided three components: sum of squares, degrees of freedom, and mean squares resulting to F-statistic and p-value to determine whether the observed differences are statistically significant which is illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3
Overall ANOVA Results of Self-Assessed English Writing Competence

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Syntactic Competence	Between Groups	13.989	4	3.497	14.186	.000
	Within Groups	18.489	75	.247		
	Total	32.478	79			
Lexical Competence	Between Groups	9.489	4	2.372	8.114	.000
	Within Groups	21.928	75	.292		
	Total	31.417	79			
Discourse Competence	Between Groups	3.041	4	.760	3.277	.016
	Within Groups	17.403	75	.232		
	Total	20.444	79			
Cognitive Competence	Between Groups	4.571	4	1.143	4.684	.002
	Within Groups	18.301	75	.244		
	Total	22.872	79			

Table 3 demonstrates that the ANOVA results on English writing self-assessed competence that there is a statistically significant differences between groups across indicators. For syntactic competence, the between groups variance (sum of squares = 13.989, $df = 4$) was significantly larger than the within groups variance ($F = 14.186$, $p < .001$), with a mean square of 3.497 between groups compared to .247 with groups. Similarly, the lexical competence showed significant between groups differences (sum of squares = 9.489, $df = 4$, $F = 8.114$, $p < .001$) with between groups mean square of 2.372 versus within groups mean square of 0.292. For discourse competence, demonstrated significant variation between groups (sum of squares = 3.041, $df = 4$, $F = 3.277$, $p = .016$), with between groups mean square of 0.760 compared to within groups mean square of 0.232. Regarding cognitive competence, the between groups differences were significant (sum of squares = 4.571, $df =$

4, $F = 4.684$, $p = .002$), with between groups mean square of 1.143 versus within groups mean square of 0.244. The p -values for all indicators across competence were below the .05 threshold indicating statistically significant differences.

On the matter of overall challenges on English writing indicators that respondents encountered got a verbal interpretation of moderate challenges in English Writing across all indicators. as shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Overall Result on English Writing Challenges

Overall Result	Syntactic Competence	Lexical Competence	Discourse Competence	Cognitive Competence
Mean	3.1181	3.4179	3.2696	3.3000
Std. Deviation	.77875	.71979	.76948	.82860

Source: processed data (2025)

The overall mean score of English writing challenges was 3.2764 with a standard deviation of 0.77505, indicating moderate level of challenges in English writing experienced by the respondents. Among the four indicators, lexical competence registered the highest mean score ($\bar{x} = 3.4179$, $\sigma = .71979$) placing it within the moderate challenges in English writing. This was followed by cognitive competence ($\bar{x} = 3.3000$, $\sigma = .82860$), discourse competence ($\bar{x} = 3.2696$, $\sigma = .76948$), and syntactic competence ($\bar{x} = 3.1181$, $\sigma = .77875$).

Identifying the relationship between the indicators of English writing on challenges, Pearson correlation coefficients was utilized (Table 5) to know whether students' English writing challenges. Understanding this relationship can provide valuable insights to provide a pedagogy that will fit to current and future students in overcoming obstacles in the writing process.

Table 5
Overall Pearson Correlation Results of English Writing Challenges

		Syntactic Challenges	Lexical Challenges	Discourse Challenges	Cognitive Challenges
Syntactic Challenges	Pearson	1	.374**	.448**	.337**
	Correlation				
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001	.000	.002
Lexical Challenges	N	80	80	80	80
	Pearson	.374**	1	.699**	.736**
	Correlation				
Discourse Challenges	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001		.000	.000
	N	80	80	80	80
	Pearson	.448**	.699**	1	.748**
Cognitive Challenges	Correlation				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	80	80	80	80
Overall Challenges	Pearson	.337**	.736**	.748**	1
	Correlation				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.000	.000	
Overall Challenges	N	80	80	80	80

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 reveals statistically significant positive relationships among all indicators. Syntactic challenges demonstrated moderate correlations between lexical challenges ($r = .374$; $p = .001$) and discourse challenges ($r = .699$, $p < .001$), and cognitive challenges ($r = .736$, $p < .001$). The strongest observed relationship emerged between discourse challenges and cognitive challenges ($r = .748$, $p < .001$). All correlation coefficients reached statistical significance at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), with p-values ranging from $p < .001$ to $p = .002$. The consistently significant positive correlations suggest systematic covariation among the indicators of English writing on challenges indicating that higher performance in one (1) indicator tends to associate with higher challenges on others.

The ANOVA result regarding the English writing challenges that the respondents experienced is shown in Table 6.

Table 6
Overall ANOVA Results of English Writing Challenges

				Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Syntactic Challenges	Between Groups	(Combined)		46.873	76	.617	1.784	.357
		Linear Term	Weighted	1.175	1	1.175	3.399	.162
			Deviation	45.698	75	.609	1.763	.362
	Within Groups			1.037	3	.346		
	Total			47.910	79			
Lexical Challenges	Between Groups	(Combined)		39.848	76	.524	1.454	
		Linear Term	Weighted	.009	1	.009	.026	
			Deviation	39.839	75	.531	1.473	
	Within Groups			1.082	3	.361		
	Total			40.930	79			
Discourse Challenges	Between Groups	(Combined)		43.500	76	.572	.524	.885
		Linear Term	Weighted	.854	1	.854	.782	.442
			Deviation	42.646	75	.569	.521	.866
	Within Groups			3.276	3	1.092		
	Total			46.775	79			
Cognitive Challenges	Between Groups	(Combined)		51.140	76	.673	.651	.788
		Linear Term	Weighted	.721	1	.721	.698	.465
			Deviation	50.419	75	.672	.651	.788
	Within Groups			3.100	3	1.033		
	Total			54.240	79			

Table 6 provides ANOVA results of English writing challenges. For syntactic challenges, the between groups combined effect yielded a sum of squares of 46.873 ($df =$

76, mean square = 0.617), with an F-value of 1.784 ($p = 0.357$). The linear term (weighted) showed a sum of squares of 1.175 ($df = 1$, mean squares of 45.698 ($df = 75$, mean square = 0.609), $F = 1.763$ ($p = 0.362$). The within groups sum of squares was 1.037 ($df = 3$, mean square = 0.346), and the total sum of squares was 47.910 ($df = 79$). The syntactic challenges illustrate not statistically significant.

On lexical challenges, the between groups combined effect resulted in a sum of squares of 39.848 ($df = 76$, mean square = 0.524, $F = 1.454$). The linear term (weighted) had a sum of squares of 0.009 ($df = 1$, mean square = 0.009), $F = 0.026$, while the deviation term showed a sum of squares of 39.839 ($df = 75$, mean square = 0.361), and the total sum of squares was 40.930 ($df = 79$). The lexical challenges demonstrate not statistically significant.

Along the discourse challenges, the between groups combines effect produced a sum of squares of 43.500 ($df = 76$, mean square = 0.572), $F = 0.524$ ($p = 0.885$). The linear term (weighted) had a sum of squares of 0.854 ($df = 1$, mean square = 0.854), $F = 0.782$ ($p = 0.442$), while the deviation term showed a sum of squares of 42.646 ($df = 75$, mean square = 0.569), $F = 0.521$ ($p = 0.866$). The within groups sum of squares was 3.276 ($df = 3$, mean square = 1.092), and the total sum of squares was 46.775 ($df = 79$). The discourse challenges showed not statistically significant.

Regarding cognitive challenges, the between groups combined effect resulted in a sum of squares of 51.140 ($df = 76$, mean square = 0.673), $F = 0.651$ ($p = 0.788$). The linear term (weighted) had a sum of squares of 0.721 ($df = 1$, mean square = 0.721), $F = 0.026$, while the deviation term showed a sum of squares of 39.839 ($df = 75$, mean square = 0.361), and the total sum of squares was 40.930 ($df = 79$). The lexical challenges demonstrate not statistically significant.

Overall, none of the ANOVA tests for challenges on syntactic, lexical, discourse, or cognitive showed statistically significant differences ($p = > .05$) in all cases due to substantial individual differences within each group suggesting that any variations between groups were not strong enough to stand out against the fluctuations. The differences were too small compared to the wide range of individual abilities within each group. Due to high within group variability led to non-significant ANOVA results despite the presence of meaningful correlations in the Pearson analysis.

The overall Pearson correlations between English writing self-assessed competence and English writing challenges is illustrated in Table 7.

Table 7
Overall Correlations between English Writing Self-Assessed Competence and English Writing Challenges

		Overall Self-Assessed Competence in English Writing	Overall Challenges in English Writing
Overall Self-Assessed Competence in English Writing	Pearson Correlation	1	.131
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.245
	N	80	80
Overall Challenges in English Writing	Pearson Correlation	.131	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.245	
	N	80	80

Source: processed data (2025)

Table 7 demonstrates Pearson correlation analysis revealing a weak positive relationship between overall self-assessed competence in English writing and overall challenges in English writing ($r = .131$, $p = .245$). The correlation coefficient of .131 indicated a negligible association between the two variables, suggesting that higher self-assessed competence in did not strongly correspond to increased or decreased challenges experienced in English writing. The significance value ($p = .245$) exceeded the conventional alpha level of .05 indicated that the observed correlation is not statistically significant.

Discussion

This study affirms the findings of Arihastha (2023) and Woodeson et al. (2023) that the difficulty on syntactic knowledge hinder Thai university students in English writing development because of their limited English writing practice, unfamiliarity on the topic, and pre-university English writing experience. This result is consistent with the study of Kaosayapandhu (2023) that Thai students' ability to write effectively in English is affected by their inadequate syntactic and lexical knowledge due to the interference of their first language. The indicators on English writing competence revealed a strong positive correlation among each other indicating a significant interrelationship demonstrating that students who excel in syntactic knowledge are likely to have a well-developed lexical knowledge which enhances the ability to construct syntactically correct sentences leading to better discourse knowledge organization in writing which would provide quality and clarity of the content produced. Students who demonstrate proficiency in grammar and sentence structure tend to produce more coherent and developed cognitive knowledge in their writing.

In relation to the findings, the study of Waluyo (2019) found that the average Thai university student is in A1 and A2 level or pre-intermediate which means that a learner can understand basic sentences and communicate in simple matters. Align with the findings of this study, Thai university students need sufficient time and effort to develop their English competence to become competitive in the international job market. However, English writing is considerably a great academic task among Thai university students since English is not an easily acquired skill among Thais despite having it as part of their core subjects in elementary, high school, or even at university level due to their weak commitment to practice English writing. Practicing English writing to develop proficiency can only be achieved when students learn to correctly connect and organize their ideas effectively in order to develop a stronger voice and a more confident writing style. Chatdecha and Liangpanit (2023) stated that English writing is a complex task among Thai university students because it requires proficiency in English to be able to write in academic writing styles. Thus, giving importance on syntactic, lexical, discourse, and cognitive knowledge would prepare students to refine their writing skills, improve their academic performance, and enhance the ability to communicate ideas across cultural boundaries which will be the key to academic and professional success in a globalized world.

Clearly, English writing competence of Thai university students indicates the urgent need to be developed and enhanced through the reevaluation of English writing pedagogical strategies that highlight on foundational skills, enhancing content knowledge, and adopting a conducive learning environment that nurtures motivation and engagement in writing. By following a pragmatic approach pedagogy for writing competence development, Thai university students will be better equipped with English writing skills that they need to compete to the globalized job market as Meniado, Duong, Panyadilokpong, and Lertkomolwit

(2023) expressed that the inadequate English writing ability stems from weak content knowledge, weak reading comprehension, limited vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, insufficient metacognitive abilities, inadequate writing instruction, limited exposure to various writing genres, and lack of motivation to write in English.

Thai university students' underlying difficulties can be attributed to inadequate indicators of English writing as the findings demonstrate that there is a fundamental gap in the educational support structures available to students reflecting a lack of understanding and mastery of the English communicative skills that often lead to intentional instances of plagiarism indicating a critical need for structured instructional interventions that emphasize the importance of academic writing. Thus, the English writing competence of Thai university students suggests an urgent need for reevaluation of English writing pedagogical strategies that should set focus on foundational skills, enhancing content knowledge, and adopting a conducive learning environment that nurtures motivation and engagement in writing.

On the matter of English writing challenges, the results imply that Thai university students have varied challenges. Simply put, while some Thai university students are grappling with challenges, the challenge for some might not be the same for others based on a deeper examination carried out through Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and found that there is no statistically significant variation among groups across all components. Thus, the absence of significant differences suggests that instructional strategies provided to students do not sufficiently address their specific needs on the English writing development because to achieve students' success in English writing, students' engagement and critical thinking skills should be prioritized to achieve a more interactive and student-centered approaches into the curriculum. Furthermore, addressing the challenges of Thai university students in English writing offers opportunities for growth and development that can foster a deeper understanding of English writing process. Umar, Ajmal, and Ajmal (2023) reiterated that the main problem in English writing is the weak foundation of students' English language skills because they commonly have problems with English writing indicators.

Thus, Thai university students should understand that writing is an evolving process so they can be more inclined to embrace challenges and persist in their efforts the feeling of being more connected to the writing process to achieve engagement and motivation leading to acquire a strong writing skill that is not only for academic success but also a vital skill for the demands of the modern job market. This study demonstrates an urgent need for a comprehensive rethinking of English writing pedagogy to adopt a more responsive and student-centered to create a more inclusive and effective learning environment to enhance not only students' writing abilities but also their confidence, motivation, and overall academic success to become competent, confident, and trained to meet the demands of business communication in English.

Based on the findings of this study, the recommendations that can be proposed to the enhancement of English writing teaching pedagogy in the Thai context in building a strong foundation in acquiring the English writing competence for academic success.

For syntactic competence, it is recommended to develop a stronger foundation in grammar and sentence structure among students to improve their English writing performance through: (1) reviewing or reintroducing the parts of speech and their uses; practice on frequently used grammar structures, such as subject-verb agreement and tenses; familiarize the sentence patterns to build sentence clarity in academic writing; (2) developing students' knowledge on the difference of a fragment, run-on, phrase, clause, and sentence; (3) providing

relatable topics that students like writing something about their families, friends, hobbies, celebrations, festivals, or studies. Students can start with simple sentence construction, then gradually start writing compound sentence. A little longer, start writing complex sentences, until reaching the stage of writing compound-complex sentences; (4) giving immediate feedback on any written assignments about grammar and sentence structure highlighting errors and explain the appropriate necessary corrections to be in place. These simple yet achievable syntactical pedagogy would assist Thai university students to attain the English skills needed to achieve the proficiency for English writing.

For lexical competence, vocabulary and word choice are vital components of effective communication and language proficiency. Students without a strong vocabulary and ability on word choice would always struggle and impede opportunities of expressing themselves clearly either in speaking or in English writing. A simple yet powerful pedagogical approaches are: (1) conducting vocabulary size test to all students enrolled in the writing class to assess their current vocabulary levels; and provide the necessary feedback regarding the vocabulary size achieved; (2) giving practical and relevant vocabulary to students' academic, personal, and cultural background to easily connect on the knowledge to be learned. This can be through simple writing exercises like word matching and sentence completion. Relating the different meanings of an English word can aid a wider comprehension; (3) using visual aids to make vocabulary relatable and memorable and provide tasks to students to use the learned vocabulary in writing different sentences. In writing sentences using the learned vocabulary, students would be able to practice word choice during the construction of their sentences. This can be easily done by students in an advanced level, however, in case there are some who are in the advanced level, the activities provided should also adapt to the level of student; to those who are still struggling, they need to write in a way that their messages can get across to the reader; (4) providing reading and comprehension open ended questions can assist students to expound their thoughts in writing; (5) building sense of accountability and autonomy among students in any writing class highlighting that plagiarism or using someone's work as their own is not only unethical but also a deliberate violation of academic rules. In relation to, it is essential in any writing class to develop the character of students so they would avoid cheating in any circumstances. Hence, providing writing prompts to students that they can make during their free periods could assist them to develop their English writing skills as well as discourse competence; and cognitive competence.

For discourse competence, it primarily deals with difficulties with organizing ideas and structuring writing styles. Having setbacks on this would cause problems to students' ability to set logical flow of sentences and paragraphs. Mitigating any issues on this, students should be trained on the following: (1) using examples and exercises focusing on identifying, determining, and creating clear topic sentences, supporting details, and concluding sentence; in addition, the teacher is expected also to discuss in details the essay structure regarding introduction, body, and conclusion highlighting the essence of hooks and main ideas of any academic writing endeavors; (2) developing how to organize ideas before writing. Outlining, mind maps, and other techniques on how to generate and outline ideas should be prioritized; (3) providing well-written examples or models of sentences, paragraphs, and essays showing the proper organization and structure of any academic text; (4) testing students' comprehension abilities in writing by providing sentences from a paragraph or essay in random order and ask them to rearrange to form a logical sentence, then paragraph and essay. If students can perform the task clearly, acknowledging their progress could achieve motivation

and engagement to do better, however if there are difficulties, providing feedback on the specific areas that need improvement or expressing that committing mistakes are part of the process but they need to be corrected and learned from them.

For cognitive competence, enabling students to write with confidence and relevance would yield depth and clarity. However, lacking on these areas would cause a struggle to expand ideas in producing better writing outcomes. To develop cognitive competence, the focus should be on the following: (1) improving students' ability to generate, elaborate, and organize ideas effectively to foster stronger and more coherent and cohesive English writing; (2) answering writing prompts or writing assignments aligned with the topic; (3) preparing students to write simple to complex paragraphs through showing good examples or models of well-developed paragraphs and essays that used effective transitions and logical flow of ideas; (4) declining any underdeveloped English writing output to motivate students to submit a well-planned English writing output.

Implementing this teaching pedagogy focusing on the development of (1) syntactic competence; (2) lexical competence; (3) discourse competence; and (4) cognitive competence will define Thai university students' English writing competence. Over time, the expected learning outputs regarding English writing will gradually be achieved.

Conclusion

This study concludes that that Thai university students demonstrate a moderate ability in English writing, across four key indicators: (1) syntactic competence; (2) lexical competence; (3) discourse competence; and (4) cognitive competence. While they encounter comparable challenges in English writing, each student has its own ways to manage writing tasks. The findings demonstrate strong metacognitive awareness among Thai university students though no statistically significant differences were found in the distribution of English writing challenges across the group. These findings highlight the need for targeted English writing pedagogy that strengthens the foundational skills, engaging lessons, while nurturing student engagement and motivation. A practical teaching approach can help students become more confident and improve their English writing competence, which is valuable for their academic and professional future.

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