# Assessing the English Writing Needs of Undergraduate Business Administration Students for ESP Writing Course Development: A Case Study in Thailand

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## Abstract

In developing an ESP writing course to prepare business administration students for business careers, it is essential to identify their English writing needs. Thus, this study aims to explore the English writing needs of Thai undergraduate business administration students as an initial step of ESP writing course development, highlighting four areas: their perceived writing abilities, writing challenges, required writing skills, and learning preferences. This study employed an interpretivist approach with a qualitative design, drawing on data from semi-structured interviews with 12 business administration students and 16 stakeholders, including employers, employees, entrepreneurs, ESP lecturers, and business lecturers. The findings reflect the learning experiences and insufficient English writing abilities of

business administration students and graduates with problematic areas in grammar and vocabulary. In addition, they typically have problems with writing emails and reports. Specifically, three English writing skills were identified as required skills for business administration personnel, namely the skills to write emails providing information, e-commerce product descriptions, and progress reports. Student preferences for business vocabulary and communication expressions, teacher feedback, and a positive learning environment were revealed. This study offers educators and course designers valuable insights into the English writing needs of Thai business administration students for ESP course development.

## Introduction

In Thailand, in addition to its crucial role in business communication, English is important for career advancement (Hiranburana, 2017; Thitthongkam et al., 2011). English writing, in particular, is perceived by employers as crucial since personnel need to communicate in writing with clients and colleagues accurately (Thitthongkam et al., 2011). It is even suggested that Thai businesspeople use written English more often than oral English, given the importance of emails in business communication (Hiranburana, 2017).

Despite this, writing and grammar are particularly found to be problematic for Thai businesspeople (Hiranburana, 2017). Similarly, writing is a challenge for Thai students considering their mean score in the writing section of the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), which was only 20 out of the maximum score of 30 marks (Education Testing Services, 2021). This is relatively low in comparison to students from other countries. Thai business students and graduates, in this case, are of most concern since it has been indicated that they need greater training in English writing, specifically on email writing and formal writing styles, to advance in their business careers (Kawinvasin et al., 2021; Low, 2020).

Nonetheless, speaking skills are seemingly more significant in the English curriculum at the target university as most English classes emphasize speaking or general communication skills, with a limited focus on writing. Furthermore, these courses are general in nature, concentrating on general business English without considering the

differing needs of students from various disciplines and the expectations of stakeholders. In fact, to prepare students for business careers, English courses need to align with employer expectations (Cheep-Aranai et al., 2017) and target situations (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987).

One alternative to address such issues is to develop a writing course drawing on an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approach to accommodate both student needs and stakeholder expectations. This is because the main characteristic of ESP is to prepare students to use English in a particular field and a specific target situation (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). Moreover, it is suggested that ESP writing lessons are effective in enhancing Thai students' writing abilities (Changpueng, 2012). In ESP course development, needs assessment is crucial in providing vital information to inform decision-making (Graves, 2000). Consequently, the needs of business administration students should be examined to facilitate course development.

Nonetheless, empirical evidence in the Thai context tends to focus on the needs of students from different fields, speaking skills, and businesspeople (Boonteerarak, 2021; Hiranburana, 2017; Polsombat, 2015; Rimkeeratikul, 2022). To bridge the gap in literature, there is a call for the investigation of Thai business students' writing needs. This study was thus conducted as part of an ESP writing course development project to explore the English writing needs of Thai undergraduate business administration students, drawing on the needs analysis models by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Graves (2000) with the focus on target needs, learning needs, and present situations.

Thus, the research questions are as follows:

(1) What are the perceived English writing abilities of business administration students and graduates?

(2) What are the common English writing challenges experienced by business administration students and graduates?

(3) What are the required business English writing skills for business administration personnel?

(4) What are the learning preferences of business administration students when learning English writing?

## Review of Literature

A thorough literature review was conducted in the following areas:

Needs Analysis in ESP

In ESP course design, needs analysis is an integral process that involves collecting information about learner preferences and needs in order to set priorities and inform decisions in regard to course content, goals, and objectives (Graves, 2000; Hutchison & Waters, 1987).

The fundamental components of needs analysis include target situation analysis, (TSA) learning situation analysis (LSA), and present situation analysis (PSA). Firstly, TSA involves identifying learners' target needs or target communicative activities. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) defined target needs in terms of necessities, lacks, and wants. Necessities describe what students need to learn to perform target situations efficaciously, whist lacks are the gaps between their current skills and the required knowledge. Lastly, wants are what students desire to learn. Secondly, LSA concerns learning needs, which are related to learners' reasons for learning and efficacious learning methods (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). In exploring learning needs, crucial information includes who the learners are, why they take the course, how they learn most effectively, where and when the course will be offered, and what the available resources are (Hutchison & Waters, 1987). Another needs analysis component is PSA, which addresses the learners' present situations. It involves collecting information regarding learners' current skills, language problems, attitudes towards language learning, and learning experiences (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998).

With reference to needs analysis models, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) devised a well-known model emphasizing target needs and learning needs, which are associated with students' necessities, lacks, wants, and learning preferences. Graves (2000) also proposed the needs analysis cycle to gather data on the learners' future and present information, which is comparable to Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) model with the addition of present situation analysis. In her model, learners' present information includes their characteristics, language proficiency, challenges, interests, intercultural knowledge, learning preferences, and attitudes. In contrast, the future information includes stakeholder and student expectations, target situations, required skills, and language modality.

Considering business students' need for more training in English writing (Kawinvasin et al., 2021; Low, 2020) and the lack of English writing courses designed in accordance with their needs at the target university,

it is imperative to conduct a needs analysis to obtain information about the English writing needs of Thai undergraduate business administration students for ESP writing course development from the perspectives of both students and stakeholders. In this study, the needs analysis frameworks devised by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Graves (2000) were adopted in the design of the needs analysis, emphasizing target situation analysis, learning situation analysis, and present situation analysis.

## Review of Studies on Business English Writing Needs

In the global context, various studies have investigated business English writing needs of differing participants (Atique & Khan, 2015; Heckadon & Tuzlukova, 2021; Khan & Khan, 2015; Wu, 2012). Drawing on TSA, PSA, and LSA, Wu (2012) conducted a needs analysis surveying Chinese college students' business English needs by exploring the opinions of employers, graduates, and students. Writing English business correspondence was identified by college graduates pursuing business careers as an important target situation.

The findings from Khan and Khan's (2015) study also confirm the significance of writing business correspondence. In a Pakistani context, a needs analysis was performed with bank officers and students with an interest to pursue banking careers. Using a questionnaire and a writing test, the study revealed the importance of writing emails, letters, memos, and reports in banking careers. It also identified students' problems in constructing sentences, using tenses, and employing writing techniques.

Moreover, a study of Atique and Khan (2015) sheds light on the writing needs of Pakistani business students from the viewpoint of EFL teachers. The interview results highlighted the need to focus on students' awareness of different writing genres and registers as well as the incorporation of reading tasks. The students' problems in organizing ideas and using proper language were also identified, which support the results of Khan and Khan (2015).

In an Omani context, Heckadon and Tuzlukova (2021) employed a survey to investigate business students' writing needs, wants, and challenges. Writing a CV, writing in clear and effective English, and writing emails were deemed necessary. Nonetheless, common writing challenges included referencing, paraphrasing, proofreading, and using proper

grammar and vocabulary. The participants also indicated their desire for writing tasks to be more connected to real-world tasks with more guided writing activities and feedback.

Despite such empirical evidence in the global context, there is an evident gap in literature on business English writing needs in the Thai context. That is, literature based on needs analysis with the focus on business writing in Thailand remains scarce.

## Review of Studies on ESP Needs Analysis in Thailand

With the significance of ESP in Thailand, researchers have explored various aspects of ESP, especially needs analysis for course and material development. Polsombat (2015), Hiranburana (2017), Boonteerarak (2021), and Rimkeeratikul (2022) carried out needs analyses focusing on different business contexts.

In terms of needs analysis for material development, Rimkeeratikul (2022) investigated the needs of graduate students majoring in Career English for International Communication, graduates, and employers to develop a textbook. In the writing part, email writing, summary writing, and report writing were revealed to be necessary areas for emphasis.

With the focus on businesspeople, Polsombat (2015) examined the English needs and challenges of Thai sales employees in a Japanese company. Using a questionnaire, it was found that listening and speaking skills were required skills for sales employees. Japanese accent, grammar, and vocabulary issues were identified as common problems.

Moreover, Hiranburana (2017) examined the use of English for communication in Thai workplaces. Thai companies were asked to complete a questionnaire surveying the nature of English communicative activities and to provide text samples for genre analysis. It was revealed that writing emails was the most frequently performed activity, followed by reading and writing memos as well as presenting facts.

In retail business, Boonteerarak (2021) identified the target situations and the English communication needs of counter clerks in convenience stores for curriculum development. Through interviews and observations, the findings revealed that employees needed English to perform communicative tasks, such as welcoming and assisting customers, discussing offers, socializing with customers, and handling complaints.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the English writing needs of Thai undergraduate business administration students have not been identified since previous studies explored the needs of students majoring in business English and businesspeople with no relevance to the stakeholder expectations or the learning preferences of business administration students. Hence, to address the gap in literature, there is an apparent need for a needs analysis to be conducted to assess undergraduate business administration students' English writing needs.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study employed an interpretivist approach with a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews to obtain student and stakeholder insights into the English writing needs of business administration students. The interpretivist approach, which "allows researchers to view the world through the perceptions and experiences of the participants" (Thanh & Thanh, 2015, p.24), was deployed with the use of a qualitative method to obtain in-depth insights into student needs based on the experiences and opinions of the participants.

### Research Participants and Sampling Method

The population was undergraduate business administration students from a public university in Thailand and key stakeholders. In selecting participants, a purposive sampling method was employed, which was suitable because it allowed the researchers to include or exclude participants based on pre-determined criteria to select participants whose views could best reveal the English writing needs of business administration students.

The selection criteria for the business stakeholders were that they needed to possess at least a bachelor's degree in business administration and worked in industrial businesses to be in line with the focus of the business program at the target university. These participants were equally selected to be representative of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and large enterprises according to the business classification by size proposed by the Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion

(2019). As for ESP and business lecturers, they had to have at least 10 years of experience teaching undergraduate business students. Furthermore, equal numbers of students were recruited based on their year of study and their sub-major in the business program.

Hence, as detailed in Table 1, 28 participants from six groups participated in the interviews, including two employers holding managerial positions, eight employees or operational staff, two entrepreneurs, two business lecturers, two ESP teachers, and 12 undergraduate students.

**Table 1**

*Needs Analysis Interviews of Participants*

| Group | Number | Selection Criterion |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Stakeholders | Two employers | One from an SME and one from a large enterprise |
| | Eight employees | Four from SMEs and four from large enterprises; two sales, two marketing, two finance and accounting, two HR |
| | Two entrepreneurs | One from an SME and one from a large enterprise |
| | Two business lecturers | One from the industrial business management major and one from the entrepreneurship and management major |
| | Two ESP lecturers | Two lecturers with 10 years of experience teaching undergraduate business students |
| Students | 12 business administration students | Four fourth-year students, four third-year students, and four second-year students with job training experience equally selected from the two majors |

## Data Collection

### Data Collection Method

The data were collected using semi-structured interviews. The face-to-face interview sessions, which lasted approximately 30-45 minutes, were individually conducted with each participant in private meeting rooms. The interviews were conducted in Thai to avoid language barriers.

*Research Instrument*

The instrument was semi-structured interviews designed based on the needs analysis frameworks of Graves (2000) and Hutchinson and Waters (1987) with the focus on TSA – required language skills and target situations, LSA – students' learning preferences, and PSA – students' problems, current skills, and learning experiences. Six sets of interview questions followed the same construct, concentrating on perceived English writing abilities, learning experiences and preferences, writing problems, required business English writing skills, and target situations.

Furthermore, three experts in business administration, ESP, and English writing instruction checked the content validity of the interview questions, which was followed by pilot testing to eliminate ambiguity and to maximize clarity. The interview questions were also translated into Thai using the back-translation method to avoid language barriers.

## Data Analysis Method

The data from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, which was based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps of thematic analysis, namely familiarizing with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. As for the trustworthiness of qualitative data, the process of inter-coder reliability was conducted to check for percent agreement between the researcher and another experienced coder, which revealed 91.07 percent agreement between the two coders. In addition, reported themes were verified by two specialists with experience in conducting thematic analysis and needs analysis.

## Ethical Considerations

To uphold research ethics, prior to the interviews, permission to collect data was obtained from the Dean of the Business School of the target university and relevant organizations. The participants were also fully informed of the research details, and informed consent forms were collected beforehand.

<p style="text-align: center; color: #2e6da4;">Findings</p>

The results of this study are analyzed and presented in the following sections:

## Perceived English Writing Abilities

Both stakeholders and students offered insights into the English writing abilities of business administration students and graduates. Based on their experience of working with business graduates and interns, the stakeholders were asked to identify whether the students and graduates typically had sufficient English writing abilities for effective workplace communication. It was revealed that 75 percent of the stakeholders perceived that most students and graduates did not have adequate English writing abilities, while only 25 percent stated that they possessed sufficient writing skills for basic communication. This indicates that business administration students and graduates do not have sufficient English writing abilities to meet the demands of employers.

The students were also asked to self-assess their English writing abilities from level 1 (very weak) to level 5 (excellent). Most students perceived their writing abilities as relatively low, as shown in Figure 1.

## Figure 1

*Students' Self-Assessment of their English Writing Abilities*
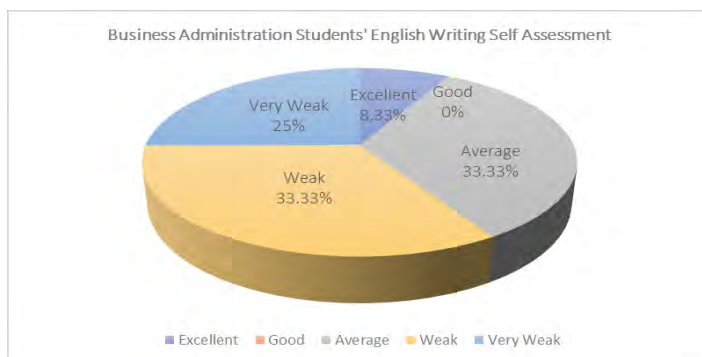


Most students believed that they possessed average to very weak levels of English writing proficiency with 33.33 percent of the participants

reporting themselves as weak, 33.33 percent as average, and 25 percent as very weak. In contrast, only one student, or 8.33 percent, indicated that he had an excellent command of English writing. This suggests that business administration students have limited English writing abilities and are not confident in their abilities.

Furthermore, in terms of their experience of learning English writing, the participants revealed two main reasons contributing to their limited English writing abilities. Firstly, despite having more than 15 years of experience studying English, many participants revealed that they normally had very limited exposure to English writing and few opportunities to practice English writing because they studied in a non-international program with most business classes, and even some English classes, delivered in Thai. Some students stated that they did not have sufficient opportunities to write in English which was regarded as a major problem in their learning process. Secondly, learning too much content, especially grammar rules, was regarded as problematic in their learning process. One student noted that trying to absorb too much knowledge in one course lessened her learning productivity.

## Common Challenges in English Writing

Various English writing challenges of business administration students and graduates were identified, which can be classified into two areas, namely general writing issues and challenges in writing business texts, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2

*English Writing Challenges*

| Writing Challenges | Frequency | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | Stakeholders | Students |
| **General Writing Issues** | | |
| Grammar issues | 13 | 10 |
| Vocabulary issues | 11 | 8 |
| Writing style issues | 8 | 5 |
| Issues related to ideas | 6 | 2 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| First language interference issues | 3 | 4 |
| Confidence issues | 5 | 0 |
| **Difficulties in Writing Business Texts** | | |
| Writing emails | 9 | 6 |
| Writing reports | 3 | 4 |
| Writing product descriptions | 3 | 1 |
| Taking notes at meetings | 3 | 1 |
| Writing business plans | 2 | 0 |

Based on Table 2, the two most frequently identified writing problems were grammar and vocabulary issues. The participants identified the grammar-related issues as the most problematic, citing the problems in using verb tenses, word order, articles, spelling, and complete sentences. As reflected in the excerpts, both stakeholders and students agreed that using correct tenses was the most challenging aspect. The word order problem was also identified since the students had issues sequencing words according to grammar rules.

> I encounter problems about how to use tenses in English because I'm more familiar with the basic three tenses we use in conversations. But when I write emails, there are additional tenses that I'm unfamiliar with. (Employee 2)

> It's like I don't know grammar and rules. I don't know which word should come first, and I don't know what tenses to use and if the tenses I use are correct or not. I don't even know which tenses to use for past, present, or future… (Student 8)

Vocabulary issues were also identified in the interviews. The vocabulary problems include the insufficient vocabulary repertoire, the inability to use words according to the context, and the lack of technical terms. Among these, students' limited repertoire of technical vocabulary, especially terms related to business, company structure, sales, logistics, economics, and manufacturing process, was identified by both stakeholders and students to be the most common issue. Some participants stated that since different industries use differing technical terms, it is a requirement for employees to learn specialized terminology in their industry, as exemplified in the following excerpts:

> What problems? The most frequent one would be related to the use of vocabulary, especially technical terms. If we are not fully involved in the field, we won't be able to understand some terms. For example, in my case, I usually communicate via emails with customers, and there are some unfamiliar technical terms in the emails. (Entrepreneur 1)

> I can write in English with only limited vocabulary. It could have been more, especially formal communication words and technical terms in business and economics. I don't think I have enough repertoire of vocabulary. (Student 6)

In addition, other problems in English writing were specified, including difficulties in writing emails and letters in a formal style and a polite tone, formulating ideas, translating from the first language, and having low levels of confidence in their English writing abilities.

As for the second category, both stakeholders and students noted difficulties in writing business texts among business students and graduates. Emails were regarded as the most challenging text, followed by reports, product descriptions, meeting notes, and business plans, respectively. In detail, emails were the most challenging task due to the required patterns and level of formality. Formal emails normally have specific patterns, namely a salutation, content, and closing, which could be difficult for them to write, as demonstrated in the following comments:

> Business administration graduates lack skills to effectively write business emails in the correct formal pattern. From my experience from high school till the master's degree, we hadn't been taught to effectively write formal business emails. I had to learn to do it at work. (Employee 2)

> Writing emails is difficult for me because there are specific patterns for emails such as a greeting, an introductory paragraph, content, and a closing statement. I think these patterns are difficult, especially if you need to write formal emails to customers or senior executives. (Student 10)

Moreover, writing business reports was also problematic since writing reports typically involves explaining reasons, summarizing details, and combining information in a concise manner, which could be difficult for most students and graduates, as described in these excerpts:

> Most of them have problems writing reports. When I read their reports, I often find they can't effectively summarize information and explain why problems and delays occur, you know. These kinds of things need good explanations to support. (Manager 2)

> Writing English reports is hard because I can't summarize main ideas. When you write reports, you need to summarize ideas to make it concise. Writing to summarize information is very hard for me, and I'm not good at English. (Student 8)

In summary, most business administration students and graduates normally experience various English writing challenges with grammar and vocabulary as the most prominent ones. In addition, they find emails and reports the most problematic text types. These identified problem areas are thus taken into consideration when designing the ESP writing course.

## Required English Writing Skills for Business Administration Personnel

When asked to identify the English writing skills necessary for workplace communication in the business administration context, both stakeholders and students specified several English writing skills, as detailed in Table 3.

### Table 3

*Required Business English Writing Skills*

| English Writing Skills | Frequencies | |
|---|---|---|
| | Stakeholders | Students |
| Writing emails | 16 | 12 |
| Writing reports | 9 | 8 |
| Writing product descriptions | 8 | 5 |
| Writing meeting notes | 5 | 2 |
| Writing for presentation | 3 | 3 |
| Writing letters | 5 | 0 |
| Writing business plans | 2 | 0 |
| Writing press releases | 1 | 0 |
| Writing marketing plans | 1 | 0 |

As shown in Table 3, writing emails, writing reports, and writing product descriptions were identified as the required skills for business administration personnel in regard to workplace communication. Writing emails was the most crucial skill since all participants specifically identified the importance of emails in business communication.

Furthermore, the stakeholders, particularly businesspeople, were asked to identify the target situations in which such writing skills were frequently employed. They indicated that business administration personnel frequently wrote emails to provide information to customers and colleagues, such as informing customers about the details of their orders or projects, coordinating with colleagues about problems, updating meeting results, and reporting information about their work to the management team, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

> It is writing emails as it is 90% of what we do. And we don't usually write letters anymore, but mostly we write emails. The most frequent task for me is sending emails to give information and coordinate with customers, other departments, and other organizations. (Employee 4)

Moreover, writing English reports is a task business administration personnel frequently perform. Several types of reports were mentioned, namely sales reports, marketing reports, and progress reports. Nevertheless, the stakeholders indicated that progress reports on assigned work completed weekly or monthly were the most frequently written reports since it was part of their routine to update their work to customers and team members, as noted below:

> All the time, we do our weekly reports and monthly reports on our work. So, we do them on a regular basis for projects we are working on. And sometimes when we have a new product launch, after it launches for a couple weeks or months, we need to do a proper report to track the results of the new product. And we have to make sure that it's running ok and report back to the main office in the UK. (Manager 1)

Additionally, writing e-commerce product descriptions to promote products and to expand the business was identified as a crucial task for

marketing and sales personnel as well as SME entrepreneurs due to the popularity of e-commerce trade:

> As part of my work for marketing, I often design the artwork and write short product descriptions advertising the products in our online store and social media channels to make the products appealing to customers and promote the company at the same time. (Employee 4)

To summarize, the findings revealed three required English writing skills in the business administration context, which will be incorporated into the writing course content. These skills include writing emails providing information, preparing progress reports, and composing e-commerce product descriptions.

## Learning Preferences of Business Administration Students

The students were asked to offer insights into their learning preferences, which may help them to learn English writing more effectively. Three main themes were identified, namely the importance of teacher feedback, the focus on useful words and expressions, and the desire for a positive learning environment.

Firstly, the students most frequently mentioned the importance of teacher feedback, pointing out its benefits in helping them improve their writing performance and acknowledge their strengths and weaknesses. Most students preferred a mixture of oral and written feedback since receiving both feedback forms could maximize their comprehension of the feedback, as described below:

> The mixture of oral and written feedback is effective for me. From my experience, I emailed the teacher my work, and she sent back her written comments. Then, we had an opportunity to discuss the comments over a call. That was helpful for me because I could know why and how I needed to fix the errors. (Student 3)

Furthermore, most students expressed preferences for the emphasis on business terms and useful expressions for formal business communication in English writing courses, instead of teaching basic grammar. Since they may work in different industries, it is beneficial for

them to learn useful business vocabulary and expressions which can be put into practice across business fields, as illustrated below:

> You should teach something ready to use, like you don't need to start teaching basic grammar from the start. You need to teach words and expressions normally used in formal workplace communication, so they can adapt to the sub-field of business they work in. (Student 7)

Creating a positive learning environment is also deemed important in English writing courses considering students' lack of interest in English. It was revealed that the learning atmosphere is as important as the learning activities since if the class atmosphere is positive, students will feel less nervous and engage more in learning activities, as demonstrated in the following excerpt:

> To be honest, not even half of business students are really interested in English. So, you need to make the learning environment positive to keep them engaged in the class, and they will gradually absorb the knowledge. So, I think a positive class atmosphere is very important. (Student 2)

In summary, the students identified three main aspects of learning preferences for English writing courses, which should be incorporated into the writing course for business administration students to carter to their needs.

## Discussion

The findings from this study reveal the following issues and pedagogical implications for consideration in applying the results:

### Insufficient English Writing Abilities of Business Students and Graduates

The findings of this study reveal the limited English writing abilities of Thai business administration students and graduates for business communication, which support the argument made by Kawinvasin et al. (2021) and Low (2020). Nonetheless, such findings contradict the findings of Hiranburana's (2017) study, which indicated that even though most

businesspeople made errors when writing in English, they could still communicate in English with no major issues interrupting their business.

This study also explored business students' experiences of learning English writing. Most business students revealed their limited exposure to the practice of English writing skills in formal education settings. This aligns with a claim made by Dueraman (2015) that Thai students have limited opportunities to practice and gain experience in English writing. This lack of opportunity to practice English writing seems to hinder their learning progress, which is consistent with Boonyarattanasoontorn's (2017) suggestion that limited and late exposure to English can give rise to learners' writing difficulties.

Therefore, Thai students need to be better trained in English writing skills and more exposed to English writing practice in preparation for their business careers. When instructing English writing, it is thus suggested that teachers should provide opportunities for students to obtain first-hand experience in English writing through the incorporation of various writing tasks. For instance, in addition to the main writing tasks, teachers can engage students in journal writing to record their learning experiences and provide them additional writing practice.

## English Writing Challenges of Business Students and Graduates

Another crucial point is that Thai business students and graduates struggle with grammar and vocabulary the most when writing in English, especially inappropriate tense usage and limited technical vocabulary knowledge. This supports the conclusion drawn from the study of Boonyarattanasoontorn (2017), which revealed that Thai undergraduate students perceive grammar as the most serious issue, and problems in using tenses are common. Furthermore, the findings are congruent with those of Hiranburana's (2017), which indicated that vocabulary, expressions and grammar are common problems for Thai businesspeople when communicating in English. Thus, it can be assumed that such challenges could result from students' limited language knowledge and experience in English writing. These grammar and vocabulary challenges should be taken into serious consideration by teachers since vocabulary and grammar are fundamental aspects in writing (Moses & Mohamad, 2019).

Moreover, the present study describes the challenges in writing emails and reports for business administration students and graduates due to the complexity of differing patterns and formality required for such genres. This conclusion concurs with the findings of the studies of Khruawan et al. (2021) and Pimthong et al. (2019), which indicated that Thai business students and businesspeople have issues in writing English emails. Based on such findings, it is recommended that teachers and course developers should address these writing challenges when designing ESP writing courses. Writing emails and reports ought to be incorporated into the course content since they are crucial in business communication and problematic for business administration students. Furthermore, when teaching a specific genre, relevant grammatical and vocabulary features, namely relevant tenses and technical terms, should be highlighted to help students form sentences and express ideas effectively.

## Importance of Business English Writing Skills

The significance of three writing skills for business administration personnel is highlighted, namely the skills to write emails giving information, progress reports, and e-commerce product descriptions. This can perhaps be explained by the importance of emails as an indispensable medium of business communication, the necessity to routinely report work progress, and the popularity of e-commerce trade. The findings are vital for the design of ESP writing courses for business administration students to better reflect real-world writing practices. Such findings support the conclusions drawn from the studies of Hiranburana (2017) and Rimkeeratikul (2022), which highlighted the significance of report writing and email writing in the Thai workplaces, especially for employees at the administrative level. In comparison with studies in the global context, the current findings support the results from the study of Khan and Khan (2015) in terms of the significance of writing emails and reports and the study of Heckadon and Tuzlukova (2021) on the importance of emails for business students.

Nevertheless, the current findings contradict results from the studies of Hiranburana (2017) and Khan and Khan (2015) in terms of the frequent use of English for writing memos since the participants in the present study did not identify the significance of memo writing. Instead,

they highlighted the importance of writing e-commerce product descriptions for entrepreneurs of small businesses and marketing and sales personnel.

Overall, it is imperative that both learner needs and employer expectations need to be taken into consideration in selecting ESP course content. Therefore, ESP writing courses for business students should encompass these three skills to reflect students' real-world usage of English writing since business students need to be trained to produce these texts to meet employer expectations and to communicate effectively using English writing in authentic situations.

## Recommendations on Teaching English Writing based on the Learning Preferences of Business Students

This study presents three main preferences of business administration students when learning English writing. Firstly, the preference for teacher feedback in both written and oral forms is noted from the findings. Teacher feedback is indicated to be of particular benefit to business students in their learning-to-write process, which corresponds with the results of studies conducted by Grami (2005) and Zacharias (2007) showing students' positive attitudes towards and strong preferences for teacher feedback in the revision process. Moreover, in regard to the student preferences for both oral and written feedback, the findings are in line with those of Tian and Li (2018) in the sense that students typically have positive opinions toward oral and written feedback. Based on these findings, it is recommended that ESP writing teachers should provide both written and oral feedback when assessing student writing. That is, written feedback should be initially provided in student drafts, which should be followed by teacher-student conferences to clarify the unclear written comments.

Additionally, business students revealed a marked preference for the teaching of business vocabulary and useful expressions for formal communication in writing courses, which could arise from their identified vocabulary challenges when writing. This supports the importance of learning vocabulary and expressions as an indispensable element of writing (Moses & Mohamad, 2019). Moreover, the findings support those of Asyiah (2017) who found that English learners generally have positive perceptions of vocabulary learning and teaching. Hence, such a preference

supports the recommended inclusion of business terms and communication expressions that are appropriate for various business genres into the course content and materials.

Lastly, their preference for a positive learning environment was also identified, which is a crucial point for consideration for English writing teachers given the difficulty of English writing and low motivation of students to learn English writing. This corresponds to the findings of Aboudan (2009) who found that a positive learning environment with the use of humor is critical in the language classroom and is favored by most language learners. Therefore, the current findings suggest that writing teachers should create a positive learning atmosphere in English writing classes to enhance student motivation, foster student-teacher rapport, reduce anxiety, and maximize student learning experience. This can be achieved by using humor and teacher-student interaction to make students more willing to partake in class activities.

## Conclusion

This study presents four main findings from assessing Thai undergraduate business administration students' English writing needs. First, by performing PSA, it was revealed that business students and graduates possess insufficient English writing abilities for workplace communication and their learning experiences in English writing are rather limited. Second, as another element of PSA, grammar and vocabulary issues are common challenges encountered by business administration students and graduates when writing in English. They typically encounter these difficulties when writing emails and reports. Third, in terms of TSA, the skills to write emails providing information, e-commerce product descriptions, and progress reports in English are the most frequently used skills for business administration personnel. Finally, learning preferences of business students in three main areas were identified using LSA, namely the preferences for teacher feedback, the learning of business terms and communication expressions, and a positive learning atmosphere. These elements, in conclusion, are essential components of needs assessment for ESP course development.

Furthermore, this study reveals the uses of English writing in business contexts and common writing problems, which are essential information for teachers and course developers. These findings offer

intriguing insights which can be used to inform decisions in designing ESP writing courses for business administration students.

With reference to the limitations, it should be noted that this study is a case study drawing data from only one university in Thailand. As a result, the research findings may not be representative of all Thai undergraduate business administration students. Moreover, the study employs self-reported data in the form of self-assessment in interviews. Therefore, the self-reported data should be treated with caution. These limitations reveal the need for future studies to examine the needs of Thai undergraduate business administration students in a larger scope by drawing on the insights of students from various universities and a greater number of stakeholders.

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