# Language Learning Strategies Used in English Writing by Thai Undergraduate Students

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**Abstract**

*This research investigated language learning strategies used in English writing by 100 Thai undergraduate students. It analyzed differences in the use of language learning strategies in English writing in the second semester of the 2019 academic year at Kasetsart University in Chonburi, Thailand. The research instrument was a 50-item questionnaire adapted from Oxford's strategy inventory for language learning (SILL). Data on language learning strategies used in English writing were examined using descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, percentage and standard deviation). Differences in the use of language learning strategies in English writing were analyzed by t-test and F-test. The results indicated that primarily, students used social strategies, followed by memory strategies, compensatory strategies, metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and affective strategies in English writing, respectively. Significant differences in the use of language learning strategies in English writing were found on students' field of study, year of study and writing frequency, except gender, age and English point.*

**Keywords:** Language learning strategies, Use of language learning strategies, English Writing, Thai undergraduate students

## Introduction

Writing is an essential but difficult skill for it is a process of thinking, drafting and revising. To write, a person needs to learn how to write and must have language capability (Arphakul & Rattanasaenwong, 1998; Padgate, 2008; and Xia, 2011). The 2004–2013 studies revealed that Thai learners still have difficulties in writing. They must be developed for competitive worlds while teachers and researchers are finding ways to improve learners' writing ability (Chuenchaichon, 2014). Boonyarattanasoontorn (2017) noted a high level of Thai undergraduate students' writing difficulties, especially with grammar. Rodsawang (2017) and Padgate (2008) summated students' writing problems consisting of grammar, vocabulary, usage of words, styles of writing, hours of writing practice, instructors' feedbacks and knowledge in writing.

As writing involves a learner's specialized skills, language learning strategies are substantial in dealing with writing problems. Brown (2001) described language learning strategies as techniques a learner utilizes to achieve learning success. A good learner will find out and choose language learning strategies suitable for learning (Rubin & Thompson as cited in Brown, 2001).

Sunpanich (2010) found that students moderately used all writing strategies. Except for gender and year of English study, the field of study had a significant effect on differences in their writing strategy use. Boonyarattanasoontorn (2017) reported students' moderate use of writing strategies, particularly cognitive strategies, which were the most frequent. Meanwhile, Raoofi et al. (2017) perceived a high writing strategy use, especially significantly with students having high writing ability.

As a writing teacher, the researcher realizes an important role of language learning strategies on students' writing ability. This research aimed to survey language learning strategies used in English writing & analyze differences in use of these strategies in English writing by Thai UG students. If students can choose and adopt suitable language learning strategies, their writing skills will enhanced.

**Review of Literature**

Writing is not a reproduction of speaking since it is thinking, drafting and revising, which requires an individual's specialized skills (Brown, 2001). As writing is a language skill, a person must learn what and how to write and apply certain grammatical rules in writing. A person's language capability is reinforced when thoughts or ideas are expressed through writing (Xia, 2011).

Carroll (1997) disclosed that successful language learning depends on several factors. A human's intelligence is needed in learning. A person must have an understanding of grammatical rules and usage of language elements. A person needs spend much time, patience, & effort in learning a language. Importantly, a person must know what and how to use certain & suitable strategies in language learning.

Oxford (2003) defined language learning strategies as "specific behaviors or thought processes that students use to enhance their L2 learning." A strategy will be useful if it is practicable to language tasks and suits a learner's learning style preferences. Meanwhile, a learner can effectively use and link it with other strategies.

Language learning strategies are categorized into six groups (Oxford, 2003; Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995; Oxford, 1990 as cited in Hismanoglu, 2000).

1.  Cognitive strategies are used to make sense of learning and manipulate language materials. They are reasoning, analyzing, summarizing and general practicing, such as writing words several times, using words in different ways and writing notes or reports.
2.  Memory strategies help a learner to store information and link an L2 item or concept with another. They are grouping, imagery, rhyming and structured reviewing, such as flashcards, reviewing often and remembering by location.
3.  Compensatory strategies enable a learner to overcome knowledge gaps such as guessing, using synonyms and inventing new words.
4.  Metacognitive strategies help a learner to regulate the overall learning process such as planning, noticing mistakes and looking for chances to practice.
5.  Affective strategies involve a learner's emotional requirements such as having confidence, encouraging oneself, expressing feelings and rewarding oneself.
6.  Social strategies help a learner interact with others and understand a target language, such as asking questions, asking for a correction and practicing with others.

**Research Objectives**

1.  To investigate language learning strategies used in English writing by Thai undergraduate students.
2.  To analyze differences in the use of language learning strategies in English writing by Thai undergraduate students based on gender, age, the field of study, year of study, English point and writing frequency.

**Research Methodology**
**Population and Participants**

The population involved 100 Thai undergraduate students enrolling in English classes instructed by the researcher in the 2nd semester of the 2019 academic year at Kasetsart University in Chonburi, Thailand. All these students participated in the study. Most participants were female (80.0%) and first-year students (73.0%), aged 19 years (47.0%). They majored in Finance and Investment (36.0%), Marketing (28.0%), Hotel and Tourism Management (26.0%) and Applied Science (10.0%). Most of them got the English point between 2.01 and 2.50 (33.0%), followed by 2.51-3.00 (30.0%); 1.51-2.00 (16.0%); 3.01-3.50 (13.0%); and 1.00-1.50 (8.0%), respectively.

Most students perceived writing as the most difficult English skill (42.0%). They practiced English writing 1-2 times a week (71.0%) by doing exercises in books and reading, memorizing and writing down words and sentences. They had writing

difficulties regarding grammar, vocabulary, writing knowledge, word usage and confidence. They solved the problems by memorizing and writing down words and sentences, writing frequently; looking for words & structures on internet, asking friends & teachers, reviewing grammar, and paying attention in class.

**Research Instrument**

A questionnaire was used to collect demographic data and language learning strategies used in English writing. The strategy inventory for language learning (SILL) was adopted to develop fifty questions on using six groups of language learning strategies in English writing using a 5-point Likert scale (Oxford, 2003; Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995; and Oxford, as cited in Hismanoglu, 2000). The questionnaire was attested for its validity by English lecturers before it was piloted and tested for reliability. The 0.966 Cronbach's alpha coefficient showed that the questionnaire was reliable to collect data for study.

**Data Analysis**

The IBM SPSS Statistics V21.0 was used for data analysis. Demographic data and language learning strategies used in English writing were examined using descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, percentage and standard deviation). Differences in the use of language learning strategies in English writing were analyzed by t-test and F-test based on students' gender, age, the field of study, year of study, English point and writing frequency.

**Results and Discussion**

**1. Language Learning Strategies Used in English Writing**

Of six language learning strategies, social strategies were highly used in English writing by Thai undergraduate students. They moderately used memory strategies, compensatory strategies, metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and effective strategies. Details were in Table 1.

**Table 1: Mean Scores of Language Learning Strategies Used in English Writing**

| No | Strategies | $\bar{x}$ | SD | Deg. |
|----|-----------|------|------|------|
| 1 | Social Strategies | 3.51 | 1.08 | High |
| 2 | Memory Strategies | 3.28 | 0.98 | Fair |
| 3 | Compensatory Strategies | 3.28 | 0.92 | Fair |
| 4 | Metacognitive Strategies | 3.23 | 0.95 | Fair |
| 5 | Cognitive Strategies | 2.83 | 1.05 | Fair |
| 6 | Affective Strategies | 2.76 | 1.09 | Fair |

**2. Differences in the Use of Language Learning Strategies in English Writing**

The analysis detected significant differences in the use of language learning strategies in English writing by Thai undergraduate students when their field of study, year of study and writing frequency were considered, except gender, age & English point.

**Field of Study**

The overall results found significant differences in the use of language learning strategies in English writing by students of different fields of study at the statistical level of 0.001. Students majoring in Hotel and Tourism Management and Finance and Investment used language learning strategies in English writing more than students of Marketing and Applied Mathematics.

Also, comparisons revealed that cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies were differently significantly used in English writing by students of different fields of study at the statistical levels of 0.001 and 0.003, respectively. Students majoring in Hotel and Tourism Management and Finance and Investment adopted more cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies than students of Marketing and Applied Mathematics, consecutively. Details are illustrated in Table 2.

**Table 2: Mean Differences of Language Learning Strategies Used in English Writings based on Field of Study**

| No | Strategies | Mean | | | | Sig. |
|----|-----------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | | HT (n=26) | MK (n=28) | AM (n=10) | FI (n=36) | |
| | Overall | 3.35 | 3.00 | 2.78 | 3.22 | 0.001* |
| 1 | Cognitive Strategies | 3.08 | 2.63 | 2.38 | 2.93 | 0.001* |

| 2 | Memory Strategies | 3.44 | 3.05 | 2.98 | 3.42 | 0.012 |
| 3 | Compensatory Strategies | 3.37 | 3.16 | 3.15 | 3.33 | 0.433 |
| 4 | Metacognitive Strategies | 3.52 | 3.05 | 2.69 | 3.32 | 0.003* |
| 5 | Affective Strategies | 3.22 | 3.03 | 2.93 | 3.07 | 0.440 |
| 6 | Social Strategies | 3.67 | 3.51 | 3.07 | 3.51 | 0.103 |

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

HT = Hotel and Tourism Management; MK = Marketing; AM = Applied Mathematics; FI = Finance and Investment

**Year of Study**

The overall results indicated significant differences in language learning strategies used in English writing by students of different years of study at the statistical level of 0.009. Third-year students differently significantly manipulated language learning strategies in English writing more than first- and second-year students, especially cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies at the statistical levels of 0.010 and 0.013, consecutively. See Table 3 for details.

**Table 3: Mean Differences of Language Learning Strategies Used in English Writings based on Year of Study**

| No. | Strategies | Mean | | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Year 1-2 (n=74) | Year 3 (n=26) | |
| | Overall | 3.08 | 3.35 | 0.009* |
| 1 | Cognitive Strategies | 2.74 | 3.08 | 0.010* |
| 2 | Memory Strategies | 3.22 | 3.44 | 0.105 |
| 3 | Compensatory Strategies | 3.24 | 3.37 | 0.321 |
| 4 | Metacognitive Strategies | 3.13 | 3.52 | 0.013* |

| 5 | Affective Strategies | 3.04 | 3.22 | 0.135 |
| 6 | Social Strategies | 3.45 | 3.67 | 0.139 |

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

**Writing Frequency**

The overall findings revealed significant differences in language learning strategies used in English writing by students with different writing frequencies at the statistical level of 0.000. Students who often and who sometimes practiced English writing adopted language learning strategies more than students who never practiced English writing.

Also, comparisons showed that cognitive strategies, memory strategies and metacognitive strategies were differently significantly adopted in English writing by students with different writing frequencies at the statistical levels of 0.000, 0.000 and 0.000, consecutively. Students who often practiced English writing manipulated cognitive strategies, memory strategies and metacognitive strategies more than students who sometimes and never practiced English writing. Meanwhile, students who sometimes practiced English writing used cognitive strategies, memory strategies and metacognitive strategies more than students who never practiced English writing. Details were shown in Table 4.

**Table 4: Mean Differences of Language Learning Strategies Used in English Writings based on Writing Frequency**

| No | Strategies | Mean | | | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Often (n=11) | Sometimes (n=71) | Never (n=18) | |
| | Overall | 3.51 | 3.22 | 2.64 | 0.000* |
| 1 | Cognitive Strategies | 3.25 | 2.92 | 2.21 | 0.000* |
| 2 | Memory Strategies | 3.67 | 3.33 | 2.85 | 0.000* |
| 3 | Compensatory Strategies | 3.30 | 3.34 | 3.01 | 0.083 |
| 4 | Metacognitive Strategies | 3.87 | 3.33 | 2.47 | 0.000* |

| 5 | Affective Strategies | 3.17 | 3.14 | 2.83 | 0.099 |
| 6 | Social Strategies | 3.91 | 3.58 | 2.99 | 0.000 |

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level; Often = 3-4 times a week; Sometimes = 1-2 times a week.

## Discussion

In this study, students reported writing as the most difficult English skill. Consistent with the studies of Padgate (2008); Olivares and Fonseca (2013); Rodsawong (2017); and Boonyarattanasoontorn (2017), Thai students perceived that writing is an important but the most difficult skill to acquire.

The majority of students practiced English writing 1–2 times a week: by doing exercises in books, when having an exam, and while studying in class. Carroll (1997:1-5) noted that to be a successful language learner, a person needs to spend much time, patience, and effort in learning.

In the study, students had writing problems related to vocabulary, grammar, sentence organization, writing knowledge and word usage. Similarly, Padgate (2008), Olivares and Fonseca (2013); Rodsawang (2017); and Boonyarattanasoontorn (2017) indicated students' writing weaknesses in vocabulary, grammar, mechanics, writing knowledge, content organization and practicing hours. Brown (2001: 335) and Xia (2011) proposed that since writing is a thinking process, drafting and revising, a person must know what and how to write. Also, Carroll (1997:1-5) suggested that a person must understand grammatical rules to write successfully.

The results showed that students fairly adopted language learning strategies in English writing, except social strategies. Carroll (1997: 1-5), McMullen (2009), and Raoofi et al. (2014) claimed that a greater strategy use would enable students to develop their language skills. Students must know what and how to use certain language learning strategies in developing their writing skills. Sasaki and Victori (as cited in Raoofi et al., 2017) asserted influences of language learning strategies on writing ability. Students with high writing ability were found to use more writing strategies than those with low writing ability.

Significant differences in language learning strategies used in English writing were found on students' field of study, year of study and writing frequency. McMullen (2009), Sunpanich (2010), and Chan (2014) noted significant differences in the use of writing strategies between male and female students. McMullen (2009) found the most frequent use of social strategies while these strategies were the least frequent in Raoofi et al. (2017). Sunpanich (2010) indicated that students most frequently manipulated compensation strategies, whereas Chand (2014) and Boonyarattanasoontorn (2017) revealed cognitive strategies as the most frequently used. Hismanoglu (2000) and Oxford (2003) explained that differences in the strategy use occurred because language learning strategies are specific behaviors a learner will choose and use to enhance language learning. The strategies will be useful if they fit a learner's learning style preferences.

## Conclusion

In this study, social strategies were primarily used in English writing by Thai undergraduate students. Their field of study, year of study and writing frequency resulted in differences in the strategy use. Nevertheless, data collected for the study were limited due to the spreading of COVID-19 in February 2020 in Thailand.

## Recommendations

Since students' writing weaknesses were found in the study, writing teachers play an important role in coaching students to write, advising them to use suitable language learning strategies, reviewing grammatical rules, and writing regularly. Meanwhile, students must put much more effort and time into practicing to be a successful writer.

Writing is a process of thinking, drafting, and revising. To empower their writing skills, students are recommended greater use of both cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies. They should use cognitive strategies in learning and understanding what and how to write. They should adopt metacognitive strategies in planning, organizing and revising when writing.

Future research with students of other studying fields is suggested to get wider views of how

language learning strategies are used in English writing. An in-depth study can help determine how students particularly use language-learning strategies to enhance their writing skills.

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