Research Article

ENHANCING ENGLISH GRAMMATICAL COMPETENCE AND WRITTEN PERFORMANCE FOR FIRST YEAR NON-ENGLISH MAJOR UNDERGRADUATES THROUGH A SELF-INSTRUCTIONAL PACKAGE COUPLED WITH PROCESS-BASED WRITING

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the study was to enhance English grammatical competence and written performance for first-year non-English major undergraduate students pursuing their first degree at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Phranakhon Rajabhat University through a self-instructional package coupled with process-based writing. Research participants included 30 EFL students from 3 different academic concentrations: business Chinese, community development, and political science. Instruments for data collection comprised a pretest, a posttest, a self-instructional package, and a writing checklist. The self-instructional package included two parts. The first part deal with English grammatical elements needed for writing well-formed sentences. The second part involved an organization of a paragraph and a process of paragraph writing. The findings revealed that after implementing the self-instructional package, research participants were able to write grammatically correct sentences in English. Their posttest scores were higher than the pretest scores at a significance level of .05. The results of the study also showed that participants were able to write basic English texts at a paragraph level.

Keywords: Grammatical Competence, Written Performance, Self-instructional Package, Process-based Writing

Introduction

Obviously, grammar is considered well-formed, conventional patterns in language. It is a syntactic system that determines the orders and patterns in which words are organized in sentences. Every sentence resulted from the correct combination of every single unit of linguistic (grammatical) elements. Grammar also indicates which elements are important to the appropriate and accurate interpretation of spoken and written discourse. It is considered a useful tool for the creation and comprehension of written and oral discourse as well. Grammar helps learners discover the nature of language—the predictable patterns that make what we hear, say, read, and write intelligible. It is "the weaving that creates the fabric" (Azar, 2007). Without an understanding of grammar, a communication breakdown may arise. Due to its importance, grammar teaching is still part of language learning courses and materials. Most L2 courses and materials have been included with grammatical rules and ample exercises to foster learners' linguistic competence and performance.

Concepts of a Grammatical Framework

According to Larsen-Freeman (2014), language constructions are the interconnection of three dimensions, including structure, semantics, and pragmatics. A structure or form refers to lexicogrammar patterns (the relation of grammar to words) and morphosyntactic forms (the sets of rules that govern linguistic units). Both determine how language learners put together linguistic elements into a particular well-formed construction and how they arrange those elements in the correct order with other constructions in a sentence or text. Semantics explains what language learners know about the meaning of a grammar construction or usage of a certain grammatical structure. The meaning can be lexical or grammatical. Pragmatics describes the appropriate use of language in different contexts. The context can be either social (the use of language depends on a speaker-listener relationship, or the setting) or linguistic discourse co-text (the linguistic units that precede or follow a certain structure in the discourse, or how a particular genre or register influences the

use of a construction). To be effective in communication, it is necessary for language learners to understand the three linguistic dimensions.

Concepts of L2 Writing

Writing is perhaps the most difficult and challenging skill for foreign language learners to acquire because it is both more complex and more abstract than talk (Gunning, 1998). It is definitely hard work (Emmons, 2003) which could cause learners to experience physical and mental suffering (Parker, 1993). Palmer, Hafiner, & Sharp (1994) also asserts that: "Writing is difficult to learn because authors should utilize a process that includes planning, organizing, and revising to present meaning in word form." Difficulties and challenges resulted from the incompetence of the L2 linguistic system. New language learners are more likely to encounter problems in writing from the very first step of writing to the last; they do not know how to generate ideas, translate them into understandable utterances, and organize them into a well-formed English text. According to Canale and Swain (1980), writing is also considered an active or productive skill that require both strong efforts and an understanding of L2 linguistic competence in terms of language

patterns or rules (grammar), genre and rhetorical patterns (discourse), appropriate use of L2 (sociolinguistic), and strategic use of L2 when encountering communication problems (strategic). Most L2 learners often experience greater difficulties when writing in L2. The less they have L2 proficiency, the more writing challenges they encounter.

In dealing with L2 written tasks, it is necessary for language learners to utilize their L2 competence in terms of low- and high-level skills in writing. The low-level skills include, for example, grammatical rules, writing mechanics, and word choices. The high-level skills consist of planning and organizing ideas. When composing L2 written texts, it is necessary for writers to utilize their prior knowledge to construct meaning through writing. Writing genres do not develop in a vacuum; they are socially constructed to meet the writers' particular purposes and audience's needs as well. To have better understanding and respond to the expectations of writing purposes, teachers should explain how and why texts are structured in certain ways and how those structures work to support the readers' comprehension of written texts. Having realized the features of writing genres, students can organize the L2 written texts well, understand the communicative

purpose of a genre, and become more aware of the reader's expectations of a text.

Writing deals mainly with a system of written symbols, representing sounds, syllables, words, with different writing mechanics, including capitalization, spelling, punctuation, form, and meaning. To be effective in writing, students need to know how to write with well-formed sentence structures, correct grammatical rules and writing mechanics, and coherence and cohesion. Nunan (1991) asserts that "writing is an extremely complex cognitive activity in which the writer is required to demonstrate control of variables simultaneously. At the sentence level, these include control of contents, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, spelling and letter formation. Beyond the sentence, the writer must be able to structure and integrate information into cohesive and coherent paragraph and text."

Process Approach in L2 Writing

Many scholars explain major characteristics of process approach as follows. In the process approach, writing activities move learners from generating ideas, collecting data, to publishing a finished text (Tribble, 1996) and need time and positive feedback (Stanley,

1993). Different classroom activities are purposefully utilized to advocate the development of language use (Steele, 1992), fostering the steps involved in the creation of a piece of work (Nunan, 1991).

Steele (1992) claims that a process approach comprises eight stages, including generating ideas through brainstorming and discussion, converting the ideas into a note form and evaluating the quality and usefulness of ideas, organizing the ideas based on the relationship of ideas through mind-mapping or linear form, preparing the first draft in pairs or groups, exchanging first drafts with other students for comments and feedback, making necessary changes responding to other students' feedback, writing the final draft, and submitting the final draft to teachers for evaluation and feedback.

Significance of the Study

Learning the English language is a bitter pill to swallow for Thai students. It is a situation that they do not want to accept. It has been a big challenge for most Thai students. Although they learn the English language for ages, they seem to be far away from the success of the second language acquisition. Obviously, some empirical evidence still exhibits this

long-term problem in all Thai educational systems. As shown on the 2019 Ordinary National Education Test (O-Net) scores in the English subject, the mean scores for students in Grades 6, 9, and 12 were 34.42, 33.25, and 29.20 respectively (Mala, 2019). Moreover, during the past 17 years of the researcher's L2 teaching experiences at a university level, the same unsuccessful results as those in lower levels still exist. This is an undeniable fact that most Thai students have less English proficiency that leads to lower competitiveness in seeking a good job and keeping up with the fast-changing world.

Regarding the findings of the researcher's previous study, namely *An analysis of errors committed by Thai EFL non-English major students of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Phranakhon Rajabhat University*, they well illustrate the students' unsatisfactory performance in L2 writing (Charoento, 2018). Most research participants in the study cannot write well-formed sentences in the English language. Different types of written errors are found in their writing task. The written errors mostly resulted from the three major causes as follows:

1. The dearth of knowledge of L2 linguistic elements or systems

2. Differences between L1 and L2 linguistic system. The greater structural differences between L1 and L2, the more errors L2 learners make.

3. Lack of L2 writing practices

Literature Review

Concepts in Grammar Instruction in Writing Classes

According to Ferris & Hedgcock (2005), grammar instruction should be conducted in line with the following principles:

A writing class is not a grammar class. Explicit grammar instruction should be conducted with other phases of the writing and editing process.

Grammar instruction should start after the assessment of students' prior L2 competence in terms of what L2 linguistic rules they have and what they lack (linguistic gap) through an error analysis based on initial writing sample in tandem with an L2 linguistic knowledge pretest.

Grammar and writing instruction should be done with the use of minilessons which are created concisely and precisely.

Concepts in L2 Process-Based Writing

The concept behind this orientation is that basic thinking processes are central

to writing activity. Students are required to develop their abilities to plan, define writing problems, and find and evaluate solutions (Hyland, 2003). The writing process in this way is originally from planning-writing-reviewing framework. This orientation views writing as a "non-linear, exploratory, and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning" (Zamel, 1983, as cited in Hyland, 2003, p. 11). The writing processes--planning, drafting, revising, and editing--do not occur in a linear order, but in a recursive and interactive manner. Writers may opt to go forward or backward to their writing activities. For instance, they may need to revise their plan to accommodate new ideas, search for further information, or revise their drafts based on peer feedback.

Writing teachers in this orientation play a major role in guiding students through the writing process, helping them to develop writing strategies, for example, how to generate ideas about content and organization using brainstorming, listing, or outlining. A final written work is absolutely completed through several drafts, extensive feedback, text revisions, peer feedback, and error corrections. The teaching strategies most used in the process-based concentration are, for

example, teacher-student discussions, problem-based activities, journal writing assignments, group discussions, or portfolio evaluation (Hyland, 2003).

Teachers in a process approach guide students through the writing processes with a focus on developing necessary writing techniques for generating, drafting, and refining ideas. Different pre-writing assignments to motivate students are for generating ideas about content and structure through brainstorming, listing, mind-mapping, outlining, writing several drafts, providing feedback either by writing teachers or peers, revising texts, and editing their writings in terms of writing mechanics and grammatical accuracy at the final stage. Teachers play a major role in response to students' writing progress by giving corrective feedback and formal language instruction.

Concepts of Self-Instructional Package in L2 Instruction

Self-instruction, also called learner-oriented instruction, is viewed as learning without the physical presence of teachers. It relied on the principles of programmed learning derived from the concept of operant conditioning proposed by Skinner in 1954. Programmed instruction is considered a process of material arrangement in a series

of small steps designed to lead a learner through self-instruction from what learners already know to the new knowledge and more complex knowledge and principles (Sharma, 2000).

Research Methodology

Research Question

The study sought to respond to the following research question: Does a self-instructional package coupled with process-based writing help enhance English grammatical competence and written performance for first-year non-English major undergraduates?

Purpose of the Study

The objective of the study was to enhance English grammatical competence and written performance for L2 learners majoring in non-English disciplines through a self-instructional package coupled with process-based writing.

Hypothesis of the Study

It is hypothesized that the English posttest scores were significantly higher than the pretest ones (p≤.05).

Scope of the Study

Research Participants

Research participants in this study comprised 30 Thai EFL first-year non-English major students from 3 different academic concentrations under the Faculty of Humanities and Social Science, Phranakhon Rajabhat University, including business Chinese, community development, and political science majors. They were selected through random sampling, i.e., every 3rd student in a class list of the three majors were included, and they all voluntarily participated in the study.

Scope of Contents

The contents of the research were basically based on the L2 grammatical elements resulting in written errors detected in the researcher's previous study in 2018, namely *An analysis of errors committed by Thai EFL non-English major students of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Phranakhon Rajabhat University* (Charoento, 2018). Types of written errors were classified into 5 categories as follows:

Sentential errors: incomplete sentences like sentence fragment and run-ons, two independent clauses joined without appropriate punctuation (compound sentence), and incorrect word order

Lexical errors: written errors found on word level like misuse of pronoun, misuse of vocabulary, underuse of possessive adjective, underuse of apostrophe s ('s), and underuse of noun and pronoun

Writing mechanic errors: underuse of capitalization, misuse/underuse of punctuation, spelling mistake, and misuse of abbreviation

Tense errors: misuse of tense, underuse of passive voice construction, misuse of auxiliary, and misuse of subject-verb agreement

Others: word-for-word translation and texts with incomplete thought

Instrumentation

Major instruments used in the study were a pretest, a posttest, a writing checklist, and a self-instructional package providing English linguistic rules in tandem with learning activities for writing English texts and detailed explanation about paragraph organization and steps of how to write a good paragraph. The English grammatical rules in this research were mainly associated with written errors found from the researcher's previous study in 2018, namely *An Analysis of Errors Committed by Thai EFL Non-English Major Students of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Phranakhon Rajabhat University*.

Process of Instrument and Research Design

The instrument design for data collection in this study was conducted based on the following steps:

1. Collection of English Written Errors

Initially, the instrument design started with gathering English written errors from the researcher's previous study. Then the written errors were classified into two major grammatical levels: lexical and sentential.

2. Study of Effective English Written Patterns

Patterns of effective paragraph writing were studied. Selection of the only one pattern suitable to the study was made, followed by making steps of paragraph writing with detailed information of each step.

3. Development of Pre-and Post-tests

The construction of pre- and post-test papers was conducted based on problematic areas of L2 grammar which resulted in written errors. Both pre- and post-test papers consisted of two parts. The first part included 20 English ungrammatically correct sentences with different types of written errors. The written error-detection test format could illustrate well the problematic areas of L2 linguistic rules. The sample was requested to correct the errors by rewriting each test item in a

well-formed sentence pattern. One point was given to each grammatically correct sentence, totaling 20 points. The second part dealt with basic paragraph writing. The sample was required to study details of an organization of a good paragraph and a process of how to write it in a self-instructional package and then write a short paragraph on different topics related to their own background knowledge such as "My Best Friend." The purposes of this part were to assess the participants' writing ability, i.e., whether they can produce a writing product based on the process of paragraph writing and to check their final product for written errors as well as paragraph organization on their own. No score was given to this part, but the detailed information about written errors was described. The content of the pre- and post-test papers was quite similar, but not identical in the first part. In the second part, the content of both pre-and post-tests was the same; they were asked to write a paragraph about "Self-Introduction."

Both pre-and post-test papers were then assessed for suitability by three experts in different academic concentrations, including educational research and evaluation, English, and curriculum and instruction. The results of instrument assessment showed that the instruments were accepted by all three readers in all twenty test items, with an IOC score of each test item equal to 1.

4. Development of a Self-Instructional Package for Enhancing English Grammatical Competence and Writing Performance

English grammatical rules necessary for written error correction were studied and carefully selected, followed by the development of a self-instructional package in Thai with different types of exercises. They were orderly organized from a simple topic to a more difficult one, e.g., parts of speech to tenses. A pilot test of the self-instructional package was carried out with another group of students majoring in non-English disciplines to assess its use and correctness.

5. Use of Self-Instructional Package

Before implementing the self-instructional package, participants were required to take a pretest. The participants' pretest papers were checked by the researcher; the pretest scores were kept for comparison with the posttest ones.

The self-instructional package was used by the sample for a period of 30 days. They studied the English grammatical elements in the self-instructional package, did different exercises in each grammatical

rule, and practiced writing English paragraph on a simple topic closely related to their background. Grammatical errors and paragraph organization mistakes on the samples' tasks were checked by the researcher. The errors and mistakes were discussed with the participants. During this period, participants and a researcher met twice a week to ask, answer, and discuss about what topics in the self-instructional package participants did not understand and needed clarification.

6. Assessment of English Grammatical Competence and Written Performance

A posttest was conducted after 30 days of use of the self-instructional package to evaluate their progress on grammatical skills and writing ability. The posttest scores were compared to the pretest ones for progress assessment. The final product in writing was also checked for written errors along with a writing checklist.

Steps of Writing L2 Composition Through Process-Based Approach

As mentioned earlier, participants initially acquired L2 grammatical elements necessary for writing well-formed sentences in a new language. They were then required to study informative details relevant to an organization of a paragraph and a process of paragraph writing based on the process-based approach in the self-instructional package. The following steps of writing L2 texts implemented in the study were presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Steps of Writing L2 Paragraphs Through Process-Based Orientation

Steps of Writing Instruction Through Process-Based Orientation		
Prewriting	**Step 1:** Establishing L2 linguistic knowledge	• Investigating authentic use of L2 grammatical elements, written discourse, and rhetorical patterns through contextualized literacy
	Step 2: Analyzing L2 model texts	• Reading model paragraphs • Mapping out the outline of a given text • Choosing the best grammar form to complete a text
	Step 3: Exploiting L2 linguistic forms and vocabulary	• Matching topic sentence with support details • Inserting topic sentence in support paragraphs • Deleting incoherent sentences • Transforming an outline into a paragraph
	Step 4: Generating ideas for writing	• Coming up ideas with generating idea techniques like brainstorming, listing, mind-mapping etc.
Drafting	**Step 5:** Composing a first draft of written texts	• Writing a first draft incorporating learned L2 linguistic forms, functions, and patterns
Revising	**Step 6:** Giving corrective feedback by peers and teacher	• Asking for feedback from peers and teacher
	Step 7: Revising texts	• Revising written texts based on peers' and teachers' corrective feedback
Editing	**Step 8:** Editing texts	• Checking for typographical and linguistic errors • Correcting typographical and linguistic errors • Producing final work
Publishing	**Step 9:** Publishing the final work	• Submitting the final work to a teacher

Source: Adapted from Hyland, 2003 and Liang, 2007

Results of the Study

This study aimed to respond to the research question, *Does a self-instructional package coupled with process-based writing help enhance English grammatical competence and written performance for first-year non-English major undergraduates?* The results of the study were exhibited in the following tables.

The statistics shown in Table 2 indicated the scores of the pretest and posttest and the difference between the 2 test scores. The participants' pretest scores ranged from 0 to 7 while the posttest ones ranged between 10 and 20. The difference between the pre- and post-test scores ranged from 5 to 17.

Table 2 Distribution of the Difference Between Pre- and Post-test Scores

Student Number	Scores of the Achievement Test		Difference	Student Number	Scores of the Achievement Test		Difference
	Pretest	Posttest			Pretest	Posttest	
1	0	11	11	16	6	12	6
2	1	15	14	17	6	15	9
3	2	17	15	18	3	20	17
4	3	15	12	19	2	10	8
5	3	18	15	20	2	15	13
6	1	17	16	21	5	12	7
7	0	13	13	22	0	13	13
8	0	11	11	23	0	13	13
9	3	19	16	24	7	14	7
10	7	13	6	25	0	10	10
11	0	17	17	26	3	11	8
12	6	11	5	27	2	12	10
13	5	12	7	28	0	11	11
14	0	13	13	29	4	12	8
15	5	12	7	30	6	15	9

Table 3 Distribution of Independent Paired T-test Value

	$\overline{X}$	SD	d	SD	t	Sig (2-tailed)
Pretest	2.77	2.49	10.96	3.53	16.98	.00
Posttest	13.73	2.62				

As exhibited in Table 4, the statistics revealed that the pretest and posttest mean scores were 2.77 and 13.73 respectively. The posttest mean scores were significantly higher than the pretest ones. After implementing the self-instructional package, participants' posttest scores were higher ($\overline{X}$ = 13.73).

The t-value equal to 16.98 indicated that the research participants had higher posttest scores after implementing the self-instructional package at a significance level of .00. The results also showed that the self-instructional package could help enhance participants' English grammatical competence and written performance. Thus, the hypothesis of the study, the English posttest scores are significantly higher than the pretest ones (p≤.05), was accepted.

Conclusions

The objective of the study was to increase English grammatical competence and written performance through a self-instructional package coupled with process-based writing. It attempted to respond to the following research question: Does a self-instructional package coupled with process-based writing help enhance English grammatical competence and written performance for first-year non-English major undergraduates?

With an attempt to respond to the afore-mentioned research question, scaffolded instructions on English grammatical rules as well as paragraph writing were administered through the use of self-instructional package coupled with process-based writing. Data were analyzed with quantitative statistics.

The findings of the study showed how much they knew about the English grammatical elements and new language. Most participants had less knowledge or understanding about the L2 linguistic rules even they have studied the English language for ages. Some did the pretest well, but

not well enough to utilize their knowledge in writing a new language text. The pretest scores of all participants ranged from 0 (the lowest) to 7 (the highest) which indicated less L2 competence of all participants in terms of grammatical skills, vocabulary, and an understanding of writing L2 texts. Many L2 written errors such as fragments, run-ons, grammar, and writing mechanics were found in their written performance. Also, they made typographical mistakes with words they were familiar with like their university name.

Upon the completion of the study, all participants performed better on the posttest as seen in the posttest scores ranging between 10 and 20. The difference between the pre- and post-tests was greater. Some participants had none of the pretest scores, but they had more scores in the posttest. It is apparent that all participants improved their L2 grammatical competence and written performance. They performed better than before acquiring a new language through the self-instructional package. They had enough knowledge of L2 necessary for writing the English texts. They can turn their knowledge into action, i.e., they are able to write well-formed sentences and a short paragraph about their story. Interestingly enough, there was one out of 30 participants

performing very well on the posttest; he got the full scores. Even they possess a certain level of English competence, they still make written errors. Keep learning and practicing would be a solution to this problem. As EFL learners, making mistake cannot be avoided. Mistakes and errors can be accepted if they do not cause any failure in communication.

According to the mean scores of the pre- and post-tests as shown in Table 3, the results indicated that the participants' L2 grammatical competence was improved with the posttest mean scores equal to 13.67, compared to 2.77 of the pretest ones. It was apparent that with the use of the self-instructional package, the participants did better in the posttest and were able to write English well-formed sentences.

Regarding the t-value equal to 16.48 as exhibited in Table 3, it revealed that the research participants got higher scores in the posttest after implementing the self-instructional package at a statistical significance of .00. The two research results mentioned earlier revealed that the self-instructional package coupled with process-based writing could enhance L2 grammatical competence and written performance of the research participants. Therefore, the hypothesis for this study--the participants' posttest scores are higher than

the pretest scores at a significance level of 0.05--was accepted.

Discussion of the Research Findings

The findings of the study clearly illustrated that the self-instructional package coupled with process-based writing brought about the positive effect on L2 grammatical knowledge and writing ability of L2 learners. The participants gained higher posttest scores as well as benefited a lot more from the self-instructional package. They could correct written errors and change the grammatically incorrect sentences to the well-formed ones. The mean scores for the posttest were higher, compared to the mean scores for the pretest; this reflected the success in learning the L2 grammatical rules and writing a paragraph in a new language. In other words, they performed quite well for the posttest. Moreover, they could write a simple paragraph in English with correct paragraph pattern and writing mechanics. The self-instructional package in this study was perhaps another good choice for enhancing English grammatical elements and writing ability, for it can improve participants achievement and enable them to be more careful when using the English language in writing. It was obvious from data analysis that there was a relatively

substantial amount of achievement of L2 grammatical competence and written performance. The findings of the present study were in line with previous studies having the positive effect on scaffolded grammar and writing skills, for instance, Huggins and Edwards, 2011; Riazi and Rezaii, 2011; Burch, 2007; Culican, Milburn, and Oakley, 2006.

The process of gathering ideas through brainstorming encourage students to interact with peers and develop their writing skills. Previous studies asserted the positive outcomes of cooperative and supportive environment in learning the new language (Burch, 2007; Olson and Land, 2007; Safadi & Rababah, 2012).

The application of modeling in the writing process resulted in a positive effect on the writing achievement. Explicit modeling helped participants recognize the tasks and accomplish them. The contribution of modeling produced the success in imitating or mastering of skills. Therefore, modeling could be part of L2 writing development.

Finally, the findings of the study would provide support for scaffolded instruction in developing L2 grammatical and writing skills. The scaffolds may be another good strategy to be included in the

grammar and writing classes as the findings of the present study highlighted.

Recommendations for Further Research

1. The present study was conducted at an only one university in Bangkok, Thailand. To carry out the study with an inclusive of different universities throughout Thailand would produce more generalization of the research findings to more language learners in Thai contexts.

2. The study was administered only to undergraduate students in Thailand. Inclusion of other education levels, e.g., from elementary to tertiary levels would make the surveys more possible to examine the efficacy of scaffolded instruction on English grammatical competence and written performance at all educational levels as well as to discover this instructional method effective to each educational level.

3. The instruments used in the present study included a self-instructional package and process-based writing approach. Including other instruments, for instance, product-based writing approach in future study would bring about more productive outcomes of the acquisition of English grammatical elements and written composition.

4. The present study was carried out based on teacher-center approach. The generalization of this approach was restricted to only an instructor in designing educational materials and activities. This approach could result in distorted results. A teacher-student collaboration in learning activity design should be carried out in future study.

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