

DEVELOPING STUDENTS' ENGLISH COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS THROUGH DIARY  
WRITING : A CASE STUDY OF SECOND YEAR BUSINESS ENGLISH MAJORS, FACULTY  
OF LIBERAL ARTS, SBC

การพัฒนาทักษะการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษ ของนักศึกษาจากการเขียนบันทึกประจำวัน :  
กรณีศึกษานักศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 2 วิชาเอกภาษาอังกฤษธุรกิจ คณะศิลปศาสตร์  
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**Abstract**

This research investigated the 2<sup>nd</sup> year Business English majors' communicative skills through diary writing. The objectives were to 1) find out if diary writing is a meaningful way to develop Thai students' communicative skills, 2) find the relationship between reading ability and writing development. The participants consisted of 16 students : 5 males and 11 females whose age ranged from 19 to 21. They studied Reading Skills and were assigned to read *The Little Prince* as an external reading, including other authentic materials on their own. There was a discussion after, and they were required to write their opinion on what they had learned in class in a personal diary for a period of 5 weeks. The data used for the study was the participants' diaries. This included their reflections on the instructor's teaching styles, and evaluation. A qualitative research method was employed to analyze the data. The findings revealed that diary writing was an effective way to develop the learners' communicative skills, especially writing. The results of this study recommend using diary writing to improve communicative writing skills.

**Keywords :** Developing english, Communicative skills, Diary writing

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## บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อศึกษา ว่าการเขียนบันทึกประจำวัน จะสามารถพัฒนาทักษะภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษาในกลุ่มนี้ได้หรือไม่ และเพื่อศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างความสามารถในการอ่านกับพัฒนาการด้านการเขียน โดยกลุ่มเป้าหมายประกอบด้วย นักศึกษาวิชาเอกภาษาอังกฤษธุรกิจ ชั้นปีที่ 2 จำนวน 16 คน แบ่งเป็น ชาย 5 คน หญิง 11 คน อายุระหว่าง 19 ถึง 21 ปี ทำการทดลอง โดยให้กลุ่มตัวอย่างฝึกเขียนบันทึกประจำวันทุกวันเป็นเวลา 5 สัปดาห์ เพื่อศึกษาพัฒนาการด้านการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษ ในการเรียนรายวิชาทักษะการอ่าน ทั้งนี้ นักศึกษาได้รับมอบหมายให้อ่านหนังสือนอกเวลาเรื่อง “เจ้าชายน้อย” และเลือกอ่านหนังสืออื่น ๆ ตามความสนใจและนำเสนอในชั้นเรียน หลังการอ่านมีการอภิปรายเนื้อหาที่น่าสนใจและข้อคิดเห็นจากเพื่อนร่วมชั้นตลอดจนคำแนะนำจากผู้สอน กลุ่มตัวอย่างจะบันทึกสะท้อนมุมมองของตนเองได้อย่างเสรี เพื่อฝึกทักษะการแสดงออก และแก้ไขข้อบกพร่องในการเรียนรู้ของตนเอง การวิจัยนี้ เป็นการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ โดยใช้ข้อมูลจากบันทึกประจำวันของนักศึกษา มาวิเคราะห์เชิงพรรณนา พร้อมทฤษฎีและผลงานวิจัยที่เกี่ยวข้องมาอ้างอิง ผลการทดลองพบว่า การเขียนบันทึกประจำวันเป็นวิธีการที่มีประสิทธิภาพในการพัฒนาทักษะการสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษของกลุ่มทดลอง จากการเขียนบรรยายความรู้สึกของตนเองที่มีต่อบทเรียน

**คำสำคัญ :** พัฒนาทักษะ การสื่อสารภาษาอังกฤษ การเขียนบันทึกประจำวัน

## Introduction

### 1. Rationale and Significance of the Study

The significant role of English as a tool for communication in the world today is obvious. Bryson (2001) an internationally renowned writer states that:

For non-English speakers everywhere, English has become the common tongue. Even in France, the most determinedly non-English-speaking nation in the world, the war against English encroachment has largely been lost. In early 1989. The Pasteur Institute announced that henceforth it would publish its famed International medical review only in English because too few people were reading it in French.

Bryson (2001) also concludes that without any doubt, English is the most important language in the world. With that in mind, it is practical for English teachers to encourage their students to use English as much as possible so that they will

become proficient in English. In Thailand, English is considered by most people to be an important language for career growth, as well as a tool to pursuit intellectual growth and personal fulfillment. John Dewey's classic statement is "Learning by doing". Therefore, the practical way to develop students' communicative skills is by making them use English on their own as most as possible. Many researchers have revealed that diary writing has positive outputs among their students to improve their English. The findings of this study will inspire other teachers to use diary writing as a tool to develop the students' English writing and communicative skills.

The advantage of diary writing for students was that they can use English everyday for a period of 5 weeks, and 5 days a week. This means they could communicate their ideas in writing for 25 days. They were encouraged to write a paragraph of any length, using appropriate tenses, and the vocabulary as well as idioms they have learned in their reading. They had to write the date of their journal entry, so that the researcher would be able to keep track on the frequency of their writing. As it was free writing, no brainstorming, or outlining, nor peer feedback on their writing was required. This would make the students feel secure and comfortable about their writing. The students submitted their diaries to the researcher every week, and the researcher also made a personal journal on the students' proficiency and limitations. The researcher then made use of an hour for each session providing students with remedial works on grammar based on their common mistakes. Although this assignment was free writing by nature, the researcher also inspired the students to write a critical review of *The Little Prince* based on the film they had seen in comparison to the book they had read.

## **2. Definition of Term**

Lee (2002) defines diaries as first person observations of experiences that are recorded over a period of time.

Bailey (1996) defines diary as a first person account of a language learning or teaching experience, documented through regular and candid entries in a personal journal and then analyzed.

Diary writing in this study refers to students' responses to class activities, materials and the instructor's feedbacks and teaching styles.

### 3. Diary writing and language improvement

Barjesteh, Vaseghi, and Gholami (2011) whose paper entitled “The Effect of Diary Writing on EFL College Students’ Writing Improvement and Attitudes” showed that diary writing can be a very productive and creative pre-writing activity for a writing classroom, and writing a diary may foster reading and encourage students to read different topics/books/articles to gain ideas for contents and this may develop their reading as well as writing skill.

Rasouli and Shoari (2015) conducted their research entitled “The Effect of Diary Writing on Improving Iranian Young EFL Learners’ L2. Vocabulary Learning” using 60 female learners at pre-intermediate level. The findings revealed that diary writing can provide a deeper engagement in the process of word acquisition. Therefore, the instructor, including course designers must realize the reality of their tasks or activities to enhance learners’ self-confidence. Writing a diary can provide students to write and learn in a free manner that make them feel safe in an actually calm atmosphere.

Marefat (2002) in her research titled “The Impact of Diary Analysis on Teaching/Learning Writing” with 80 Farsi-speaking undergraduate students majoring in EFL at Allameh Tabatabaiee University found that diary writing was a useful practice in identifying students’ particular areas of difficulty and interest. Thus leading her to revise the syllabus and the materials. They all opted for simpler texts, enjoyed peer correction, and wished to discuss recurring problems in class. Moreover, students reported that they enjoyed the realistic task of having active dialogs, which indirectly led them to practice and improve writing. She recommended that diaries may be used to facilitate and improve teaching and learning writing.

Sadeg, Akbar, Taqi, and Shuqair (2011) in their research titled “EFL Writing Students’ Perception of the Effect of Diary Writing” at College of basic Education with 51 female students, who would become English teachers in primary schools. The students were asked to write their diaries during the semester. At the end of the semester, they were given a questionnaire with 19 statements and 4 open-ended questions. The results showed that the majority of the students enjoyed writing a diary, and believed that their language and writing techniques have improved. They

have also reflected pleasant emotional effects such as removing stress, keeping memories and strengthening the student-teacher relationship. The researchers believe that writing a diary is very useful to EFL learners in terms of language learning and enforcing positive energy in the class.

Zhao (2011) undertook a research titled “Using Learners’ Diaries to Investigate the Influence of Students’ English Language Proficiency on Peer Assessment” with 10 second year Chinese majors at a university in Southern China to examine how the Chinese students’ language proficiency affected the use of peer assessment. These students were asked to keep diaries from their experiences being involved in peer assessment over 16 weeks. The data showed that the students viewed their English language proficiency as a salient variables influencing the focus, the type, the appropriateness, and the impact of peer feedback on learners’ redrafts.

This research, not only shows that diary writing is a practical way to improve students’ writing skill, but is also an effective teaching approach to enhance learning in many ways.

Davies (2015) conducted a research titled “Using Personal Diaries to Improve Students’ Academic Writing Skills in English” found that among 32 students, many received little practice of writing beyond the sentence level in their previous English education, and some said that they were unwilling to write extensively due to a perception of writing as “difficult” and “boring”. However, she made a case study by using diary writing as a tool for students to express themselves freely. In her class, students were asked to write a personal diary every week. They were graded on volume of output, and the teacher feedback focused on the content of the diary rather than on grammar, structure and spelling. The findings based on discourse analysis and the data from the questionnaire showed that writing a diary in English can have positive effects on learners’ willingness to produce longer pieces of academic writing. Students’ diary writing also lead to increased sentence complexity, a more varied vocabulary, and ability to structure written reports more effectively. Davies concluded that personal diary writing can have positive effects on learners’ attitudes towards writing, leading to measurable gains over their peers who did not write diaries. In addition, she also found that through the dialog process, it was

possible for her to learn more about the students' lives, enabling her to tailor class towards their needs or interests.

Yavarian (2015) undertook a research entitled "The effect of Diary Writing on Learning Grammar by Intermediate EFL Learners", of which 24 of her intermediate students from one of the institutes in Birjand, South Khorasan were randomly selected to be samples for the study. The pretest was used to measure the ability of the students. Then the control group received the regular class instruction, but the experimental group was instructed to write at least ten diaries during the remaining period of the institute term. After a period of one month, the students were given an Oxford placement test as well as the control group. The results of the two tests were analyzed using one way ANCOVA test. The findings showed that students who participated in the diary writing experiment had indeed gone through a process of grammar acquisition by themselves ( $p < 0.05$ ) compared with the control group. In addition, the results showed that keeping diaries is an effective way for the improvement of learning grammar by EFL learners.

Yi (2008) did a research on "The Use of Diaries as a Qualitative Research Method to Investigate Teachers' Perception and Use of Rating Schemes". Although the main purpose of this research was for teaching pedagogy, it also aimed to explore the possibility of using it to investigate how teachers perceive and use rating schemes. Three English teachers who worked at various high schools in Korea rated 224 scripts written by 112 Korean high school students for this study. The teachers assessed the scripts twice, first according to their subjective holistic scoring and then using the FCE scale for writing assessment, and they kept diaries on their rating process for each assessment. The analysis of their diaries showed the teachers' rating patterns and tendencies, problems with the rating schemes and their understanding of the rating schemes

#### **4. Objectives of the study**

This study aims to (1) find out if diary writing a meaningful activity to develop Thai students' communicative skills in English (2) find the relationship between reading ability and writing development.

## 5. Literature Review

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) make interesting remarks as follows:

...Teaching like a pro means continuously inquiring into and improving one's own teaching. It means constantly developing and reinvesting in professional. All teachers need to become not just good, but excellent at teaching. Driving up standards, narrowing achievement gaps, engaging young minds amid all the distractions that now sorrow them, and preparing young people to live successfully and cohesively in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are all higher order requirements that all for the highest quality of teaching. Mere proficiency or passing will no longer serve as a yardstick for success....

The citation above clearly underpins the limitation of a traditional language teaching and learning, where the emphasis is put on the teacher-centered approach and the students' achievement is based on the test score or language proficiency. To prepare young students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century education, the teacher should encourage the students to be autonomous, and able to choose what they want to learn. With this in mind, the researcher motivated the participants to make use of IT, social media, and external reading to improve their communicative skills. The tool used is diary writing to let student express their feelings and opinion about what they have learned outside class.

As reflected in the a previous research on the impact of diary writing for language improvement both on the learners' point of view and the instructors' discussed earlier, students' diary writing not only improved their communication skills, and enhanced their English proficiency, but it is also useful for the instructor to understand the learners' language need. This usefulness can help the instructors design meaningful English lessons for their students. With all the advantages, the researcher believes that this research will be useful for course developers and teachers in organizing meaningful activities for their students to rebalance group dynamics and engage the students with real language tasks. The byproduct is to discover what the students think about the teaching materials and class activities

used in this class. Finally, the researcher expected to explore assessment related aspects that can really measure the students' language need and their English improvement to make teaching and learning more enjoyable and rewarding.

McDonough (1994) interestingly remarks that learning diaries or learner diaries can be a pedagogical tool for teachers in the EFL classroom to discover learners' perception of classroom activities, learning difficulties and their interaction with teachers and peers. They can be adopted as a research to gain insight into learners' language learning experiences.

### **Methodology**

This study is based on a case study of 16 second year Business English majors studying Eng 201203 : Reading Skills. They were encouraged to reflect their opinion on the reading materials in writing their diaries after discussion. The activities lasted 4 weeks. The researcher did not give any grade on the quality of these students' diary, but communicated with each of them to make them feel motivated to write more. At the same time the researcher also wrote her own diary reflecting each student's writing organization, their ideas and feelings, including their writing mistakes. In class the researcher provided remedial works and supplementary assignments on grammar to eliminate the common grammatical mistakes found in their dairies.

### **The Participants**

The participants in this study consisted of 16 second year Business English majors, consisting of 15 Thais. The researcher did not want to include 1 Filipino in the study because for her, English is considered second language(ESL), whereas for Thai students, English is a foreign language(EFL). There were 5 males ,and 10 females, whose age ranged from 19 to 21. The students studied Reading Skills in the first semester starting from August18-November 24, 2015, but their diary writing started from the 2<sup>nd</sup> August 25, 2015 to the 6<sup>th</sup> Week, September 22, 2015. They were required to write intensively everyday after class to give their opinion based on their impressions on the reading materials, class activities, oral presentations, and their external reading. In their diaries, they were inspired to reflect their ideas about their own learning and language improvement. This assignment was worth 40% of the



course evaluation. The main reason is to inspire them to write freely as much as they can to find out if their reading assignments have helped them improve their writing skills.

Since the class was a block of three hours, and students met only once a week, the ultimate goal of the class was to develop their communication skills, making use of reading materials to extend their vocabulary, and reinforce understanding of the use of grammar and structures.

#### **Procedures for students' diary writing**

On the first day of the class, students were given a course syllabus and evaluation criteria. They received detailed explanation on the evaluation scale of which diary writing weighed 40% of the evaluation. The researcher gave them guidance on how to communicate effectively using all the four skills, and made them understand that a lot of research has found that there was a relationship between reading and writing. Students who read well can also write better than students who read poorly or hardly read. Therefore, they were encouraged to read extensively, and *The Little Prince* was selected as their external reading. Since this class was the first to be assigned to read externally, the researcher allocated the last period of the class reviewing *The Little Prince* by grouping different chapters for discussion. Luckily, the film based on *The Little Prince* was released a month before the class was finished, so all students were assigned to see the film and write their response. This also made the class very enjoyable as students directly experienced real language use outside class.

As the students were rather poor at writing in English, quantity of their writing was set at a minimum of one paragraph of about 50 words. However, all the students were encouraged to write as much as they could. There is no grade on the quality of their writing to avoid creating any unnecessary tension or stress among slow learners.

#### **Data Collection**

The research data was based on the students' diary writing, reflecting their impressions on the class activities, reading assignments, and their evaluation of their own learning. The students submitted their writing every week for 5 executive weeks.

The researcher read the diaries, and communicated with the students in a positive way to encourage them to keep on writing and develop their language skills. The researchers made her own personal diary as a record of students' weakness and progress to provide suitable supplementary exercises for their improvement. Assessment of the participants' English improvements was based on the final grades. Samples of the participants' feedbacks on class activities were presented to reflect their impression on the overall class activities and their own evaluation of their English improvement.

### **Data Analysis**

The data was analyzed for both the participants' writing and their language proficiency. Data analysis was based on two research questions as follows:

*Research Question1: Does diary writing help develop the participants' English writing skills ?*

*Research Question2: To what extent does the participants' extensive reading and writing enhance their communicative skills?*

### **Results**

The findings revealed that all the students developed their writing skills because they were able to write their diaries freely without any tension or fear of making mistakes. They were able to express what they thought about the reading materials, their writing limitations, and how they felt when they were given positive comments from the researcher. They also found that it was useful to get feedbacks from their peers by exchanging reading each other's diary. In this way, they also learned about their grammatical mistakes. The support from their peers made them feel more comfortable about using English in class as many of them made similar mistakes. The participants' performances in using English for communication based on their discussion, oral presentations, questions and answers showed that they had improved their English. In addition, their reading materials enhanced their vocabulary, and they also learned to adapt the reading model in their extended writing. In short, the participants' English improvement has answered the Research Question1. that diary writing helps develop their English writing skills.

Consequently, all the participants agreed that reading was a very important skill for them to acquire knowledge and improve their English. As the participants' interests were diverse, the selections of their reading also varied. In this aspect, when they made oral presentations in class their peers also had a chance to extend some new vocabulary and expressions, and enjoyed learning more. Below are samples of the participants' diaries, and their reflections about how they have improved their English :

**Participant 1 : Tiya**

English plays a role in my daily life more today because of the development around the world. The world is now connected via the Internet, fast food restaurants, and tourism. There are many tourists visiting my country.

Studying reading skills, my instructor teaches me how to read, correct my grammar and encourages me to use appropriate sentences. I learned new words through external reading, and can apply them in my communication. Presenting my assignments in class using power-point, made me improve my communicative skills. I also learned many things, such as the danger of fast food. Another thing that interested me was reading *The Little Prince*. It is a short novel that is popular around the world, and now was made into a film. I have read the book and saw the film, and it made me imagine the message.

I think learning English is very important to integrate all the skills : listening, speaking, reading, and writing. So I need to understand my weakness to improve my English. Thank you teacher for opening up my world.

**Participant 2 : Kanokwan**

If I want to succeed in life, I need to have skills. What skill? Speaking, listening, reading, writing. Now I have all the four skills.

First, I try to listen to international songs. Although I don't know the whole song, I can find lyrics, and compare and edit the incorrect sentences.

Second, I am a movie lover. I can watch the sound track movie without having to read the subtitle. I listen to real accent and learn new vocabulary. I try to practice a conversation.

Last, I will not have any real experience if I don't travel. So I like to travel to improve my English. In travel, I meet new friends, learn new culture and how to communicate with other people.

**Participant 3 : Suchada**

English is very important for many people because it is the medium of communication, such as for business and education.

I want to improve my English and must take an English class and join English group and friends to make me assertive. I tried to read a lot, and I am not afraid of making mistakes. If I am afraid I will never know if I am correct or not. To improve my communication skills, I always review my grammar and vocabulary. Travel to a foreign country helps me improve my speaking, such as when I don't know about the place, I can ask somebody in English.

In summary, I can understand when the teacher speaks English in class, and understand what it means. Now I can speak to other people in English.

**Participant 4 : Kimberly**

Reading a lot of English books helped me improve my English. Writing, reading, listening and speaking can improve my English, too. Attending English classes also helped me improve my English a lot.

I can learn new vocabulary every time I read books. It makes me understand English better. Listening to English songs is also the best way to improve my English pronunciation. Reading is very good because it makes me able to know a lot of stories. There are many kinds of good books to read. I always attend my English class because my instructor always teaches a new topic every week. I communicate with my friends and the instructor, using my English to practice speaking skills.

There are a lot of ways to improve my English. Reading, listening, speaking and writing are the best ways for me. English is not so difficult if you put your whole attention to it.

**Participant 5 : Panida**

I started to develop my English through diary writing. I also practice listening to songs, reading books, and speaking in class with my friends, and my instructor. In addition, I also watched International movies with English soundtracks.

I gradually improve my English. First, I develop my listening because I like to listen to English songs. It made me want to know the meanings of lyrics. I also learn to speak by practicing singing and communicating with my friends. Reading is an essential part of language because it supports me to practice my English. I think reading has developed my English a lot.

In conclusion, I develop my English by listening, speaking, reading, and writing. I may not be very good if I did not write my diary everyday. So I will try to study hard.

The data from the participants' diaries apparently answered the

*Research Question 1: Does diary writing help the participants' improve their English writing skills?*

All the participants have improved their writing, especially, the ones who were serious about writing their diaries everyday after class for the total of 25 days.

*Research Question 2: To what extent does the participants' extensive reading and writing enhance their communication skills?*

From the samples of the participants' diaries, the participants have made significant improvement in their writing following the reading format. First, they gave introduction to what they wanted to write, then they provided supporting details, and finally, they gave a conclusion. They were also able to use inferences and new idioms and expressions. The participants were also more careful about their grammar and able to improve their vocabulary. In addition, reading passages can be cognitive models of writing.

## Conclusion and Discussion

The participants' diaries reconfirmed that there was a relationship between intensive reading, and writing. Beginning with free writing styles, the participants were able to express their feelings about what they had learned, and gradually developed their writing composition on a particular topic that interested them. They learned to organize their paragraph, using inferences and correct parts of speech they have learned from their reading materials. They were also more aware of the grammatical structures used. All of them agreed that reading a lot have helped them improve

their vocabulary and become more confident in expressing themselves and their ideas. Many researchers have agreed that there is a positive relationship between reading and writing. If carefully selected, reading materials can be used as models for students writing development.

Neuman and Roskos (1997) argued that participation in writing and reading practices represents an important phase of literacy learning because learners come to understand that print is meaningful and participation enables them to practice what written language is for and how it works. This is precisely applicable to the participants' writing improvement through extensive reading. As Brown, Pressley, Meter, and Schuder (1996) points out that learning to write developmentally can be slow but results in motivation for future writing. Also focuses on the reading-to writing relationship by claiming that it is the only way to explain how anyone learns to writes. Spivey and King (1989) agree that by integrating content from source texts with previous acquired knowledge from both reading to understand and reading to write is practical for teachers to develop their students' English proficiency. In the same way, integrating all the skills, especially making use of reading material to enhance the students' writing can enhance learners' English competence.

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