

INCoH 2017
The Second International Conference on Humanities
WRITING RUBRIC AND THREE TYPES OF REFLECTIVE
WRITTEN FEEDBACK: STUDENTS' ATTITUDE BOOSTERS

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Abstract

Different instruments and methods have been integrated in the EFL writing classrooms to enhance students' writing ability and to boost up their attitudes toward writing in English. A writing rubric and various types of feedback are ones of them. However, no findings from previous studies have revealed impacts of the writing rubric and three types of reflective written feedback: self-reflective written feedback, peer-reflective written feedback, and teacher-reflective written feedback on EFL undergraduate students' attitudes toward writing in English. Therefore, this paper pedagogically aims to raise teachers' awareness of positive effects of the writing rubric and three types of reflective written feedback on the attitudes of thirty-four English major sophomores at a university in the south of Thailand toward writing in English based on their responses to the questionnaires. According to the results of the present study, the students had positive attitudes toward writing in English because they appreciated the benefits of both the writing rubric and the three types of reflective written feedback. Moreover, these research instruments helped promote their writing proficiency since they helped them improve their language production. Once their writing proficiency gave them a sense of satisfaction, their positive attitudes toward writing in English were, therefore, settled, and vice versa. This pedagogical value highlights the significant roles of both the writing rubric and the three types of reflective written feedback employed in the writing class, especially where English is taught as a foreign language.

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Keywords: EFL students' attitudes, writing in English, writing rubric, reflective written feedback.



1. Introduction

The role of the English language, the official working language, is becoming significant, particularly in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (Kirkpatrick, 2008). As a lingua franca, it, thus, plays a prominent role in the ASEAN context including Thailand, where English is regarded as a foreign language. English proficiency is, thus, perceived as an essential capability for people in all organizations, institutions, or even their everyday lives.

English writing is inevitably an essential skill to master although it is considered as the most difficult language skill to develop or achieve either in the foreign language or second language learning context (Richards & Renandya, 2002; Weigle, 2002). Particularly, the way to express ideas and those complicated skills; for instance, punctuation, word choice, etc. required to master writing are the two important factors that foster the difficulty in writing for L2 students according to Richards and Renandya. Teaching writing, hence, receives more attention in both foreign and second language academic contexts. In so doing, a process-based approach is practically used in teaching writing nowadays to compensate what a traditional product-based approach lacks. Therefore, process skills are also the significant attributes for L2 students to develop (Richards & Renandya, 2002). When a certain skill seizes its role in the academic context, a process of assessment is definitely required. Both authentic and formative assessments are, consequently, integrated in the process-based approach in the present study as Wanchid (2013) claims that "The use of alternative assessment in the EFL writing class yields undeniable benefits, as it encourages students to develop a sense of independent learning in various degrees of success" (p. 164).

The rubric is not only an authentic assessment, but also the summative and valuable informative feedback (Overmeyer, 2009). With an integration of the rubric in the classroom, students acknowledge their learning targets, for they can develop and finally reach such learning goals (Brookhart, 2013). Moreover, Andrade (2005) stresses the significance of feedback that "feedback is profoundly educative" (p. 29). Thus, feedback from different sources, especially the specific one, is significant in language learning and development. It is even more important than the rubric because of some of its constraints, particularly some traits that cannot be referred in the rubric (Wilson, 2007). Self-reflective feedback, for instance, is the feedback promoting student-centered pedagogy as it encourages students to take responsibility for their own language learning and improvement. In the writing class, this type of feedback develops autonomous writers (Kasule & Lunga, 2010; Wanchid, 2013). Peer reflective feedback, moreover, is another effective feedback according to the results from a number of studies (Asl, 2018; Azarnoosh, 2013; Liu & Chai, 2006; Srichanyachon, 2012a; Srichanyachon, 2012b). In the peer feedback process, students can learn from each other in order to develop their writing skill (Liu & Chai). This role which previously belongs to the teacher in the traditional writing class is now shared by students. Learner-centred class is, as a consequence, developed in the writing pedagogy (Azarnoosh, 2013). Finally, teacher feedback, the most preferred feedback, is the kind of feedback students rely on (Srichanyachon, 2012a). Mack (2009) points out five characteristics of effective teacher feedback: (1) formative, (2) timely, (3) specific (errors), (4) problem-solving, and (5) criteria engaging. Most importantly, Wen (2013) highlights that teacher feedback should "lead the students to become independent of the teacher's instructions" (p. 430).

Concerning the value of the writing rubric as well as the three types of reflective written feedback, a controversial issue regarding their pros and cons has been widely discussed in diverse academic contexts. Furthermore, positive attitudes toward writing in English of students across different levels in diverse academic contexts have been driven by different language teaching instruments or methods according to a variety of studies. Nevertheless, no findings of those studies have shed light on the issue being presented in the present study. For this reason, the present study aims to investigate the undergraduate students' attitudes toward writing in English whether their experience in the writing rubric and three types of reflective written feedback: self-reflective written feedback, peer-reflective written feedback, and teacher-reflective written feedback will have any positive influence on their attitudes toward writing in English or not.

2. Problem Statement

Concerning the value of the writing rubric as well as the three types of reflective written feedback, a controversial issue regarding their pros and cons has been widely discussed in diverse academic contexts. Furthermore, positive attitudes toward writing in English of students across different levels in diverse academic contexts have been driven by different language teaching instruments or methods according to a variety of studies. Nevertheless, no findings of those studies have shed light on the issue being presented in the present study. For this reason, the present study aimed to investigate the undergraduate students' attitudes toward writing in English whether their experience in the writing rubric and three types of reflective written feedback: self-reflective written feedback, peer-reflective written feedback, and teacher-reflective written feedback would have any positive influence on their attitudes toward writing in English or not.

3. Research Questions

The present study was conducted in order to answer the major research question: What were the students' attitudes toward writing in English after the use of the writing rubric and three types of reflective written feedback: self-reflective written feedback, peer-reflective written feedback, and teacher-reflective written feedback in their writing class?

4. Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to discover the effects of the use of the writing rubric and three types of reflective written feedback: self-reflective written feedback, peer-reflective written feedback, and teacher-reflective written feedback in EFL writing class on the students' attitudes toward writing in English.

In the study, three operational terms, namely writing rubric, attitudes, and reflective written feedback were defined as follows:

1. Writing Rubric: the six-trait rubric adapted from Teacher Six-Point Writing Guide according to Spandel (2009)
2. Attitudes: students' attitudes toward writing in English both before and after an implementation of the writing rubric and three types of reflective written feedback

3. Reflective Written Feedback: two types of feedback: formative feedback; that is, self-reflective written feedback and peer-reflective written feedback, and summative feedback; that is, teacher-reflective written feedback

The three types of feedback can be classified into the following two categories:

3.1 Direct Reflective Written Feedback: the explicit corrective feedback on students' writing given by the students themselves, their peers, as well as the teacher

3.2 Indirect Reflective Written Feedback: two kinds of feedback as follows:

3.2.1 the indication by drawing a circle where an error has been made in the subjects' writing by the subjects themselves, their peers, and the teacher

3.2.2 the written feedback in the subjects' native language in terms of strengths and weaknesses of the subjects' writing reflected by the subjects themselves, their peers, and the teacher.

5. Research Methods

5.1. Subjects

Thirty-four English major sophomores at a university in the south of Thailand were the subjects of the present study. They were taking Basic Writing Course as a required course in the first semester of the academic year 2014 during the period of the study. The subjects were heterogeneous in terms of sex but homogeneous in terms of nationality as well as their native language: Thai. That's why all of them studied English as a foreign language. Their English education exposure was in between 13 and 17 years. Since these subjects were regarded as one intact group of the study and the researcher of the study was an instructor in this course, any confounding variables could be limited.

5.2. Instruments

In order to investigate the subjects' attitudes toward writing in English after they experienced the writing rubric and three types of reflective written feedback, i.e. self-reflective written feedback, peer-reflective written feedback, and teacher-reflective written feedback, the major research instruments employed in the current study were a six-trait writing rubric and reflective written feedback sheet as well as an attitude questionnaire.

5.2.1. A Six-Trait Writing Rubric and Reflective Written Feedback Sheet

The six-trait writing rubric and reflective written feedback sheet consisted of two main parts. The first part (the front page) was the six-trait writing rubric adapted from Teacher Six-Point Writing Guide of Spandel (2009) because it was compatible with the characteristics of the subjects' writing in the present study. The six traits focused in the rubric were conventions, sentence fluency, ideas, organization, word choice, and voice. For the other part of the sheet (the back page), some space was provided for three types of reflective written feedback; that is, self-reflective written feedback, peer-reflective written feedback, and teacher-reflective written feedback.

5.2.2. Attitude Questionnaire

The attitude questionnaire, used both as pre- and post- treatment questionnaires, was developed in the form of Likert-rating scale ranging from 5 to 1 (5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree) Although it was constructed in both Thai and English versions, only the Thai version was launched to the subjects in order to avoid any misunderstanding, misleading, or confusion of the statements in terms of the language use. According to Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha, the reliability of the questionnaire was .81 which affirmed that the questionnaire was highly reliable to conduct the study.

5.3. Data Collection

The present study was carried out in the first semester of the academic year 2014. During the first week of the study, the attitude questionnaire had been launched to the subjects as a pre-treatment questionnaire in order to investigate their attitudes toward writing in English before they experienced the writing rubric and three types of reflective written feedback. In the second week, the orientation of the writing rubric as well as three types of reflective written feedback and their benefits were enthusiastically introduced to the subjects by an instructor (a researcher) to encourage them to take part in the activity. In the following weeks, the subjects were assigned to produce a writing task weekly. The criteria from the writing rubric were used to evaluate their writing products and the three types of reflective written feedback: self-, peer-, and teacher- reflective written feedback were asked to be given after they completed the task. For the peer feedback process, the subjects were paired up according to their English proficiency based on their grades in General English I and II courses in order to take charge of giving peer-reflective written feedback on their partners' writing tasks. Therefore, the subjects who had higher English proficiency were paired up with those who had lower English proficiency. This process had been run weekly for eight weeks. In the final week of the study, the subjects were asked to respond to the questionnaire about their attitudes toward their writing in English after the treatment.

5.4. Data Analysis

In order to understand the data collected from both pre- and post- treatment attitude questionnaires, thirty-four subjects' responses to the questionnaires were collected and computed item by item for the mean scores since it is the most common measure of central tendency, and it suits to be used for the small number of participants (Mackey & Gass, 2015). The mean scores were interpreted according to the following criteria: 4.21-5.00 = strongly agree; 3.41-4.20 = agree; 2.61-3.40 = neutral; 1.81-2.60 = disagree; 1.00-1.80 = strongly disagree. Moreover, the mean scores of their responses to both the pre- and post- treatment attitude questionnaires were then compared by using a paired samples t-test, a type of statistics used when before/ after comparisons are tested for a within-groups research design, to find out if their attitudes toward writing in English significantly and positively changed after the treatment (Larson-Hall, 2010).

6. Findings

The pre- and post- treatment attitude questionnaires consisted of sixteen items with a five-point Likert scale ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). Thirty-four subjects' responses to both questionnaires were analyzed for the mean scores to see the level of their attitudes toward each statement both before and after the use of the writing rubric and three types of reflective written feedback: self-reflective written feedback, peer-reflective written feedback, and teacher-reflective written feedback in the writing class. The results are illustrated in Table 01 as follows.

Table 01. Subjects' attitudes toward writing in English before and after the use of writing rubric and three types of reflective written feedback

Statement	Before			After		
	Mean	S.D.	Level	Mean	S.D.	Level
1. I enjoy writing in English.	3.52	.76	Agree	4.10	.75	Agree
2. Writing in English is fun.	3.24	.83	Neutral	3.81	.75	Agree
3. Writing skill is an important skill in learning English.	4.48	.80	Strongly agree	4.61	.50	Strongly agree
4. Writing in English is important to me.	4.30	.81	Strongly agree	4.29	.69	Strongly agree
5. I think writing in English is important in my future career.	4.52	.80	Strongly agree	4.10	.79	Agree
6. I always look forward to learning writing in English.	3.64	.93	Agree	3.58	.72	Agree
7. I am satisfied with my English writing.	2.15	.87	Disagree	3.10	.94	Neutral
8. I am confident in writing in English.	2.12	.89	Disagree	2.65	.95	Neutral
9. I think writing in English is easy for me.	1.73	.80	Strongly disagree	2.29	1.13	Disagree
10. I think I write in English very well.	1.64	.70	Disagree	2.23	.88	Disagree
11. I have no problems about expressing ideas in English.	2.15	.71	Disagree	2.71	.97	Neutral
12. I like to write my ideas down in English.	2.39	1.00	Disagree	3.06	.85	Neutral
13. I think my English writing is better than my English speaking, listening, and reading.	2.03	.88	Disagree	2.32	.79	Disagree
14. I think my English writing is better than my classmates'.	1.61	.66	Strongly disagree	1.84	.86	Disagree
15. I try my best when I do my English writing assignments.	4.15	.44	Agree	3.90	.65	Agree
16. The activities I do in my writing classes help improve my writing in English.	4.52	.62	Strongly agree	4.29	.74	Strongly agree

However, the results reported in Table 01 cannot statistically show any significant difference between the subjects' responses to the two sets of questionnaires. Thus, the results are further compared by using a paired samples t-test in order to discover whether there was any significant difference of their attitudes toward writing in English after using the writing rubric and the three types of reflective written feedback or not. The results are consequently shown in Table 02.

Table 02. Comparison between subjects' attitudes towards writing in English before and after the use of writing rubric and three types of reflective written feedback

Statement	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed)
1. I enjoy writing in English.	-3.321	.00**
2. Writing in English is fun.	-2.562	.02*
3. Writing skill is an important skill in learning English.	-.849	.40
4. Writing in English is important to me.	-.197	.85
5. I think writing in English is important in my future career.	2.044	.05*
6. I always look forward to learning writing in English.	.144	.89
7. I am satisfied with my English writing.	-4.546	.00**
8. I am confident in writing in English.	-2.402	.02*
9. I think writing in English is easy for me.	-1.971	.06
10. I think I write in English very well.	-3.258	.00**
11. I have no problems about expressing ideas in English.	-2.474	.02*
12. I like to write my ideas down in English.	-3.021	.01*
13. I think my English writing is better than my English speaking, listening, and reading.	-1.351	.19
14. I think my English writing is better than my classmates'.	-1.063	.30
15. I try my best when I do my English writing assignments.	1.650	.11
16. The activities I do in my writing classes help improve my writing in English.	1.423	.17

**Significant at .01, *Significant at .05

According to Table 02, it is worth noting that the mean scores of the subjects' responses to eight items significantly increased after the use of the writing rubric and three types of reflective written feedback. That is, their positive perception that writing in English was fun and enjoyable significantly increased after the use of writing rubric and three types of reflective written feedback. Although it was still in the same level, agree, for the first item (item 1, $t = -3.321$, $p < .01$), it did significantly increase and fall into the level of agree in the post-treatment whereas it was at the level of neutral in the pre-treatment (item 2, $t = -2.562$, $p < .05$). Moreover, there was a significant difference in terms of self-satisfaction with their own English writing and their confidence in writing in English after the use of the writing rubric and three types of reflective written feedback. Both of them were at the level of disagreement before the treatment, but they significantly increased and fell into the level of neutral after the treatment (item 7, $t = -4.546$, $p < .01$; item 8, $t = -2.402$, $p < .05$). Therefore, the subjects unquestionably reported that they preferred to write their ideas down in English after the treatment as a significant difference was found in item 12 from the level of disagreement to neutral ($t = -3.021$, $p \leq .01$). Furthermore, the mean scores of the subjects' positive attitudes toward their writing proficiency significantly increased after the treatment although it still remained in the same level of agreement: disagreement (item 10, $t = -3.258$, $p < .01$). However, a significant difference was found in item 11 ($t = -2.474$, $p < .05$) which means that the subjects reported to have fewer problems when they expressed their ideas in English after using the writing rubric and three types of reflective written feedback. As you can see, the mean score of their attitudes fell into the level of neutral after the treatment while it was at the level of disagree before the treatment. Nevertheless, the result surprisingly showed that the subjects' attitudes toward the importance of writing in English in their future career significantly decreased; that is, from strongly agree to agree (item 5, $t = 2.044$, $p \leq .05$).

According to the findings, the subjects generally had quite positive attitudes toward writing in English both before and after the integration of the writing rubric and three types of reflective written feedback: self-reflective written feedback, peer-reflective written feedback, and teacher-reflective written feedback into the writing class. However, their positive attitudes toward writing in English significantly increased in only six aspects: (1) enjoyment of writing in English, (2) significance of writing in English, (3) self-satisfaction of their own English writing performance, (4) self-confidence in writing in English, (5) less difficulty in expressing their ideas in written English, and (6) preference to express their ideas in the English written form based on eight items: item 1, item 2, item 5, item 7, item 8, item 10, item 11, item 12. This highlights the benefits of the use of both the writing rubric and three types of reflective written feedback. The same result is also presented in Andrade and Du's study (2005), Hisatsune's study (2008), and Kasule and Lunga's study (2010). In this case, the value of rubric and feedback was found to promote students' learning goal-setting, self-assessment, self-confidence, autonomous language learning and development, and especially the student-centred writing pedagogy as affirmed by Andrade (2005), Brookhart (2013), Overmeyer (2009), and Wilson (2007).

As a result, some profound pedagogical issues are raised for helping teachers effectively teach writing in English by integrating the writing rubric as well as three types of reflective written feedback in their writing classes, especially in the academic context where English is taught as a foreign language.

6.1. From grammar focus to other features of good writing

Teaching writing in English traditionally means teaching grammar in the Thai academic context for ages. In so doing, the students have been practically learning about the target language instead of using the written target language to communicate. Undoubtedly, Thai students are confronted with difficulty to produce the target language in the written form since writing is the productive skill and the most difficult language skill to master even though they have learnt English for more than a decade. Thus, their attitudes toward writing in English are always negative. With an integration of the writing rubric and the three types of reflective written feedback in the present study, however, the focus on teaching writing in English shifted from grammar, which was stressful and boring, to six characteristics of good writing. Consequently, their writing in English was improved in more than one aspect apart from grammar; for example, organization, fluency, word choice, etc. Their attitudes toward writing in English were subsequently positively boosted up. When the students had positive attitudes toward writing in English, their English writing proficiency was, therefore, further developed and vice versa.

6.2. Friendlier writing classroom environment: Collaborative and interactive atmosphere

Traditionally, the students are perceived as passive learners in the writing pedagogy. With the employment of the writing rubric and three types of reflective written feedback, it promoted active learners who took part in their own language learning and skill development in the collaborative and interactive writing classroom atmosphere. Hence, this friendly atmosphere helped change from the tense atmosphere from teaching grammar in the writing class where the teacher plays the leading role to a more supporting atmosphere where everyone in the classroom including the teacher is regarded as a facilitator to help develop their language learning and skill. Particularly, peer assessment is one of the major

effective methods to create such a positive language learning and improvement environment according to Spendlove (2009).

6.3. From self-satisfaction and self-confidence to autonomous learners

An integration of the writing rubric and three types of reflective written feedback into the English writing classroom helped develop autonomous learners in this study. The similar result can be found in various studies; for instance, Andrade and Du's study (2005), Kasule and Lunga's study (2010), and so on. According to the activity in the study, the students had to rely on themselves to learn the target language as well as to improve their language skill. As a result, they took responsibility of their own target language learning and improvement with some limited degree of facilitation from their teacher and peers. Accordingly, when they achieved any certain level of improvement, self-satisfaction was undoubtedly built up. Once their self-satisfaction was developed, the students were more confident to produce the target language, particularly with less difficulty since they acknowledged their own capability. For that reason, their positive attitudes toward writing in English were finally boosted up. These positive attitudes toward writing in English, moreover, encouraged them to master the target language in further degrees for their lifelong learning.

6.4. From an unavoidable language skill to learn to an important skill of enjoyment and preference to be improved

Writing is one of four important language skills to learn (Weigle, 2002). Unquestionably, it is the significant and required language skill for the students who learn the target language to master. However, it is always claimed that writing is the most difficult language skill to master, particularly in the foreign language or the second language (Weigle, 2002). As a consequence, it is also the inevitable hard language skill to develop. With the use of the writing rubric and three types of reflective written feedback in the writing class in the present study, the students enjoyed developing this difficult language skill. This can be possibly explained that the writing rubric and three types of reflective written feedback are the specific guides for them to improve their writing performance (Montgomery, 2002). With informative and specific feedback from these sources as well as cooperation from both their peers and teacher, the students know their strengths and weaknesses, so they can easily build up their writing skill from the level they are in (Brookhart, 2013; Wilson, 2007). This, hence, fosters their positive attitudes toward developing their writing skill in English.

7. Conclusion

The present study is significant in its nature. It is one of very few, if any, to explore EFL students' attitudes toward writing in English after using the writing rubric and three types of reflective written feedback; that is, self-reflective written feedback, peer-reflective written feedback, and teacher-reflective written feedback in the Thai academic context. According to the EFL students' responses to both pre- and post-treatment questionnaires, the students' positive attitudes toward writing in English were boosted up in some certain degree, especially in six features: (1) enjoyment of writing in English, (2) significance of

writing in English, (3) self-satisfaction of their own English writing performance, (4) self-confidence in writing in English, (5) less difficulty in expressing their ideas in written English, and (6) preference to express their ideas in the English written form. With regard to the findings and certain limitations of the study, some recommendations for future studies are given as follows.

1. The correlation between the students' attitudes toward writing in English after the use of the writing rubric and three types of reflective written feedback and their competence in writing in English should be considered in further studies to see if they are significantly related or not.

2. To confirm the findings of the current study, this study should be replicated with the subjects with different demographic information, for instance, the sample size, the level of education, the period of time, the academic context, etc to see whether the same findings will be given: whether the students will have positive attitudes toward writing in English or not.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank three anonymous reviewers for their careful reading of my paper, their constructive feedback, and their helpful suggestions. This study was supported by Department of Western Languages Research Fund, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Thaksin University, Thailand.

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