EFL Writing at Thai Secondary Schools: Teachers and Students' Views, Difficulties and Expectations

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Abstract
Thai students' writing in English is a chronic problem documented in the literature of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Thailand. However, little research has been conducted on how Thai teachers and students perceive the importance of English-writing and what difficulties and expectations/suggestions they have in teaching and learning this skill at upper-secondary schools (U-SS). This study, therefore, plans to fill this gap by employing two sets of surveys and semi-structured interviews with 114 teachers and 170 students from 30 different U-SS in the Northeastern part of Thailand and two provincial supervisors of Foreign-Language-Education Divisions (Pro-Sup). Besides their various stated personal and contextual problems in terms of time constraint, insufficient resources and poorly-motivated and mixed-ability students, national test structures and the presence of untrained English teachers, the participants acknowledged the importance of English-writing and expected to have this skill taught at all school levels. These findings suggest that to improve the teaching and learning practices of this skill at U-SS in Thailand and other countries with similar contexts, relevant support and necessary reforms from teachers, school leaders and national-test and policymakers are needed.

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1. Introduction

Writing in English is considered to be the most difficult skill, especially for English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, to master because it requires them to have a certain amount of knowledge about the target language regarding the rhetorical organizations and appropriate language use with which they would like to communicate to their readers (Hedge, 2005). Harmer (2007) states that this skill should be taught to help students acquire the language through the visual demonstration of how it is constructed and reinforce what they have learned. However, due to the complex nature of English-writing and EFL learners' limited linguistic knowledge, teaching and learning English-writing in EFL contexts is a challenging process (Derakhshan & Karimian Shirejini, 2020; Ghoorchaei & Khosravi, 2019; Nguyen, 2021; Syafii & Miftah, 2020). In fact, besides learning the English language, learners need to learn how to develop their ideas to produce texts with the rhetorical features that they have never had in their first language (L1). As stated by Ghoorchaei and Khosravi (2019), this challenge would be compounded if students' previous learning experiences do not include this skill. Similarly, Adugna (2019) also says that while L1 writers face difficulties in fluency of writing, EFL writers encounter challenges of linguistic aspects and writing strategies. The challenges by EFL learners could subsequently prompt the difficult task for teachers because developing this skill takes a long time to see the improvement (Tangpermpoon, 2008). This study thus plans to investigate the difficulties faced by Thai teachers and students at U-SS and their suggestions and expections for teaching and learning this skill effectively in their educational settings.

2. Literature review

Several studies have been conducted in various EFL contexts to help teachers and learners teach and learn EFL writing effectively. Nguyen (2009) identified the problems language teachers had in teaching EFL writing in Vietnam and suggested different ways to develop Vietnamese students' English-writing skills. Similarly, based on the documented problems in EFL writing by Chinese students, Sun (2010) provided several pedagogical solutions to help them improve their English-writing competence. Tangpermpoon (2008) suggested incorporating the product, process and genre-based approaches to teach EFL writing to Thai students. Employing modified genre-based approaches to teach Thai-university students, Changpueng

(2012), Kongpetch (2006) and Nguyen (2018) found the effectiveness of their instructional techniques in improving Thai university-students' EFL writing. In Indonesia, to enhance grade-nine students' skills and motivation in writing reports, Syafii and Miftah (2020) employed the Venn-diagram strategy and found it effective. Besides the approaches to teach EFL writing, research on Iranian and Taiwanese learners' learning writing strategies was also carried out (Aidinlou & Far, 2014; Ghoorchaei & Khosravi, 2019; Kao & Reynolds, 2017; Tangpermpoon, 2008). Their findings showed a positive relationship between learners' language proficiency, self-efficacy beliefs, writing strategies and students' writing abilities.

In Thailand, where English has been taught as a foreign language for decades, Thai university-students' writing ability has been reported to be of particular concern because extended writing is not widely taught (Changpueng, 2012; Darasawang, 2007; Franco & Roach, 2018; Nguyen, 2018). This reality is likely to challenge the national objectives of improving Thai students' writing skills as stated in the Basic Education Core Curriculum (BEC) (Franco & Roach, 2018; Kaur et al., 2016; Ministry-of-Education, 2008; Office-of-the-National-Education-Commission, 2010). In fact, Thai students are required to be fluent in all four language skills to ensure that Thais are able to actively participate in the global economy rather than to serve as a source of cheap labor in multinational corporations (Franco & Roach, 2018; Kaur et al., 2016). Nevertheless, irrespective of the continuous efforts by BEC, Thai students' writing ability tends to be far from satisfaction, and several reasons could account for this failure. As explained by Darasawang (2007) and Wongsothorn et. al., (2002), teachers relied heavily on outmoded grammar-translation, rote-memorization and teacher-centered methods of teaching in Thai classrooms although the communicative language teaching approach (CLT) is recommended by BEC. Also, as stated in previous studies (Baker, 2008; Darasawang, 2007; Hallinger & Lee, 2011; Nguyen, 2019c; Stone, 2017), the concept of learner-centeredness has not been well-accepted among Thai teachers of English. This results in their negative attitudes and little improvement in English language education despite Thai government's push for a change from teacher-centered to learner-centered approaches.

Moreover, Hayes (2010) who studied English language learning, teaching and educational reform in rural Thailand reported that teachers were poorly-prepared, and there were "shortages of appropriately qualified teachers" (p. 305). Besides,

Thai is used as the main language of instruction of every subject, including the English language, and multiple-choice tests have been used in almost every English class with no exception to the English-speaking class (Darasawang & Todd, 2012; Hayes, 2010; Stone, 2017). National tests, such as O-NET (Ordinary National Education Test) and General Aptitude Test, designed to measure Thai students' English proficiency levels, are also formatted in the multiple-choice style which aims to measure grammar and semi-writing skills through error identification and/or sentence completion with the correct form of words, and reading and semi-speaking skills with dialogue or conversation completion tasks. Thai students thus have very few actual opportunities to represent their ideas and knowledge through the written mode (Nguyen, 2018; Stone, 2017). Studies have shown that Thai university-students had difficulties in organizing their ideas in English, and they often planned their essays in Thai language, and then translated them into English using online translation tools and Thai-English dictionaries without noticing the different nature of each language (Nguyen, 2018; Stone, 2017). Besides theses, Thai university-students reported that their ideas were blocked when teachers asked them to attend to both content and form at the same time (Bennui, 2008; Nguyen, 2018). These difficulties are likely to hamper the national objectives of improving Thai students' writing skills stated in BEC (Ministry-of-Education, 2008).

Despite the identified problems about teaching and learning EFL writing in Thai educational contexts, insufficient research has been conducted to help Thai students improve their writing in English. Besides the studies on appropriate approaches to teach EFL writing with Thai cultural values (Changpueng, 2012; Kongpetch, 2006; Nguyen, 2018), Stone (2017) suggested the implementation of an adapted critical literacy in Thai EFL writing classrooms to promote the interactive and student-centered environment for learning this skill. Sersen (2011) found Thai university-students' improvement in their writing skills through their awareness of L1 to L2 (second language) negative transfer factors. A few studies focused on the effective feedback strategies on EFL writing of Thai university-students. For example, Nguyen (2017, 2019a, 2019b) developed a combined peer-teacher feedback model to use in her paragraph and essay writing classes and found its effectiveness for her Thai English-majored students. In order to explore whether or not self-assessment increases learners' writing ability and there are any obstacles that inhibit their writing improvement, Honsa (2013) implemented the self-assessment program in Thai university-students' writing classes. The results supported the argument that self-assessing their own writing improved students' writing ability. In general,

previous studies tended to focus on how to help Thai university-students to learn this skill. To the authors' best knowledge, there is a scarcity of research on how EFL writing is taught and learnt at elementary and secondary schools in Thailand. With the contextual constraints in the test-oriented education system in Thailand, it is necessary to know how Thai teachers and students perceive the importance of EFL writing and what difficulties and expectations/suggestions they have in teaching and learning this skill at their own schools. However, these topics have not been documented in the literature although, as prescribed in BEC, all language skills should be taught at all educational levels (Ministry-of-Education, 2008). The present study, therefore, will explore these topics with teachers and students at U-SS (Grades 10, 11 & 12) in the Northeastern part of Thailand. The research questions (RQs) posited for this study are as follows:

1) What are U-SS Thai teachers and students' views on the importance of EFL writing?

2) What are their difficulties in teaching and learning EFL writing at U-SS?

3) What are their expectations/suggestions for making the teaching and learning of EFL writing at U-SS more effective?

The answers to these questions are expected to shed more light on teachers and students' perspectives on EFL writing and their difficulties and expectations in teaching and learning this skill at U-SS in Thailand. Furthermore, the findings are hoped to give school leaders, curriculum designers and policymakers in other regions in Thailand and other countries with similar EFL educational cultures some insights for their plans to provide relevant and timely support to teachers and students for the effectiveness of teaching and learning of this skill.

3. Methods

With the assistance of five Pro-Sups, two sets of surveys were sent to teachers and students of 30 U-SS of ten provinces in the Northeastern part of Thailand (considered as rural communities in Thailand). Completed surveys from 114 teachers and 170 students were employed to address the three RQs in this study. There were two parts in each survey; the first one aimed to collect the participants' biographical data while 5-point Likert-scale items were employed in Part 2 to learn

about the participants' views on the importance of English-writing, their difficulties in learning and teaching English-writing and their expectations and/or suggestions on how to help teachers and students at U-SS in Thailand to teach and learn English-writing in class effectively. In particular, with four open-ended questions, Part 1 in the teachers' survey (TS) aimed to get the information about the teachers' age, gender and degrees. In Part 2 (Tables 1, 2 & 3), besides seventeen 5-point Likert-scale items to learn about their views, difficulties and expectations/ suggestions on how to teach English-writing effectively, one open-ended question for each surveyed category was also included for them to add their own views, difficulties and suggestions if they were not listed in the survey. Similarly, in the students' survey (SS), the first part gathered information about themselves, and the second part with fourteen items (Tables 1, 2, & 3) collected the information about their views, difficulties and expectations/suggestions for teachers and schools to help U-SS students with English-writing. Similar to Part 2 in the TS, after each group of the surveyed items, an open-ended question was included for students to add their own views, difficulties and expectations/suggestions if they were not included in the survey.

Their responses in the first part of each survey were summarized to have some general information about the participants. In order to understand teachers and students' views, difficulties and expectations/suggestions on how to make teaching and learning EFL writing effective, the mean scores of all items in both teacher and student surveys were determined with the employment of SPSS. Their self-reported responses to the open-ended questions in each category were independently read and classified into themes by each researcher, and discussion on the differences was then conducted to achieve the complete agreement on the theme classification. Employing the purposeful sampling method, the semi-structured interviews with 10 teachers (T1-T10), 20 students (S1-S20) and two volunteering Pro-Sups (Pro-Sup1-Pro-Sup2), were also conducted in Thai language. Then, the findings from the surveys and the open-ended questions were interpreted together with the interview data, but only the related interview information was translated and included in the manuscript for a better understanding of the research findings.

4. Results

This section summarizes the participants' biographical information (Figures 1 & 2),

followed by the findings on each category (views, difficulties and expectations/suggestions) from both teachers and students (Tables 1, 2 & 3; Figures 3, 4, 5 & 6). The discussion on these findings with the interiew data will be presented in the Discussion section.

4.1. Participants' Biographical Information

Among 114 teachers who participated in the study, 93 were female and 21 were male. As can be seen in Figure 1, almost half of them were in the age of forties (mid-career) while the other half were in the ages of twenties (13.2%), thirties (16.7%) and fifties (22.8%). 52.6% of them held a Bachelor degree, teachers with Master's and doctoral degrees accounted for 45.6% and 1.8%, respectively.

Figure 1
Teachers' Age and Degrees
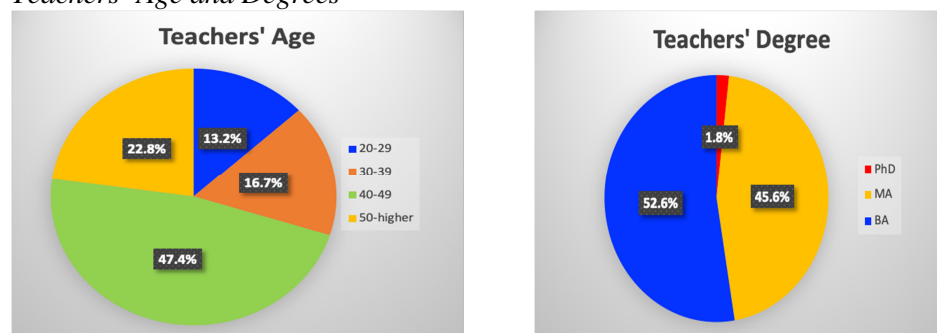
Similar to teachers, more female than male students responded to the survey (85% & 15%, respectively). Furthermore, as seen in Figure 2, most students were in the age of 16-18, the popular age groups for U-SS students, and very small percentages of them were in the age of 15 (2.1%) and 19 (5.3%). 45.3% of them were Grade 12 students while students from Grades 10 and 11 participating in the study accounted for 34.7% and 20%, respectively.

Figure 2
Students' Age and Levels of Study
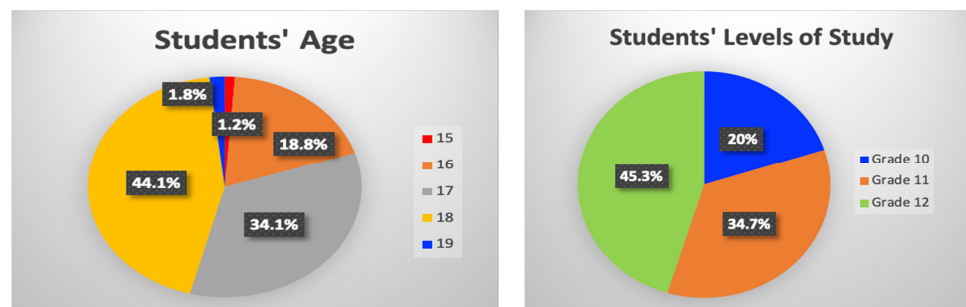
4.2. Teachers and Students' Views on the Importance of EFL Writing

In general, the mean scores of 27 (out of 31) surveyed items in three categories (views, difficulties and expectations/suggestions) were higher than 3.0 (Table 1, 2 & 3), indicating the general agreement from both teachers and students to most surveyed items. However, with the lowest mean score (1.89) in Table 1, Item 5 in TS tends to confirm that EFL writing was taught in class. With a mean score of 2.07, Item 4 in TS (*Writing in English is not a necessary skill for my students*) is in line with Item 1 (*Writing is an important skill for students*), which has the highest mean score (4.55) in TS. Ranked second (4.47), Item 2 in TS reveals teachers' belief in the importance of EFL writing, but they found the writing lessons in the textbooks were too difficult for them (Item 3, TS). Different from the surveyed items in TS, all items in SS had very high mean scores. Although these U-SS students agreed that EFL writing was difficult for them (Item 5, SS), they admitted that this skill was important for their future jobs (Item 1, SS). Besides, they also believed that writing in English helped them improve their ability to use English, supported them to learn other language skills and organized their ideas in English-thinking ways (Items 2, 3 & 4, SS, respectively).

Table 1
Teachers and Students' Views on EFL Writing

Teacher Survey (TS)		Student Survey (SS)	
Item	*Mean*	*Items*	*Mean*
1 Writing is an important skill for students	**4.55**	1 English-writing is important for future jobs	**4.69**
2 My students need to learn English-writing in class	**4.47**	2 Writing in English helps improve my ability to use English	**4.68**
3 I find the writing lessons in the textbooks too difficult for students	**3.27**	3 Writing in English supports me to learn other language skills	**4.54**
4 Writing in English is not a necessary skill for students	**2.07**	4 Writing in English helps me organize my ideas in English-thinking ways	**4.37**
5 Because writing is not an important part in the test, I usually skip writing lessons in the textbooks	**1.89**	5 English-writing is difficult for high-school students	**3.85**

Regarding teachers and students' self-reports of their views on the importance of EFL writing, only two teachers and three students left their additional opinions. While all three students stated that English-writing is important for daily communication, two teachers mentioned that writing is a difficult skill for U-SS students.

4.3. Teachers and Students' Difficulties in Teaching and Learning EFL Writing

Table 2 and Figures 3-4 summarize teachers and students' difficulties in teaching and learning EFL writing. As seen in Table 2, the highest mean in TS is for Item 1, stating that teachers do not have enough time to teach this skill in class, and teachers' lack of time to check students' writing (Item 4, TS) also gained a relatively-high mean score (3.11). In teachers' self-reports on their difficulties, this problem was also mentioned by eleven teachers and school activities were reported to be the main cause of not teaching this skill properly (Figure 3). Another difficulty receiving the second high mean score (3.68) in TS is the test focus (Item 2, TS), and this issue was also raised by four teachers in their self-reports (Figure 3). Although Item 3 (*The writing lessons in the textbooks are too difficult to teach*) received a mean of 3.42, not all teachers agreed that they did not have enough materials to use in their EFL writing classes (Item 6, TS), and seven of them self-reported this difficulty (Figure 3). Item 5 (*I don't have sufficient knowledge for teaching English-writing*) also got a relatively-high mean score of 3.06, and thirteen teachers also

admitted that they lacked teaching techniques and their writing ability was not good (9 & 4 teachers, respectively) (Figure 3). Teachers' difficulties from several student-related factors in teaching this skill were also mentioned in their self-reports. As seen in Figure 3, 25 teachers indicated their students' lack of grammar and vocabulary for writing, 11 of them mentioned that their difficulties in teaching this skill were due to students' different abilities, and five teachers even stated that their students did not care about their learning.

Table 2
*Teachers and Students' Difficulties in Teaching and Learning EFL wZriting*

TS		SS	
Items	*Mean*	*Items*	*Mean*
1 I don't have enough time to teach writing in class	**3.80**	1 I don't have enough vocabulary	**4.12**
2 Tests don't focus on writing but other skills and grammar	**3.68**	2 I am not good at English grammar	**4.06**
3 The writing lessons in the textbooks are too difficult to teach	**3.42**	3 I don't know how to write in English due to differences between Thai and English languages	**3.71**
4 I don't have enough time to check students' writing	**3.11**	4 I don't know the importance of English-writing	**2.84**
5 I don't have sufficient knowledge for teaching English-writing	**3.06**		
6 I don't have enough materials to use in English-writing classes	**2.59**		

Figure 3
Teachers' Self-reported Difficulties
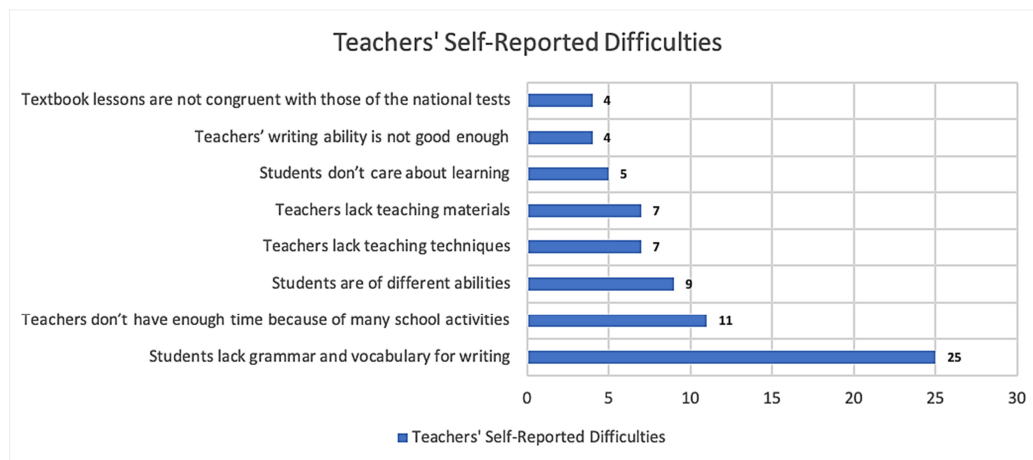
For students, their two-top difficulties were vocabulary and grammar (Items 1 & 2, Table 2) which achieved the two-top mean scores in SS (4.11 & 4.06). These problems were also self-reported by nine and thirteen students, respectively (Figure 4). Differences in writing styles between Thai and English received these students' general agreement with a mean score of 3.71 (Item 3, SS) while not many of them thought that their difficulties in learning this skill was from their not knowing its importance (Item 4, SS). Besides grammar, vocabulary and writing styles, these students also added four different difficulties they had in learning EFL writing. Two students indicated that they had no motivation to learn English and no ideas to write (Figure 4). While three students reported that their teachers were not responsible for their teaching, five other students said that what they learnt was different from what was tested in the national tests.

Figure 4
Students' Self-reported Difficulties
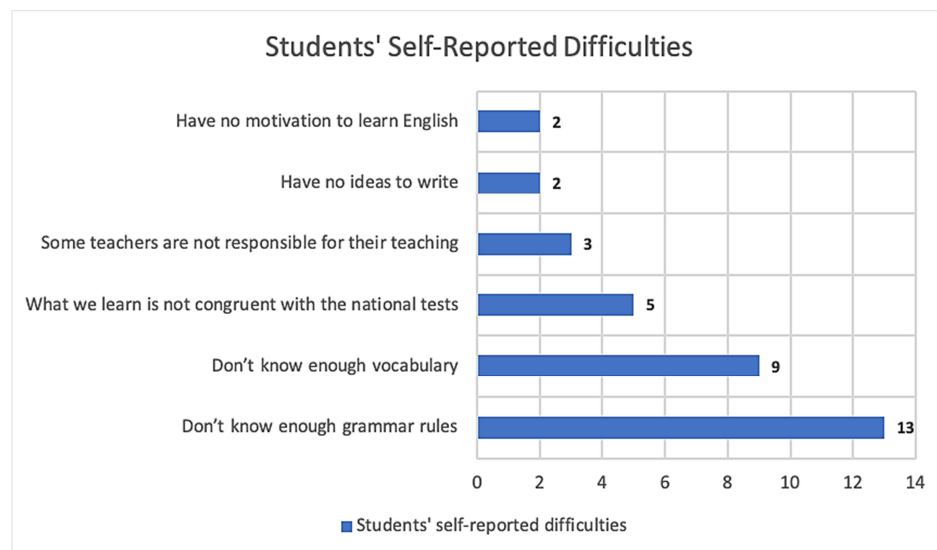
4.4. Teachers and Students' Expectations/Suggestions on How to Help English Teachers at U-SS Teach English-Writing in Class Effectively

As seen in TS, Table 3, "*Provide teachers with hand-on training on how to teach each writing task in the textbooks*" received the highest mean (4.18), followed by "*Require English teachers at elementary and lower-secondary schools to teach English-writing*" (4.16). "*Reduce the teaching contents for each grade*" and "*Increase the teaching time for each unit in the textbooks*" (Items 3 & 6, respectively) had the mean scores of 4.06 and 3.74, respectively. Items 4 and 5 showed these teachers' agreement in adjusting the test components which included writing parts with the mean scores of 3.96 and 3.76, respectively.
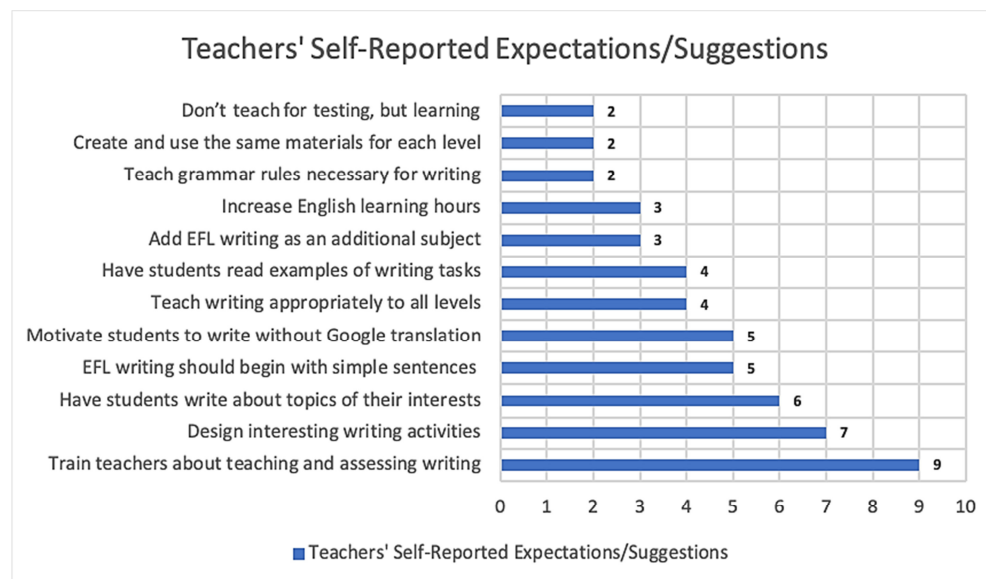
Table 3
Teachers and Students' Expectations/Suggestions

TS			SS		
Items		*Mean*	*Items*		*Mean*
1	Provide teachers with hand-on training on how to teach each writing task in textbooks	**4.18**	1	Teachers should organize writing activities in an interesting way	**4.64**
2	Require English teachers at elementary and	**4.16**	2	Teachers should have good	**4.61**

| TS		Mean	SS		Mean
Items		*Mean*	*Items*		*Mean*
	lower-secondary schools to teach writing			knowledge of teaching writing skills	
3	Reduce the teaching contents for each grade	**4.06**	3	Tests should have writing components	**4.46**
4	Make writing a compulsory part of the test	**3.96**	4	Teachers should spend more time correcting students' writing	**4.44**
5	Adjust the national test structures in which writing parts account for a relative weight in comparison to other skills and grammar	**3.76**	5	Teachers should focus more on teaching writing skills in class	**4.43**
6	Increase the teaching time for each unit in the textbooks	**3.74**			

In teachers' self-reported expectations/suggestions on how to make teaching and learning EFL writing at U-SS in Thailand effective (Figure 5), twelve themes were classified from fifty-two instances. The highest number of teachers (9) expected to be trained on teaching and assessing this skill, followed by designing interesting writing activities and having students write about topics of their interests (7 & 6 teachers, respectively). Besides their suggestions on teaching simple sentences and teaching grammar rules (5 & 2, respectively), six teachers expected to have more time for this skill (*Increase English learning hours* & *Add EFL writing as an additional subject)* while four teachers suggested teaching EFL writing to students of all levels. Five teachers suggested motivating students to write without using Google translation. While four teachers suggested providing students the writing samples of writing tasks, teaching for learning (not for testing) and having the same materials to teach students of each level of study were recommended by another four teachers (2 each).

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Figure 5
Teachers' Self-reported Expectations/Suggestions

Regarding students' expectations/suggestions for schools and teachers to improve the teaching of EFL writing at U-SS in Thailand (SS, Table 3), very high mean scores were given to all five surveyed items. Item 1 (*Teachers should organize writing activities in an interesting way*) and Item 2 (*Teachers should have good knowledge of teaching writing skills*) were rated the highest (4.64 & 4.61, respectively). In addition to Items 4 and 5 on their expectations from teachers (*Teachers should spend more time correcting students' writing* & *Teachers should focus more on teaching writing skills in class*) with the mean scores of 4.44 and 4.43, respectively, these students also showed their general agreement on including writing parts in the tests with a mean score of 4.46 (Item 3).

Figure 6
Students' Self-reported Expectations/Suggestions
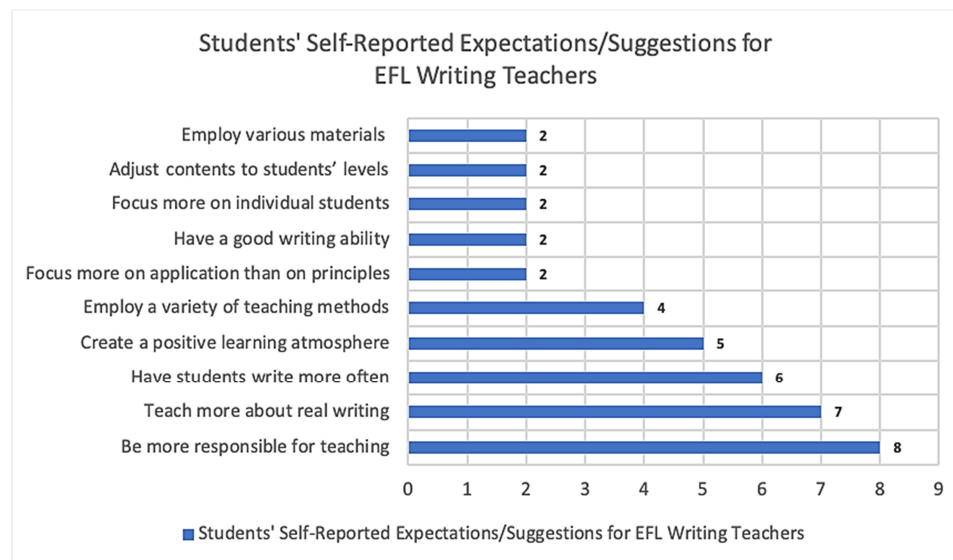
From students' self-reports (Figure 6), 40 instances of their expectations/ suggestions for EFL writing teachers were categorized. While eight expected their teachers to be more responsible for their teaching, fifteen of them would like their teachers to teach more about real writing, have students write more often and focus more on application than on principles of writing (7, 6 & 2, respectively). Furthermore, eleven students also expected their teachers to create positive learning environments and employed different teaching methods and various materials (5, 4 & 2, respectively). Besides, teachers were expected to have good writing abilities, focus more on individual students and adjust the contents to suit students' language proficiency levels (2 each).

5. Discussion

Different from some Thai university-students' reports on the complete absence of teaching EFL writing at their secondary education pointed out in T. T. L. Nguyen's (2018, 2019a, 2019c) studies, most teachers in this study disagreed with Item 5 in TS (Table 1) stating that "*Because writing is not an important part in the test, I*

usually skip writing lessons in the textbooks". This finding tends to signify a pronounced shift in these teachers' practices despite the entrenched examination-oriented culture of Thailand. Besides this, the survey also revealed these teachers' beliefs in the importance and the necessity of teaching EFL writing to their students (Items 1 & 4, TS, Table 1). These results are likely to confirm Wongsothorn et al. (2002) optimistic expectation for a drastic change in ELT in the country as a result of the government' effort in implementing the CLT approach to develop Thai students' communicative competence (Ministry-of-Education, 2008). As reported in the interview with teachers (T3-T10), it was known that they had to teach EFL writing to their students because it was required by the school curriculum. Also, teaching EFL writing was listed as one of the prescribed indicators in BEC (Ministry-of-Education, 2008). Besides following the prescribed curriculum by the Ministry of Education, some teachers (T1-T4-T5-T7-T8) stated that they saw the need to improve their U-SS students' language skills and prepare them for their higher education. Other teachers (T2-T6-T9) also added that EFL writing should be taught as it was an important productive skill for their students' future careers. Similarly, the highest mean of "*English-writing is important for future jobs*" (Item 1, SS, Table 1) and the lowest mean score of "*I don't know the importance of English-writing*" (Item 4, SS, Table 2) indicated that these Thai U-SS students were also aware of the importance of this skill. Moreover, their agreement through the high mean scores for Items 2, 3 and 4 in SS (Table 1) is likely to show their positive attitudes to learning EFL writing as it helped them improve their ability to use English, to learn other language skills as well as to organize their ideas in English ways, respectively. As revealed in the interviews with students (S1-S4-S8-S15), it was known that when they learned this skill, their vocabulary and grammar was also consolidated, and with the newly-gained knowledge, they felt motivated and more confident to use English. To clarify why English-writing was reported to be important for their daily communication, three students (S9-S13-S17) were interviewed, and it was known that this skill was necessary for them to communicate with their online foreign friends via Facebook and Line applications. The positive attitudes and beliefs of these Thai teachers and students towards EFL writing are therefore likely to show teachers' readiness to create a meaningful EFL writing classroom and students' inclination to seek intrinsic motivation for their learning of this skill (Adugna, 2019; Stone, 2017).

Despite their acknowledgment of the significant role of EFL writing, both teachers and students admitted that it was difficult for Thai U-SS students to learn

through teachers' self-report (Figure 3) and Item 5 (SS, Table 1). As seen in Item 3 (TS, Table 1) and teachers' self-report on their difficulties in teaching EFL writing, the writing lessons in the textbooks were believed to be too difficult for their students. From the interview with the two Pro-Sups, it was known that based on the prescription by the Ministry of Education, international publishers produced the skill-integrated and theme-based English textbooks for public schools in Thailand. Moreover, as commented by Kanoksilapatham (2018), these textbooks represent the cultural features of English speaking countries, which are distinct from those of Thailand (e.g., language, weather, food, way of life, beliefs, practices or traditions), making it difficult for Thai teachers and students to relate to in their writing lessons. Besides this, some of these teachers also reported that they did not have enough materials to supplement their teaching of this skill (Item 6, TS, Table 2 & Figure 3). This could reflect the practical problems of insufficient teaching resources and aids, as reported by Hayes (2010) and Kaur et al. (2016), in the rural areas in Thailand. Various learning materials were therefore expected by teachers and students for each educational level and these should also be adjusted to suit students' levels (Figures 5 & 6).

Another problem commonly-known in Thai schools was also mentioned by these teachers: not having enough time to teach this skill (Items 1 & 4, TS, Table 2 & Figure 3). As revealed by teachers (T3-T5-T10), they had several responsibilities, namely organizing and participating in many learner-development activities (sports, music, dance, academic camps or academic competitions), cultural activities (religious holidays & national holidays) and school events. This reality could partly account for three students' claims on their difficulties in learning EFL writing because of their teachers' irresponsibility for their teaching (Figure 4). However, in the interview, Pro-Sup1 revealed that as stated in BEC (Ministry-of-Education, 2008), teachers and students at U-SS in Thailand are required to have more time for learner-development and extra-curricular activities as compared to those in elementary and lower-secondary schools. As shared in the interviews with teachers (T4-T8) and students (S2-S5-S19), such busy schedules together with the objective-type questions with sentence completion, reordering sentences and error correction tasks in the O-NET (Wongsothorn et al., 2002) demotivated them in teaching and learning this skill (Item 2, TS, Table 2 & Figure 4).

Besides the contextual challenges, several teachers and most students (Figure 3

& Items 1 & 2 with the highest mean scores, SS, Table 2, respectively) agreed that students' lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge made the teaching and learning of EFL writing difficult. The interviews with students (S2-S3-S11-S18) disclosed their worries of wrong sentence structures, misspelling of words and being unable to find the words to write. Also, having no ideas to write in English was also reported by two students (Figure 4). Furthermore, some teachers suggested teaching grammar rules and simple sentences as ways to make learning and teaching of EFL writing better (Figure 5). These Thai participants' preoccupation with grammar and vocabulary suggested that they viewed language as structure rather than as meaning or communication. Thus, they tended to believe that mastery of writing skills was equated with mastery of the intricacies of traditional grammar and having a good knowledge of vocabulary. Their beliefs are likely to confirm a strong influence of their previous learning experiences from the grammar-translation approach that has been prevalent in ELT in Thailand (Darasawang, 2007; Darasawang & Todd, 2012; Jiang et al., 2020; Nguyen, 2019c; Wongsothorn et al., 2002). Moreover, students of different abilities and without motivation for learning (*Students don't care about learning* & *Have no motivation to learn English*, Figures 3 & 4, respectively) were also mentioned as the causes for these teachers and students' difficulties in teaching and learning EFL writing at U-SS in the Northeastern region of Thailand. The issue of low motivation among Thai students, especially in the rural areas, has been documented as one of the main challenges for improving their English proficiency levels (Kaur et al., 2016). Furthermore, similar to the classrooms described by Chamcharatsri (2010), two Pro-Sups said that classes in most schools in the region accommodated about 30 to 40 students with mixed abilities of English, challenging the application of the CLT approach to cultivate Thai students' communicative competence prescribed in BEC (Ministry-of-Education, 2008).

The final difficulty in students' learning EFL writing presented through their agreement with a high mean score in SS (Item 3, Table 2) was the differences in writing styles between Thai and English languages. This reported problem was similar to that by Chinese and Vietnamese students whose languages follow the circular, indirect and inductive patterns in thinking and writing (Nguyen, 2009; Sun, 2010). In fact, in Thai writing, writers generally do not state the main topics explicitly and usually repeat the same points in their texts, instead of grouping each point into a clear and highly-organized order with clear topics and well-supported details in typical English essay writing (Bennui, 2008; Nguyen, 2018; Stone, 2017).

Therefore, if Thai EFL students are unaware of this difference in writing styles and not properly guided by their teachers, they would find a mismatch when following their L1 discursive patterns to English-writing (Stone, 2017; Sun, 2010). Although five teachers suggested motivating students to write without using Google translation (Figure 5), it would be more effective to help them understand the differences in thinking and writing habits. When applying English thinking patterns or cross-cultural contrastive rhetoric in their EFL writing, Thai students would find it easier to express their ideas and reduce the chances of miscommunication.

In addition to their difficulties, Thai teachers and students at U-SS in the region also made several suggestions in order to help schools and teachers at this educational level to teach EFL writing more effectively. Besides the high mean scores given to all surveyed items in both TS and SS (Table 3), it was interesting to see almost all the self-reported expectations/suggestions were for teachers while schools, national test-maker organizations and policy-makers received a few of them (Figures 5 & 6). As reported in their difficulties that they did not have enough time to teach EFL writing, these U-SS teachers would like their schools to increase time for learning English at school and to make EFL writing as an additional subject (Figure 5). These expectations were also displayed through the high mean scores in Item 3 "*Reduce the teaching contents for each grade*" and Item 6 "*Increase the teaching time for each unit in the textbooks*", (TS, Table 3). The interviews were conducted with teachers (T3-T5-T6-T8) to find out why they did not require the schools to cut down the learner-development and cultural activities and school events instead of decreasing the learning contents and adding English learning time. The interviewed data revealed that schools in Thailand are granted with full authority to design their own curriculum for all subjects, depending on their contextual conditions, priorities and readiness whereas school activities should be strictly followed to maintain the Thainess (national cultures and identities) (Baker, 2008; Kanoksilapatham, 2018; Kaur et al., 2016). Two Pro-Sups also confirmed this decentralization policy and referred to the time-framework prescribed on page 25 of BEC (Ministry-of-Education, 2008) for both learning and activities. Another expectation/suggestion that both groups agreed with the high mean scores was the inclusion of writing skills with relative weight in comparison to other language skills and grammar in the national tests (Item 5, TS & Item 3, SS, Table 3). In the interviews with teachers and students, it was known that the O-NET

mainly focuses on reading comprehension (35 items), language use (i.e., sentence completion & error correction) (20 items) and writing ability (passage completion) (10 items). Furthermore, as reported in several studies (Darasawang, 2007; Darasawang & Todd, 2012; Hallinger & Lee, 2011; Kaur et al., 2016; Nguyen, 2019c; Stone, 2017; Wongsothorn et al., 2002), the education system in Thailand is closely tied with high-stakes examination at almost every level of education, and the examination-oriented culture in the country tends to mean that learners' success or failure is determined by their ability to do well on the English-exam paper. Hence, the teachers and students in this study believed that the presence of the writing skill components in the national test would lead to significant changes in the teaching and learning practices of EFL writing at U-SS in Thailand. The last suggestion for school leaders and policy-makers to help improve the teaching and learning of EFL writing at U-SS made by four teachers in their self-reports was making elementary and lower-secondary school teachers to teach this skill (Figure 5). In the interviews, these teachers (T1-T3-T9-T10) stated that students should be familiarized with writing for audience and meaning, rather than writing for learning other skills and aspects (listening, reading, speaking, vocabulary and grammar) (Harmer, 2007) when they learn English. They added if this skill was taught at all school levels, teaching it at U-SS would not be challenging. Regarding this recommendation, two teachers even stated "Don't teach for testing, but learning!" in their self-reported suggestions (Figure 5).

With regard to suggestions/expectations for U-SS teachers to teach EFL writing more effectively, "*Provide teachers with hand-on training on how to teach each writing task in the textbooks*" gained the highest level of teachers' agreement (Item 1, TS, Table 3). In SS, almost all of them agreed that their teachers should have good instructional knowledge to teach this skill (Item 2, Table 3). In their self-reports on this research category, nine teachers expected to be trained on teaching and assessing EFL writing (Figure 5) while four students expected their teachers to employ a variety of teaching methods (Figure 6). This expectation by a majority of the participants is likely to indicate the chronic problem commonly reported in the ELT literature in Thailand on the lack of trained teachers and poor instruction delivered by unqualified local teachers (Hayes, 2010; Kaur et al., 2016; Nguyen, 2019c; Stone, 2017). Moreover, it is also known that there is a wide gap concerning quality English teaching between schools in big cities and their rural counterparts (Lathapipat, 2018), so it is necessary to provide teacher training to equip local teachers with both language knowledge and teaching techniques. In the interviews

with teachers, two of them (T4-T7) said that they did not learn to teach English, but their schools' needs turned them into English teachers. This information is likely to confirm Hayes' (2008) statement that in Thailand "individuals may choose to become members of their state teaching systems first and foremost and that their choice of subject to teach is a secondary consideration" (p. 488).

Besides teaching methods, a majority of students agreed that their teachers should focus more on teaching writing skills in class and spend more time correcting their writing (Items 4 & 5, SS, Table 3). Similarly, in students' self-reports (Figure 6), seven and six of them expected their teachers to teach more "real writing" and have them write more often, respectively. Two of them would also like their teachers to focus more on individual students and writing practices rather than on writing theories, and have good writing abilities. Eight students even expected their teachers to be more responsible with their teaching. As revealed in the interviews with students (S6-S7-S12-S14), it was known that sometimes their teachers skipped the writing lessons in the textbooks, or these lessons were used to practice the target grammar points in the chapters. Additionally, some students added that sometimes teachers gave them a sample writing and asked them to write a similar piece of writing. Although such instructional techniques were employed due to teachers' hectic schedules and were considered appropriate with the objective-test items in the exam-oriented contexts in Thailand, they could not help Thai U-SS students acquire the ability to write in English. The last group of suggestions/expectations made by the participants through their agreement on having writing activities in an interesting way (Item 1, SS, Table 3), self-reports on creating positive learning environments, designing interesting writing activities and giving students writing topics of their interest (Figures 5 & 6). This tends to show Thai culturally-based values of classroom behavior of having fun, enjoyment and comfort (Baker, 2008; Nguyen, 2019c).

6. Conclusion

This study explores the views, difficulties and expectations/suggestions on the teaching and learning of EFL writing from 114 Thai teachers and 170 students of 30 U-SS in ten provinces in the Northeastern part of Thailand. Two surveys of 5-point Likert-scale items and open-ended questions were administered with teachers and

students, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten teachers, twenty students and two Pro-Sups in order to shed more light on the findings from the surveys. Besides their various stated personal and contextual problems, these participants showed their awareness of the importance of EFL writing, and their expectations and several suggestions were also made for teachers, schools, national-test and policy-makers. Although (Stone, 2017) stated that Thai students are usually unaware of the importance of English language skills until they enter the workforce or further their education, these Thai U-SS students' awareness of the significant role of EFL writing for their future jobs suggested that they would seek the best way to achieve their learning goals. A similar possibility was also seen from the U-SS teachers in this study through their agreement to all surveyed items on the need to teach EFL writing to their students. However, teachers and students' reported difficulties in teaching and learning this skill due to students' lack of grammar and vocabulary, and teachers' expectations to be trained on how to teach and assess EFL writing indicated the impact of grammar-translation approach on their mindsets and teachers' lack of English language and instructional skills to facilitate the teaching of this skill. Additionally, their contextual difficulties in terms of time constraint, insufficient resources and poorly-motivated and mixed-ability students, national test structures, the presence of untrained English teachers and teachers' expectations to have this skill taught at all school levels suggest great efforts needed from the government to improve Thai students' English-writing ability. Furthermore, the findings on the difficult writing lessons in the textbooks and having "fun" in EFL writing classes in this study confirmed the arguments by Baker (2008) and Nguyen (2019c) for the effectiveness of any teaching pedagogy and materials in Thailand. In other words, to be successful in Thai educational settings, ELT methodologies, training and textbooks need to be adapted to suitably fix the local needs.

Despite a small scope of research with U-SS teachers and students in the Northeastern part of Thailand, this study provided school leaders, national-test and policy-makers and teacher-educators, both in Thailand and in other educational settings, with similar teaching and learning cultures, more insights into their plans to provide relevant and timely support to teachers and students at secondary-schools in order to improve the teaching and learning of this difficult skill. In the environment where teacher-centeredness, memorization-based schooling, large-group and exam-oriented teaching is popular in Thailand (Baker, 2008; Darasawang, 2007; Hallinger & Lee, 2011), proper instruction on EFL writing is

not widely used. Therefore, research on teachers and students' views, challenges and expectations in other educational contexts in Thailand and in other countries where English is taught as a foreign language is necessary. This could provide a general picture of how EFL teachers and students view on English-writing and what difficulties and expectations they have in common in teaching and learning this skill so that effective strategic plans to enhance the writing ability of EFL students can be developed.

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