

Enhancing L2 Learners' English Writing Proficiency through Blended Learning: A Case Study of Thai Undergraduate Students

Sudarat Phosa¹ / Sudakarn Patamadilok²

^{1,2}Faculty of Education, Naresuan University, Phitsanulok, Thailand

Received: August 13, 2020
Revised: August 19, 2020
Accepted: August 20, 2020

Abstract

Writing is a significant skill in English as a foreign language. It is considered as a challenging skill, particularly for L2 learners. To improve their writing proficiency, integrating writing instruction with blended learning has been considered as an alternative approach. The objective of this study was to investigate Thai undergraduates' writing proficiency before and after implementing writing instruction with blended learning combined with face-to-face instruction and online instruction via the online educational platform (Google Classroom). The study was conducted by using a one-group pretest-posttest design. The samples were 35 second-year undergraduates in academic year 2019-2020 in Faculty of Education at Buriram Rajabhat University, selected by a purposive sampling method. The data obtained from pre-test and post-test were statistically analyzed by using means, standard deviation and t-test analysis.

The results indicated that the mean score of the post-test was higher than the pre-test with significant difference at 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$). Five criteria were used to measure English writing proficiency outcomes: 1) organization, 2) content, 3) grammatical accuracy, 4) mechanics and 5) conclusion. The results revealed a significant improvement in all five criteria, concluding that Thai undergraduates'

writing proficiency was improved after learning with blended learning.

Keywords: writing proficiency, L2 learners, blended learning, Google classroom

Introduction

In the 21st century, English has increasingly become a leading international language, an essential skill in many fields such as education, business tourism and a core subject in many countries (Ketamon, Sudinpreda, Watcharajinda, Na Phayap & Chanchayanon, 2020), especially in Thailand where Thai students are required to study it at schools and universities (Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2013). Among the four skills of English learning, writing is significant to L2 learners because it is a crucial skill for their academic English language (Lan, Sung, Cheng & Chang, 2015). Nevertheless, academic English writing is the most challenging area for learning English as a foreign language (Fareed, Ashraf & Bilal, 2016). As Kanchina & Deepadung (2019) mentioned, L2 learners confront many challenges in terms of different backgrounds and knowledge, including difficulty in transferring their native language (L1) into the English language (L2). To deal with these problems, a model of teaching and learning cycle could be an appropriate instruction method to improve L2 learners' English writing proficiency. This cycle was first developed in Australia and designed as a teaching approach to teach English writing (Enli, 2015). According to Callaghan and Rothery (1993), the development of the teaching and learning cycle model consisted of three stages: 1) modeling a text; 2) jointing construction of a text; and 3) building independent construction of a text. In modeling a text, the teachers provide guidance to students who are required to analyze the text structure, grammar and language features. In jointing construction of a text, the teacher teaches students

to compose the text and leads them to practice writing. In building independent construction of a text, the students are asked to compose a text by themselves (Kartika-Ningsih & Gunawan, 2019). These three stages lead to English writing from dependent to independent steps that effectively enhance students' writing (Dirgeyasa, 2016).

At present, one of the most innovative instruction methods is ICT in education or the instruction methodology that uses information and communication technology to develop teaching and learning processes (Noor-Ul-Amin, 2013). The use of digital tools and the Internet has become a popular trend in education as they help increase English writing skills. According to Bailey, Lee, Vorst & Crosthwaite (2017), technology facilitates students to practice English writing in their own time and study at their own pace in their daily lives. As blended learning is part of such a trend, it becomes suitable for teaching strategies and learners' characteristics in this era (Hawi & Sudira, 2019). In higher education, blended learning is widely adopted as a new teaching model, and an growing research study (Dziuban, Graham, Moskal, Norberg & Sicilia, 2018).

Recently, the approach has been more common in Asia: Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines and Thailand. It is also regarded as a significant instructional approach to improve L2 learners' English writing skills in this era. Regarding its methods and procedures, blended learning combines face-to-face instruction and online instruction (Visser & Sukavatee, 2020). Many schools and universities have adopted a 50/50 framework of blended learning approach: 50 percent of online learning and 50 percent of face-to-face learning. The suitable time proportion of blended learning is mostly 50/50 framework (Johnson & Marsh, 2014). To Khalil (2018), it is a flexible and manageable instruction method that allows

teachers to set up class, provide materials or assignments and communicate with students in an interactive way.

In this study, the researcher implemented the English writing instruction and integrated the teaching and learning cycle model with blended learning to investigate Thai undergraduates' writing proficiency.

Literature Review

Writing is the act of forming the words to sentences grammatically, organized with logical, systematical, cohesive, variety of words and proficiency in mechanics (Fareed, Ashraf & Bilal, 2016). Writing in English enhances global communication that increases an opportunity to communicate with people internationally and an essential skill that both L1 and L2 learners have to study to achieve their academic goals. However, it is more challenging for L2 learners who study English as a foreign language because they have to compose texts in another language different from their native one. To compose texts in English, L2 learners are required to study grammatical rules, writing structure, writing strategies and vocabulary (Raoofi, Binandeh & Rahmani, 2017). Therefore, teaching and learning English as a foreign language in the academic setting is essential for L2 learners.

According to Graham & Perin (2007), students' writing proficiency can be developed by enhancing their encouragement and motivation through technology. In order to adopt technology in the instruction method, blended learning is a suitable approach to improve students' writing proficiency by combining face-to-face instruction and online instruction. The major requirements for blended learning are mixed teaching methods of face-to-face interaction as direct instruction in the classroom and online instruction using the online platform to deliver content. In

blended learning environment, a variety use of technology, the Internet and digital tools are applied (Gaol & Hutagalung, 2020). It is flexible and manageable because students are able to manage time, place, path and pace. They can also gather knowledge, review lessons and discuss with the teacher and classmates through online platform (Siripongdee, Pimdee & Tuntiwongwanich, 2020).

In this era, blended learning is widely adopted as an instructional method. There were some studies conducted blended learning to assist L2 students in writing. According to the study in Indonesia by Rakhmawati (2020), the researcher conducted the writing instruction with blended learning by implementing face-to-face instruction and online instruction via Google Classroom. The results revealed that Google Classroom was a supportive tool that improved teaching and learning processes, and enhanced L2 students' English writing effectively. Correspondingly, Sutarsyah, Yufrizal & Sudirman (2019), the researchers adopted face-to-face and online instruction. Google Classroom was employed as an online educational platform in the English writing course. The results indicated that L2 students' English writing proficiency was improved in this study. To many scholars, the utilization of technology improves learning effectiveness and enhances learning experiences (Siripongdee, Pimdee & Tuntiwongwanich, 2020).

Research Objective

To investigate Thai undergraduates' writing proficiency before and after implementing writing instruction with blended learning combined with face-to-face instruction and online instruction via the online educational platform (Google Classroom)

Research Methodology

Participants

The population was second-year undergraduates from Faculty of Education at Buriram Rajabhat University. The samples of the study were 35 second-year undergraduates in the academic year 2019-2020 in Faculty of Education at Buriram Rajabhat University, Buriram, Thailand.

The researcher selected the sample by using the purposive sampling method.

Research Instruments

In this study, there were three research instruments: 1) lesson plan, 2) pre-test and post-test, and 3) rubric writing scale. All research instruments were developed by the researcher and evaluated by three experts who specialized in English Instruction, Educational Technology and Communication, and Educational Research and Evaluation, respectively.

Lesson plans

There were five lesson plans: Lesson Plan 1 (orientation and pre-test), Lesson Plan 2 (writing introduction), Lesson Plan 3 (writing body), Lesson Plan 4 (writing conclusion), Lesson Plan 5 (conclusion and post-test). The content of the lesson plans covered descriptive writings on the topic of describing facts and figures in English. The key learning outcomes of this study were meant to improve L2 learners' English writing skill to be able to describe, classify, compare and summarize information. The instruction method was based on the teaching and learning cycle model integrated with 50/50 blended learning (i.e. three hours each week in face-to-face classroom and three hours each week via the Google classroom).

The pilot study of the lesson plan was conducted with the try-out group of second-year students who were not in the sample group. The try-out group had similar writing abilities compare with the sample group. The Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) was used to evaluate the lesson plans. There were six aspects of evaluation: 1) lesson plan, 2) objective, 3) use of language, 4) format, 5) instructional procedures, and 6) period of time. The results of IOC were 1.00 in all aspects. The lesson plans were therefore considered acceptable.

Pre-test and Post-test

The pre-test was employed in the first session and the post-test was employed in the last session. The students had two hours to compose an English paragraph, at least a 100-word paragraph. A score based on a total of 20 scores was given covering five criteria with organization (4 points), content (4 points), grammatical accuracy (4 points), mechanics (4 points) and conclusion (4 points), respectively.

The reliability of the pre-test and post-test employed in this study was estimated through a pilot study on 10 Thai undergraduate students, who were not in the sample group. Moreover, the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) was used to evaluate the pre-test and post-test and the results of IOC were 1.00. According to the results, pre-test and post-test were considered acceptable.

Rubric writing scale

The researcher designed a writing evaluation rubric scale adapted from Brown (2004) and Tucker (2012). There were five criteria to evaluate the writing (1) organization, (2) content, (3) grammatical accuracy, (4) mechanics, and (5) conclusion. A score based on a total of 20 scores; each criterion was marked out of 4 points. The Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) was used to evaluate the rubric writing

scale. There were five aspects of evaluation and the results of IOC were 1.00 in all aspects. Therefore, the rubric writing scale had acceptable content validity.

Instructional Procedures

There were three phases in teaching and learning processes: (1) Pre-class phase (Google Classroom), (2) In-class phase (face-to-face instruction) and (3) Post-class phase (Google Classroom), as shown in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Table 1

English writing instructional phases in blended learning

Instructional phases	Teaching delivery methods	Instructional methods
1. Pre-class phase	Google Classroom	<p>1.1 To learn and gather useful knowledge about English writing via Google Classroom before attending the classroom</p>
2. In-class phase	Face-to-Face Instruction	<p>2.1 The face-to-face instruction procedures consisted of four steps: 1) warm-up, 2) lecture, 3) practice and 4) review and discussion.</p> <p>2.2 Teaching English writing instruction in the classroom applied three stages of the teaching and learning cycle (modeling a text, jointing construction of a text and building independent construction of a text).</p>

Table 1 (Continued)

Instructional phases	Teaching delivery methods	Instructional methods
		2.3 The online media and websites are used as supporting tools in teaching activities.
3. Post-class phase	Google Classroom	<p>3.1 To review and summarize knowledge about English writing via Google Classroom after attending the classroom</p> <p>3.2 To compose and edit the texts independently</p>

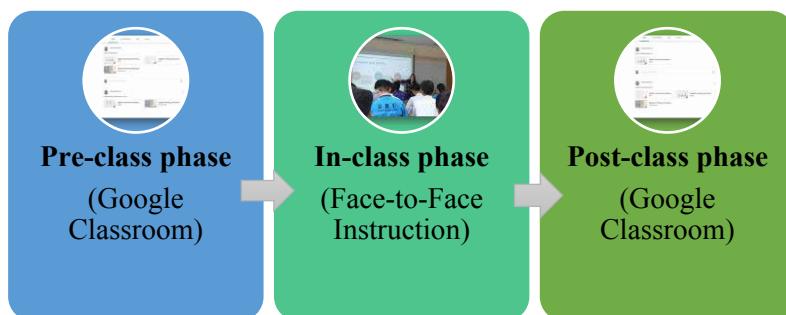


Figure 1: English writing instructional phases diagram

Data Collection

At the beginning of the experiment, students were asked to do the pre-test. After that, the students were given the treatment with the writing instruction with blended learning for five weeks (i.e. three hours each week in face-to-face classroom and three hours each week via the Google classroom). At the end of experiment, the post-test was given to students to examine their writing proficiency.

Data Analysis

To analyze the obtained data, the Statistic Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze data and calculate scores collected from the participants by mean, standard deviation and paired-samples t-test.

Research Results

The results of Thai undergraduate students' writing proficiency before and after implementing the writing instruction with blended learning

Table 2

Thai undergraduate students' writing proficiency pre-test and post-test score

Test	n	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-test	df	p
Pre-test	35	10.66	2.41		34	0.015
Post-test	35	17.37	1.66	17.2*		

* $p < 0.05$

Table 2 shows that the mean score of the post-test was higher than the pre-test. The mean score of pre-test was 10.66 (S.D. = 2.41), while the mean score of post-test was 17.37 (S.D. = 1.66). The results indicated that there was a significant

difference at 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$) between the pre-test and post-test mean scores. It could be concluded that Thai undergraduate students' writing proficiency was improved by the English writing instruction with blended learning.

Five criteria were used to measure the students' writing proficiency: 1) organization, 2) content, 3) grammatical accuracy, 4) mechanics, and 5) conclusion. The students' English writing mean scores of pre-test and post-test for five criteria are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Thai undergraduate students' writing proficiency in five criteria

Criteria	n	Pre-test		Post-test		t-test	df	p
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.			
Organization	35	2.34	0.68	3.77	0.43	12.91*	34	0.025
Content	35	2.46	0.74	3.83	0.38	12.57*	34	0.003
Grammatical accuracy	35	2.00	0.59	3.40	0.60	12.73*	34	0.014
	35	2.23	0.97	3.71	0.46	10.30*	34	0.003
Conclusion	35	1.63	0.81	2.66	0.73	9.17*	34	0.000

* $p < 0.05$

Table 3 indicates the pre-test and post-test mean score of each criterion. The content criterion was the highest score in both pre-test ($\bar{x} = 2.46$, S.D. = 0.74) and post-test ($\bar{x} = 3.83$, S.D. = 0.38). The organization criterion was the second-highest mean score in both pre-test ($\bar{x} = 2.34$, S.D. = 0.68) and post-test ($\bar{x} = 3.77$, S.D. = 0.43). The mechanics criterion was the third-highest mean score in both pre-test ($\bar{x} = 2.23$, S.D. = 0.97) and post-test ($\bar{x} = 3.71$, S.D. = 0.46). The grammatical

accuracy was the fourth-highest mean score in both pre-test ($\bar{x} = 2.00$, S.D. = 0.59) and post-test ($\bar{x} = 3.40$, S.D. = 0.60). Lastly, the conclusion was the fifth-highest mean score in both pre-test ($\bar{x} = 1.63$, S.D. = 0.81) and post-test ($\bar{x} = 2.66$, S.D. = 0.73). Based on the results, students' writing proficiency increased from pre-test and post-test in all five criteria at a 0.05 level of significance ($p < 0.05$).

The results of students' writing proficiency improvement in both pre-test and post-test for each criterion are shown in Figure 2.

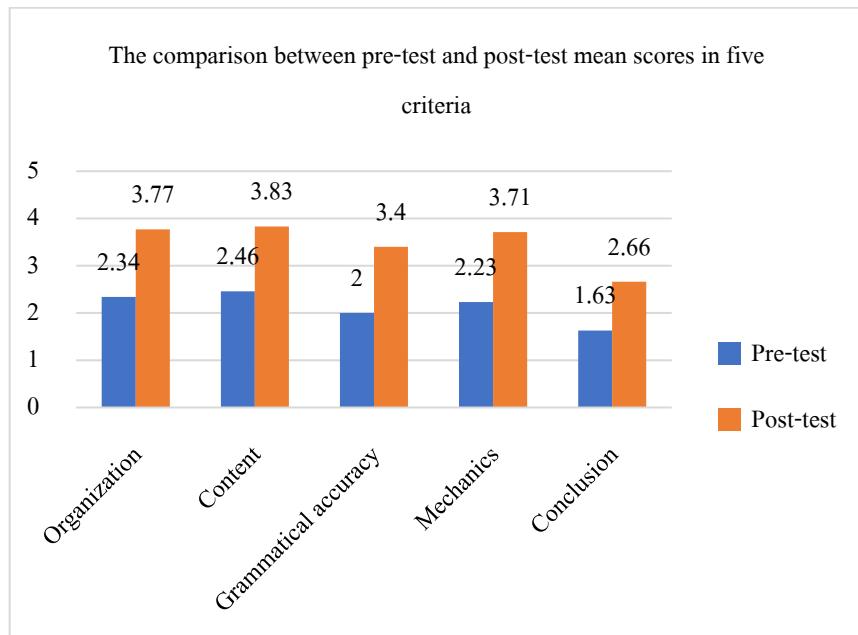


Figure 2: The comparison between pre-test and post-test mean scores in five criteria

As seen in Figure 2, the comparison between pre-test and post-test mean scores indicated the improvement of each criterion. The highest improvement criterion was mechanics by increasing 1.48 points from the pre-test to the post-test.

This is followed by organization, grammatical accuracy, content and conclusion, increasing of 1.43 points, 1.40 points, 1.37 points and 1.03 points, respectively. In brief, it could be concluded that there was a positive improvement in the students' English writing proficiency after they studied via writing instruction with blended learning.

Discussion

This study intended to investigate Thai undergraduates' writing proficiency before and after implementing writing instruction with blended learning that combined face-to-face instruction and online educational platform via Google Classroom. The significant effects of implementing the teaching and learning cycle integrated with blended learning, were significantly improved students' writing proficiency. The students gained higher scores on the post-test in all five criteria. The content criterion was the highest score in both pre-test and post-test. The students were able to write the text that supported the main idea with details or facts. Differently, the conclusion was the least mean score in both pre-test and post-test. The results indicated that some students wrote paragraphs fairly well. These results are correlated with the study by Puspita & Hasyim (2019) that used Google Classroom as an online educational platform in teaching English writing and pointed out that the teaching method improved the English writing skills of students significantly. Correspondingly, Wahyuni (2018) looked at the effect of the blended learning model on students' writing ability and found that blended learning helped improve students' English writing skills. According to Puspita & Hasyim (2019), blending Google Classroom and classroom lectures are teaching methods that lead to a supportable teaching and learning process, especially in writing class. As

Tuomainen (2016) stated, it is an innovative teaching approach used to increase students' writing proficiency.

According to this study, teaching and learning with a blended learning environment effectively supported students in studying English writing. There were various advantages of using the Internet and digital tools as supportive tools in teaching and learning processes. The flexible and manageable instruction with blended learning has been considered as a core advantage that positively enhanced students' English writing proficiency. In terms of media, the students mainly used Google Classroom, digital tools and the Internet as supportive tools in the learning process. The online media and websites helped them to gather ideas and information to compose text successfully. In terms of writing improvement of each criterion, the highest improvement criterion was mechanics, indicating that the students mostly improved their writing in capitalization, punctuation, or spelling. Students used the online website or online dictionary to translate the meaning of vocabulary and make sure that there are no vocabulary mistakes during the writing stage, which helped develop students' writing tasks. This is similar to the results of Visser & Sukavatee (2020) who studied an implementation the genre-based writing instructional module with blended learning. Their results indicated that blended learning helped improve the English writing proficiency of Thai university students. This study is also supported by Challob, Bakar & Latif (2016) who point out that teaching writing skills with face-to-face instruction and online learning environment enhances students' writing performance. Accordingly, using technology in teaching methods significantly supports students' English writing proficiency in an interactive way.

In conclusion, teaching and learning with digital and technological tools help develop the English writing proficiency of L2 learners. Therefore, teaching

English writing with blended learning can be an innovative and effective instructional method to improve L2 learners' English writing proficiency (Mulyadi & Wijayatiningsih, 2020).

Recommendations

According to this study, the following recommendations were recommended for future studies:

Implications

1. Implications for EFL writing teachers

To implement writing instruction with a blended learning environment, EFL writing teachers should consider students' characteristics and factors that affect students' learning achievement. Teachers have to understand the steps of using an online platform and clearly explain it to students. Moreover, adjusting the time to suit each learning activity is necessary.

2. Implications for L2 learners

Learning English writing with blended learning improves L2 students' writing proficiency. When students study online, they should concentrate on the lessons and actively communicate with teachers and peers. They also have to manage the time to study when they study online and practice at their own pace. It will help them to improve their writing proficiency positively.

Further studies

1. The time proportion should be adjusted in accordance with learning objectives and lessons. In this study, the time proportion was based on the 50/50 blended learning. The teaching and learning methods were combined with 50% face-to-face and 50% online. For future studies, the researcher can adjust the right time

proportion to suit different groups of students with different knowledge and background.

2. The future study might be conducted with two groups of students which are the control group and experimental group to compare the results of the two groups.

3. The study might be conducted with young learners (school students) to find out whether writing instruction with blended learning could be used with L2 learners in other contexts.

References

Bailey, D., Lee, A., Vorst, T. & Crosthwaite, P. R. (2017). An investigation of differences and changes in L2 writing anxiety between blended and conventional English language learning context. *Computer-Assisted Language Learning-Electronic Journal*, 18(1), 22-39.

Brown, H. D. (2004). *Language assessment, principle and classroom practice*. New York: Longman.

Callaghan, M. & Rothery, G. (1993). *The power of literacy*. Ersneville, NSW: Metropolitan east Disadvantaged School's Program.

Challob, A. A. I., Bakar, N. A. & Latif, H. (2016). Collaborative blended learning writing environment: Effects on EFL students' writing apprehension and writing performance. *English Language Teaching*, 9(6), 229-241.

Dirgeyasa, I. W. (2016). Genre-based approach: What and how to teach and to learn writing. *English Language Teaching*, 9(9), 45-51.

Dziuban, C., Graham, C. R., Moskal, P. D., Norberg, A. & Sicilia, N. (2018). Blended learning: the new normal and emerging technologies. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education, 15*(1), 1-16.

Enli, L. (2015). Implementing genre-based curriculum cycle in teaching writing in secondary school setting. *Studies in Literature and Language, 10*(1), 47-50.

Fareed, M., Ashraf, A. & Bilal, M. (2016). ESL learners' writing skills: problems, factors and suggestions. *Journal of Education and Social Sciences, 4*(2), 81-92.

Gaol, F. L. & Hutagalung, F. (2020). The trends of blended learning in South East Asia. *Education and Information Technologies, 25*(2), 659-663.

Graham, S. & Perin, D. (2007). *Effective strategies to improve writing of adolescents in middle and high schools*. A report to Carnegie corporation of New York, New York: Alliance for Excellent Education.

Hawi, F. M. & Sudira, P. (2019). The effect of blended learning model to improve the conceptual understanding of computer and network engineering students. *Journal of Physics: Conference Series, 1413*(1), 1-7.

Johnson, C. P. & Marsh, D. (2014). Blended language learning: An effective solution but not without its challenges. *Higher Learning Research Communications, 4*(3), 23-41.

Kanchina, Y. & Deepadung, S. (2019). Request modifications used by Chinese learners and native speakers of Thai. *Journal of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society, 12*(1), 83-112.

Kartika-Ningsih, H. & Gunawan, W. (2019). Recontextualisation of genre-based pedagogy: The case of Indonesian EFL classrooms. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 9*(2), 335-347.

Ketamon, T., Sudinpreda, H., Watcharajinda, A., Na Phayap, N. & Chanchayanon, A. (2018). Students' attitudes towards English learning through English camp at Princess Ubolratana Rajakanya's college Phatthalung. *Journal of Education Naresuan University*, 22(2), 19-30.

Khalil, M., Z. (2018). EFL students' perceptions towards using Google Docs and Google Classroom as online collaborative tools in learning grammar. *Applied Linguistics Research Journal*, 2(2), 33-48.

Lan, Y. J., Sung, Y. T., Cheng, C. C. & Chang, K. E. (2015). Computer-supported cooperative prewriting for enhancing young EFL learners' writing performance. *Language Learning & Technology*, 19(2), 134-155.

Mulyadi, D. & Wijayatiningsih, T. D. (2020). The role of blended learning in enhancing students' writing paragraph. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Literacy*, 4(1), 13-19.

Noor-Ul-Amin, S. (2013). An effective use of ICT for education and learning by drawing on worldwide knowledge, research and experience. *Scholarly Journal of Education*, 2(4), 38-45.

Puspita, N. & Hasyim, U. A. A. (2019). Implementing blended learning to promote sustainable teaching and learning process in writing class. *English Education: Journal Tadris Bahasa Inggris*, 12(1), 120-128.

Rakhmawati, I. (2020). The effectiveness of Google classroom on the first semester students' writing skill at STKIP PGRI Tulungagung. *BRIGHT: A Journal of English Language Teaching, Linguistics and Literature*, 3(1), 21-33.

Raoofi, S., Binandeh, M. & Rahmani, S. (2017). An investigation into writing strategies and writing proficiency of university students. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 8(1), 191-198.

Siripongdee, K., Pimdee, P. & Tuntiwongwanich, S. (2020). A blended learning model with IoT-based technology: effectively used when the COVID-19 pandemic?. *Journal for the Education of Gifted Young Scientists*, 8(2), 905-917.

Sutarsyah, C., Yufrizal, H. & Sudirman, S. (2019). Improving writing English performance through the application of Google classroom feedback at higher education institutions in Bandar Lampung. *Asian journal of science and technology*, 10(10), 1052-1059.

Tucker, C. R. (2012). *Blended learning in grades 4–12: Leveraging the power of technology to create student-centered classrooms*. California: Corwin Press.

Tuomainen, S. (2016). A blended learning approach to academic writing and presentation skills. *International Journal on Language, Literature and Culture in Education*, 3(2), 33-55.

Visser, P. & Sukavatee, P. (2020). Effects of the genre-based writing instructional module in a blended learning environment. *Journal of Education Naresuan University*, 22(2), 1-18.

Wahyuni, S. (2018). The effect of blended learning model towards students' writing ability. *Journal of English for Academic*, 5(2), 97-111.

Watcharapunyawong, S. & Usaha, S. (2013). Thai EFL students' writing errors in different text types: The interference of the first language. *English Language Teaching*, 6(1), 67-78.

Authors

Miss Sudarat Phosa

M. Ed. Student, Faculty of Education, Naresuan University, Phitsanulok Province, Thailand

Tel. +66 (0)966641460 Email: sudarat.phosa@gmail.com

Assistant Professor Dr. Sudakarn Patamadilok

Division of Education, Faculty of Education, Naresuan University
Moo 9, Tha Pho Subdistrict, Mueang Phitsanulok District, Phitsanulok Province, Thailand

Tel. +66 (0)55 962411 Fax. +66 (0)55 962402 Email: sudakarnp@nu.ac.th