

The Development of the ESP Process-Genre Writing Course for Thai Business Administration Undergraduates: The Closer Look at the Student Experiences

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Abstract

In Thailand, English writing is crucial for career advancement and workplace communication. Nevertheless, empirical evidence has suggested that English writing is not typically emphasized in English language curricula offered at Thai universities, and there are limited English writing courses tailored to specific needs of business administration students. Thus, this study aims to develop the ESP writing course based on the process-genre approach for Thai business administration undergraduates. Drawing on the ESP approach and the process-genre pedagogy, the course was developed according to seven course development processes adapted from Graves' (2000) framework of language course development, namely defining the context and articulating beliefs, assessing needs, formulating goals and objectives, conceptualizing content, organizing the course, developing materials, and designing an assessment plan. Following the course development phase, the course was implemented with 40 business administration undergraduates, and their experiences were explored with the use of two main instruments, namely the student logs and semi-structured interviews. The results revealed that the students were satisfied with the course, citing numerous favorable elements of the course and perceived benefits of the course in enhancing their English writing skills. Some unfavorable aspects of the course were also reported for future course refinement. The results imply that the custom-made ESP course is suitable and satisfactory to learners. On this basis, it is encouraged that ESP courses be developed to cater to student needs by primarily focusing on appropriate sub-skills and technical knowledge for each group of students.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes, Language Course Development, Process-Genre Approach, English Writing Instruction

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Introduction

Considered as the essential communication tool in the business context, English writing skills are undoubtedly pivotal for Thai businesspeople, especially when executing work-related tasks as well as communicating with colleagues and clients (Cheep Aranai et al., 2017; Jitpanich et al., 2022; Ulla & Winitkun, 2017). English writing is also deemed crucial for career advancement in the business administration field (Thitthongkam et al., 2011). Moreover, empirical evidence has indicated that English writing is more frequently exercised in Thai workplace than English speaking considering from the significance of emails for business communication (Hiranburana, 2017; Jitpanich et al., 2022).

In spite of the critical importance of English writing, it has been reported that both Thai businesspeople and students have issues communicating using English writing. To elaborate, Thai businesspeople struggle to communicate effectively using English writing in forming workplace communication (Jitpanich et al., 2022), and English writing is deemed one of the most serious areas of problem for Thai businesspeople (Hiranburana, 2017). In a similar manner, Thai students, especially business administration students, reportedly possess inadequate English writing ability to form effective workplace communication and perform work-related tasks in the business context (Jitpanich et al., 2022; Low, 2020).

In this regard, the insufficient preparation of Thai learners and graduates in their tertiary education could give rise to such inadequate English writing abilities of Thais when pursuing careers in the business field (Dueraman, 2012; Wiriyachitra, 2002). To illustrate, Thai business administration graduates presently pursuing business careers indicate that do not have sufficient training in English writing, particularly writing formal emails and employing linguistic knowledge to write in the formal style (Jitpanich et al., 2022; Low, 2020).

As a result, this highlights the need to better prepare Thai students in terms of their English writing skills for their future business careers. One potential solution is the development of an English writing course based on the English for Specific Purposes approach (ESP) owing to the fact that the ESP approach is mainly involved with catering to student needs and preparing them to utilize English in a specific area of expertise or situation (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). This could be ideal in this regard since the developed ESP writing course could focus specifically on what English writing skills needed for the field of business administration since it is suggested English courses should be designed to be corresponding to student needs (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Rahman, 2015), employer expectations (Cheep-Aranai et al., 2017), and target situations (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987).

Moreover, since the majority of English writing classes in Thailand are dominated by the teacher-centered and product pedagogies, it could be interesting to employ the use of a relatively novel approach in the Thai context. In this case, owing to the fact that the process-genre approach combines strong elements of differing writing approaches (Badger & White, 2000), it could be ideal to be used to instructed the developed ESP writing course for business administration students.

Nevertheless, research studies conducted in the Thai context in pursuit of developing English writing courses and modules appear to solely focus on English academic writing (Sanonguthai, 2011; Visser & Sukavatee, 2020). Only one study focused on the ESP writing course development but with a different target student, engineering students in that case

(Changpueng, 2009). To bridge the gap in literature, this study was thus conducted with two main research objectives, as listed below:

- 1) To design and develop the ESP process-genre writing course based on the English writing needs of Thai undergraduate business administration students
- 2) To determine Thai undergraduate business administration students' experiences with the developed course

Literature Review

English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

As a response to the demand for English courses customized to serve learners' specific needs, the construct of ESP emerged in the early 1960s (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). In essence, ESP, according to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), is a communicative approach with relevance to learners' needs rather than a language product, having needs analysis as the central idea for ESP course development. In agreement with this, Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) perceive needs analysis as the crucial aspect underlying the approach. They deliberate on the ESP characteristics that ESP courses are mostly designed for adult learners and can employ differing teaching methodologies than those used with General English (GE). To elaborate further, ESP has been cited as the opposite of GE in their focuses and learners' reasons for learning. In contrast to GE, which is more exam-oriented and entails the concentration on all four language skills, ESP emphasizes particular language skills and professional knowledge necessary for learners to carry out language-related tasks in particular contexts (Rahman, 2015).

ESP can be divided into various categories. Nevertheless, there are two main types of ESP commonly presented in literature, namely English for occupational purposes (EOP) and English for academic purposes (EAP). Based on its definition and classifications, this study takes into account the main characteristic of ESP, specifically on the primacy of needs analysis to develop a course to correspond to specific learners' needs, and the EOP classification with the focus on English writing for workplace communication.

Process-Genre Approach

Considered as an integrated approach, the process-genre approach incorporates the strengths of different teaching approaches to guide the teaching practice. In details, the process-genre approach basically draws on the key concepts of the genre pedagogy in combination with the process approach (Badger & White, 2000; Gao, 2007; Hyland, 2003; Nordin & Mohammad, 2006; Rusinovci, 2015).

In principle, the process-genre approach highlights the genre elements of writing, namely the analysis of texts in terms of the key linguistic and textual elements associated with the target genres, the explicit instruction of textual and linguistic features dominant in the target genres, and the awareness of the social contexts of writing (Badger & White, 2000; Gao, 2007). Simultaneously, it also focuses on the process aspects of writing, particularly the recursive writing process and the composing skills involved in the writing process (Badger & White, 2000; Nordin & Mohammad, 2006; Rusinovci, 2015).

Framework of Language Course Development by Graves (2000)

Course development is typically defined as a process of designing a course and implementing it, which involves systematic planning (Graves, 2000). There have been several frameworks language course and curriculum design proposed to guide the course design and development processes. One of the most influential frameworks is the framework of language course development by Graves (2000), which contains six main stages. These include assessing needs, formulating goals and objectives, designing an assessment plan, developing materials, organizing the course, and conceptualizing content. In her model, there are two additional aspects serving as the foundation for the aforementioned six stages, particularly defining the context and articulating beliefs. Graves' (2000) model emphasizes two unique features of language course design. First, it is the non-hierarchical nature of language course design, meaning that the course development process can be initiated from any stage in the model based on the target context. Second, Graves' (2000) model focuses on the interconnected relationship between each course development stage.

Adapted Course Development Process

In this study, Graves' (2000) framework of language course development was adapted to fit the context of the study in order guide the course design process. The adaptations made to Graves' (2000) model include two main aspects. First of all, the course development processes employed in the present study followed the linear process, which basically meant that the researcher or course developer developed the course in a sequential order. That is, one step was completed before continuing to other remaining stages. Second, even though all the original six steps in Graves' (2000) were maintained, the two aspects serving as foundation for other stages were combined into one preliminary step, making the course development steps become seven in the present study, as portrayed in Figure 1.

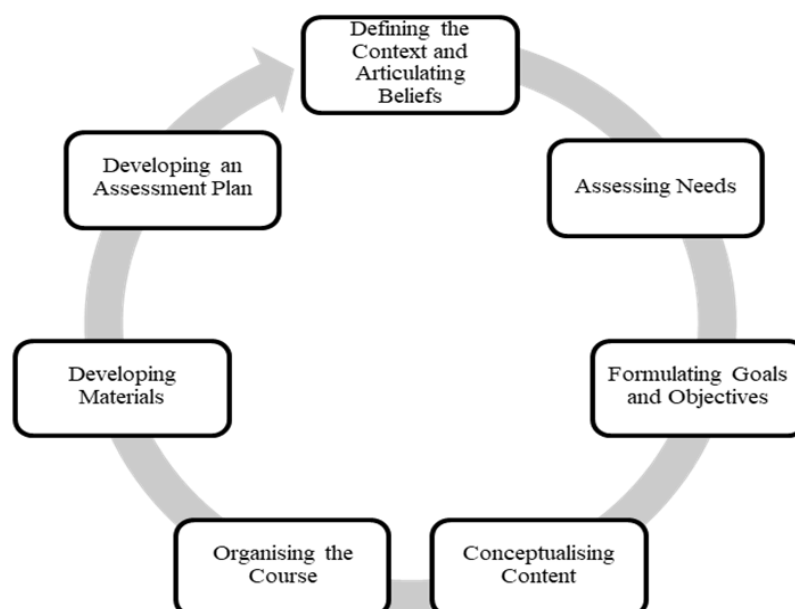


Figure 1: Adapted Course Development Process

As presented in Figure 1, the first step the researcher undertook was to define the context and articulate beliefs. To elaborate, the information regarding the context in which the course was developed was collected by the researcher to gain insights into the timetable, the involved

educational institutes, the physical setting, the instructional resources, and the nature of the course. In addition, in order to inform decision-making in the course development process, the researcher's beliefs regarding how language instruction should be carried out were reflected on. Following that, the needs analysis was performed based on the frameworks of needs analysis of Graves (2000) and Hutchinson and Waters (1987), highlighting three key elements: (a) target situation analysis – required language skills in performing specific target situations, (b) learning situation analysis – efficacious ways of learning language as identified by learners, and (c) present situation analysis – their existing skills and issues in using the language.

This was followed by the stage in which the course goal and objectives were formulated based on the results of the needs analysis with the list of three writing skills, namely the skills to write emails giving information, e-commerce product descriptions, and progress reports. Afterwards, in the conceptualizing content stage, it involved the selection of the content. The final product of this stage was an initial form of syllabus outlining the key themes to be explicitly instructed in the course. In the next stage of organizing the course, the course instructional units were sequenced according to the sequencing principle as suggested by Graves (2000). To elaborate, the course units were organized from the simplest unit to the most complex unit. Therefore, the course sequence became writing emails giving information, writing e-commerce product descriptions, and writing progress reports, respectively. This decision was based on the genre analysis results with the analysis of sample texts.

After that, the researcher designed the teaching materials and the associated lesson plans based on the teaching activities as guided by the adapted process-genre teaching model employed in this study. The adapted teaching model as adapted from Yan (2005) consists of five main teaching phases, namely preparation, modeling and reinforcing, independent constructing, joint constructing, and revising. Finally, the assessment plan used to measure the learning progress of students was developed, employing both formative and summative forms of assessment. That is, three writing assignments assigned at the end of the three instructional units were used to formatively assess student progress in the course, whilst the final examination in the form of a writing test was administered as summative assessment of their learning.

Following the rigorous process of course development, the product was the developed ESP process-genre writing course with the focus on English writing for professional purposes, with three instructional units as identified from the needs analysis, which were writing emails giving information, e-commerce product descriptions, and progress reports. The course was also verified by the experts and pilot tested before actual implementation.

Research Methodology

Research Design

It is imperative to address that this research is part of my PhD project using the mixed-method research design in the overall study. Nonetheless, for this particular part of research reported hereby, it used the qualitative research design with the usage of two qualitative research instruments, namely the semi-structured interview and the student log.

Research Participants

Forty business administration undergraduates enrolling in one intact class from a Thai public university were selected to participate in the study using the purposive sampling method.

Research Instruments and Data Analysis

There are two research instruments utilized to gather data for this study, which include the semi-structured interview and the student log. The first instrument is the semi-structured interview developed according to Graves' (2000) suggested areas of focus when obtaining feedback about the course. There were 17 questions in the interview, soliciting respondents' opinions about their experiences with the ESP process-genre writing course. In addition, the student log, which was adapted from Changpeung (2009), was also utilized to record the student experiences with the course in the written form through the semester. There were eight items in each log, and each student was required to complete three logs throughout the semester, particularly one at the end of each course unit. The data generated from the student logs and the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Research Findings and Discussion

There were two prominent themes emerging from both the semi-structure interview and the student log, namely the positive experiences and negative experiences. Table 1 encapsulates the main themes along with their sub-themes and the associated codes.

Table 1: List of Themes, Sub-Themes, and Codes

Theme	Sub-Theme	Codes
Positive experiences	Favorable aspects of the course	Relevant and useful content Practical vocabulary and expressions Analysis of model texts Personalized and positive teacher feedback Classroom interaction Abundant English writing practices
	Improvement in English Writing Skills	Greater vocabulary repertoire More accurate use of grammar Improved idea organization Enhanced ability to write properly according to the context Enhanced ability to write the three genres
Negative experiences	Unfavorable aspects of the course	Difficulty of English grammar Challenging peer-review activity Improper time allotment and teaching pace

Positive Experiences

The majority of business administration undergraduates stated that they had positive experiences with the ESP process-genre writing course, specifying various favorable aspects of the course and improvement in their English writing skills in many areas.

Favorable Aspects of the Course

In terms of their favorable aspects of the course, the business administration undergraduates acknowledged the relevant and useful content to their future career in business administration, the practicality of the vocabulary and expressions learned in the course, the analysis of model texts, the personalized and positive teacher feedback, the classroom interaction, and the abundant opportunities to practice English writing as the course aspects that they truly enjoyed. The following interview and log excerpts illustrate the point, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Examples of Excerpts for Favorable Aspects of the Course

Code	Example of Log or Interview Excerpt
Relevant and useful content	<i>“I like learning to write emails. In the future, I think I can use this knowledge learned to write emails properly in my business career.” (S1- Log)</i>
Practical vocabulary and expressions	<i>“I learned many useful new vocabulary words that I could apply into my writing.” (S4- Log)</i>
Analysis of model texts	<i>“I enjoyed analysing sample texts. I found it to be very useful for my writing process. It made me become familiar with the structure of the texts that I would soon write on my own” (S12 – Interview)</i>
Personalized and positive teacher feedback	<i>“The teacher feedback really helped me to know what my errors were and how I should fix those errors. I really liked it that the teacher took time to comment on my work and explain it afterwards” (S3 - Interview)</i>
Classroom interaction	<i>“The class discussions allowed me and my friends to interact in order to reduce our nervousness when writing, which I really enjoyed.” (S9 – Interview)</i>
Abundant English writing practices	<i>“I got to practice writing in English in this course which really helped me because I did not usually have chances to practice it outside of the class.” (S35 - Log)</i>

Based on the reported findings, it can thus be concluded that the business administration undergraduates had positive experiences with the course, addressing six areas of the course to be favorable. First of all, the marked preference of the students for the relevant course content to the field of business administration could perhaps be explained by the ESP nature of the course, which catered to their needs in learning English writing. This is congruent with the results of the study of Changpueng (2009), which indicated that students possess positive attitudes towards ESP courses since they catered to their needs in learning. Second, the students’ preference for the instruction of useful words and phrases for business communication could be the result from their perceived usefulness for their career preparation, which is consistent with the findings from the research of Asyiah (2017) in the aspect that students the instruction of English vocabulary was fondly perceived by learners.

Third, the positive attitudes towards the analysis of model texts employed in the course could be attributed to the perceived practicality of such as activity in assisting them to become familiar with key textual and linguistic features of the target genre. Such findings are compatible with those of Kitajroonchai et al. (2022), which indicated that learners found the analysis of model texts to be beneficial. Fourth, the personalized and positive teacher

feedback provided on students' texts were favorable for the students because such teacher feedback could motivate students to continue writing despite the difficulty of the writing tasks, and the feedback also helped the students in acknowledging their improvement areas in writing. This is consistent with the findings from Zhan (2016) in the sense that students valued the teacher feedback and had positive attitudes towards the teacher feedback.

Fifth, the students' preference for the classroom interaction put forth through collaborative learning and writing activities could be explained by the nervousness the students faced in their writing process due to the perceived difficulty of English writing. In the student view, the classroom interaction could mitigate their nervousness. This is similar to the findings of Zhang (2018), who reported that students expressed positive attitudes towards the interaction with peers in the process-genre writing class. Finally, the abundant opportunities for the students to practice English writing was identified as their favorable aspect of the course due to the fact that the students' insufficient English writing practice, which is congruent to the findings of Kitajroonchai et al. (2022) that the process-genre lessons allowed students chances to practice English writing when being exposed to the recursive process of drafting and revising texts.

Improvement in English Writing Skills

With regard to the students' improvement in English writing skills, the students mentioned five main areas which they improved their English writing skills the most after attending the ESP process-genre writing course, namely their greater vocabulary repertoire, more accurate use of grammar, improved idea organization, enhanced ability to write properly according to the context, and enhanced ability to write the three genres. Table 3 presents the interview and log excerpts which demonstrate such areas of progress.

Table 3: Examples of Excerpts for Improvement in English Writing Skills

Code	Example of Log or Interview Excerpt
Greater vocabulary repertoire	<i>"I learned a lot of new words from taking this course, which enabled me to write in English using more various word choices." (S6- Interview)</i>
More accurate use of grammar	<i>"This knowledge learned from this unit has expanded my vocabulary knowledge." (S32- Log)</i>
Improved idea organization	<i>"I learned to organize details in writing more efficiently, especially after completing the outline." (S14- Log)</i>
Enhanced ability to write properly according to the context	<i>"After I acknowledged the purpose of writing and the reader-writer relationship, I could use more proper writing style and writing tone to write accordingly." (S1 – Interview)</i>
Enhanced ability to write the three genres	<i>"I think I can now write the emails, the reports, and the product descriptions better because I learned the writing principles from this course." (S10 – Interview)</i>

In accordance with the reported findings, it can be seen that the business administration undergraduates had positive experiences with the course considering from how they identified numerous benefits of the course in enhancing their English writing skills. Firstly, the enhancement of their vocabulary repertoire could be attributed to the genre elements of the process-genre approach used to instruct the developed course, particularly the analysis of

model texts for their key lexical features and the explicit teaching of key words and expressions associated with the target genre. These findings are consistent with those of Huang and Zhang (2020), which concluded that the process-genre approach could help enhance students' vocabulary repertoire and vocabulary knowledge. Secondly, the improvement in the accurate use of grammar could be the result from the explicit instruction of key grammatical features in the target genre, which is aligned with the results of Huang and Zhang (2020) in the sense that the explicit instruction part of the process-genre approach plays a pivotal role in students' development in their grammatical competence.

Thirdly, the students demonstrated the improved ability to organize ideas and details in writing, which could perhaps be explained by the use of outline as part of the process aspects of the process-genre approach. This is similar to the findings from the research of Kartawijaya (2018), who revealed that the outline technique helped students improve their English writing skills in terms of organizing ideas in writing. Fourthly, the enhanced ability to write appropriately according to the context using the proper style and tone of writing was the positive consequence of the students' development of genre awareness following the completion of the process-genre lessons, which is congruent with the results of Huang and Zhang (2020) in the aspect that the development of genre awareness could positively influence students' selection of rhetoric and language features to be according to the writing context and the communicative purpose. Ultimately, the students' increased ability to write the three target genres could be attributed to the exposure to the process-genre teaching stages, which gradually helped them improve their English writing skills. This is partly similar to the findings of Huang and Zhang (2020), which similarly suggested that the process-genre teaching phases were beneficial in enhancing students' writing performance, especially in the aspect of content.

Negative Experiences

Nonetheless, the business administration undergraduates also stated that they occasionally had negative experiences with the developed ESP process-genre writing course, enumerating their three main unfavorable aspects of the course.

Unfavorable Aspects of the Course

There were three unfavorable aspects of the course as identified by the business administration undergraduates who took the developed ESP process-genre writing course, which included the difficulty of English grammar instructed in the course, the challenging peer-review activity, and the improper time allotment and instructional pace. Table 4 presents the examples of log and interview excerpts which illustrate the unfavorable aspects of the course.

Table 4: Examples of Excerpts for Unfavorable Aspects of the Course

Code	Example of Log or Interview Excerpt
Difficulty of English grammar	<i>“Grammar is my biggest problem in writing in English, and there was a lot of content about grammar in the course, which made me rather nervous. I was not confident that I could understand how to use grammar correctly.” (S6- Interview)</i>
Challenging peer-review activity	<i>“I do not really like the peer-review activity. It is rather difficult for me to evaluate my friends’ texts. I do not think I am good enough in English to give them useful comments.” (S12 – Interview)</i>
Improper time allotment and teaching pace	<i>“In Unit 1, the content was way too much for the time we had. The teacher had to rush through a lot of sections in that unit.” (S19 – Log)</i>

According to the reported findings, it can be seen that the students identified a few course elements to be favorable in their learning experiences. First of all, the reason underlying why the business administration undergraduates disliked the difficult grammar could be their limited confidence in their ability to use grammar in writing, which is somewhat consistent to the findings of Jitpanich et al. (2022), which revealed that most of the business administration students and graduates English grammar found English grammar to be the most difficult element in English writing.

In addition to this, the peer-review activity was identified to be challenging for the students, and most of them did not seem to like doing this activity. This occurrence could be a result of their limited confidence in their English writing ability since they believed that they did not have sufficient ability to evaluate texts of their peers, and they were also skeptical of their friends’ ability to provide comments on their texts. The findings are somewhat consistent with those of Money Penny et al. (2018) in the sense that students, especially those with limited experience with peer reviewing, had negative attitudes towards the peer-review activity. Ultimately, the improper time allotment and the slow teaching pace were another unfavorable aspect of the course for the students owing to the fact that the difficulty of English writing in the view of the students, which would require substantial amount of time for them to understand the learned writing principles and practice the writing skills. The slow teaching was mainly due to the excessive and heavy focus on vocabulary teaching in the course. The findings of the present study are somewhat similar to those of Viriya and Wasanasomsithi (2017) in the sense that learners would become dissatisfied because of the excessive amount of content.

Conclusion

This study was mainly related to the development of the ESP process-genre writing course based on the English writing needs for professional purposes of Thai business administration undergraduates and the exploration of the student experiences with the developed course. The findings revealed that the students had relatively positive experiences with the ESP process-genre writing course. This is because they specified various aspects of the course to be favorable for them, namely the relevant course content to their future career in business administration, the usefulness of the vocabulary and expressions learned in the course, the analysis of model texts, the personalized and positive teacher feedback, the classroom interaction, and the plentiful opportunities to practice English writing. They also developed their English writing skills in various ways after attending the course, particularly their

greater vocabulary repertoire, more accurate use of grammar, improved idea organization, enhanced ability to write properly according to the context, and enhanced ability to write the three genres. Nevertheless, the negative experiences of the students were also reported in their unfavorable aspects of the course, which are crucial to be considered for course refinement for future course implementation. These included the difficulty of English grammar instructed in the course, the challenging peer-review activity, and the improper time allotment and instructional pace.

The findings of this study offer pedagogical implications for both English writing teachers and ESP course designers. For English writing teachers, the findings highlight the use of the process-genre approach in English writing classes, as it has been proven to enhance learners' learning experiences in this study. As for the ESP course designers, it is recommended that English writing courses should be designed based on the learner needs in order to maximize their learning experiences.

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