



# A Survey Study of English Writing Strategies Used by Thai Undergraduates in Business English Program

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## Abstract

*The research study aims to explore writing strategies used by Thai first to fourth-year university students. Thirty-six (36) students from the Business English program at a government university in Southern Thailand who had experience in English writing, served as the subject of the research. They responded to a questionnaire. The online questionnaire was created by using SurveyCan. The questionnaire focused on students' English writing experiences through the use of writing strategies. The results revealed that most of the students used both cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies for the prewriting or planning stage. During the drafting stage, it was found that most of the students used metacognitive strategies in developing their ideas when writing a text. Besides, they used cognitive strategies and socio-affective strategies in engaging their writing tasks, searching for more information from other resources, and asking their peers. In the post-writing stage, most of the students sometimes used cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and socio-affective strategies, respectively. The findings of this study suggest that most of the students may not get familiar with learning new things from each other in developing their ideas, using critical thinking, and solving problems in their writing. Overall, they use various strategies in each stage of their writing and they may not be aware of the effectiveness of writing strategies in developing their English writing skills at higher levels.*

**Keywords:** English writing, writing strategies, metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, socio-affective strategies, writing process, Thai undergraduate students

## Introduction

English is now widely accepted as an international language and is the world's most widely used in the fields of business and education. Mastering English for students of tertiary education, especially those who major in Business English is essential not only for their education but also for their future careers. Studying business English allows students to develop their English language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and help them gain more experience to fulfill their needs in practicing English. Among the skills, writing is the most challenging skill, especially for EFL learners.

Writing is an essential tool for communication, expressing opinions, and explaining stories to readers. In most English classes, writing is considered to be the most difficult skill compared to other skills (Negari, 2011; Salma, 2015). Regarding second or foreign language acquisition, the skills of listening, speaking, and reading are naturally acquired before writing, which is the last skill to be acquired. For EFL learners, it is more difficult to learn how to write in English because of the

differences in terms of linguistic features, rhetorical patterns, writing styles, and other cultural factors (Benson & Heidik, 1995, as cited in Mohamed & Zouaoui, 2014).

In developing EFL writing, it is not easy for many EFL learners because of learners linguistic deficiencies, such as a lack of ideas and incorrect writing mechanics vocabulary diversity, grammatical difficulties and flaws, and wrong spelling (Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016). Therefore, using writing strategies is important to help learners develop their EFL writing and help them to become successful writers.

Many studies suggest that writing strategies can assist learners to develop their L2/EFL writing skills. It seems that writing strategies are needed for effective writing. Mu and Carrington (2007) investigated three Chinese students about writing strategies used in their English writing. The results indicated that the students employed a broad range of writing strategies to reach their goals of writing. From the collected data, they used different English writing strategies compared to their L1 language because of the difference between the L1 and L2 writing processes. In English writing, they write out the outline, while they planned in their mind when writing in Chinese. They employed metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective strategies that can be transferred across languages positively, at least from Chinese writing to English writing. In contrast, Fajrina, Everatt, and Sadeghi (2021) studied writing strategies used by Indonesian EFL students with different English proficiency. The results showed that 135 Indonesian EFL undergraduate students of the study used writing strategies at a moderate level. The results also indicated that the writing strategy did not correlate in assisting high and low-English proficiency learners to improve their writing quality. However, there are some inconsistencies in the findings of mentioned studies.

In the issues, many students still lack writing skills, writing knowledge, and writing strategies use causing inefficient writing. Therefore, this study focused on examining what English writing strategies Thai EFL university students used, how students majoring in Business English used writing strategies in their English writing, and what other English writing strategies were used before, during, or after writing. This study was conducted to help students improve their English writing skills through writing strategies to help the teacher gain a better understanding of improving students' English writing skills and knowledge, and provide students with useful guidelines.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Language Learning Strategies**

From theories of writing strategies, Mu (2005) summarizes writing strategies into five categories rhetorical strategies, meta-cognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, communicative strategies, and social/ affective strategies. First, rhetorical strategies involve organization, use of L1, formatting/modeling, and comparing. Second, meta-cognitive strategies involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating. Third, cognitive strategies involve generating ideas, revising, elaborating, clarifying, retrieving, rehearsing, and summarizing. Fourth, communicative strategies

involve avoidance, reduction, and sense of readers. Last, social/affective strategies involve resourcing, getting feedback, assigning goals, and rest/deferral. It can be summarized that the classification of writing strategies may be varied on knowledge and experience. Compared to language learning strategies, Oxford and Crookall (1989) define learning strategies as steps taken by learners to facilitate the acquisition, storage, and retrieval of information. Learning strategies help learners maintain involvement in the language learning process. They are also essential for improved proficiency and greater motivation (Oxford, 1990). Moreover, learning strategies help students understand, learn, and absorb new information more easily (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). According to Oxford (1990), learning strategies facilitate learning to be more effective and enjoyable. Kussin, Omar, and Kepol (2018) state language learning strategies that can be divided into direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies, involving strategies directly related to language learning, are subdivided into memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies. Indirect strategies, or strategies that support and manage learning, are subdivided into metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies.

In this study, the researchers grouped and categorized language learning strategies used in English writing into three types as mentioned in the next section.

### **Metacognitive Strategies, Cognitive Strategies, and Socio-affective Strategies**

Metacognitive strategies refer to the actions that learners use consciously to organize their language learning attentively. Metacognitive strategies deal with knowing about learning. It means that learners learn how to learn with metacognitive strategies. With the help of this language learning strategy, learners are involved in thinking about the process of learning while they are planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own learning, exactly like pre-task activities (Holden, 2004).

On the other hand, cognitive strategies are separate learning activities and they are basically activities that are used by learners in order to understand the linguistic input and get knowledge. For example, when a learner finds a difficult word in a text and infers the meaning of that word from the context, in fact, he/she used the cognitive strategy. In addition, cognitive strategies are those that control the input or use a certain skill to complete a particular task (Holden, 2004; Meang, 2006; Griffiths, 2004; Azumi, 2008; Martinez, 1996). According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), cognitive strategies are strategies that "reflect mental manipulation of tasks", such as practicing and analyzing, enabling learners to understand and produce new language in many different ways.

The last one is social/affective strategies or socio-affective strategies. Socio-affective strategies refer to strategies that learners use to learn by interacting with their classmates and questions that are asked by the teacher to understand the special subject or remove or lower their anxiety.

### **Writing Strategies Used in Language Learning**

In this study, three learning strategies can be applied to developing writing skills. The writing strategies are discussed below (Oxford, 1990: 37-173).

#### **a. Metacognitive strategies**

Metacognitive strategies focus on pre-assessment and pre-planning, planning, and evaluation, and post-evaluation of language learning activities. Learners can control their own cognition via these strategies and by coordinating, planning, organizing, and evaluating their writing. There are some more strategies that are in the realm of meta-cognitive strategies such as the strategies of advance preparation, self-monitoring, delayed production, self-evaluation, and self-reinforcement.

#### **b. Cognitive strategies**

Cognitive strategies refer to the language learning strategies of identification, retention, rehearsal, and comprehension or production of words, phrases, and other elements of the second language, it is an essential part of writing. Among other activities which fall into a cognitive category, it can be pointed to repetition, researching, translation, grouping, note-taking, deduction and recombination, imagination, direct physical response auditory representation conceptualization elaboration, and transfer and inference.

#### **c. Socio-affective strategies**

Socio-affective strategies take the appropriate actions of the learner to make communication with others related to people around them into consideration. Among such actions, we can point to asking questions, clarifying social roles and relationships, or cooperating with others in order to complete their writing tasks. Socio-affective strategies also help students overcome their emotional, psychological, and social problems such as reduction of anxiety and apprehensions in the writing process.

### **Method**

The research design use in quantitative research focused on Likert scale questions. The participants of the study were 36 first to fourth-year students majoring in Business English who studied at a government university in southern Thailand and had experience in using English writing strategies. The questionnaire was distributed to the participants from 15 to 25 August 2021. They were assigned to complete the online questionnaire using SurveyCan. The questionnaire was divided into three main parts. The first part was about the respondents' personal information concerning their gender, age, and experiences in using writing strategies. The second part was about writing strategies and the level of writing strategies used. The third part was about suggestions for using other writing strategies.

The questions on the questionnaire were created on a 6-point scale, which can be measured from almost always to never. The 6-point Likert scale consists of (6) almost always (81%-100%); (5) very

frequently (61-80%); (4) often (41-60%); (3) sometimes (21-40%); (2) rarely (1-20%); and (1) never (0). The collected data were calculated by mean, standard deviations, and percentages and grouped under the same theme, following each part of the questionnaire.

## Results and Discussion

### Results

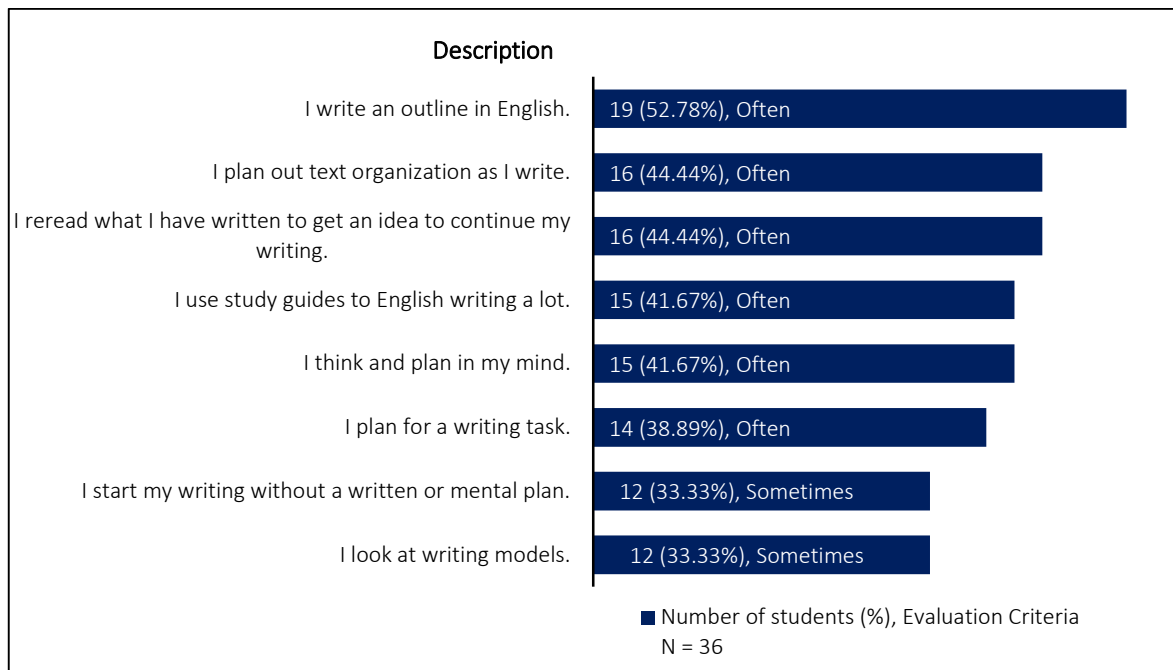
The results of the study showed various writing strategies used in English writing in order to answer research questions 1 to 3, (1) What English writing strategies do Thai students in the Business English Program use when they learn English writing courses? (2) To what extent do they use these strategies? (3) What other English writing strategies do they use before, during, or after writing?

The 36 respondents were aged between 18-23 years (100%). From the students' responses, there were 31 females (86.11%) and 5 males (13.89%). In the pre-writing stage, the majority of respondents (15 students, 42.13%) used cognitive strategies in their writing. In the while-writing stage, most of the respondents (15 students, 40.97%) used metacognitive strategies in their writing. In the post-writing stage, most respondents (13 students, 37.04%) used more cognitive strategies than other strategies in their writing. All of them (100%) had not many experiences in using English writing strategies. Anwar (2000) indicates some writing problems that the inherent complexity of writing, insufficient practice, inadequate feedback, and the limitations of the knowledge of the students are the main obstacles to the quality of EFL writing. All these problems can relate to students' learning experiences in EFL writing.

### Students' Knowledge and the Use of English Writing Strategies

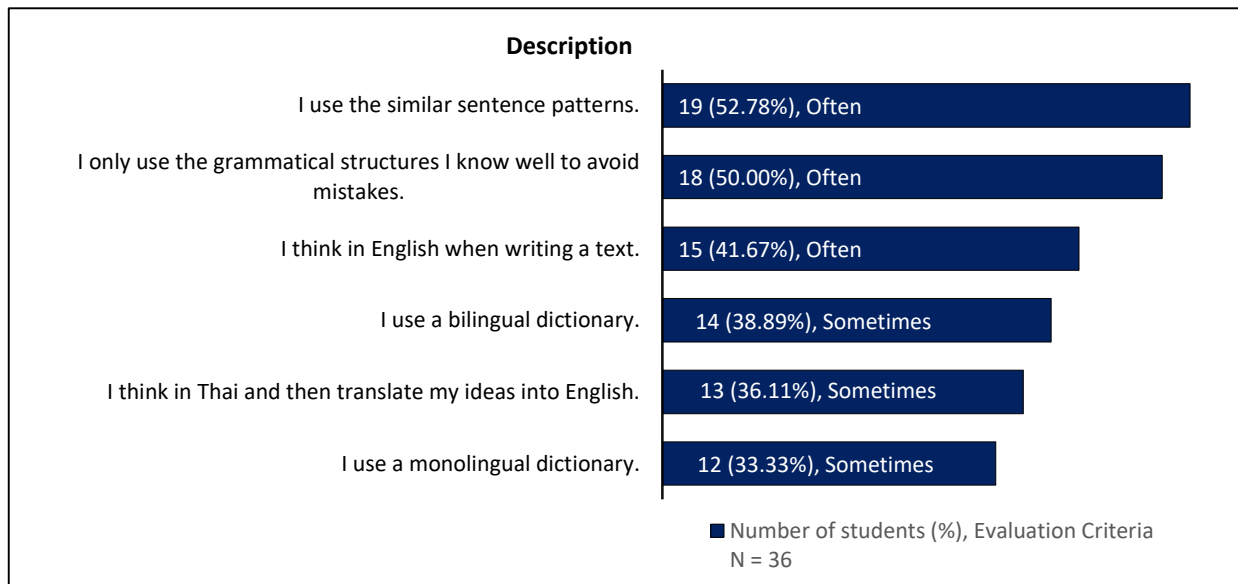
#### Pre-writing Stage

In the pre-writing stage, most students used cognitive strategies that related to organizing ideas, understanding the information or language input in order to produce their writing tasks, and developing their written work ( $\bar{X}=15.17(42.13\%); S.D. = 2.79$ ). Whilst, many students used metacognitive strategies that related to the process of thinking of getting ideas, organizing ideas, monitoring, and evaluating of thinking process before writing ( $\bar{X}=14.88(41.32\%); S.D. = 2.29$ ).



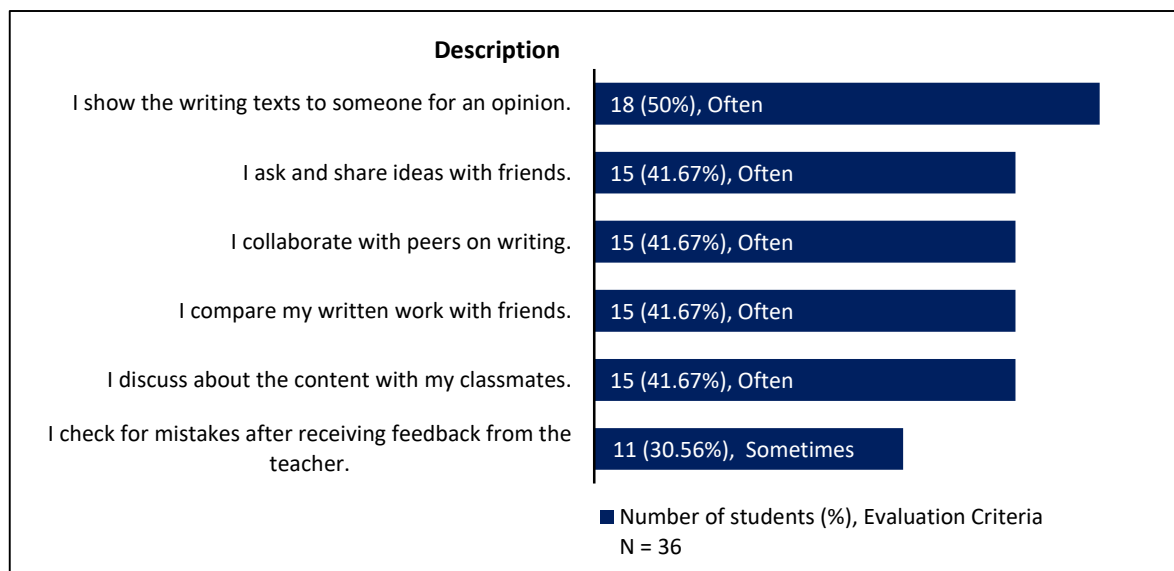
**Figure 1. Metacognitive strategies**

As shown in Figure 1, the data showed that most of the students (19%) used English writing strategies which were “write an outline in English” (52.78%); “reread what I have written to get an idea to continue my writing” and “plan out text organization as I write” 16 (44.44%) were the second highest average, followed “think and plan in my mind” and “use study guides to English writing a lot” 15 (41.67%). The overall average was 41.32%, of which 14.88 were in evaluation criteria “often”.



**Figure 2. Cognitive strategies**

As shown in Figure 2, the data showed that most of the students (19) used English writing strategies which were “use the similar sentence patterns” (52.78%). Half of the students who only use “the grammatical structures I know well to avoid mistakes” 18 (50.00%) was the second highest average, followed by “think in English when writing a text” 15 (41.67%). The overall average was 42.13%, of which 15.17 were in evaluation criteria “often”.



**Figure 3. Socio-affective strategies**

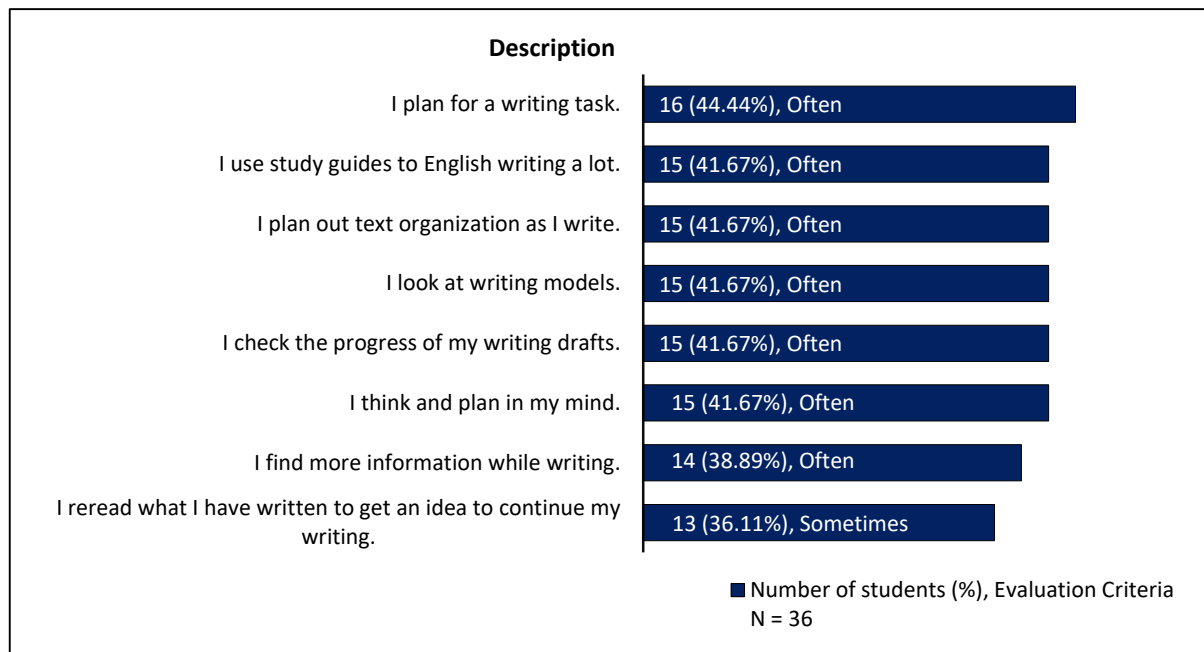
As shown in Figure 3, the data showed that most of the students (18) used English writing strategies which were “show the writing texts to someone for an opinion” (50.00%); “discuss the content with my classmates”, “compare my written work with friends”, “collaborate with peers on writing” and “ask and share ideas with friends” 15 (41.67%). Four of these were the second highest average, followed by “check for mistakes after receiving feedback from the teacher” 11(30.56%). The overall average was 41.21%, of which 14.83 were in evaluation criteria “often”.

From the findings, the highest score was cognitive strategies. Most of the students used cognitive strategies more than the other two strategies. The data also showed that they often used metacognitive and socio-affective strategies, respectively

### While-writing Stage

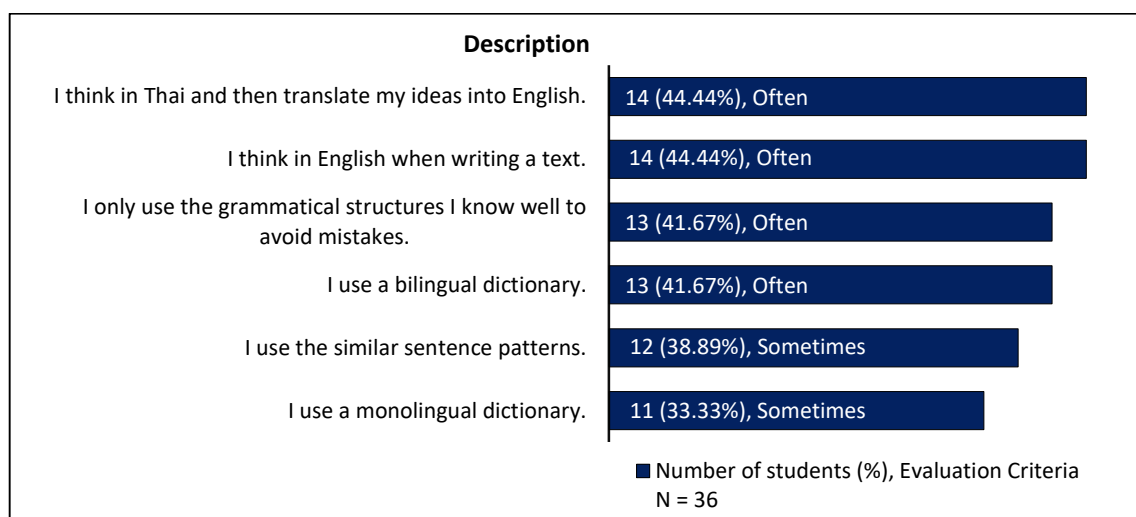
In the while-writing stage, most students used metacognitive strategies that related to the process of thinking, getting ideas, organizing ideas, monitoring, and evaluating of thinking process ( $\bar{X}$  =14.75(40.97%); S.D = 0.89). They also used cognitive strategies that related to organizing ideas, understanding the information or language input in order to produce their writing tasks, and develop their written work ( $\bar{X}$  =12.83(40.74%); S.D = 1.17), and socio-affective strategies that related to knowledge or information of knowledge or prior knowledge links to the content of the

writing, searching for more information from other resources, and developing their written work ( $\bar{X}$  =12.83(35.65%); S.D = 1.17).



**Figure 4. Metacognitive strategies**

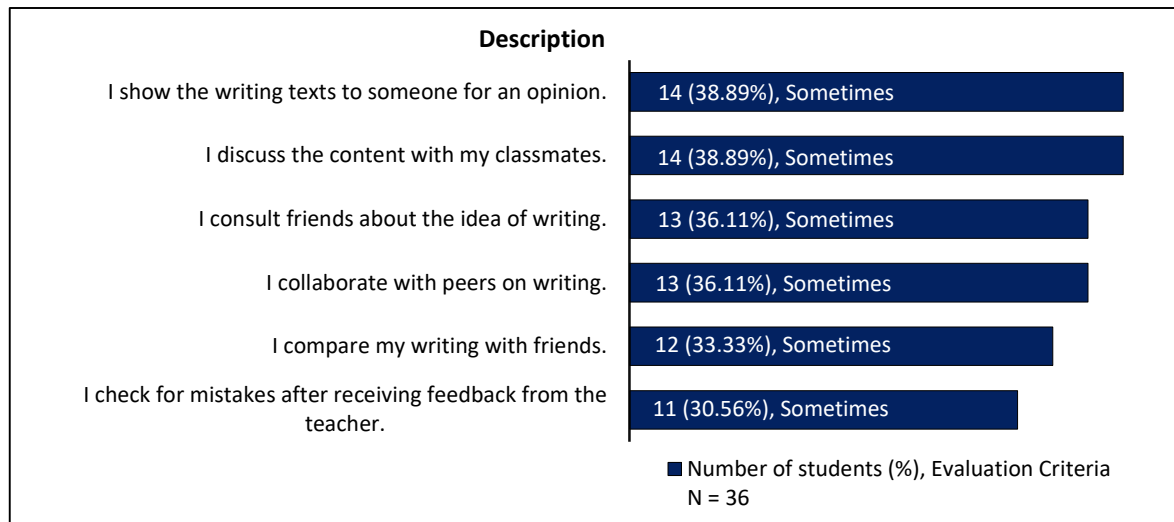
As shown in Figure 4, the data showed that most of the students (16) used English writing strategies which were “plan for a writing task” (44.44%). Besides, they used other writing strategies which were “think and plan in my mind”, “check the progress of my writing drafts”, “look at writing models”, “plan out text organization as I write”, and “use study guides to English writing a lot”, 15 (41.67%) were the second highest average, followed “find more information while writing” 14 (38.89%). The overall average was 40.97%, of which 14.75 were in evaluation criteria “often”.



**Figure 5. Cognitive strategies**



As shown in Figure 5, the data showed that most of the students (14) used English writing strategies which were “think in English when writing a text” and “think in Thai and then translate my ideas into English” (44.44%); “use a bilingual dictionary” and “use only grammatical structures I know well to avoid mistakes”, 13(41.67%) were the second highest average, followed “I use the similar sentence patterns” 12(38.89%). The overall average was 40.74%, of which 12.83 were in evaluation criteria “often”.

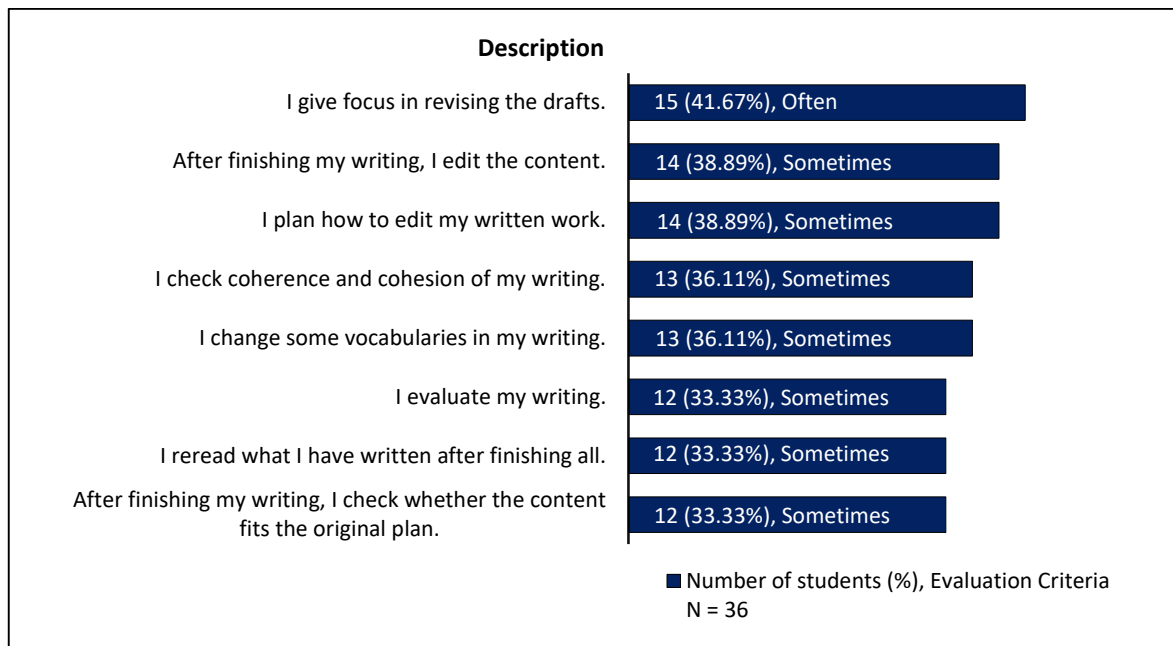


**Figure 6. Socio-affective strategies**

As shown in Figure 6, the data showed that most of the students (14) used English writing strategies which were “discuss the content with my classmates” (38.89%) and “show the writing texts to someone for an opinion” (38.89%); “collaborate with peers on writing” and “consult friends about the idea of writing”, 13(36.11%) were the second highest average, followed “compare my writing with friends” 12 (33.33%). The overall average was 35.65%, of which 12.83 were in evaluation criteria “sometimes”.

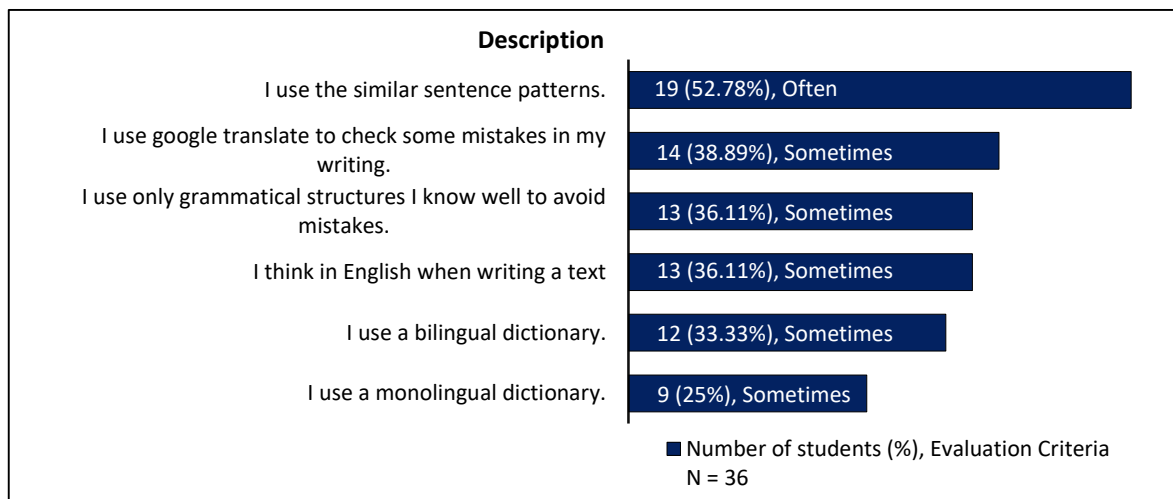
### Post-writing Stage

In the post-writing stage, most students used cognitive strategies that related to organizing ideas, understanding the information or language input in order to produce their writing tasks, and developing their written work ( $\bar{X}=13.33$  (37.04%);  $S.D. = 3.27$ ). They also used metacognitive strategies that related to the process of thinking of getting ideas, organizing ideas, monitoring, and evaluating of thinking process ( $\bar{X}=13.13$  (36.46%);  $S.D. = 1.13$ ), and socio-affective strategies that related to information of knowledge or prior knowledge links to the content of the writing, searching for more information from other resources, and developing their written work ( $\bar{X}=11.83$ (32.87%);  $S.D. = 0.76$ ), respectively.



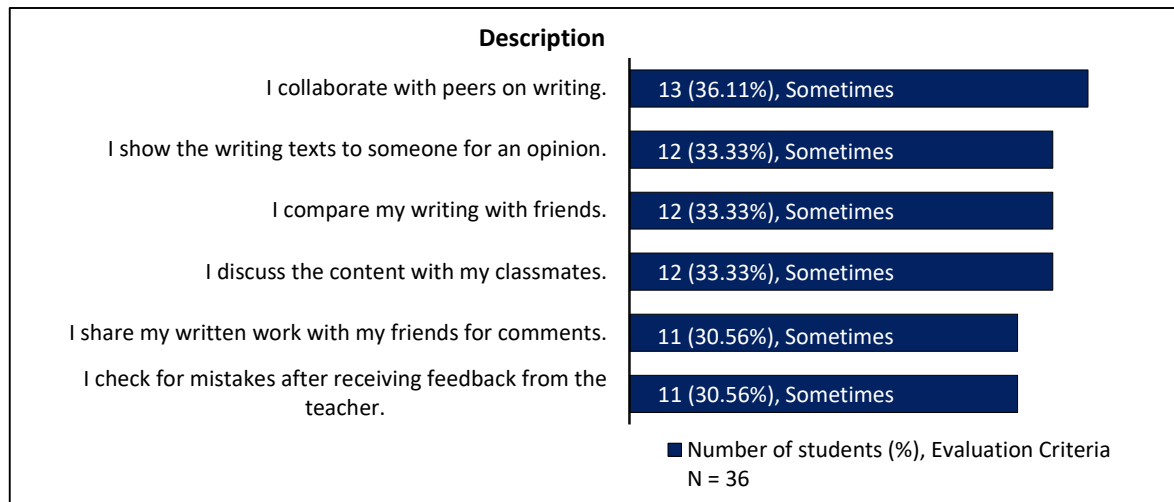
**Figure 7. Metacognitive strategies**

As shown in Figure 7, the data showed that most of the students (15) used English writing strategies which were “give focus in revising the drafts” (41.67%); “After finishing my writing, I edit the content” 14 (38.89%) were the second highest average, followed “change some vocabularies in my writing” and “check coherence and cohesion of my writing” 13 (36.11%). The overall average was 36.46%, of which 13.13 were in evaluation criteria “sometimes”.



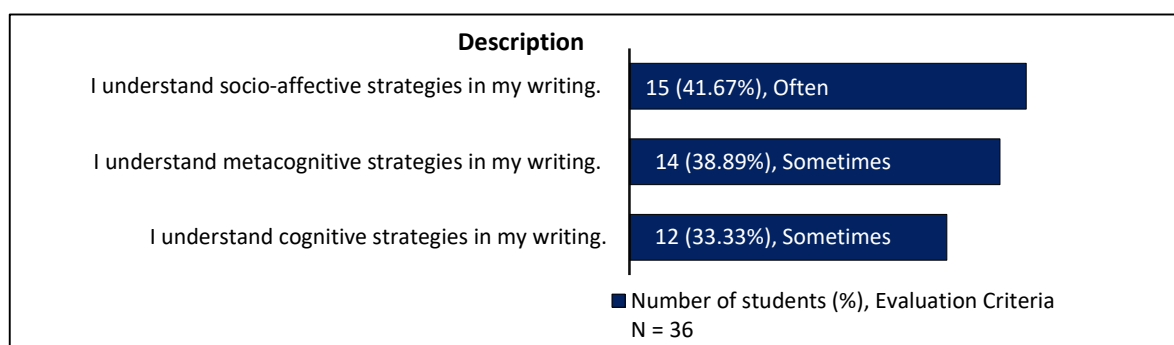
**Figure 8. Cognitive strategies**

As shown in Figure 8, the data showed that most of the students (19) used English writing strategies which were “use the similar sentence patterns” (52.78%); “use google translate to check some mistakes in my writing” 14 (38.89%) were the second highest average, followed “think in English when writing a text” and “use only grammatical structures I know well to avoid mistakes” 13(36.11%). The overall average was 37.04%, of which 13.33 were in evaluation criteria “sometimes”.



**Figure 9. Socio-affective strategies**

As shown in Figure 9, the data showed that most of the students (13) used English writing strategies which were “collaborate with peers on writing” (36.11%); “discuss the content with my classmates”, “compare my writing with friends”, and “show the writing texts to someone for an opinion”, 12(33.33%) were the second highest average, followed “check for mistakes after receiving feedback from the teacher” and “share my written work with my friends for comments” 11(30.56%). The overall average was 32.87%, of which 11.83 were in evaluation criteria “sometimes”.



**Figure 10. Students' understanding of writing strategies**

As shown in Figure 10, the data showed that most of the students (15) understood English writing strategies which were “social-affective strategies in my writing” (41.67%); “metacognitive strategies in my writing” 14 (38.89%) were the second highest average, followed “cognitive

strategies in my writing” 12(33.33%). The overall average was 37.96%, of which 13.67 were in evaluation criteria “sometimes”.

### **Students’ Suggestions about Using Writing Strategies**

The data showed that there were not any comments or suggestions given by the students in this section. This showed that most students used only three basic writing strategies which were metacognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective strategies in their English writing. It can be implied that the students may get familiar with only three strategies as mentioned or they may not have any experience using other writing strategies.

The results of using writing strategies showed that the students used various writing strategies in each stage of their English writing in order to complete their writing tasks. However, they did not use many socio-affective strategies in their post-writing stage, for asking teachers or peers to help them develop and complete their written work.

### **Discussion**

This section discusses two main issues that arose from this study. Firstly, the English writing strategies used by Thai EFL university students, the results showed that the students used various writing strategies in each stage of their writing. According to Seow (2002), students used various strategies before, during, and after each stage of their writing, whereas they used more cognitive and pre-writing strategies at the beginning because they tried to think, plan, and write to stimulate their thoughts from getting ideas, generating ideas, and collecting information for writing. It implies that the students can apply writing strategies to stages of English writing, but this does not relate to writing quality. Secondly, regarding the use of English writing strategies in developing the students’ writing quality, the results revealed that most of the students used cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies in the pre-and while-writing stages. They used fewer socio-affective strategies in the post-stage of their writing. The result, it indicates that the students pay little attention to cooperative writing skills.

### **Conclusion**

The students did not use the writing strategies in a systematic way. They only used three main basic writing strategies in the writing process: metacognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective strategies in their English writing. This study revealed that most of the students used both cognitive and metacognitive strategies in the pre-writing stage. In the planning phase of the writing process, they brainstormed, researched, gathered, and outlined ideas before starting their writing. In writing texts, they used similar sentence patterns and showed the writing texts to someone for an opinion. During the writing stage, the students often used metacognitive strategies and cognitive strategies.

They still planned their writing task and often thought in Thai and translated the texts into English. In the post-writing stage, the students used cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and socio-affective strategies, respectively. It is surprising that most of the students did not use socio-affective strategies in the post-writing stage. Most of the students lacked skills in cooperative learning and they did not talk and share their writing to learn new things from their peers. All of the mentioned above, they did not aware of the writing strategies used in their writing. Manochphinyo (2007) states that selecting appropriate language learning strategies can assist students to become successful L2 learners. Therefore, teachers should give learners opportunities to apply L2 strategies in their language learning tasks. Therefore, if the teachers teach the students to use English writing strategies explicitly and suitably for their writing proficiency level, it might help them write better.

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