Cooperative Learning and Writing Ability Improvement

Nakamol Nudee¹, Assoc. Prof. Monta Chatupote, Ph.D.², Assoc. Prof. Adisa Teo, Ph.D.³
1. M.A. in Teaching English as an International Language, Department of Languages and Linguistics, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University
2. Department of Languages and Linguistics, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University
3. Department of Languages and Linguistics, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University

ABSTRACT

The use of cooperative learning has become increasingly popular in recent years as pedagogy trends worldwide has shifted from teacher-centered to learner-centered methods. In teaching writing, there are many methods adopted by writing teachers in language classrooms to ensure that learners finally master writing and incorporation of CL is one recommended method (Kagan and High 2002). The present study investigated the effects of traditional learning (TL) and cooperative learning (CL) on students’ writing ability. The subjects were sixty grade 11 students in the first semester academic year 2009 at Hatyaiwittayalai 2 School, Songkhla. The subjects were divided into two groups of 30 subjects. The experimental group studied writing through CL and the control group studied writing through TL. Each group was taught writing for nine periods; each period lasted 120 minutes. The research instrument used was the identical pre- and post-wrining proficiency test. The findings indicated that TL and CL had improved the students’ writing ability. However, the students who learned writing through CL had achieved higher level of writing ability and moved up to higher levels in greater number than those who studied through TL method. The resulting t-test of the post-test mean scores of both groups indicates a statistically significant difference.

Key word: cooperative learning, writing
1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, there is a significant shift in pedagogy trends worldwide from the teacher-centered method or “traditional learning” (TL) in which instruction is managed and controlled by the teacher who holds power and responsibility in class, while playing the role of a controller, a decision maker, or an instructor, to a more student-centered method which allows learners to become more active in the learning process (Altan & Trombly, 2001; Brown, 2003; Sarigoz, 2008). One popular instructional method responding to such shift in the trends is “cooperative learning” (CL). This is a method in teaching and learning in which classroom is organized so that students work together in small cooperative teams with clearly defined roles in order to ensure interdependence, to create less threatening learning environment for students, to increase the amount of student participation, to reduce competitiveness, to reduce the teacher’s dominance, to create a student-centered environment, and to promote healthy psychological adjustment (Artz & Newman, 1990; Beachler & Glyer-Culver, 1998; Goosell, Maher, & Tinto, 1992; Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1987; Slavin, 1995). Its numerous techniques are designed to make learning more engaging and more successful, and can be applied to any subject depending on the nature of students and type of educational outcome to be fostered while offering teachers to freely select contents to serve the steps of the techniques (Artzt & Newman, 1990; Kagan, 1990; Slavin, 1995). Furthermore, it can be assumed that CL can be a good representative of teaching methods to promote the Thai educational policies. The Thai National Education Act of B.E.2542 (1999 p.12) section 22 states that Thai education should be based on the principle that all learners are capable of learning and self-development. In the teaching-learning process, learners are the most important and they should be encouraged to develop themselves to reach their best potential.

The shift in pedagogy trends worldwide from the teacher-centered approach to a more student-centered approach instills a shift in emphasis of composition teaching from “product approach” to “process approach”. Many writing teachers a few decades ago were mostly concerned with the final product of writing. Today many of them focus on the process of writing such as planning, drafting, revising and editing, rewriting, and publishing that leads to the final product (Brown, 1994; Chandrasegaran, 2002). This new paradigm has been applied to ESL and EFL writing teaching (Badger & White, 2000; Mesana, 2004; Sengupta, 2000; Silva, 1993). This study focuses on the way to improve EFL writing skills because writing is important for communication. Writing is a tool for expressing critical thinking, reasoning, discovering, creating, and sharing of ideas and knowledge, and it allows writers to present
those ideas, feelings, and cultural knowledge through various kinds of writing strategies (Smith, 1990, Villimil, 1991, and Wells, 1986 cited in Gooden-Jones & Carrasquillo, 1998). Therefore, developing competent writers is one crucial purpose of language teaching. Many researchers recommend the inclusion of CL because by using CL in process writing, students not only gain the academic benefits but also social benefits. CL promotes social interaction in language learning as students work together in asking questions, organizing ideas, deciding the best choice or concept in order to write an effective composition and help each other to learn (Adeyemi, 2008; Bermudez & Prater, 1993; Kagan & High, 2002). In Thai context, although the process approach to writing has proven to improve the writing performance of Thai learners rather than the product approach (Preepool, 2008), English writing skills of Thai learners don’t yet reach the standard and the students pay little attention to the skills because of its complexity, time consuming, and demand for intensive practice (Khamruangsri, 2005). Therefore, it is urgent to help reform the writing teaching and learning methods to make sure that Thai learners become skillful in English writing, the skill which is considered to the most complex for Thai learners.

A variety of CL instruction techniques have been developed and applied to many subject areas and class levels. In teaching writing, some specific techniques are adopted in composition classes such as Think-Pair-Share (Lyman, 1981), Collaborative/Cooperative Writing and Peer Response (Crandall, 1999; Harmer, 2004), and Write-Pair-Square (Goh & Jacobs, 2007). This current study is based on the Write-Pair-Square technique. The students are in group of four. Each student works alone to write about the topic given. That is the Write step. In the Pair step, each student tells his one partner what s/he wrote. The partner gives comments and asks questions. In Square step, the two pairs in the foursome come together and each student tells the other pair about their partner’s idea (not their own idea). The other pair comments, asks questions, and takes turn to discuss their ideas and try to develop their writing even better.

The Write-Pair-Square technique includes five CL basic elements (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1993) which are—positive interdependence (students must believe that the success of a cooperative group comes from the success and efforts of all members as a team), individual and group accountability (the performance of each member in a team is checked and assessed, and the group grade is the results of each member’s performance), face-to-face interaction (group members encourage discussion of ideas, concept clarification, and oral summarization to make learning become active rather than passive), interpersonal and small–group skills (Team members need to develop not only language skills but also
interpersonal, leadership, decision making, trust building, and conflict resolution skills), and group processing (Team members need to reflect on the difficulties they encountered and how to improve). When implementing a CL lesson, whatever technique it is, if any elements are excluded, CL cannot take place because those elements make group work more effective.

The following studies can be the evidence that demonstrate the benefits of CL in promoting students’ writing ability in writing classrooms. In Thai context, Sirikhun (2000) investigated the development in English writing competence of 20 grade 9 students learning under CL through process approach of writing. It was found that CL could contribute the improvement of the students’ writing competence especially in the aspects of content, organization, and vocabulary. In Botswana, a study by Adeyemi (2008) which attempted to find out whether male or female students in a form one class at a junior secondary school would perform better by using the individualized and cooperative strategies, found that while the use of the cooperative strategy to composition writing was more successful than the individualized one, the female students performed better in composition writing using either of the two strategies. In Malaysia, Ismail and Maasum (2009) found the positive effects of CL in enhancing writing performance of form one students in an urban school. The students in this study performed better not only in the composite scores but also in the five components of writing (content, vocabulary, organization, grammar, mechanics) in the post-test compared to the pre-test after the incorporation of CL in the writing classes.

This current study investigated the effects of CL on writing ability of a group of grade 11 students at Hatyaiwittayalai 2 School, Songkhla, Thailand. The focus is on the effects of using CL particularly the Write-Pair-Square technique through process approach of writing on improving English writing ability of Thai students. The research questions are “Do cooperative learning and traditional learning improve the students’ writing ability? If so, is there difference between writing ability improvement of students taught through cooperative learning and traditional learning?”

2. METHOD

2.1 Subjects

Sixty subjects (30 pairs) with equal writing ability measured by the pre-test were selected to participate in this study. They were grade 11 students in the first semester of the academic year 2009 at Hatyaiwittayalai 2 School, Songkhla. They were all Thai native speakers and of mixed gender. The average age was 17. They had studied English for approximately 12 years. All 60 subjects were studying in Math-English Program.

2.2 Research Instrument
2.2.1 The Identical Pre- and Post- Writing Proficiency Test: The pre-writing proficiency test was used as an instrument in order to place the subjects in two comparable groups, and compare their English writing ability before and after the experiment. For the test, the subjects were required to write a three-paragraph narrative essay with approximately 100-150 words within 60 minutes on the topic “My Happiest School Break”. This topic was chosen to comply with the school curriculum which requires the students to be able to recount their own experiences and past situations. The post-writing proficiency test, which was identical to the pre-writing proficiency test, was then used again to evaluate the subjects’ writing ability after the experiment. In order to evaluate the subjects’ writing proficiency levels, two raters (the inter-rater reliability was 0.96 which was statically consistent and therefore reliable) were individually scored the pre and post-tests by using the iBT TOEFL Test: Independent Writing Rubrics developed by Education Testing Service (ETS). It is a holistic rubric used to score the over all essay quality and students’ performance as a whole, without judging the component parts separately (see appendix A).

2.3 The Teaching Materials for Writing Instruction: The teaching materials for nine periods of 120 minutes for both subject groups were developed and used by the researcher herself: A “Self-Editing Checklist” (adapted from Adeyumi, 2008) consisting of eight items concerning the subjects’ views on their own essays was developed and used with both groups as a reminder of what they should look for in the revising and editing stages of writing process, a “Peer-Editing Form” (adapted from Adeyumi, 2008) was developed and used only in the experimental group (in the pair step when students did a CL group work to edit/revise each other’s writing without the teacher’s help), and nine essay worksheets for nine writing topics of recounts: Experience I Will Never Forget, My Favorite Trip, My Beloved Teacher, The Most Memorable Day in My Secondary School, A Night to Remember, My Childhood Secret, My Biggest Regret, My Most Embarrassing Day, and My Favorite Movie.

2.4 Procedures

2.4.1 Data collection: This study was conducted for 12 weeks during the first semester of academic year 2009. The data collection procedures were divided into three main stages: pre-treatment period, treatment period, and post-treatment period. Within the experimental group, a small group placement and role assignment (a group leader, checker, time keeper, and quiet captain) were conducted in the pre-treatment period. During the treatment period, the subjects from both groups under two different learning conditions were taught nine writing lessons for nine periods following the process approach to writing. The class met two hours a week (each week covered one lesson)—the first hour was for the
grammar review and recap students’ errors in writing, and the second hour was for narrative writing practice on the topic given. Specifically, the experimental group focused on the Write-Pair-Square Technique, while the control group focused on independent learning and individual writing without doing pair/group work or having role assignment. However, both groups learned writing through the process approach. This writing course was not as a part of school subjects. It was separately conducted for this study in the students’ extra time. In post-treatment period, post-test was administered to both groups at the end of the course.

2.4.2 Data analysis: To find out whether CL and TL improve the students’ writing ability, the means and standard deviations of scores on the pre- and post-tests of the experimental group and the control group were compared by using paired samples t-test to determine whether there was a significant difference in students’ English writing ability after studying writing through CL and TL. To find out whether there is difference between writing ability improvement of students taught through CL and TL, The post-test mean scores of the two groups were compared by using the independent samples t-test to see whether there was significant difference.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Writing Ability of Both Groups before and after the Experiment

The mean scores of pre-test and post-test of the experimental and control groups were compared by using paired samples t-test to determine whether there was any significant difference in the English writing ability of the students in this group. Table 1 demonstrates the pre-test and post-test mean scores of both groups.

Table 1: Writing Ability of Both Groups before and after the Experiment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Experimental Group (N=30)</th>
<th>Control Group (N=30)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>Post-test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at p < .05 level

Table 2 Writing Ability of Both Groups after the Experiment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>.819</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>-2.496</td>
<td>&lt;.05*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental Group</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>.935</td>
<td>N=30</td>
<td></td>
<td>N=30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at p < .05 level

Table 1 shows that the means scores of the pre-test of the experimental and control groups were equal (\(\overline{x}=1.93\)) so it could be assumed that their writing ability prior to the experiment was at the same level. As shown in the table, the pre- and post-test mean scores of the experimental group are significantly different (p<0.05) and so in the control group. This means that the writing ability of the experimental group increased significantly after the
group was taught writing through CL, and the writing ability of the control group increased significantly after the group was taught through TL.

Table 2 shows post-test mean score of the experimental group (\(\bar{x}=3.43\)) is higher than that of the control group (\(\bar{x}=2.87\)). The resulting t-test of the post-test mean scores of both groups indicates a statistically significant difference (p<0.05). This indicates that after the two groups were taught with two different teaching methods, CL and TL, the writing ability of the students in the experimental group was improved more greatly than that of the control group. It is clear that CL and TL showed a different effect on students’ writing ability.

It should be pointed out that, there is a noticeably greater improvement in writing ability of the experimental group than of the control group. The rate of improvement in the experimental group is 1.50 (pre-test: \(\bar{x}=1.93\), post-test: \(\bar{x}=3.43\), \(t = -8.437, p< 0.05\)) while that of the control group is 0.94 (pre-test: \(\bar{x}=1.93\), post-test: \(\bar{x}=2.87\), \(t = -5.037, p< 0.05\)). It is possible that this greater improvement of writing ability in the experimental group was a result of learning writing through CL. Therefore, it could be interpreted that the students studying writing through CL developed their writing ability more than the students studying through TL. To further investigate the differences in writing score levels between the experimental and control groups, the numbers of the students at each level before and after the experiment were compared. The data are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Number of the Students at Each Score Level before and after the Experiment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level*</th>
<th>Score (point)</th>
<th>Number of the students in both groups before the experiment (Pre-test)</th>
<th>Number of the students after the experiment (Post-test)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental Group</td>
<td>Control Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12 (40%)</td>
<td>0 (0%) 3 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8 (27%)</td>
<td>5 (17%) 3 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10 (33%)</td>
<td>11 (37%) 19 (63%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>10 (33%) 5 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>4 (13%) 0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>30 (100%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>30 (100%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>30 (100%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The score was also used to indicate the level e.g. 2 point = level 2 (see appendix A for task descriptions)

Table 3 shows that before the experiment, the numbers of the students in both groups at each level were equal. In the pre-test, the students in both groups scored only at levels 1 to 3. None of the students in both groups scored at level zero in the pre- and post-tests. According to the ETS’ iBT TOEFL Test: Independent Writing Rubrics, this means that none of the students’ essays merely copied words from topic, rejected the topic, or was otherwise not connected to the topic, was written in a foreign language, consisted of keystroke characters, or was blank. Thus, it can be said that all students could write something related
to the topic given. However, the students in the control group achieved levels 1 to 4 while those in the experimental group could achieve levels 2 to 5 in the post-test. Moreover, the number of the students in the experimental group was more spread out. As can be seen, 17%, 37%, 33%, and 13% of the students in the experimental group scored at levels 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively while 10%, 10%, 63%, and 17% of the students in the control group scored at levels 1, 2, 3, and 4 respectively. It should be pointed out that only the students in the experimental group could reach the highest score level and the number of the students in the experimental group at the low levels are also smaller than those in the control group. They even managed to completely leave level 1.

Detailed investigation reveals that, in the pre-test, 40% of the students, which was the majority of the students of each group, scored at level 1. In the post-test, however, 10% of the students in the control group remained in this level while none of the students in the experimental group did. This reveals that after the experiment, 40% of the students in the experimental group achieved higher levels than those 10% in the control group whose essays were in level 1 meaning that 10% of the essays in the control group were seriously flawed by one or more of the following weaknesses: serious disorganization or underdevelopment; little or no detail, or irrelevant specifics, or questionable responsiveness to the task; serious and frequent errors in sentence structure or usage. It can be seen that essays at this level are still full of weaknesses both in terms of language and organization but the students trained with cooperative writing had overcome all these flaws.

As shown in Table 3, the highest score level is 5. After the experiment, none of the students in the control group reached this highest score while 13% of the students in the experimental group did. It could then be claimed that the ability of the students in the experimental group was improved more greatly than those in the control group. Based on the ETS’ iBT TOEFL Test: Independent Writing Rubrics, the essay which was rated 5 largely accomplished all of the following: effectively addressing the topic and task; being well-organized and well-developed, using clearly appropriate explanations, exemplifications, and/or details; displaying unity, progression, and coherence; displaying consistent facility in the use of language, demonstrating syntactic variety, appropriate word choice, and idiomaticity, though it may have minor lexical or grammatical errors. This means, writers at level 5 have full control of both content and language, and successfully tackled their writing task. In this experiment, only students trained with CL could achieve this highest level. The following sample essays written by the student taught through CL in the pre- and post-tests can better illustrate the writing improvement after the experiment from level 2 to level 5.
Pre-test (scored at level 2, experimental group, subject no. 16)

Last month, I was very happy because family and me Bangkok. I and family funny with went the park. I and brother played Vortex, Giant, Big Boom, Viking, Boomerang. Mother and me played swimming the pool. My mother is shopping at Siam Paragon. I and family went to the zoo.

Post-test (scored at level 5, experimental group, subject no. 16)

My happiest school break is when my family and I went to Pattaya in Chonburi province.

When I was 15 years old, I went to Pattaya in Chonburi province with my family. My father and my mother tooe me there. I traveled to many interesting places but the most impressing place for me and family is Jomtian beach. Because there had many people. The sea water is very beautiful and there had many fun activities. My family was very happy and fun after we swam in the sea together. My brother and I were very glad. At night, Pattaya open 24 hour. At midnight, I saw many people danced in bar. I like traveled midnight. This trip is my favorite trip. I was very excited. It was my happy times. I will keep everything in my memories.

This trip was impressing so much. It made me love my family more and more. I want to tell everybody that I feel good and I don’t forget it. "My Happiest School Break"

The sample essays above show the effectiveness of CL on improving writing ability of this student who could control her writing task quite well both in terms of grammar and content. Interestingly, while the majority of the students in both groups scored at level 1 in the pre-test, after the experiment, most of them scored at level 3. However, the number of the students in the control group scoring at level 3 was much greater than that of the experimental group because the students in the latter group were spread out to other higher levels. According to the ETS’s task descriptions, an essay falling in level 3 was considered by one or more of the following: addressing the topic and task using somewhat developed explanations, exemplifications, and/or details; displaying unity, progression, and coherence, though connection of ideas might be occasionally obscured; possibly demonstrating inconsistent facility in sentence formation and word choice that may result in lack of clarity and occasionally obscure meaning; and possibly displaying accurate but limited range of syntactic structures and vocabulary. This is the mid score range at which more than half of the students (63%) in the control group scored. It shows that the majority of writers taught through TL could moderately control their language, content, and organization in the essays while many of those taught through CL could leave this level and reach the upper levels, so the number of the students in the group scoring at this level was lower than that of the control group.

Additionally, Table 4.4 shows that 17% of the students in the experimental group scored at level 2 after the experiment while 10% of those in the control group did. The students’ essays which were rated two might reveal one or more of the following weaknesses: limited development in response to the topic and task; inadequate organization or connection
of ideas; inappropriate or insufficient exemplifications, explanations, or details to support or illustrate generalizations in response to the task; a noticeably inappropriate choice of words or word forms; an accumulation of errors in sentence structure and/or usage. It is interesting to note that more students in the experimental group scored at this level which was their lowest. It was probably because they all managed to move up from level 1 so there were more of them on level 2 than the control group.

Moreover, 33% of the students in the experimental group scored at level 4 while 17% of those in the control group achieved this level. It could be seen that after the experiment, the students in the experimental group could achieve this score level in larger number than those in the control group. Essays scored at level 4 largely accomplished all of the following: addressing the topic and task well, though some points might not be fully elaborated; being generally well-organized and well-developed, using appropriate and sufficient explanations, exemplifications, and/or details; displaying unity, progression, and coherence, though they might contain occasional redundancy, digression, or unclear connections; displaying facility in the use of language, demonstrating syntactic variety and range of vocabulary, though they would probably have occasional noticeable minor errors in structure, word form, or use of idiomatic language that did not interfere with meaning. Level 4 is almost the highest level and only 17% from the control group could reach it and it was the highest that they could achieve. On the contrary, 33% from the experimental group reached this level. The following essays written by the same student taught through CL which demonstrates the improvement from level 1 to level 4 are provided as follows.

**Pre-test (scored at level 1, experimental group, subject no. 11)**

end. I was very happy here in the my home and summer because I am going to pattalong. I am going visit my aunt. and My aunt do cooking at home. I was so funny is my aunt.

**Post-test (scored at level 4, experimental group, subject no. 11)**

My happiest school is in summer. I went to Phuket. I went there with my friend. we were excited. whan we saw the sun set at Lairmpromtaib. I was happy in summer.

My friend didn’t has the map, so I called her, Sunisa, by phone to see me in front of the tourist in formation office. I gave her a guided tour of Phuket. Then we went to explor the city. I went to the phuket beaches, I welked along the beaches and found mollusks and shell fish. There the ocean was deep blue, I went to the Port. I and my friend can find tug and stevedove at the port. I and my friend bought from the Phuket beach. I took photo of my friend at Lairmpromtaib. Then I went bach home.

End happiest school break in summer. I was happed because, I saw the wonderfal beach.

The above essays could be a proof of success of using CL on developing students’ writing ability because after the experiment the students trained with this method obviously
demonstrated the improvement in writing performance especially in terms of content and organization.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the statistical analysis, the findings showed that students’ writing ability was significantly improved in terms of the test scores. The current study shows that CL and TL had improved the students’ writing ability. However, there is difference between the students’ ability improvement in both groups. The students in the experimental group who learned writing through CL had achieved a higher level of writing ability and moved up to higher levels in greater number than those in the control group who studied through TL method. In other words, after the experiment, the writing scores of the students studying writing through CL are one level higher and the students in the experimental group who reached the highest level of writing are in larger number than those of the control group.

The findings prove that CL brought significantly positive outcomes when incorporated into teaching writing for narrative genre. The fact that the students in the present study gained the CL benefits and improved their writing ability was consistent with the previous research conducted by Adeyemi (2008) which revealed a significant increase in writing achievement of the experimental group after incorporating CL into the writing class, and the results also confirm that the writing achievement of the experimental group was significantly higher than that of the control group which received individualized method. Furthermore, the findings seem to be in agreement with Sirikhun (2000), Ismail and Maasum (2009). These studies show improvement of the students’ achievement in learning writing through CL. They indicate that the students perform better in the post-test compared to the pre-test after the inclusion of CL in the writing classes. This study, however, pinpointed the different levels of effectiveness of two teaching methods, TL and CL and the results were still the same that CL enabled students to achieve better. It should be noted that making writing lessons more active and effective depends mostly on the chosen teaching methods for the classes. It is recommended that the incorporation of CL to writing class which had been proven by current research to produce positive effects in students’ writing ability can be one alternative for teachers to consider and appropriately make use of CL in teaching writing.

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THE AUTHOR

Nakamol Nudee is pursuing her master’s degree in Teaching English as an International Language, at Prince of Songkla University and is conducting a research on using cooperative learning to help EFL learners improve the skill of writing.

REFERENCES


## APPENDIX A: iBT TOEFL Test: Independent Writing Rubrics by Education Testing Service (ETS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score/Level</th>
<th>Task Description</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| 5           | An essay at this level accomplishes all of the following:  
- effectively addresses the topic and task  
- is well organized and well developed, using clearly appropriate explanations, exemplifications and/or details  
- displays unity, progression, and coherence  
- displays consistent facility in the use of language, demonstrating syntactic variety, appropriate word choice, and idiomaticity, though it may have minor lexical or grammatical errors |
| 4           | An essay at this level accomplishes all of the following:  
- addresses the topic and task well, though some points may not be fully elaborated  
- is generally well organized and well developed, using appropriate and sufficient explanations, exemplifications, and/or details  
- displays unity, progression, and coherence, though it may contain occasional redundancy, digression, or unclear connections  
- displays facility in the use of language, demonstrating syntactic variety and range of vocabulary, though it will probably have occasional noticeable minor errors in structure, word form or use of idiomatic language that do not interfere with meaning |
| 3           | An essay at this level is marked by one or more of the following:  
- addresses the topic and task using somewhat developed explanations, exemplifications, and/or details  
- displays unity, progression, and coherence, though connection of ideas may be occasionally obscured  
- may demonstrate inconsistent facility in sentence formation and word choice that may result in lack of clarity and occasionally obscure meaning  
- may display accurate but limited range of syntactic structures and vocabulary |
| 2           | An essay at this level may reveal one or more of the following weaknesses:  
- limited development in response to the topic and task  
- inadequate organization or connection of ideas  
- inappropriate or insufficient explanations, exemplifications, or details to support or illustrate generalizations in response to the task  
- a noticeably inappropriate choice of words or word forms  
- an accumulation of errors in sentence structure and/or usage |
| 1           | An essay at this level is seriously flawed by one or more of the following weaknesses:  
- serious disorganization or underdevelopment  
- little or no detail, or irrelevant specifics, or questionable responsiveness to the task  
- serious and frequent errors in structure or usage |
| 0           | An essay at this level merely copies words from the topic, rejects the topic, or is otherwise not connected to the topic, is written in a foreign language, consists of keystroke characters, or is blank. |