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## WHAT DOES FOCUS-ON-FORM JOURNAL WRITING TELL LANGUAGE TEACHERS?

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### **Abstract**

This research study employed the contemporary focus-on-form approach blending grammar instruction and communicative language teaching by means of journal writing to maximize language learners' grammatical ability in formal education. This research study aimed to (a) investigate the effects of journal writing on grammatical ability of the undergraduates and within the groups of high- and low-achievers and (b) explore the undergraduates' opinions toward the use of journal writing as a means to improve grammatical ability. The triangulated study, employing the mixed—quantitative and qualitative—methods, was conducted in Thailand on 32 first-year Thai university undergraduates' scores in the grammatical test of verbal tenses, questionnaire responses, modified journals, and interview responses. It was found that journal writing had a significant effect on grammatical ability of the low achievers. There were positive opinions toward journal writing on grammatical ability of the participants, and the awareness-raising on actual levels of English-language grammar in high and low achievers.

## **Introduction**

Concurrently, the problems of the learners' writing (Chinnawongs, 2000; ONEC, 2001 and 2002; Ministry of Education, 2002; Bhangananda, 2007; Arya, 2007) and grammatical ability particularly in verbal tenses (Bell and Burnaby, 1984; Ringbom 1987; Lush, 2002; Intratat, 2004; Charoenroop, 2006) co-exist with a shift of more communicative language learning and pedagogy in English language curricula in formal Thai education. To promote learner centeredness through a meaningful connection between classroom and authentic learning (Edelsky, 1993), journal writing has been used to lessen or solve language learners' writing deficiency (e.g. Hogan, 1995; Burton and Carroll, 2001; O'Leary Wanket, 2005). However, research studies into journal writing as a means to promote grammatical ability in the aspect of verbal tenses to non-native English learners have been few in EFL, particularly in a Thai context. Thus, the effects of journal writing on grammatical ability in the aspect of verbal tenses of Thai language learners are needed to be investigated in this study.

## ***Grammatical Ability***

Knowledge of grammar is essential and helps avoid communicative misunderstanding between a writer and a reader in a written communication (Lush, 2002; Larsen-Freeman, 2003). Grammatical ability is attributed to the ability to use correct forms to express literal, intended and appropriate meanings in a given context (Larsen-Freeman, 2008). Many scholars support that teaching grammar in the context of the authentic writing (i.e. students' own writing) is more productive than teaching language grammar in isolation (Ellis, 2002; Carter, 1997, in Ho, 2008). However, Larsen-Freeman (2008) unveils that in spite of three interrelated dimensions among accurate form, meaning and appropriate use, each three dimension of grammatical ability possibly brings about various challenges to English language learners as the evidence of tense errors in writing. Accordingly, grammatical ability in the present study can be assessed from the participants' scores from pre-test and post-test on verbal tense knowledge with the supportive data on the participants' modified-journal writing performances.

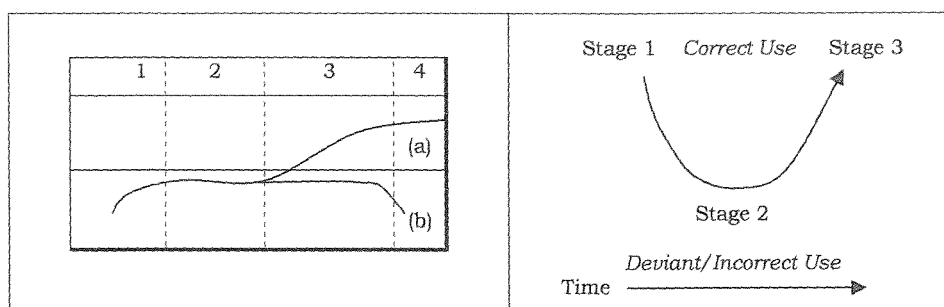
***Focus-on-Form Approach in Language Learning and Instruction***

Focus-on-form approach has been adopted since the shift of more communicative language learning and teaching in EFL curricula in the way of positioning grammar instruction into communicative language teaching in authentic written discourse to enable language learners to develop their own grammatical accuracy (Fotos, 1998; Doughty and Williams, 1998). The learners who receive focus-on-form instruction outperform those who do not because grammar instruction can help language learners perform their grammatical features more accurately, and this contributes to the precision and the comprehension of the writers' intended meaning in written communication (Long, 1983; Ellis, 2002; Lush, 2002).

As in reality, individual language learners have progressed however differently in grammatical competence and outcome, the issue of developmental stages of grammatical acquisition is addressed, in this study, under the focus-on-form approach in language learning context.

- ***Developmental Stages of Grammatical Acquisition***

Second/foreign language grammatical rules or structures in language learners can be developed through a similar series of transitional stages of grammatical acquisition (Ellis, 1994; Lightbown and Spada, 2003). In a system of grammar interlanguage, the movement from one stage to another occurs when non-native language learners move from never using a grammatical point to regularly using it (Smith and Truscott, 2005). In transitional sequences of Smith and Truscott's (2005) developmental stages 3 and 4 in Figure 1, two patterns of learners' changing grammatical development in the rising line (a) and the decreasing line (b) can be described in accordance with two possible concepts: U-shaped learning patterns as shown in Figure 2 and interlanguage development which will be explained next.



**Figure 1** A Sequence of Developmental Stages (Smith and Truscott, 2005: 225)

**Figure 2** U-Shaped Patterns (Gass and Selinker, 2008: 237)

As the evidence of cognitive development for rule-based learning, the U-shaped development patterns account for learners' order of language acquisition as in the instance of the transfer from both familiar regular and irregular tense inflections to unfamiliar verbs (Saville-Troike, 2007). Kellerman (1985) views learners' proficiency levels as the 'U' shape in terms of error frequency and accuracy in the learners' use of grammatical forms. Within three stages of U-shaped learning behavior (Figure 2), the error frequency of the learners in the use of grammatical forms is initially low, then rises, and eventually falls again. Or, their grammatical accuracy is, in turn, firstly high (i.e. a correct form), then falls (i.e. an incorrect form), and finally rises (i.e. back to correctness) again (Brown, 2007; Gass and Selinker, 2008). The downward line (b) pattern (Figure 2) implies the deterioration in second/foreign language learners' performance, resulting from their incomplete linguistic behavior as in the Stage 2 of the U-shaped patterns (Figure 2) or from the barriers in the learners' interlanguage development (Doughty and Williams, 1998; Brown, 2007).

### • *Interlanguage Development*

The language learning progress of non-native language learners can sometimes be incomplete and far from full target-language competence owing to the linguistic barriers or errors in learners' interlanguage development. The sources of grammatical errors are variedly derived from nonnative learners' interlanguage transfer, overgeneralization, inert knowledge problem,

incomprehensible input, backsliding, or stabilization/fossilization (White, 1987; Selinker, 1992; Brown, 2007; Gass and Selinker, 2008; Larsen-Freeman, 2008).

### ***Journal Writing***

Journal writing stimulates learning and teaching processes (Hogan, 1995). As a learning tool, journal writing is a record of how learners perceive their own learning and problems emerging in learning process since it makes learners' tacit knowledge explicit (Altrichter et al., 2008) and makes the learners write to learn (Hogan, 1995; Halliday, 1975, cited in Burton and Carroll, 2001). In turn, journal writing helps raise teachers' understanding of classroom learning and instruction, and of the developments of pedagogical practices.

Journal writing mainly employs the aspect of narrative writing in which chronological events need to be identified by the use of verbal tenses. In this study, a main focus on the product approach (i.e. form-focused or grammatical accuracy in verbal tenses) was integrated into the process approach (i.e. meaning-focused or idea-generated fluency) through the implementation of modified journals (MJs) which contains two writing genres: a reflective journal (RJ) and a free-writing journal (FWJ).

#### **• *Reflective Journal***

Reflective journal (RJ) refers to a student's reflections on his/her feelings, thoughts and ideas about his/her learning situations (e.g. classroom learning environment, learning activity, duration or time of studying, and teacher response) in which English is being studied. As a part of dialogue journal features, RJ is frequently used as an interactively written communication between students and teachers through written dialogues or responses (Trites, 2001; Marefat, 2002). The reflective nature of the journal is also a mode of acquisition potentially bringing about independent learning as the students become aware of their learning, strengths/weaknesses and progress in various linguistic skills (Hogan, 1995; Dam and Legenhausen, 1999; Marefat, 2002; Vickers and Ene, 2006).

- ***Free-Writing Journal***

Free-writing journal (FWJ) features a narrative essay on self-selected or assigned optional topics of interest on a student's memorable experiences or events which are relevant to his/her life. Due to the nature of learners' diversity in background knowledge and interest (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2005), freedom of choice is necessary in FWJ for students' learning to develop their talents (Rogers, 1969 in Groundwater-Smith et al., 2007), to practice writing correct English, and to improve their English language grade (Appel, 1995).

Based upon the composing process in narration, FWJ employs a process writing approach in which writing progress has been principally assessed by accuracy (Dvorak, 1986, in Schlig, 2006) since grammatical errors could signify an effective step toward contributing to learning opportunities (Corder, 1975; Selinker, 1992; Larsen-Freeman, 2008) and improving grammatical accuracy (Carroll and Swain, 1993; Ferris, 2004). To be practical in the MJs of the study, grammatical accuracy in journal writing is assessed based on the writing rubrics (i.e. content, organization, and grammar) from the compulsory English I course.

## **The Study**

### ***Background***

Under the Chulalongkorn University (CU) bachelor's degree curricula, the first-year Thai undergraduates are basically required to complete two compulsory English courses prior to taking other English language courses. Regarding the University examination specifications of summative assessment in the compulsory English courses from the academic years of 2007 to 2008, the highest weighted score was assigned to the writing part in which grammar was highest ranked. This could signify that grammatical knowledge in writing is a necessity in the overall English language achievement at the university undergraduate level.

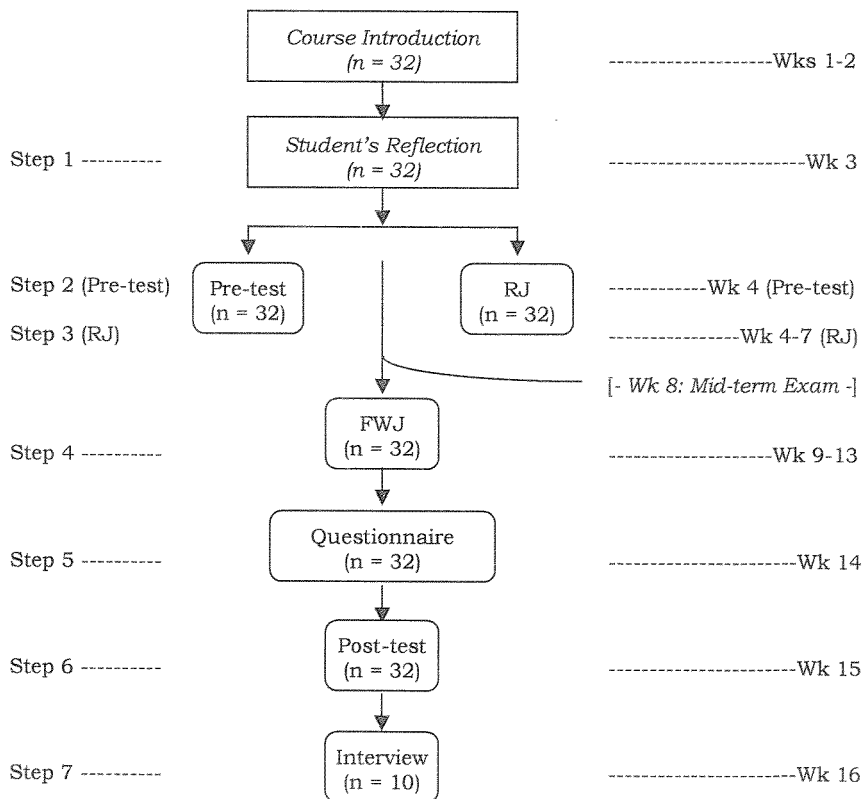
## Methodology

### Participants

From the total of 93 first-year Thai undergraduate students from the Department of Statistics in the Faculty of Commerce and Accountancy, Chulalongkorn University, 32 undergraduates were purposively chosen as the participants of the study. There were 25 females (78%) and 7 males (22%). As for the qualitative analyses of the MJs and the interview, ten participants were randomly selected: five in each group of high-achievers and low-achievers.

### Data Collection Procedure

The data were gathered, through research instruments (Puengpipattrakul, forthcoming), in seven steps over thirteen weeks in the 2008 first semester as depicted in Figure 3.



**Figure 3** Data Collection Procedure



**Step 1:** At the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of the starting month in the 1<sup>st</sup> semester, the “***Student’s Reflection***” worksheet, which is a supplementary material in the compulsory English I course, was distributed to survey the participants’ perception on their difficulties in English language skills.

**Step 2:** The ***pre-test*** was distributed to the participants at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> week of the month when all the participants of 32 would be settled. It should be noted that the 30-item diagnostic test with the gap-filling format was developed, with its reliability coefficient of .81, to assess the participants’ grammatical ability of the six verbal tenses (i.e. present simple, present perfect, future simple, past simple, past progressive, and past perfect tenses) in different situations.

**Step 3:** The processes of the 9-week MJ treatment were implemented for at most 20 entries (i.e. the 4-week RJ for at most 11 entries and the 5-week FWJ for at most 9 entries), each of which required the participants’ self-editing before submission and the instructor’s indirect feedback (i.e. error signals for misuse of grammar written to stimulate learners to discover their own relevant linguistic rule) on the participants’ edited MJs.

An ***RJ*** was introduced at the same 4<sup>th</sup> week of the month after the administration of the pre-test. The guideline of the RJ and the interpretation of the instructor’s corrective feedback on grammatical errors were explained to the participants despite no scoring assessment nor requirement for the word length in RJ writing. After the participants experienced in the in-class RJ writing practice, they were assigned to write RJ from week 4 to week 7 for four weeks as their out-of-class activity.

**Step 4:** At the beginning of week 9 after the mid-term examination, the FWJ guidelines, the interpretation of the instructor’s corrective feedback on grammatical errors, and the writing rubrics for FWJ were explained to the participants prior to the implementation of the FWJ. Each written task was planned and organized through rereading, revising, self-editing, and rewriting steps by means of ‘*process writing*’. Yet, only in the final version of 30 FWJ entries (i.e. the 10 randomly selected participants’ three-topic essays with their final-drafted version) was photocopied and

kept to be co-scored by the course instructor and a native English instructor. The FWJ inter-rating reliability was .98.

**Step 5:** At the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> week, the **questionnaire** (Appendix A), with its reliability index of .77, was distributed to the 32 participants in the class. The 20-item questionnaire consists of 2 parts. Part 1 contains 3 items asking about the participants' general information and background on English grammar learning. Part 2 contains 16 five-point Likert's scale items asking about the participants' opinions toward English grammar learning and journal writing.

**Step 6:** At the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> week, the **post-test** was administered to the participants. To avoid the participants' memory effect owing to the implementation of the same test, the 'pre-test' and the 'post-test' were administered during the 10-week time interval (i.e. from weeks 5 to 14).

**Step 7:** At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> week, ten participants were randomly chosen for a semi-structured **interview** for additional qualitative data on their opinions toward journal writing and grammar. With the participants' permission, the interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed to support the analysis of quantitative data.

## ***Findings and Discussion***

### **1. The Effect of MJs on Grammatical Ability in English of the Participants**

*Research Question 1: Does journal writing have a significant effect on the students' grammatical ability of English? If so, what is the effect size?*

#### **• Quantitative Results**

There was no significant effect of journal writing on grammatical ability of the participants, nor within the group of high achievers. However, a significant effect of journal writing in the grammatical ability was found in the group of low achievers at the large size of the effect ( $t = 2.94$ ,  $p < .05$ ). These findings can be interpreted as follows.

### **Causes of the Non-Significant Effect of MJs on Grammatical Ability**

The non-significant effect of journal writing on grammatical ability of the participants and the group of high achievers can be interpreted that after receiving the MJ treatment, their grammatical ability in terms of the pre-test score and the post-test score was more or less the same. The regression of their grammatical ability, notwithstanding being after the MJ treatment, may be due to:

- ***The counter nature of fluency-prior-to-accuracy in journal writing:*** As an MJ was utilized as a tool to develop grammatical ability within authentically written communication, grammatical accuracy was more emphasized than fluency, and this runs counter the fundamental feature of normal journals calling for fluency prior to accuracy.

- ***The limited practicing time in journal writing treatment:*** With reference to the journal writing processes, the duration of the 4-week RJ treatment and the 5-week three-topic FWJ treatment may not be sufficient to master all grammatical knowledge of verbal tenses. As the grammar learning process consumes time, learners do not learn each grammatical structure one at a time. But they will learn it when they are ready to learn, particularly if it is comprehensible for them (Krashen, 1981; Lightbown and Spada, 2003; Larsen-Freeman, 2008).

- ***The mismatch of learning goals:*** Throughout the semester, the MJ activity, with the focus on grammatical ability on verbal tenses, was treated simultaneously with other grammatical lesson units in the course. The requirement to pass all of the grammatical knowledge from the course might make the participants and the high achievers hardly much concentrate on the specifically grammatical point of the verbal tenses. Thus, this could deviate their awareness of the importance of the verbal tenses that may subsequently impede their grammatical ability in the area of the verbal tenses.

- ***The affective factors:*** The responses from the questionnaire and the interview could signify affective factors (e.g. negative attitudes toward grammar and journal writing, the lack of self-confidence implying their existing anxiety, unawareness of the

necessity of English language grammar, and demotivation to learn English language grammar), all of which possibly impedes the development of the grammatical ability in the post-test.

### **Causes of the Significant Effect of MJs on Grammatical Ability**

The finding of the significant progress in grammatical ability in the low achievers tends to support the notions of the contribution of incomprehensible input and errors, and of a good characteristic of risk-taking behavior. The low achievers might be highly motivated to clarify incomprehensible verbal tenses (White, 1987) by taking moderate risks (Rubin, 1975; Beebe, 1983) on trying to correct and search for new possible grammatical forms. Their error-correction could in turn enhance their grammatical accuracy over time (Carroll and Swain, 1993; Ferris, 2004).

In addition to the main purpose of the MJs on accuracy in grammar being focused and assessed through students' self-correction and teacher feedback, MJ writing is also considered a pressure-free out-of-class activity to generate ideas in writing and possibly encourages the atmosphere of autonomous learning. The benefits of self-editing, teacher feedback, and autonomous learning may be signposted in the significant effect of MJs on grammatical ability in the low achievers since an autonomous correction task helped support gains in grammatical accuracy (Vickers and Ene, 2006).

### **Comparisons within the Groups of High and Low Achievers**

#### **• Qualitative Results**

Since the analyses on MJs focus on the grammatical accuracy in the verbal tenses, the use of verbal tenses in the MJs of both groups of the achievers indicated that the high achievers used more varied tenses in both RJ and FWJ, whereas the low achievers made more grammatical errors in both RJ and FWJ.

#### ***Grammatical Tense Errors in RJs***

Due to the fact that both groups of the achievers never experienced journal writing and were just introduced to the process

of RJ writing, they had grammatical errors in terms of tense form, meaning, and use in common. Based on the RJ content analyses, the frequent types of grammatical errors found are:

### Grammatical Dimensions

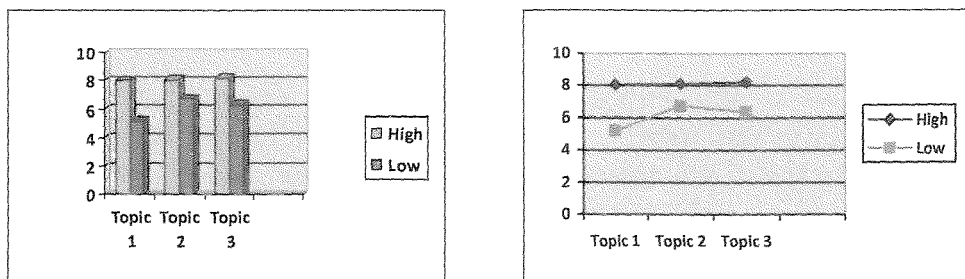
- Form
  - Wrong tense form: - Present perfect (e.g. have + 'V.1'),  
- Future simple (e.g. will + 'V.ing')
  - Overgeneralization or wrong conjugations of past-tense irregular verbs:  
(e.g. 'she understand...', 'I telled...', or 'I knowed...')
- Meaning
  - The use of present tense replacing past tense for past events within the same writing context
- Use
  - Wrong use of tense types and modes
  - Inconsistent use of the past-tense verbs within the same situations and/or the same written tasks

### Tense Errors in RJs

### Quantitative Results

#### *Development of Grammar in FWJs*

The trends on the average inter-rating scores of grammar from writing topics 1 to 3 in the final-drafted FWJs of both groups of the high achievers (i.e. 8.05, 8.1, and 8.2, respectively) and the low achievers (i.e. 5.2, 6.75, and 6.35, respectively) can be depicted as in Figure 4.



**Figure 4 :** Trend of Grammatical Scores of High and Low Achievers' Three-Topic Final-Drafted FWJs

From Figure 4, **between** the groups of the achievers, the mean scores of grammar from FWJ topics 1 to 3 of the high achievers were much higher than those of the low achievers. The higher grammatical scores in all three writing topics of the high achievers may be that the high achievers could generally implement all and more types of the verbal tenses, whereas the low achievers frequently used only a few types of the verbal tenses (i.e. present simple, past simple, and future simple) in MJ writing.

Regarding the development sequence in the average grammatical scores in FWJs **within** the group, the non-significant differences in the mean scores of grammar from writing topics 1 to 3 were found in neither high achievers nor low achievers. This may be owing to the fact that the sample size ( $n = 5$  in each group of the achievers) was too small to generate a significant result (Henkel, 1976). However, there were upward trends on both groups' grammatical scores. Comparably, the low achievers had more grammatical development than the high achievers did because the low achievers' range of score improvement (i.e. 1.15 ranged from 5.2 of writing task 1 to 6.35 of task 3) was wider than that of the high achievers (i.e. 0.15 ranged from 8.05 to 8.2). To elaborate the upward trends of grammatical scores, the low achievers' average grammatical scores from writing topics 1 to 3 demonstrate a fluctuating movement of the scores (i.e. 5.2, 6.75, and 6.35, respectively) as shown in the possible sequence line (b) from Figure 1. Noticeably, in the process of developmental stages in grammar learning, the abrupt drops in the low achievers' grammatical scores from FWJ topics 2 to 3 may be due to the issues of:

- **Interlanguage transfer and overgeneralization:** As for *first-language interference*, the achievers allowed the present simple verbs not to be ended with '-s/es' when a subject of the affirmative sentence was the third person singular (e.g. 'She give...', or 'The teacher speak ...'). As in the Thai-language linguistic system, verbs are not inflected for the third-person singular, whereas in English, verbs are inflected for the third-person singular subject. The achievers then tended to replace target-language input (i.e. the English-language verbal form) with first-language interference. Regarding *overgeneralization* of the grammatical rules, the achievers

performed wrong conjugation of past-tense irregular verbs (e.g. 'knewed', 'telled', and 'understand'). This could be due to the fact that learners are engaged in construction of the L2 grammar rules, based on interfering from target language forms (Larsen-Freeman, 2003: 80).

- ***Inert knowledge and backsliding:*** Learners' *inert knowledge* problem could be the case when they might appear to have initially progressed and acquired a particular structure in a verbal tense, but changed to be unable to apply what they have learned later (Larsen-Freeman, 2003 and 2008).

- ***Stabilization/Fossilization:*** At a stage of learners' grammatical development in the natural language learning process, they sometimes continue to make the same errors. In the study, though the achievers had chances on writing journals and self-editing their own writing, their grammatical errors in verbal tenses in terms of form, meaning, and use still existed. It could be assumed that these errors made may be temporarily stabilized or even permanently fossilized, and this might impede grammatical development, and thereby grammatical ability (Doughty and Williams, 1998; Lightbown and Spada, 2003; Smith and Truscott, 2005; Brown, 2007; Gass and Selinker, 2008).

## **2. The Opinions toward the Use of MJs on Grammatical Ability**

*Research Question 2: What are students' opinions toward the use of journal writing as a means to improve grammatical ability?*

- **Quantitative Results**

- Questionnaire***

The participants had positive opinions and agreed that English-language journal writing helped improve their grammatical accuracy (i.e. the mean score of 3.88 ( $SD = .66$ )) which was important (i.e. the mean score of 4.47 ( $SD = .57$ )) and necessary (i.e. the mean score of 4.41 ( $SD = .52$ )), in spite of being difficult (i.e. the mean score of 3.97 ( $SD = .10$ )), in English language writing skill.

Based upon the responses from the questionnaire about the opinions toward the effect of MJs on grammatical ability of high and low achievers, a significant difference was found in their opinion about the level of their English language grammar ( $t = 2.68$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This indicates that the achievers agreed with their actual levels of English language grammar; that is, the high achievers agreed that their level of English language grammar was good, while the low achievers agreed that their level of English language grammar was weak. The significant outcome of the high- and the low-achievers' opinions about their actual levels of grammar could signify the validity of the high and low achievers' **awareness** of their own grammatical competence, and this is a good signpost for their learning autonomy (Dam and Legenhausen, 1999; Burton and Carroll, 2001; Vickers and Ene, 2006; Larsen-Freeman, 2008).

#### • Qualitative Results

##### *Interview*

With reference to interview responses, the agreed point of the negative opinion toward RJ as less entertaining and boring may likely demotivate the majority of the achievers to write or practice RJ writing, and this may influence the progress of their grammatical competence and ability in writing (Gardner, 1985 in Ellis, 1989; Brown, 2007).

The limitation of **vocabulary knowledge** could be another problem obstructing the achievers' grammatical ability. The importance of vocabulary knowledge is necessary to grammatical knowledge, and subsequently grammatical competence. The knowledge of vocabulary is categorized into the area of grammatical knowledge because vocabulary knowledge involves producing or comprehending formally accurate utterances or sentences (Purpura, 2005). The findings of the study ascertain that high achievers tended to have more various use of vocabulary in FWJs than low achievers whose interview responses revealed the opinions about their limited vocabulary knowledge.

Nonetheless, learners' **affective variables** may not be sometimes related to language performance in case of the emergence of the problems in **interlanguage grammar**



**development** (e.g. inert knowledge, incomprehensible input, backsliding, and stabilization/fossilization of errors). As in the study, a high achiever's interview response on her positive attitude toward English language grammar did not match with her decreasing performances on the post-test and the MJs.

Interestingly, to prevent the emergence of the problems in grammar development, the feature of 'Good Language Learner' and teacher's indirect feedback may likely be the indicators. The qualities of 'Good Language Learners' being contributed to **autonomous learning** (Ellis, 1989) were found in the high achievers of the study. In the interview, a high achiever informed that after MJ writing, her grammatical ability was improved because in the process of rewriting, she performed her self-study by checking the accuracy with grammatical handbooks and rewriting before submitting the revised drafts. Another high achiever reported that in the future, he would probably use journal writing whenever he wanted to check his grammatical improvement.

The instructor's indirect **feedback** is another indicator encouraging the achievers' motivation to write MJs, awareness of grammatical errors, and self-correction during their grammatical development process. From the interview responses, a high achiever claimed that she hurriedly did the test and sometimes she 'forgot' grammatical tenses. But after writing journals, in which the instructor's feedback was provided, she 'became more aware' of the use of tenses. That is, the achiever initially experienced backsliding in the development of her grammatical acquisition, but the problem of backsliding seemed to be resolved through the awareness of grammatical knowledge derived from her instructor's written feedback. Another low achiever supported that after MJ writing, he liked grammar more. Before, he did not know how to write until he looked at his lecturer's feedback. He also accepted that MJs helped to improve grammatical accuracy particularly if there was the instructor's indirect feedback on grammar which could make him realize where his errors were and try not to repeat the same errors. He also felt more confident on and satisfied with his grammatical accuracy after MJ treatment. In all, the achievers' interview responses on their opinions about the importance of the teacher's corrective indirect feedback in the study supports the findings of

several studies in both EFL and ESL settings (Ellis and Schmidt, 1998, cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2003; Ferris, 2004; Ferris and Hedgcock, 2005; Sheen, 2007; Larsen-Freeman, 2008).

### ***Conclusion***

The focus-on-form journal writing in the study was emphasized on the product approach integrating into the process approach. The change from the traditional feature of journal writing to this accuracy-prior-to-fluency approach in the form of modified journals was proved to be a means to improve grammatical ability in the group of the low achievers. Positive opinions toward journal writing on grammatical ability of the participants, and the awareness-raising on actual levels of English-language grammar in high and low achievers also indicated that journal writing was worth being utilized in formal education so as to help support and improve the skills of grammar and writing of Thai EFL learners, particularly low-achieving learners. The findings of the study also provide the insights into the roles of learners' affective factors toward English-language grammar learning, the importance of teachers' indirect corrective feedback, the necessity of vocabulary knowledge for grammatical competence, the emergence of autonomous learning, and the significance of the interlanguage grammar development in non-native English-language learners' language learning process.

### ***Implications and Suggestions***

The findings of this study may provide some useful information for EFL learners and teachers.

In order to confirm the results of the study and to compare whether there is a significant effect of journal writing on grammatical ability, future research should be replicated with cross-sectional studies. Alternatively, due to the classic reason of the typical time constraints in the present study and the English-language course itself, longitudinal studies are, therefore, suggested to probably clarify those non-significant results, and likely see the development of students' grammar.

The findings of an insignificant effect of MJ's on the high achievers' grammatical ability and a significant effect of MJ's on the low achievers' grammatical ability can be explained in that the high achievers may already have their ceiling effect, whereas there is still some room for improvement in the low achievers. Yet, the actual causes of such differences of the findings in both groups have not been confirmed. As grammatical learning is a gradual and dynamic process, EFL teachers have to always be aware that all grammar lessons they teach in the class do not mean students will learn all of them (Larsen-Freeman, 2008). It would be, thus, worthwhile to focus more on their developmental processes of grammatical acquisition along the writing continuum.

The differences in the effect of journal writing on grammatical ability of both groups of the achievers could raise the question about the roles of a teacher's corrective feedback. It is noticeable that the teacher's indirect corrective feedback mainly provided in the participants' MJ's was considered metalinguistic feedback (Sheen, 2007), implying the participants were automatically trained by metacognitive approach during the MJ writing treatment. Even so, almost all of them still made similar grammatical tense errors in terms of verbal tense form, meaning and its use. The significant roles of teacher feedback are then worth investigating in the way of its effects on learners' grammatical ability for further studies.

Due to the time-consuming teacher's corrective feedback given in the individual students' MJ's, students' peer-editing should be considered to be implemented into the process writing for future studies. Given the combination of the 'self-editing' in the present study and the 'peer-editing' in the process writing, students can perform not only self-editing their own writing, but they will have also a good opportunity to edit their classmates' writing.

In light of the interesting findings of the effects of journal writing on grammatical ability particularly in the group of low achievers, journal writing is suggested to be included as a part of the English-language course evaluation at educational levels in Thailand. As a worthwhile learning activity, journal writing will be utilized to assist students, specifically low-achieving language learners, in developing their writing and grammatical ability. The students will have a more realistic chance to practice writing. When

they are motivated to write about things that are relevant to their lives, they will in turn recognize 'writing' as a part of their lives.

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**Appendix A**  
**Questionnaire**

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**English Language Learning Background and  
Opinions toward English Language Grammar**

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**Directions:** Please tick ( ✓ ) in the appropriate box and give a written answer for the information below that describes yourself.

**Part I: General Information of English Language Learning  
Background**

1. Gender                      ..... Male                      ..... Female
  2. At present, I am studying additional English language grammar by myself (self-study) in addition to what is taught in class:  
☐ Yes  
☐ No, (Reason/s).....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....
  3. At present, I am taking other additional English language grammar course/s in addition to this course:  
☐ Yes  
☐ No, (Reason/s).....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....
-



**Part II: Opinions on English Language Grammar and Journal Writing**

		Levels				
		5	4	3	2	1
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
4.	I think that the level of my English language grammar is very good.					
5.	I like English language grammar.					
6.	I think that grammatical accuracy is important in English language writing skill.					
7.	I think that grammatical accuracy is a difficult skill.					
8.	I think that grammatical accuracy is necessary for English language writing skill.					
9.	I like journal writing in English.					
10.	I like English language grammar more after writing journals in English.					
11.	I feel more confident about my grammatical accuracy after writing journals in English.					
12.	I think that English-language journal writing helps improve my grammatical accuracy in English.					
13.	I feel less confident about my grammatical accuracy after writing journals in English.					
14.	After writing journals in English, I enjoy using English language grammar more.					
15.	After writing journals in English, I enjoy writing in English more.					
16.	After writing journals in English, I enjoy studying English language grammar more.					
17.	I still continue to write journals in English though my lecturer has not assigned me to do so because journal writing is entertaining.					
18.	I still continue to write journals in English though my lecturer has not assigned me to do so because I want to improve my grammatical accuracy.					
19.	I still continue to write journals in English though my lecturer has not assigned me to do so because I want to improve my English language writing.					

20. Other comment/s or suggestion/s (on English language learning in grammar and journal writing)

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Thank you for your co-operation.

