



การประเมินคุณลักษณะทักษะการเขียนของนักศึกษา
มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏเชียงราย

The Evaluation of Students' Writing Skill Characteristics at
Chiang Rai Rajabhat University

Ali Akbar Zeinali^{1*}

¹PhD in Translation Studies, Faculty of Humanities,
Chiang Rai Rajabhat University

*Correspondence: +66617306429

E-mail: wetaservice@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study evaluated the English writing abilities of the university students, using the writing skill characteristics. The collected data included the test papers written in English by the population of 100 senior students studying in English-related major students in Chiang Rai Rajabhat University. This data enabled the researcher to go through the evaluation by statistical descriptive and qualitative analysis. The analysis indicated generally low level of writing skill across the data sample. Comparing essay and composition writing, the latter has the lower score in this study. Moreover, the most observable finding in this study is syntax with the lowest rate characteristics for writing English composition across the employed sample. In conclusion, the findings of this study indicated that there is a problem with English writing ability of the chosen students.

Keywords: writing skill, English language, writing assessment



บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษาครั้งนี้เป็นการประเมินความสามารถในการเขียนภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษาโดยใช้การวิเคราะห์ลักษณะทักษะการเขียน เครื่องมือในการวิจัยคือแบบทดสอบข้อเขียนภาษาอังกฤษสำหรับนักศึกษาเอกภาษาอังกฤษ มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏเชียงราย จำนวน 100 คน ข้อมูลเหล่านี้ช่วยให้นักวิจัยสามารถทำการประเมินทักษะการเขียนของนักศึกษาโดยการวิเคราะห์ด้วยสถิติเชิงพรรณนาและเชิงคุณภาพ การวิเคราะห์พบว่าทักษะการเขียนของนักศึกษาโดยทั่วไปอยู่ในระดับต่ำ เมื่อทำการเปรียบเทียบการเขียนเรียงความจากข้อความที่ได้อ่านและการเขียนตามหัวข้อที่กำหนด ผลการวิเคราะห์พบว่าการเขียนตามหัวข้อที่กำหนดได้คะแนนต่ำกว่าการเขียนเรียงความ นอกจากนี้ผลการวิจัยยังพบว่าลักษณะโครงสร้างประโยคการเขียนตามหัวข้อที่กำหนดของนักศึกษาอยู่ในระดับที่ต่ำที่สุด ผลการศึกษาสรุปว่านักศึกษากลุ่มนี้มีปัญหาด้านทักษะการเขียนภาษาอังกฤษ

คำสำคัญ: ทักษะการเขียน, ภาษาอังกฤษ, การประเมินการเขียน



Introduction

Among the different language skills, the students feel writing to be the most difficult in real practice and in the examination. It is mostly assigned as homework in teaching / learning activities. In this context, the only solution lies in the continuous pursuit of knowledge and skills. If the learners have the skills and habit of learning independently, they will be able to face the challenges. In writing, the students take the English language as a tool for learning an academic subject rather than a language; they will be concerned only with passing the exam for getting an academic degree. Educators in all disciplines and at all academic levels have become concerned in recent years about the apparent decline in the writing ability of their students, and this study shares that concern.

Research objectives

To evaluate the writing skill characteristics of CRRU students studying in English majors.

The Theoretical Framework

Each characteristic was classified as being either a discourse characteristic, a syntactic characteristic, or a lexical characteristic based on Breland & Jones (1982), as below:



Discourse Characteristics	Syntactic Characteristics	Lexical Characteristics
1. Statement of thesis (theme) 2. Overall organization 3. Rhetorical strategy 4. Noteworthy ideas 5. Supporting material 6. Tone and attitude 7. Paragraphing and transition 8. Sentence variety 9. Sentence logi	10. Pronoun usage 11. Subject-verb agreement 12. Parallel structure 13. Idiomatic usage 14. Punctuation 15. Use of modifiers	16. Level of diction 17. Range of vocabulary 18. Precision of diction 19. Figurative language 20. Spelling

Considering a society of the students with good knowledge in English language, the sample has been selected from the senior students studying in English majors in the faculty of Humanities, Chiang Rai Rajabhat University (CRRU), and semester one in 2017. The study employed the staff of the faculty who is fluent in English for the assessment of the students' test papers. The significance of the study is to find out the problem area(s) in the students' writing skill.



Literature review

This study attempted to review the focused areas subjected in similar studies and surveys in the field of writing skills. Karki's (1996) study on writing proficiency between the students of private and public schools of grade ten in Lamjung district, for example, found out that the students of private schools were far better than public school. Poudyal's (1999) study found that the students of Kathmandu district were better than the students of Gulmi district in writing proficiency. Bhattarai's (2002) study concluded that the students of institutes have greater proficiency in writing than the students of faculties and the boys are ahead of girls. Acharya's (2010) research on "activities used in teaching essays" concluded that the teachers did not motivate the students as it was required, large percentage of teacher translated difficult words into mother-tongue. In the same way, he found that the teachers were not comfortable in teaching essays because of poor linguistic background of the students in the English language. This research is different from those reviewed ones in the sense that the studies above were conducted as survey and experimental rather than action research. They found that the students were weak in their writing skills in general illustrating their proficiency in percentage or found that the teacher did not motivate them. They were unable to identify the areas where students really need to be improved. This study focused on developing writing skills of the students with the frequency of different grammatical levels of writing essays descriptively and identifying from where we need to begin teaching writing.



Methodology

The selected main area in this study is the writing skill which involves three domains of discourse, syntactic and lexical characteristics. The scores resulted from the test paper assessments provides a data population involving the writing skills in the English language.

In the first stage of the study, written test papers by the students, in the English language, are employed as tools or instruments of collecting data in the initial field work of this study. The collected test papers are classified into 3 main groups: essay, composition, comprehension + grammar, all in English language. These are the assessment instruments in verities for further reliability and validity. In essay assessment, the students will be asked to write an opinion essay whether the opinion is supported with reasons and / or examples. In composition assessment, the students will be asked to read a passage and describe it with their own words through variety of their sentences. In comprehension, the students will be asked to read a passage and answer the followed questions in multiple choices. In grammar test, the students will be asked to find the correct answer, with respect to grammar, punctuation and vocabulary.

The researcher conducting qualitative research attempts to discover as much information as possible by providing detailed descriptions of the phenomena rather than statistical calculations.

The data sample is consisted of 100 Thai (and not international) senior CRRU students studying in English majors provided in the Faculty of Humanities, regardless of varieties in race, religion or sex. The texts written by these students and the scores resulted through assessments by the authorized English reviewers and readers will be considered as the data for collection.

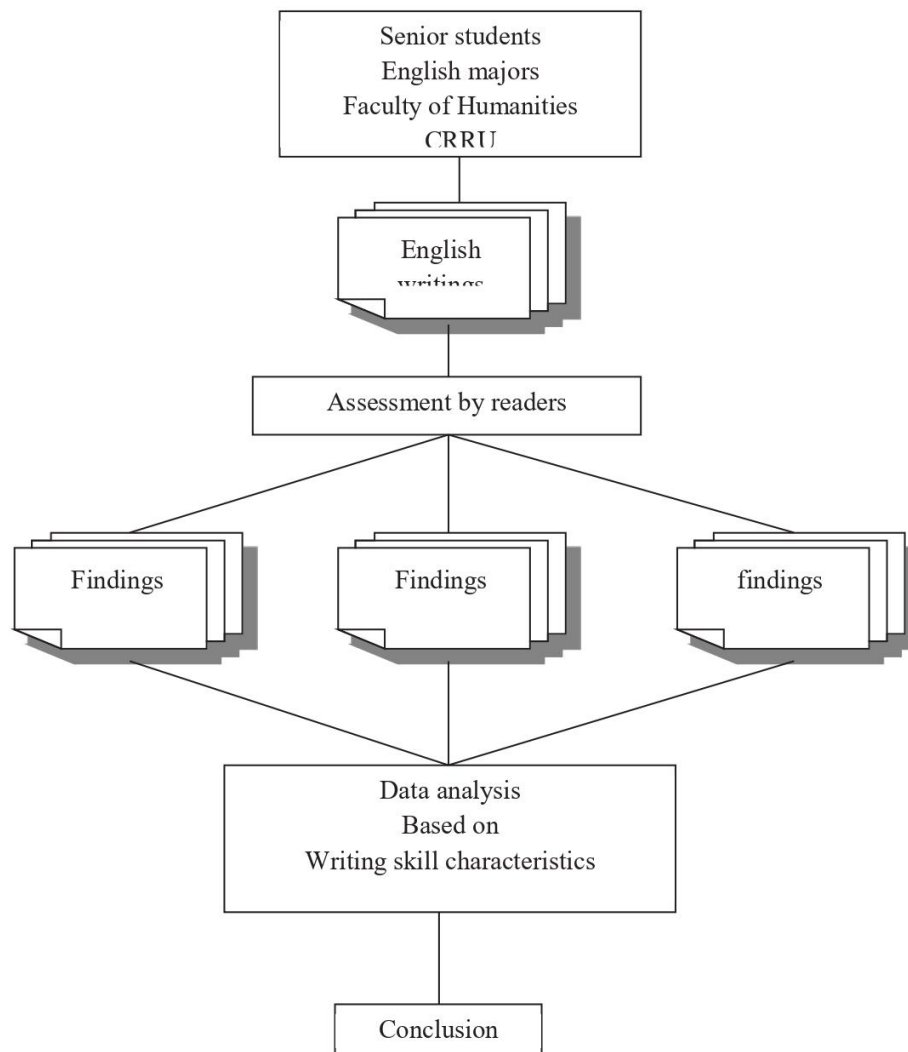


Figure 1 – Theoretical Framework



The characteristics of the writing skill will be scored by the authorized reviewers and / or readers according to rating module of 1 to 5 representing poor (low) to excellent (high) based on (Hyslop, 1983).The data is analyzed characteristically with respect to discourse, syntax and lexicon applications, respectively.

Data analysis and methods

This study analyzes the data through statistical descriptive methodology. In this method, all the collected data will be described and then will be converted to numerical format and subjected to statistical analyses. The findings indicate the poor to strong characteristics in the sample data. The collected test papers are classified into three main parts: essay, composition and grammar together with comprehension tests, all in English. The characteristics of the writing skill will be scored by the authorized reviewers and / or readers according to rating module of 1 to 5 representing poor (low) to excellent (high) based on (Hyslop, 1983) as: (1) Poor, (2) Fair, (3) Average, (4) Good and (5) Excellent.

Research Findings

Writing skills analysis of the data resulted from part one indicates that 24% of the students are in above average rate in their discourse ability and it is 32% for their syntax or lexicology abilities, as shown in table 1 below.

Table 1 – Frequency of CRRU Students Based on English Writing Skills in Essay

Part one	Discourse		Syntactic		Lexical	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Poor	52	52	28	28	24	24
Fair	24	24	40	40	44	44
Average	12	12	32	32	32	32
Good	12	12	0	0	0	0
Excellent	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

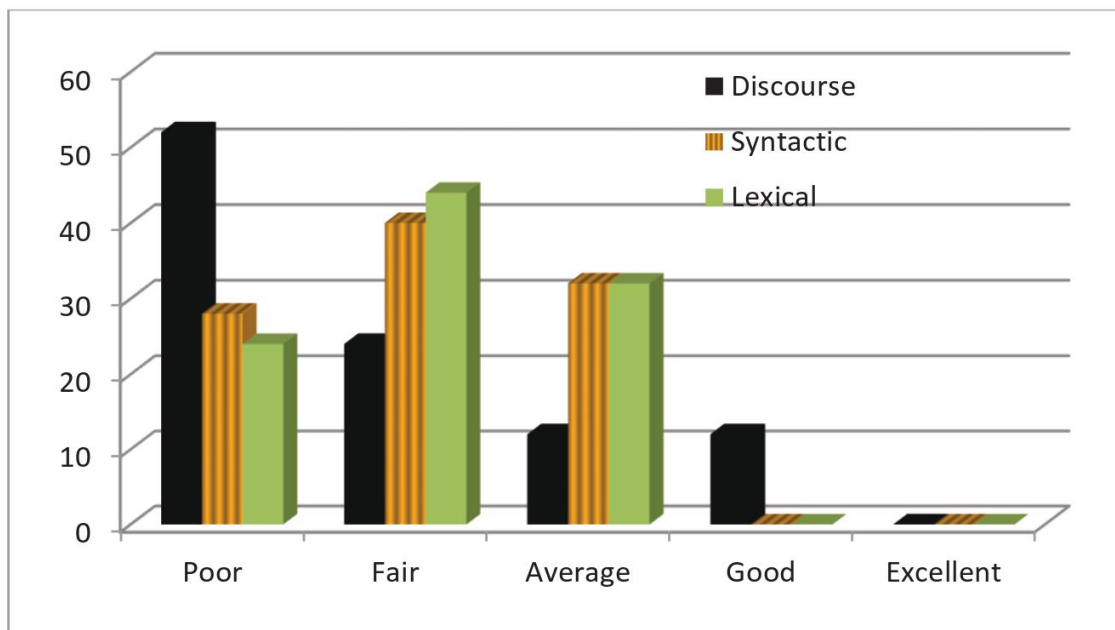


Figure 2 –Frequency of CRRU Students Based on English Writing Skills in Essay (percent)



With respect to the second part of the English test papers assessment, the writing skills analysis indicates that 19% of the students are in above average rate in their discourse ability. It is 27% for their syntactic and 42% for their lexical abilities, as shown in table 2 below.

Table 2 – Frequency of CRRU Students Based on English Writing Skills in composition

Part two	Discourse		Syntactic		Lexical	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Poor	46	46	42	42	35	35
Fair	35	35	31	31	23	23
Average	19	19	23	23	42	42
Good	0	0	4	4	0	0
Excellent	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

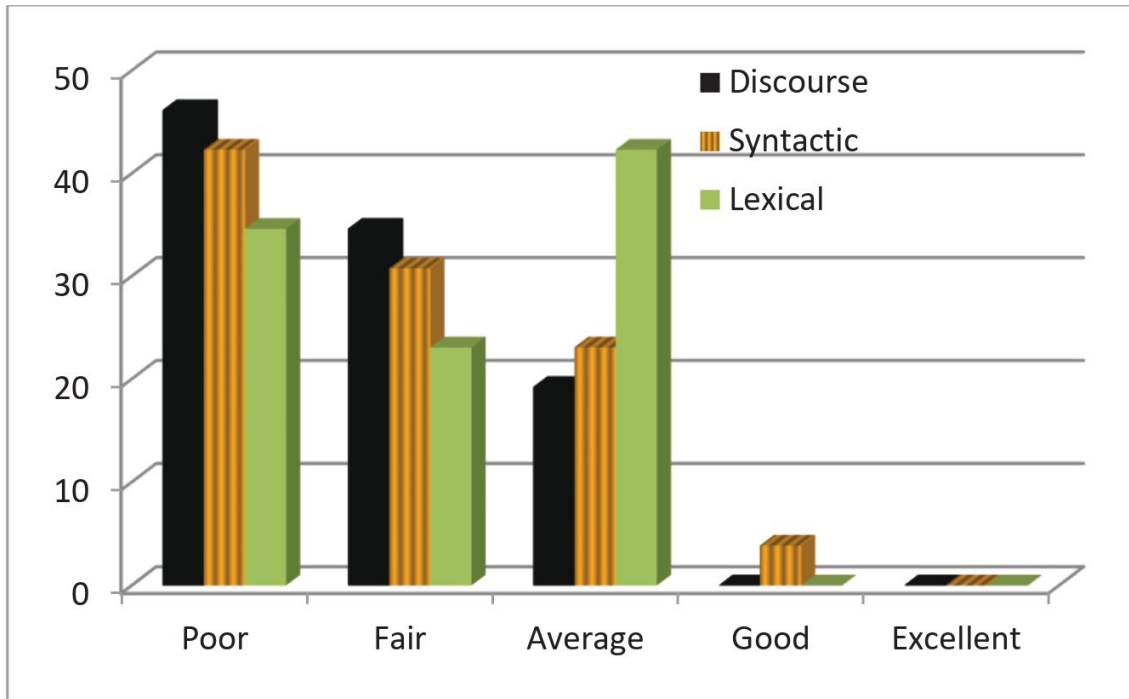


Figure 3 –Frequency of CRRU Students Based on English Writing Skills in Composition (percent)

Grammar and comprehension, as the third part of the English test paper assessment of the selected students in this study, assigns the English knowledge level of the resulted data with only 8% as the distribution rate of above average across the sample, as shown in table 3 below.



Table 3 –Frequency and Percentage of CRRU Students Based on English Knowledge level

Pill	Grammar and Comprehension	
	Frequency	Percentage
Poor	28	28
Fair	64	64
Average	4	4
Good	4	4
Excellent	0	0
Total	100	100

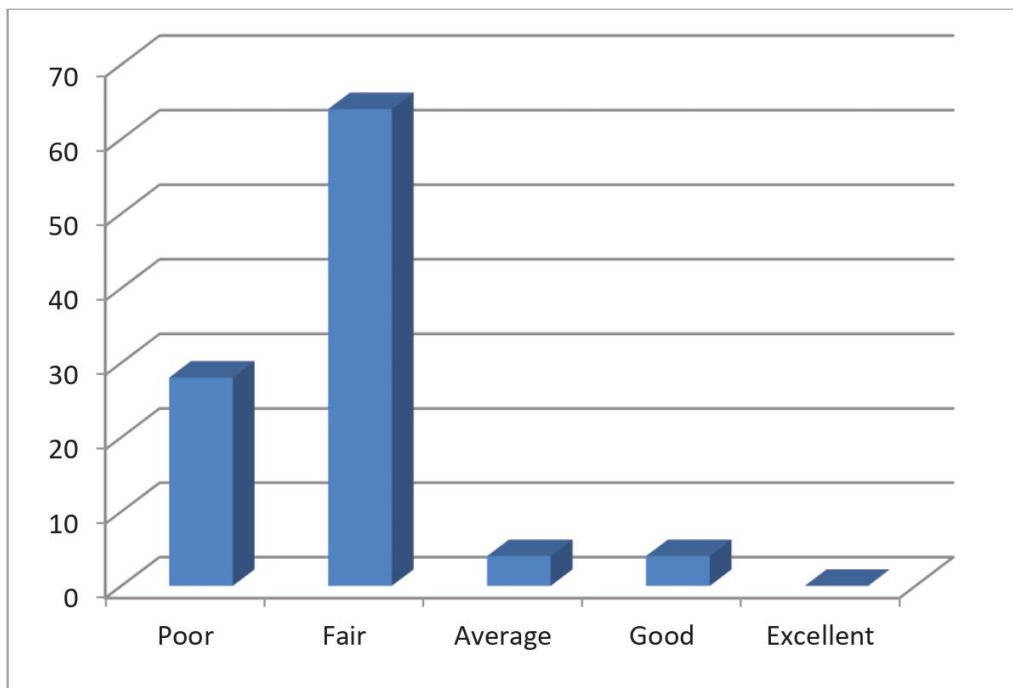


Figure 4 –Frequency of CRRU Students Based on English Knowledge level (percent)



Research Discussion

Following the data collection, the study attempts to illustrate the average of the scores of the English test papers of all the students for each part, respectively (Table 4).

Table 4 – Mean Scores in English Test Paper Results

Test Parts (English)	Mean Scores
PI	1.897
PII	1.871
PIII	1.869
General Mean Score	1.879

As shown in the above table, the mean score of 1.897 indicates the writing skill level of the CRRU students in writing an essay in English which is “fair”. It is 1.871 for their composition skill level which is “fair”, too. The mean score of 1.869 shows the same level for their grammar and comprehension knowledge level. The general mean score of these students estimated from all the parts of the test papers in English indicates generally low level of writing skill across the data sample which is “fair”. Rounding up the mean scores may be calculated as “2” (“fair”) for all the parts; however, focusing the scores in detail, the study investigates any probable differences among the parts of the test papers through considering three decimal digits. The following figure explicitly illustrates the differences.

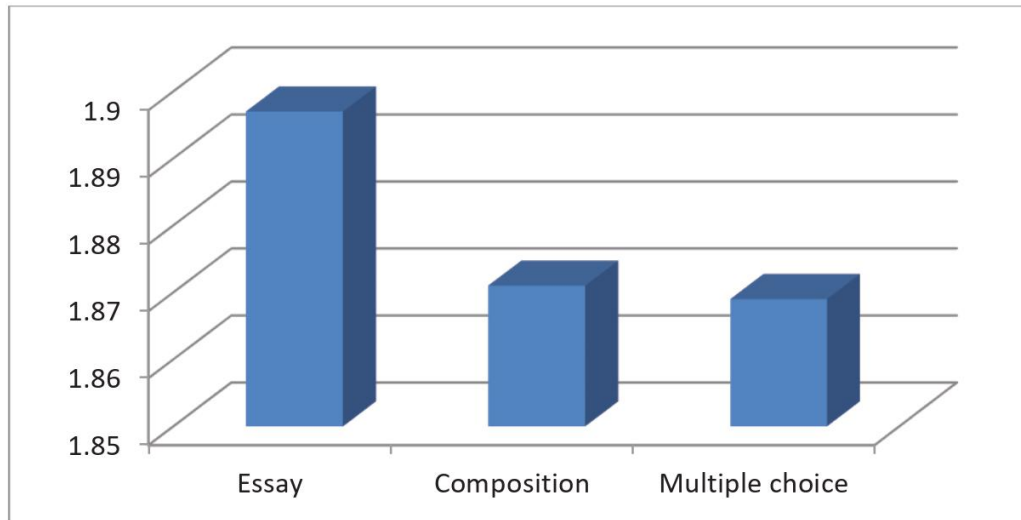


Figure 5 – Mean Scores in English Test Paper Results

The above figure illustrates significant difference between composition and essay in which the writing skill of the students in writing composition is lower than essay. The low level of part three indicates the knowledge of the students in “grammar and comprehension” which is located at the lowest rate. Comparing the condition of writing skills of the sample in the above figure indicates that the creativity in making sentences or basic knowledge of English in the related population is not satisfactory; and the higher level in essay writing shows that the previous background resulted from reading the given passage helped them to write English sentences. Although all the levels of the assessments in the English test paper results of the CRRU student are very low and not satisfactory, this study attempts to go through the investigation by comparing essay and composition writing skills and finding the lower rate which is

composition with the mean score of 1.871. Analyzing the students' skills in writing composition provides this study with some findings illustrated in table 5.

Table 5 – Mean Scores in Composition Writing Characteristics

Writing Characteristics	Mean Scores
Discourse	1.815
Syntax	1.667
Lexicology	2

Table 5 provides an intuitive interpretation by demonstrating some comparable frequency occurrences through discourse, syntactic and lexical characteristics of writing English skills across the CRRU students in this study.

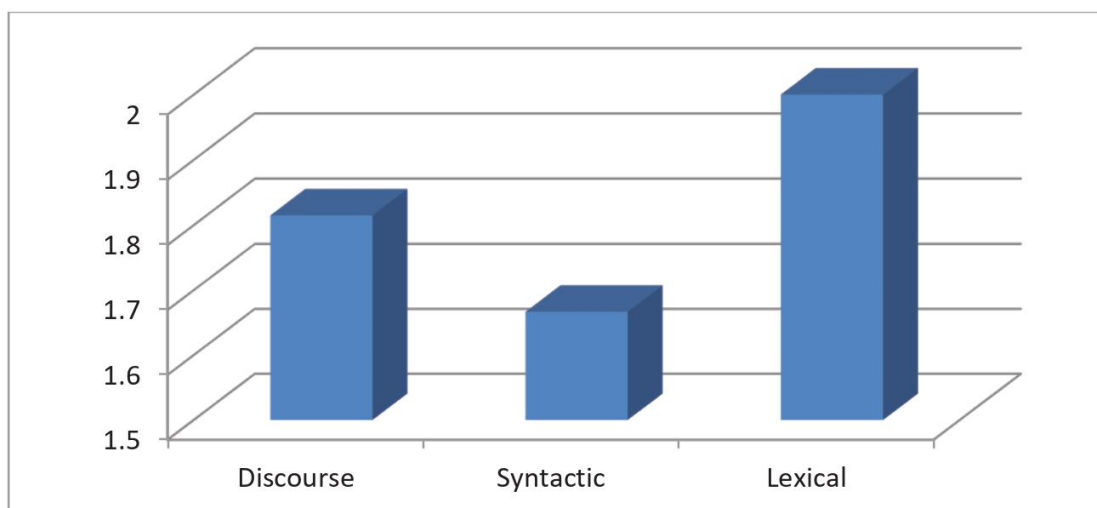


Figure 6 – Mean Scores in Composition Writing Characteristics



Examining the histogram chart illustrated in figure 6, it is indicated that syntax is the lowest rate characteristics (1.667) for writing composition across the sample in this study, although the other characteristics are lower than average as well.

Conclusion

This study has found several types of writing difficulties encountered by the students. The implication of the findings contributes to the understanding of students' writing difficulties and the information obtained enable lecturers to help them in developing substantive knowledge of the writing process, therefore produce effective writing. Thus, this problem will be improved through appropriate extracurricular programs by the university.

Recommendation for further studies

This research focused on the study of one of the learning skills. The students, researchers, linguists and education developers are recommended to do further investigations in other skills (reading, speaking and listening) of learning a foreign language, especially English, or to repeat this study within consecutive academic years with different university students in a certain period for finding more comprehensive or effective results. Indeed, this study is considered as a step into recognizing the hidden problems of writing English ability. Presenting descriptions of the writing skill abilities of the CRRU students in the English language with furnishing linguists



and researchers with knowledge of writing skill characteristics is considered as preliminary step to deal with the challenges in teaching and learning a second/foreign language process. The researcher suggests it as pathology of EFL / ESL teaching or learning approach for CRRU students.



References

- Acharya, H. (2010). Activities used in Teaching essays, An unpublished thesis , Med,n TU.
- Bhattarai, P.D. (2002). *A comparative study of the writing proficiency of bachelor's Level students*. An unpublished Thesis of M.Ed,TU., Kathmandu.
- Breland, H.M., 6 Jones, R.J. (1982). Perceptions of writing skill. New York: CollegeEntrance Examination Board.
- Hyslop, Nancy B. "A Study to Test the Effects of Daily Writing upon Students' Skills in Explanatory Discourse at the Eleventh Grade Level." Unpublished dissertation, 1983.
- Karki, H. B. (1996). *A comparative study of English language writing proficiency in H.S.S of Gulmi and Kathmandu district*. An unpublished Thesis of M.Ed. Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu.