Improving the English-Language Academic Paraphrasing Guidelines Taught at a Thai University

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Abstract

This case study investigates the effectiveness of paraphrasing guidelines taught in a graduate academic and research writing class at a Thai university. It evaluates the use of paraphrasing strategies, as taught through the guidelines, by students when paraphrasing English-language sources. The assessment considers the students' utilization of these strategies while employing all available resources, which is the typical approach in academic writing. A pretest/posttest task was administered to determine the improvement, if any, in key paraphrasing strategies among the 12 students enrolled in the course. Background information was collected through a questionnaire before the pretest, and face-to-face interviews were conducted after the posttest. Although students demonstrated significant improvement in almost all strategies, it was identified that explicit instruction should be increased, particularly in skills related to reordering words, such as changing sentence structures, as well as adding text by conveying the same meaning in their own words. Additionally, a moderate emphasis on instruction could be placed on strategies related to changing words, such as finding synonyms. Other skills, notably citing, require no further emphasis. Based on the results, recommendations are provided for enhancing the guidelines, and suggestions are offered for instructors looking to refine their own writing courses that incorporate paraphrasing.

Introduction

Background and Significance of the Problem

Given the crucial role of paraphrasing in advanced academic writing, the approach of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners to synthesizing English-language source texts into their writing has become a significant focus for educators. Paraphrasing presents a major challenge for EFL novice writers (Flowerdew & Li, 2007; Shi, 2012), leading to a growing interest in understanding their strategies. This interest has spurred a rise in studies exploring the challenges encountered by EFL

learners worldwide in mastering paraphrasing (e.g., Alaofi, 2020; Chen et al., 2015; Liao & Tseng, 2010; Na & Nhat Chi Mai, 2017; Neumann et al., 2020; Shi, 2012).

Despite numerous studies highlighting the necessity of increasing EFL learners' practice in paraphrasing (e.g., Liao & Tseng, 2010) due to their insufficient proficiency in this skill (Alaofi, 2020; Toba et al., 2019), Yahia and Egbert (2023) emphasized the urgent need to develop specific strategies to enhance these learners' paraphrasing abilities. This emphasis stems from the understanding that instruction in paraphrasing strategies leads to improved academic writing skills (Choy & Lee, 2012). Yahia and Egbert (2023) focused on the effectiveness of providing explicit guidelines to EFL learners as part of their instruction, with the goal of improving their ability to produce acceptable paraphrases. Utilizing pretest and posttest quantitative analyses, as well as qualitative methods including surveys and interviews, the study aimed to assess the impact of such instruction. The findings revealed that clear guidelines and specific instruction significantly enhanced EFL learners' paraphrasing performance, including their ability to make appropriate lexical and syntactical changes.

In their suggestions for future research, Yahia and Egbert (2023) suggested evaluating guidelines in diverse contexts and from multiple perspectives. Interestingly, they observed that while many researchers acknowledge the necessity of developing paraphrasing guidelines, few studies offer specific guidance on what these guidelines could entail (p. 308). Importantly, they highlighted the importance of exploring how EFL learners' paraphrasing behavior may change when digital resources are permitted. Notably, their study was conducted with students paraphrasing solely using pen and paper.

Study Objective

In line with the suggestion made by Yahia and Egbert (2023), this case study aims to investigate the paraphrasing strategies utilized by graduate students majoring in an English-related subject at a Thai university. The study focuses on their English academic writing skills, both before and after completing an academic and research writing class. To conduct this investigation, digital copies of two different but equivalent texts were utilized, with the pretest administered after the first class and the posttest after the final class. Importantly, students were granted access to the Internet and all available resources during both assessments. Furthermore, they were asked to complete a survey after the conclusion of the first class, and interviews were conducted following the completion of the final class to gain insights into their perspectives on paraphrasing and the strategies taught during the course.

This investigation evaluates the effectiveness of paraphrasing strategies explicitly taught and practiced during the course. It aims to determine which strategies have been successfully conveyed and highlights areas that may need additional emphasis in future cohorts. The findings can provide valuable insights for educators developing writing courses that incorporate paraphrasing or for those teaching paraphrasing in their own classes.

Exploring the writing practices of EFL learners with access to digital texts and the Internet during paraphrasing is of particular interest. To the best of this researcher's knowledge, no specific study has been conducted in this area, despite it being the common approach for post-graduate students engaging in advanced academic writing tasks, such as composing their Independent Study (IS) or Thesis.

Research Questions

The literature review as the background and the paraphrasing guidelines mentioned below form the basis used as this study's theoretical framework, and from which three research questions were formulated:

RQ1: Which paraphrasing strategies are employed more frequently by students after completion of the academic writing course compared to the beginning?

RQ2: What are the students' perceptions of their paraphrasing, and how do they believe the guidelines can be improved?

RQ3: How effective are the paraphrasing strategies taught, and how can the guidelines teaching them be improved?

Literature Review

Numerous studies affirm that teaching paraphrasing is not only highly beneficial for EFL learners studying academic writing in a tertiary setting but is also considered a crucial skill (Tran & Nguyen, 2022). According to Keck (2006), paraphrasing involves integrating a source text by rewriting, restating, rephrasing, and rewording without changing the meaning or original ideas. However, as noted earlier, this task poses a significant challenge for EFL novice writers, often resulting in difficulties in appropriately paraphrasing source material, leading to instances of copying or plagiarism (Leask, 2006; Shi, 2012).

Paraphrasing strategies, including word swapping and using synonyms, are often employed in an attempt to conceal intentional plagiarism (Bakhtiyari et al., 2014; Khairunnisa et al., 2014; Mozgovoy, 2007). However, these strategies should not be used in isolation, as they alone would be insufficient to avoid plagiarism. If changing and reordering words are applied "properly and to decrease similarity percentage as much as possible" (Bakhtiyari et al., 2014, p. 57), such an approach can ethically transform the text and, when combined with proper citation practices, this approach can effectively prevent plagiarism.

Given the challenges associated with student copying, educators increasingly advocate for addressing this issue through pedagogy rather than disciplinary measures (Liao & Tseng, 2010; Valentine, 2006). As emphasized by Yahia and Egbert (2023), there is a pressing need to develop effective paraphrasing strategies for EFL learners. They suggest that specific instruction coupled with

clear guidelines can aid in improving paraphrasing skills, yet note the lack of detailed analysis on instructional methods in recent studies (p. 308). While some guidance on paraphrasing guidelines exists, such as the three stages proposed by Yahia (2020)—understanding, production, and evaluation—there remains variability in approaches to evaluation, with no universally agreed-upon definition of what constitutes an "acceptable" paraphrase (Egbert et al., 2020; Yahia, 2020).

In Yahia and Egbert (2023), the researchers detailed a three-stage process undertaken over two pages (pp. 317–318), effectively outlining how the 6.5 hours spent teaching paraphrasing proceeded as part of a 48-hour academic writing class with 14 EFL doctoral students from various disciplines in the USA. The study found that students demonstrated improvement in the posttest compared to the pretest in the following areas:

"Used appropriate synonyms for the author's commonly used key words" and "Changed the sentence structure of the original passage" (improved).

"Included all the main points from the original text" and "Kept the view or opinion or attitude of the author" (improved slightly).

"Avoided having 3–4 unchanged words in a row," "Used quotation marks for words taken directly from the original text," and "Cited the original" (improved markedly).

"Kept the text length about as long as the original text" (no improvement).

"Used the same technical words" (students consistently retained technical words in both tests).

Another valuable study concerning guideline development is Bhagat and Hovy (2013). Although their focus is not specifically on guideline development, the researchers outline 25 paraphrasing strategies that could be invaluable for educators in formulating their own guidelines. Arifuddin (2021) further delves into the practical application of these strategies in the paraphrasing practices of Indonesian EFL teachers, offering detailed insights into how these 25 strategies were implemented by participants.

In the current study, the researcher/instructor has developed a paraphrasing guideline based on their experience teaching similar courses over time. The assessment focuses on writing part of a literature review and a brief introduction, with students evaluated in a significant part on their ability to conduct research writing outside of class using all available resources. The research aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on EFL paraphrasing pedagogy, addressing a gap highlighted by Yahia and Egbert (2023). These researchers not only analyzed students' use of specific paraphrasing strategies through pretest and posttest tools but also collected data on participants' prior experience with paraphrasing instruction. They found that none of the 14 students had received explicit paraphrasing instruction before the study. In addition, student interviews were conducted after the instruction to aid in data interpretation by identifying trends and patterns in student performance, leading to several recommendations provided by the students.

Adopting a similar methodological approach, this study aims to investigate EFL learners' paraphrasing practices when utilizing digital resources, guided by the paraphrasing guidelines provided

as part of the course curriculum. The evaluation centers on assessing the enhancement of English academic paraphrasing strategies among graduate students enrolled at a Thai university.

In the Academic and Research Writing course under investigation, specific instruction based on the paraphrasing guideline developed by the researcher/instructor begins in class 2. During a session lasting 2.5 hours, students are introduced to the fundamentals of in-text citations (ITCs) and reporting verbs. Classes 3 and 4, spanning a total of 4.5 hours, are dedicated to teaching summarizing and paraphrasing simultaneously. Initially, the process of gathering sources is outlined, emphasizing the distinctions between summarizing and paraphrasing at their extremes. Subsequently, students are guided in performing both actions using paraphrasing strategies. They learn to identify key information, such as the subject and major findings, and then paraphrase it accordingly. This instructional approach aligns with Keck's (2014) assertion that EFL learners primarily summarize by selecting important points in the source and paraphrasing them.

Methodology

Participants and Setting

The participants, all 12 first-year graduate students from China, were selected through convenience sampling, as the researcher was also the instructor for this particular course. They were enrolled in the M.A. English Language Studies and Teaching (International Program) at the Graduate School of Language and Communication (GSLC), National Institute for Development Administration (NIDA), Bangkok, Thailand. Further details on the participants can be found in the results of the survey questionnaire. The course attended by the participants was Academic and Research Writing (MLT5000), a 3-credit/45-hour course held face-to-face during the first semester of the academic year 2566 BE (2023). The course aims to develop students' MA-level academic and research writing and thinking skills. Together with other courses, particularly the Research Methods for English Language Studies and Teaching (MLT 6002), it is intended to help students develop the skills required to compose an IS (6 credits) or Thesis (12 credits).

The three-hour classes were conducted over a two-week period in August, as opposed to the conventional format of one class per week over 15 weeks. From the researcher's perspective, the condensed schedule did not impede in-class learning. However, students had less time to practice the strategies outside of class through completing their coursework for assessment, which primarily focused on completing part of a literature review, introduction, and reference list for assessment.

Paraphrasing Guidelines

The specific instruction included guidance on changing words, reordering words, and making other modifications. Firstly, the process of finding synonyms was taught through four steps: (1) identifying commonly used words to replace, (2) searching for synonyms in a thesaurus and/or

dictionary, (3) using the base form of the word and adapting the new word to fit the context, and (4) verifying potential synonyms in a dictionary to ensure contextual suitability; if unsuitable, finding another potential synonym. Students then practiced this by completing an exercise.

Subsequently, guidance was provided on changing other elements such as percentages and numbers, conjunctions, attribution signals, and word group alterations, with each topic accompanied by an exercise. Two further exercises were then conducted to practice these strategies concurrently.

Following that, the instruction detailed changing word form and inflection, accompanied by three exercises for practice. Subsequently, the session addressed complications in paraphrasing, such as maintaining appropriate formality, ensuring the right fit of meaning (neither too broad nor too narrow), using multiple thesauruses, considering potential synonyms beyond obvious choices, and avoiding the retention of more than four consecutive words from the original text. The session also covered instances when finding a synonym should be avoided, such as refraining from altering basic terms/proper nouns (except for changes in word form or when using pronouns or summary words after the first instance) and key technical terms. Again, each topic was accompanied by an exercise and two additional exercises were provided to practice these strategies concurrently. Finally, a figure illustrating the four-step procedure and other methods for making changes was presented.

The subsequent focus was on reordering words, with instruction on changing sentence structures, such as changing from active to passive voice or vice versa, and breaking clauses into separate sentences. Two exercises were provided for practice. Following this, instruction covered the reordering of clauses, adverb clauses, lists, and words within clauses, with each topic accompanied by an exercise. Additional strategies were then suggested, including instruction on shortening by removing words and lengthening by adding words without altering meaning, effectively conveying the same message in one's own words. Exercises were provided for each strategy. Many of these strategies align with those identified in studies by Bhagat and Hovy (2013), Yahia (2020), Arifuddin (2021), and Yahia and Egbert (2023).

To begin practicing these strategies, students were advised to focus on paraphrasing parts of abstracts, particularly sentences on the subject and results. Next, students analyzed a real abstract and selectively summarized/paraphrased it, following a step-by-step process: finding the study's subject and results and inserting ITCs, reporting verbs, and pronouns; deleting words not to be included; reordering words; and changing commonly used words. Here, the students begin to put into practice the instruction of selecting important points in the source and paraphrasing them (Keck, 2014).

Detailed guidance accompanied each step. A second figure illustrated the entire process, from gathering sources to adding the citation to the reference list once the paraphrase is complete. Additionally, in class 4, students were taught how to cite primary and secondary sources, with exercises for 30 minutes, and how to cite two or more works in parentheticals, along with other common ITC variations, also with exercises for 30 minutes. Students received individual feedback on their

paraphrases multiple times as they practiced paraphrasing throughout the course. As part of the course review, an additional hour was dedicated to practicing paraphrasing in class 14.

Instruments

To answer the three research questions, the following tools were employed. To collect quantitative data, a pretest was distributed via Microsoft Teams after the first class, and a posttest was similarly distributed after the last class of the course (see Appendix A). To complement these tools with a qualitative dimension, four students were selected through convenience sampling for semi-structured interviews conducted after the completion of the posttest (see Appendix B). Additionally, a background questionnaire was distributed via Teams and completed by all 12 students (see Appendix C).

Both the pretest and posttest consisted of a short passage exemplifying academic writing similar to the type the students would encounter when reading academic journals for research material to include through paraphrasing in their IS or Thesis. The two tests were different but comparable, addressing similar topics and having similar structures, with no significant variations in sentence structure and similar vocabulary on topics the students would be familiar with (EFL/ESL learning). It was necessary to use two different texts to avoid issues associated with a repeated measure, as students could revisit the pretest text before taking the posttest.

The two texts used were specifically designed to resemble *real* source material commonly found in academic resources such as Google Scholar. The decision to formulate these texts, rather than source them elsewhere, aimed to ensure that the various strategies explicitly given instruction on and included in the guideline could be specifically identified and tested regarding the students' ability in the three core types of paraphrasing strategies: Changing Words, Reordering Words, and Making Other Modifications. This allowed for a detailed comparison of the students' texts against the source texts on a word-by-word and sentence-by-sentence basis.

Additionally, formulating the texts in-house ensured equivalence in terms of difficulty. The difficulty level was measured using the Flesch Reading Ease available at www.charactercalculator.com. Both tests were rated as *very difficult to read* and *appropriate for college graduates*, with the pretest having a reading level rating of 21.60 and the posttest rating slightly more difficult at 20.12 (Readable, n.d.). This indicates that the texts aligned with the participants' reading level as master's students.

For changing words, the researcher ensured there were sufficient words that could be changed, including basic terms in the field and proper nouns (see Table 1). The texts were composed of words from the most important foundational 2809 words for EFL (NGSL Project 1.2), with exceptions for proper nouns, acronyms, antonyms of words in the NGSL, compound words of words found in NGSL, noun versions of adjectives found in NGSL, and dates. Concerning reordering words, the researcher ensured there were sentence structures that could be changed from active to passive or vice versa, along with clauses that could be changed without altering the meaning, lists that could be reordered, and words

that could be reordered within phrases. A fictitious reference was supplied to test the students' ability to add ITCs and any reporting verbs.

To provide students with the opportunity to voice their views on the paraphrasing guidelines, four students were selected by convenience sampling for semi-structured interviews based on the results of the pretest: the two highest-scoring students and the two lowest-scoring students. Individual interviews were conducted with these students after completion of the posttest.

Data Collection Procedure

To avoid disrupting the existing course curricula and overcome the physical constraints of the classroom (Campbell, 1990), students were asked to complete the tests outside of class. This approach aimed to ensure that students had ample time to complete the tasks without feeling rushed, mirroring the real-life situation where students typically paraphrase in their own time with loose constraints.

Both tests were *open book* meaning students had access to all the materials and resources they would normally use when paraphrasing, such as thesauruses on the Internet, reflecting the usual real-life situation. As mentioned in the introduction, Yahia and Egbert (2023) suggested that future research should address the issue of allowing students to access all resources. This approach could potentially overcome the drawback of their study, which only allowed students to produce a single draft due to the limited timeframe using pen and paper.

Data Analysis Procedure

Questionnaire survey.

Personal characteristics and data on students' educational background and knowledge of paraphrasing were collected via a questionnaire survey, asking questions adapted from Yahia and Egbert (2023). After return of the survey by the students via Teams, their answers were analyzed in terms of frequencies and averages.

Pretest/posttest.

Paraphrasing strategies were categorized into three types: Changing Words (Strategies 1–4), Reordering Words (Strategies 5–8), and Making Other Modifications (Strategies 9–11). This taxonomy was adapted from Na and Nhat Chi Mai (2017), Yahia and Egbert (2023), and Bhagat and Hovy (2013).

For the first type, Changing Words, Strategy 1 actually consists of two sub-strategies: (a) change to synonym and (b) change word form, as words could be changed using either strategy. Although grouped together due to the potential interchangeability of these strategies, the paraphrased text produced by the student was analyzed to determine which of the two strategies was employed. Furthermore, words that belonged to Strategy 1 but could also fall into another type, such as the case of

examines, which also belongs to Strategy 2 (attribution), were assigned to the other strategy being measured. Thus, with the exception of Strategy 1, words could belong to only one strategy.

The total number of possible instances of each strategy employed by a student was quantified by counting their occurrences. Words belonging to Strategy 1 could be assessed on an individual word-by-word basis, and words in Strategies 2–4 could be assessed individually or in word groups. There were 52 words that could have synonyms found for them or a word form changed in the pretest and 61 in the posttest; three attribution signals (Strategy 2) consisting of nine words that could be changed in both tests; two percentages and numbers that could be changed (Strategy 3) consisting of two words in both tests; and five basic terms/proper nouns (Strategy 4) consisting of nine words that should not be changed in both tests. Articles (a/an/the), two-letter prepositions (at/in/of/to), and the conjunction *and* were not included in any group, although they might also be changed. These appeared 28 times in both tests. This accounts for the total of 100 words in the pretest and 109 words in the posttest. See Table 1 for details.

For the second type, Reordering Words, these could all belong to more than one strategy, as when paraphrasing, a single sentence can be changed in terms of structure (Strategy 5), clauses (Strategy 6), lists (Strategy 7), and words reordered within lists (Strategy 8). For example, the second sentence of both tests can have their sentence structures changed from active to passive, and they contain lists that can be reordered. Unlike with Changing Words, the occurrence of such possibilities was not counted beforehand, as the possible permutations are manifold. However, the actual changes made by the students could be parsed, quantified, and assessed in the two tests and compared. See Table 2 for details.

For the third type, Making Other Modifications, whether an ITC was added by the students (Strategy 9), the number and length of strings of four words and over retained (Strategy 10), and any other significant types of changes made, such as adding text by conveying the same meaning in their own words, which was also given instruction on (Strategy 11), were similarly assessed. See Table 2 for details.

The changes made were compared to the original, assessed, and rated as either *acceptable* or *unacceptable*, employing a similar juxtaposed assessment approach used by Yahia and Egbert (2023). The frequency of acceptable changes for each strategy was counted by the researcher, and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the pretest/posttest of each, employing the paired *t*-test and standard deviation of overall mean scores to determine which paraphrasing strategies had been more frequently employed after completion of the course compared to the beginning. See Tables 3 to 15 and Figures 1 and 2 in the results section for details.

Table 1

Assessment Taxonomy and Possible Changes for Pretest and Posttest for Changing Words

Changing words strategies	Total instances of possible changes and number of words (pretest)	Total instances of possible changes and number of words (posttest)
1. Were appropriate (a) synonyms of commonly used content words (nouns, verbs, adjective, adverbs) and function words (e.g., conjunctions) included or (b) were their word form or inflection changed along with any accompanying articles or prepositions, if any?	52 instances of individual words	61 instances of individual words
2. Were attribution signals changed?	3 instances, 9 words (This paper examines, The results show that, reported that)	3 instances, 9 words (This study investigates, The findings indicate that, stated that)
3. Were percentages and numbers changed?	2 instances, 2 words (2023, 65%)	2 instances, 2 words (2019, 89%)
4. Were basic terms/proper nouns that cannot be changed unchanged?	5 instances, 9 words* (Beijing, English x2, Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE), IDLE))	5 instances, 9 words (Bangkok, English x2, Learning Management System (LMS), LMS x2)

* Excluding preposition (of) in word count for this strategy.

Table 2

Assessment Taxonomy for Reordering Words and Making other Modifications

Reordering Words
5. Was sentence structure changed, e.g., from active to passive or vice versa or breaking up sentences such as breaking single sentences into two?
6. Were clauses reordered?
7. Were lists reordered?
8. Were words within clauses reordered?

Making Other Modifications
9. Was an ITC included following APA guidelines?
10. Were words kept from the original in strings of four words in a row or longer? (If so, were quotation marks and page numbers included?)
11. Were any other significant types of changes made, such as adding text by conveying the same meaning in their own words?

Interviews.

After the completion of the course, individual face-to-face interviews were conducted with two higher proficiency-level and two lower proficiency-level students, each lasting 20 minutes. The interview questions were adapted from previous studies by Na and Nhat Chi Mai (2017) and Yahia and Egbert (2023). While Na and Nhat Chi Mai conducted 15-to-20-minute interviews with three open-ended questions the day after paraphrasing activities, Yahia and Egbert conducted 30-minute interviews with 11 out of 12 participants based on 12 open-ended questions over three days following the posttest. In this study, six questions were asked, building upon those of Na and Nhat Chi Mai while omitting those not pertinent to this research from Yahia and Egbert. To aid recall, students were shown their questionnaire responses and both tests, similar to the approach used by Yahia and Egbert. Unfortunately, due to students' heavy commitments and tight schedules, the majority were unavailable for interviews within a similar timeframe. However, four students were available for interview, and all four interviews took place on the day following the completion of the posttest.

Results

Questionnaire Survey

The questionnaire taken at the start of the course revealed that all 12 participants were Chinese nationals (100%) and spoke Chinese as their first language (100%). While 11 were female (91.67%), 1 was male (8.33%). They were aged between 22 and 45 years old, with an average age of 30 years. Regarding having taken an IELTS or TOEFL test, eight said they had never done either test (66.67%), while four had taken IELTS (33.33%), two with a score of 5.5 and two with a score of 6.5, placing them in the modest and competent user bands, respectively. Asked about their years of studying English, their responses ranged from 4 to 18 years, with an average of 11.5 years. Regarding confidence paraphrasing in English, nine students said they were not confident (75.00%), while two said they were confident with provisos of not in academic contexts and needing more practice (16.67%). Only one student considered themselves confident (8.33%). Asked if they had previously studied paraphrasing, six said they had not (50.00%), with the remainder having studied it as undergraduates (50.00%). Of the six who had studied paraphrasing, three had studied it in English (25.00%), one in Chinese (8.33%), and two in both languages (16.67%). Of these, only three reported having studied steps they can follow when paraphrasing (25.00%), with one stating they did not understand the steps (8.33%), while the remaining two said they understood the overall procedure from reading and to changing and reordering words (16.67%).

Pretest and Posttest

The pretests and posttests were analyzed using the paired *t*-test to determine whether the students had significantly increased use of each of the strategies. The results are shown in Tables 3 to 14, while Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the data in terms of percentages and numbers.

Table 3

Comparison of Mean Score of Synonyms of Commonly Used Words (Strategy 1a)

Test	N	Mean	SD	Correlation	*t*	Sig.
Pretest	12	15.33	10.756	.617	-2.610	.033
Posttest	12	21.83	8.288			

Table 3 shows a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest, with a higher mean score in the posttest (Mean = 21.83, SD = 8.288) than the pretest (Mean = 15.33, SD = 10.756). Examples of synonyms used are: *correlation* replacing *relationship* in pretest and *connection* replacing *link* in the posttest.

Table 4

Comparison of Mean Score of Word Form or Inflection Changes (Strategy 1b)

Test	N	Mean	SD	Correlation	*t*	Sig.
Pretest	12	1.25	.965	.340	-4.549	.279
Posttest	12	4.00	2.216			

Table 4 shows a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest, with a higher mean score in the posttest (Mean = 4.00 SD = 2.216) than the pretest (Mean = 1.25, SD = .965). Examples of word form/inflection changes are: *communication* replacing *communicate* in pretest and *societal* replacing *social* in the posttest.

Table 5

Comparison of Mean Score of Attribution Signal Changes (Strategy 2)

Test	N	Mean	SD	Correlation	*t*	Sig.
Pretest	12	2.08	.793	.411	-2.548	.185
Posttest	12	2.67	.651			

Table 5 shows a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest, with a higher mean score in the posttest (Mean = 2.67, SD = .651) than the pretest (Mean = 2.08, SD = .793). Examples of attribution signal changes are: *explores* replacing *examines* in pretest and *researched* replacing *investigates* in the posttest.

Table 6

Comparison of Mean Score of Percentage and Number Changes (Strategy 3)

Test	N	Mean	SD	Correlation	t	Sig.
Pretest	12	.00	.000	.000	-1.915	.000
Posttest	12	.25	.452			

Table 6 shows a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest, with a higher mean score in the posttest (Mean = .25, SD = .452) than the pretest (Mean = .00, SD = .000). No percentage/number changes were made in the pretest and only three were made in the posttest, for example, *89%* was replaced by *nearly nine out of ten* and *nearly 90%.*

Table 7

Comparison of Mean Score of Basic Terms/Proper Nouns that Cannot be Changed Remaining Unchanged (Strategy 4)

Test	N	Mean	SD	Correlation	t	Sig.
Pretest	12	4.92	.289	-.091	.000	.779
Posttest	12	4.92	.289			

Table 7 shows no statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest, with a higher mean score in the posttest (Mean = 4.92, SD = .289) than the pretest (Mean = 4.92, SD = .289). These basic terms/proper nouns that cannot be changed remaining unchanged remained unchanged in both tests by all students.

Figure 1

Pretest and Posttest Results Compared in Terms of Total Average Percentages for Strategies 1–4
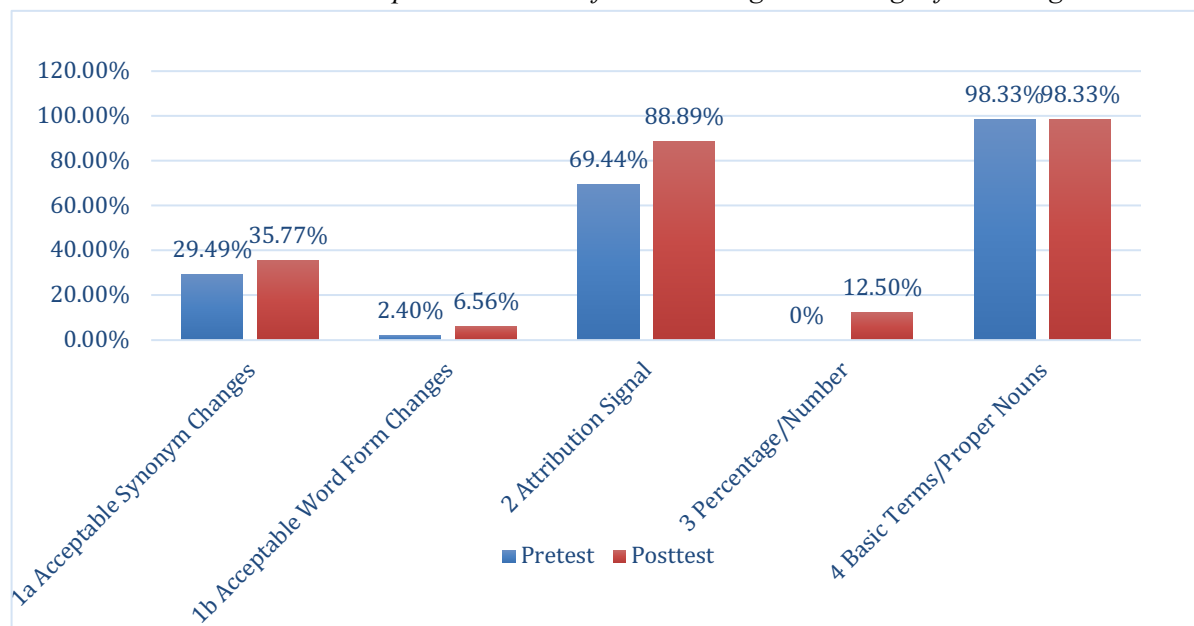
To help facilitate comparisons between the pretest and posttest results, Figure 1 compares Strategies 1–4 in terms of total average percentages. As can be seen, Strategy 1a increased 6.28%, Strategy 1b increased 4.16%, Strategy 2 increased 19.45%, Strategy 3 increased 12.50%, while Strategy 4 remained unchanged.

Table 8

Comparison of Mean Score of Sentence Structure Changes (Strategy 5)

Test	N	Mean	SD	Correlation	t	Sig.
Pretest	12	.17	.577	.165	-1.603	.607
Posttest	12	.58	.793			

Table 8 shows a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest, with a higher mean score in the posttest (Mean = .58, SD = .793) than the pretest (Mean = .17, SD = .577). An example of sentence structure changes is the second sentence of the posttest which was changed by a student into two sentences as follows: "The results revealed that a significant percentage of ESL students (approximately 89%) observed an enhancement in their English learning capabilities subsequent to their involvement in classroom sessions facilitated through the LMS. This improvement was particularly evident in areas such as grammar comprehension, motivation, and self-expression."

Table 9

Comparison of Mean Score of Clauses Reordered (Strategy 6)

Test	N	Mean	SD	Correlation	t	Sig.
Pretest	12	1.83	1.030	-2.00	2.171	.533
Posttest	12	.83	1.030			

Table 9 shows a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest, with a lower mean score in the posttest (Mean = .83, SD = 1.030) than the pretest (Mean = 1.83, SD = 1.030). In contrast to the other strategies for reordering words, the number of clauses reordered fell by 55.55% from 22 instances to 10 in total made by the 12 students. In the pretest one student moved "after participating in IDLE activities" which is at the very end of the text to after the reporting verb near the beginning of the sentence.

Table 10

Comparison of Mean Score of Lists Reordered (Strategy 7)

Test	N	Mean	SD	Correlation	t	Sig.
Pretest	12	.08	.289	.357	-2.345	.255
Posttest	12	.42	.515			

Table 10 shows a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest, with a higher mean score in the posttest (Mean = .42, SD = .515) than the pretest (Mean = .08, SD = .289). Only one student reordered lists in the pretest, while five did in the posttest. In the posttest, one student reordered the list from "grammar, motivation, and expressing themselves" to "expressing themselves, grammar, and motivation".

Table 11

Comparison of Mean Score of Words within Clauses Reordered (Strategy 8)

Test	N	Mean	SD	Correlation	*t*	Sig.
Pretest	12	.33	.492	.250	-2.966	.433
Posttest	12	1.00	.739			

Table 11 shows a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest, with a higher mean score in the posttest (Mean = 1.00, SD = .739) than the pretest (Mean = .33, SD = .492). The number of those who reordered words within clauses tripled from four to 12 students. In the posttest students changed *classmates and teachers* to *teachers and classmates*; *ability to learn English* to *English learning abilities*; and *social issues* to *problems of society*.

Table 12

Comparison of Mean Score of ITC Included Following APA Guidelines (Strategy 9)

Test	N	Mean	SD	Correlation	*t*	Sig.
Pretest	12	.08	.289	.135	-5.745	.676
Posttest	12	.83	.389			

Table 12 shows a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest, with a higher mean score in the posttest (Mean = .83, SD = .389) than the pretest (Mean = .08, SD = .289). While only one student included an ITC in the pretest, this number rose dramatically to 10 in the posttest. In the posttest, six students actually included two correct ITCs, one at the beginning, "Smith and Moss (2019)" and at the end "(Smith & Moss, 2019)." This demonstrates their understanding of both parenthetical and non-parenthetical ITCs usage.

Table 13

Comparison of Mean Score of Words Kept from the Original in Strings of Four Words in a Row or Longer (Strategy 10)

Test	N	Mean	SD	Correlation	*t*	Sig.
Pretest	12	33.67	19.570	.743	5.212	.006
Posttest	12	13.67	12.317			

Table 13 shows a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest, with a lower mean score in the posttest (Mean = 13.67, SD = 12.317) than the pretest (Mean = 33.67, SD = 19.570). The number of words kept in strings of four words in a row or longer dropped dramatically by nearly 60%. However, no quotation marks or page numbers were included by any student in either test. The most common string retained in the pretest by students (n = 9) was "at a university in Bangkok, Thailand." Likewise, the most common string retained in the posttest (n = 10) was "at a university in Beijing, China."

Table 14

Comparison of Mean Score of Other Types of Changes (Strategy 11)

Test	N	Mean	SD	Correlation	t	Sig.
Pretest	12	.92	1.240	.150	-1.269	.643
Posttest	12	1.83	2.368			

Figure 2

Pretest and Posttest Results Compared in Total Numbers for Strategies 5–11
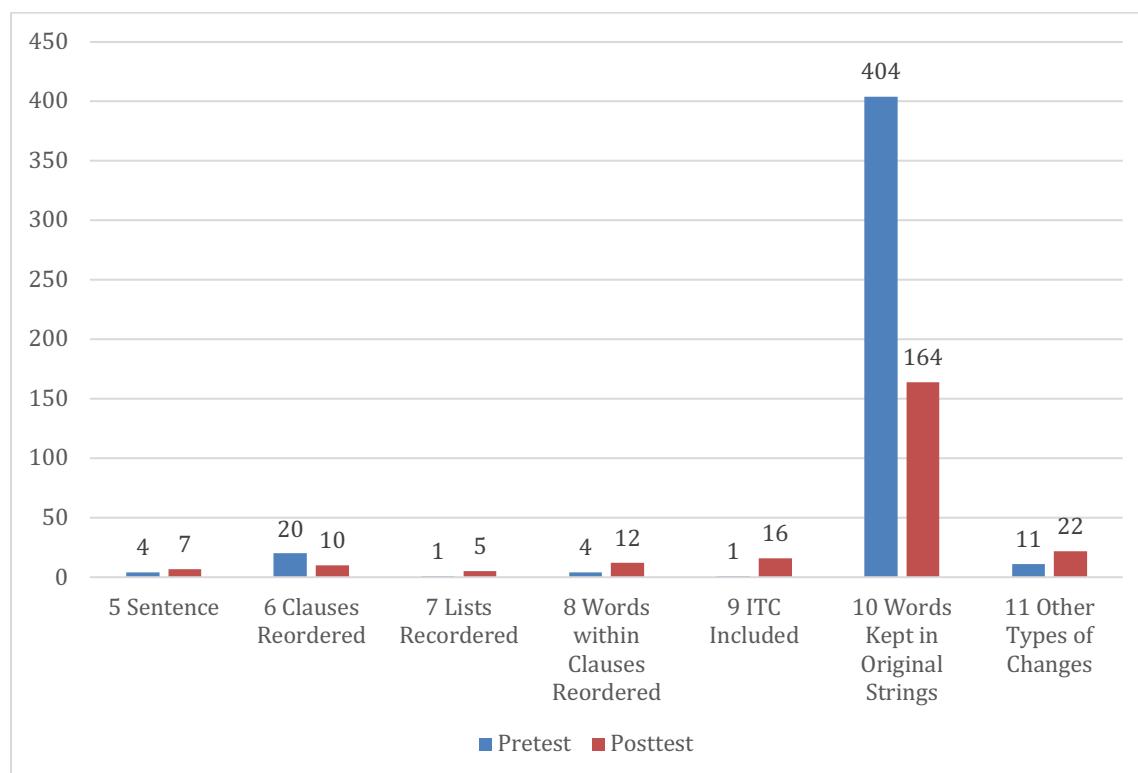

Table 14 shows a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest, with a higher mean score in the posttest (Mean = 1.83, SD = 2.368) than the pretest (Mean = .92, SD = 1.240). While there were only 11 instances of students making other types of changes in the pretest, this number

doubled to 22 instances by the students in the posttest. Examples of changes made in the pretest were insertion of phrases that add detail such as "**a majority, comprising** 65%" before the percentage (65%) and "despite these positive outcomes" before describing the negative contrast in the third sentence. In the posttest, a student inserted individual words such as "**structured** classroom **environment**" to add detail to the noun (classroom).

To help facilitate comparisons between the pretest and posttest results, Figure 2 compares Strategies 5–11 in terms of total numbers. These numbers can be extrapolated as percentages as follows: Strategy 5 increased 75%, Strategy 6 decreased 50%, Strategy 7 increased 500%, Strategy 8 increased 300%, Strategy 9 increased 1,600%, Strategy 10 decreased 59.60%, and Strategy 11 increased 200%.

Student Interviews

Although it would be preferable to interview all 12 students, only four were interviewed due to the unavailability of students. However, to attempt to capture the broadest possible view from the least number of students, the two highest scoring students (S2 and S4) and the two lowest scoring students (S7 and S12) were interviewed.

Perceptions toward the importance of paraphrasing.

Students universally acknowledged the significance of paraphrasing in academic endeavors. As expressed by one participant (S2), paraphrasing is deemed essential for academic integrity, serving as a means to avoid plagiarism. Another student (S7) underscored the role of paraphrasing in vocabulary enrichment and sentence structure analysis. Another student (S4) noted that paraphrasing guidelines encouraged them to express the meaning of the text in their own words. These sentiments collectively underscore the awareness among students regarding the importance of paraphrasing as an integral aspect of academic writing.

Difficulties encountered when paraphrasing.

Despite recognizing its importance, students articulated various challenges in effectively paraphrasing and acknowledged the difficulty of the complex task. Synonym identification emerges as a common obstacle, with students lamenting the difficulty of finding suitable alternatives (S2, S7). Additionally, linguistic limitations pose significant hurdles, as evidenced by struggles with grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure (S4, S12). The process of reordering words and clauses presents further complexities, particularly when attempting to convey meaning accurately (S7).

Instruction and guideline improvement.

Feedback on instructional resources and guidelines was predominantly positive, with students acknowledging their utility in scaffolding the paraphrasing process. Participants expressed newfound clarity regarding in-text citations and reporting verbs, attributing their improved understanding to the

structured guidelines (S2). However, suggestions for enhancement include the incorporation of more exercises to address challenges with longer sentences and complex vocabulary (S4, S7). Furthermore, participants advocated for additional practice in changing sentence structure to mitigate misunderstandings and misuses of words (S12).

Discussion and Conclusion

This study aims to investigate the English paraphrasing strategies employed by graduate students both before and after completing an academic writing class. Additionally, it seeks to explore students' perceptions of paraphrasing to assess the effectiveness of explicitly taught paraphrasing strategies and enhance the guidelines for teaching them.

In relation to the results obtained from the survey questionnaire administered at the commencement of the course, it was discovered that all the students were Chinese nationals and lacked confidence in their paraphrasing abilities. This finding aligns with the observations of Rinnert and Kobayashi (2005) and Shi (2006), who noted that Chinese students, along with those from Korea and Japan, receive minimal to no instruction on paraphrasing and citing. In the study conducted by Yahia and Egbert (2023), the participants, although non-native English speakers hailing from various nationalities with an average of approximately 10 years of studying English, reported having either very limited or no instruction on paraphrasing. Despite all the students in the current study being Chinese, they shared a similar average duration of 11.5 years of studying English and had, likewise, received little to no instruction on paraphrasing.

The survey results suggest that the students in this study, all of whom are from China, share a similar situation with those examined by Yahia and Egbert (2023) as well as found in other studies of EFL students (Alaofi, 2020; Liao & Tseng, 2010; Toba et al., 2019), in that they have received little previous instruction on paraphrasing. However, insights gained from interviews conducted at the end of the course reveal that these students not only recognized the importance of paraphrasing but also demonstrated an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses in implementing paraphrasing strategies. Moreover, they derived tangible benefits from the explicit instruction provided. Once again, these findings align with those of Yahia and Egbert (2023), as interviewees in both studies made similar remarks regarding their perceptions, difficulties, and the advantages gained from following the guidelines. Additionally, Choy and Lee (2012) interviewed graduate students about their paraphrasing skills and the effectiveness of paraphrasing instruction. The responses of students in their study suggest that while paraphrasing skills are helpful, they are also challenging to learn, and students feel they need more practice to develop them. Interestingly, a significant proportion of students (approximately a third of the 22 students in their study) did not find paraphrasing skills useful, as they believed their writing skills had not improved. In this Malaysian study, students found vocabulary substitution particularly challenging due to limited vocabulary. Once again, the results are overall consistent.

In analyzing the test results, it becomes evident that explicit instruction plays a crucial role in raising students' awareness and enhancing their proficiency in specific strategies. As observed by Yahia and Egbert (2023), students exhibited improvements in employing synonyms and altering sentence structures. Notably, in the current study there was a marked enhancement in their ability to avoid unchanged strings of words while citing the original source. Furthermore, students consistently used the same technical terms in both the pretest and posttest assessments. These outcomes align with previous research, particularly the work of Yahia and Egbert (2023), who investigated students under exam-like conditions using pen and paper in a classroom setting.

The similarity in results between the current study and the aforementioned research can be attributed to various factors. One plausible explanation is the limited time available for students to draft the passages multiple times, given that the task was due the following day. It is worth noting that classes typically meet only once per week, and the outcome might have been different if students had a week instead of a day to complete the task.

In greater detail, it can be observed that, after the course, students demonstrated a notable increase in the frequency of employing various paraphrasing strategies compared to the beginning. Specifically, there was a more frequent use of strategies such as changing synonyms, modifying attribution signals, altering sentence structures, reordering words within clauses, and making other nuanced modifications. Students exhibited marked improvement in areas such as changing word form or inflection, reordering lists, including ITCs, and avoiding the retention of words in strings of four words or longer. However, there were areas where students did not show improvement, such as changing percentages and numbers, and there was no observable change in the usage of basic terms/proper nouns. Students exhibited a decline in their ability to reorder clauses.

Although these results are positive, when considering the posttest on its own, the findings can be divided into three groups:

Very satisfactory: changing attribution signals, inclusion of ITCs, and usage of basic terms/proper nouns.

Moderately satisfactory: changing synonyms, changing word form/inflection reordering lists, and not keeping words in strings of four words or longer.

Very unsatisfactory: changing percentages and numbers, changing sentence structures, reordering clauses, reordering words within clauses, and making other modifications.

Based on these results, the strategies found to be very unsatisfactory need the most increase in instructional emphasis in future courses, the moderately successful strategies need moderately more emphasis, and the very satisfactory strategies need no further emphasis.

The insights gained from interviews align with the test results, indicating that students encountered significant challenges, particularly in reordering words (Strategies 5–8) such as changing sentence structures and reordering words. This finding is consistent with Na and Nhat Chi Mai (2017), who observed that students rarely changed sentence structures. There was also, to a lesser extent,

difficulty noted in changing words (Strategies 1–4). This finding mirrors the observations of Yahia and Egbert (2023), where participants expressed that they "perceived vocabulary selection and correct grammar usage as the most difficult challenges they faced" (p. 328) and encountered "particular problems with changing sentence structure" (p. 329). However, these results are somewhat incongruent with those of Arifuddin (2021), who found that the participants in their study primarily relied on changing words using synonyms followed by changing word order in their paraphrases, which the researcher rated to be in the medium or unsatisfactory level of ability. Notably, both the current study and Yahia and Egbert (2023) report a similar ease for students in handling citations.

Similar to the approach taken by Yahia and Egbert (2023), the results obtained from both the tests and interviews in this study can serve as valuable input for the enhancement of paraphrasing guidelines. Specifically, to refine the paraphrasing guideline taught in this Academic and Research Writing course, it is recommended to incorporate more exercises focused on practicing the identification of synonyms and changing word forms. Additionally, targeted exercises addressing the handling of percentages and numbers would be beneficial. However, of greater importance is the need to emphasize the reordering of words in all categories, excluding reordering lists. Equally crucial is the recognition of the significance of students making other modifications, such as removing words and inserting phrases or individual words without altering the meaning (Strategy 11). In essence, students should receive more explicit instruction on paraphrasing in their own words, with the ultimate goal being proficiency in this skill. Therefore, it is imperative to introduce extra instruction and activities explicitly designed to develop this strategy.

Currently, the course allocates 4.5 hours explicitly to paraphrasing, with an additional hour dedicated to revision toward the course's conclusion, making it a total of 5.5 hours out of a 45-hour course. Recognizing the crucial nature of paraphrasing, it is proposed to allocate an extra hour by trimming some non-core topics. This additional time could be effectively utilized to more comprehensively develop the strategies as outlined earlier. Consequently, a total of 6.5 hours of specific instruction, coupled with clear guidelines, should be deemed adequate to sufficiently orient students in this task. This conclusion aligns with the findings of Yahia and Egbert (2023), whose study included 6.5 hours of explicit paraphrasing instruction, albeit the course duration in their study was 3 hours longer than the course in the current study.

In summary, this study has significant practical implications for the improvement of guidelines within the course, particularly in identifying specific strategies requiring focused development to enhance students' understanding. The insights garnered are also anticipated to benefit other educators developing their own writing courses that incorporate paraphrasing. The suggested guidelines should provide a clear description of each strategy accompanied by examples, followed by exercises tailored to practice each strategy. While strategies related to changing words remain important, it is evident that reordering words poses a more pronounced challenge for EFL students. Consequently, there is a recommendation to place greater emphasis on this aspect. Moreover, there is a need for increased

dedicated instruction and activities aimed at explicitly developing Strategy 11 to assist students in paraphrasing in their own words.

Limitations and for Future Studies

The classes in the specific course investigated in this study were conducted over a brief period of two weeks. This condensed timeframe may have impacted outcomes by limiting students' opportunities to develop the taught strategies during the short duration of the course. Furthermore, external factors such as the recent arrival of many students from China may have hindered the outcome, as they dealt with transitioning issues. However, overall, students performed well, and it is anticipated that they will be able to further develop the foundation laid during the course, particularly when writing their IS or Thesis. As noted in Yahia and Egbert (2023), the development of paraphrasing skills requires time. Therefore, future research might explore the long-term effects of explicit instruction by conducting studies once students have completed their IS or Thesis or after graduation, as was done by Arifuddin (2021). Furthermore, investigating the effectiveness of condensed courses compared to regular courses conducted over the usual length of a semester could be a valuable area of study.

Another limitation is associated with the small number of interviews conducted and the relatively short duration allocated for each interview. Echoing the recommendations of Yahia and Egbert (2023), it is advisable to conduct interviews with as many students as possible and allocate more time to each interview, thereby allowing for a more in-depth exploration of qualitative insights. Thus, future researchers should consider focusing more on the qualitative dimension.

The fact that all students in this class were Chinese may indicate a broader trend of Chinese students attending NIDA and other Thai universities. While this cultural aspect was not explored in the current research, it presents a promising area for future investigation. Future researchers could delve into the implications of cultural backgrounds on the classroom environment, sociocultural constraints, and other factors, offering valuable insights into effective teaching practices in culturally diverse educational settings.

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Appendix A

Pretest

Instructions: Paraphrase the following text by changing words, reordering words, and making other modifications. This is an open book test and you are allowed to use any resources such as online thesauruses available to you; however, please do this by yourself without any assistance from others. Please return it via Teams before class tomorrow. Include an in-text citation (name of author and year of publication) plus any reporting verbs (if required) following APA if you can.

The excerpt is from page 32 of: Johnson, P. J., & Reynolds, L. M. (2023). Online learning in English. *Journal of Digital Learning*, *5*(13), 55–67.

This paper examines the relationship between Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) through online activities and readiness to communicate in English of EFL learners studying at a university in

Beijing, China during 2023. The results show that 65% of EFL learners increased their confidence to communicate in English after participating in online activities, particularly in terms of self-confidence, motivation, and readiness. However, a significant number of the participants reported that they continued to experience language anxiety and a lack of confidence when communicating in social situations with colleagues and strangers compared to friends and family after participating in IDLE activities.

Posttest

Instructions: Paraphrase the following text by changing words, reordering words, and making other modifications. This is an open book test and you are allowed to use any resources such as online thesauruses available to you; however, please do this by yourself without any assistance from others. Please return it via Teams before noon tomorrow. Include an in-text citation (name of author and year of publication) plus any reporting verbs (if required) following APA if you can.

The excerpt is from page 211 of: Smith, M. H., & Moss, T. A. (2019). Learning English online. *Journal of Online Education*, *7*(8), 96–102.

This study investigates the link between the use of classroom Learning Management System (LMS) via classroom lessons and ability to learn English of ESL students studying at a university in Bangkok, Thailand during 2019. The findings indicate that 89% of ESL students increased their ability to learn English after participating in classroom lessons using the LMS, especially with regard to grammar, motivation, and expressing themselves. Nevertheless, a considerable number of the participants stated that they continued to encounter language difficulties and a lack of skill when discussing social issues with classmates and teachers in a formal in-class setting compared to outside the classroom after engaging in LMS classroom lessons.

Appendix B

The students were shown their answers to the questionnaire, their paraphrases, and instruction on paraphrasing in the textbook to help stimulate their responses. Follow-up questions varied according to their responses.

1. How important do you think paraphrasing is in academic writing?

2. What difficulties you face when paraphrasing?

3. What do you think about your paraphrases?

4. What difficulties did you face when paraphrasing these two passages?

5. Was the instruction on paraphrasing in the course clear?

6. How could instruction on paraphrasing be improved? Are any guidelines unclear?

Appendix C

Questionnaire Survey

1. What is your age?

2. What is your sex?

3. What is your nationality?

4. What is your native language?

5. What is your IELTS and/or TOEFL score?

6. How many years have you studied English?

7. Do you feel confident paraphrasing in English? Explain.

8. Have you previously studied paraphrasing? Explain.

9. If you have studied paraphrasing, did you study it in your native language, English, or both?

10. If you have studied paraphrasing, were you taught the steps you can follow?

About the Author

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