

Analysis of Thai Undergraduates Control of a Generic Structure in Discussion Essays

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This study analyzed a generic structure in 15 discussion essays written by 15 third year English majors in one public university in the northeast of Thailand. It aimed to find out the extent to which the students were aware of a generic structure typical of a discussion genre and were able to utilize it to construct their essays. Drawing on the works of Sydney genre theorists (e.g. Knapp, 1989; Knapp and Watkins, 1994), the analysis results revealed that most students had a good control of the generic structure because their essays exhibited all three major elements as expected of a discussion genre, namely Issue, Arguments for and against, and Recommendation. Nevertheless, a closer inspection showed that some essays were not as successful as the others. While most were able to write Issue and Recommendation well, their development of Arguments needs to be considerably improved. The study concluded that the students' ability to execute a generic structure typical of a genre and to develop effective arguments are crucially important for the quality and persuasiveness of a discussion essay.

Key Words: discussion essays, generic structure, issue, arguments, recommendation

Penelitian ini menganalisis struktur skematik 15 buah esai diskusi yang ditulis oleh 15 orang mahasiswa tahun ketiga dari Program Studi Bahasa Inggris di salah satu perguruan tinggi negeri di wilayah timur laut Thailand. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui sampai sejauh mana mahasiswa memahami struktur skematik yang sering dipakai dalam jenis teks diskusi dan mampu menggunakannya untuk menyusun esai mereka. Dengan berlandaskan pada karya-karya dari para ahli teori jenis-jenis teks Sydney (seperti Knapp, 1989; Knapp and Watkins, 1994), hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar mahasiswa memiliki penguasaan struktur skematik yang bagus karena esai mereka sudah menampilkan ketiga elemen penting yang

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diharapkan ada dalam sebuah esai diskusi yaitu Isu, Argumen Mendukung dan Menentang, dan Rekomendasi. Namun pemeriksaan lebih dekat menunjukkan bahwa beberapa esai tidak sebagus esai yang lainnya. Hal ini dikarenakan pengembangan Argumen dalam esai tersebut masih sangat perlu ditingkatkan, walaupun sebagian besar dari mereka sudah mampu menulis Isu dan Rekomendasi dengan baik. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa kemampuan mahasiswa untuk menghasilkan struktur skematik yang tepat dan mengembangkan argumen yang efektif sangatlah penting bagi kualitas dan daya persuasif sebuah esai diskusi.

INTRODUCTION

Writing has long been regarded as the most difficult skill to acquire by many Thai students because it requires a higher level of language proficiency than other skills. To be able to write effectively, one needs not only be knowledgeable of sentence structure and vocabulary, but also be proficient in other related skills. Some of these include generating ideas, organizing ideas, developing details, choosing correct words and structuring ideas in correct sentences, and maintaining paragraph unity)Laksmi, 2006(. Further, they need to have critical planning and revising skills)Padgate, 2008(. Despite years of learning English, Thai students' writing skill is very poor. One of the reasons is that most classrooms emphasize the teaching of grammar, vocabulary and reading. Further, tests are usually carried out in the form of objective-type. Typically, this concerns sentence completion, reordering sentences, reordering words and error correction. Consequently, students rarely have opportunities to practice writing, particularly for actual communicative purposes)Kongpetch, 2006; Wongsothorn, 1994(. Even though writing is taught in some schools, it focuses mainly on a sentence level, reinforcing grammatical use. Zamel)1985(expressed her concern that teachers tend to view themselves "as language teachers rather than writing teachers")as cited in Celce-Murcia & Olshatain, 2000, p.14(. Therefore, they put greater effort on their students' communication skill than writing skill. Consequently, their students are unable to produce a coherent, unified and logical text. Some may even be at a loss when they are asked to write an extended text due to their lack of experiences. Noom-ura)2013(reported that Thai secondary school teachers of English found teaching writing the most challenging for them. This was attributable to their own low level of English proficiency and their lack of strategies for teaching writing.

At a university level, as parts of course requirements, many students are expected to be able to write academically-oriented essays. Thus, academic writing skills are vitally important. Yet, many students struggle. Even though they have good command of English, they are not necessarily able to write well academically because academic writing differs significantly from general writing. For academic writing, the writers need to have special skills and knowledge. They need to be capable of analyzing and explaining a topic, forming an opinion, and then supporting it. Further, their text needs to conform to certain rules for format and language use that are different from other types of writing)Blanchard, 2013(. Additionally, they may have to integrate information gained from reading materials in their academic fields. However, second language writers tend of have difficulty interpreting reading materials

Campbell, 1998). Further, they may not be familiar with the conventional style of academic writing. These problems may be due to cultural differences between their first language (L1) and second language (L2) writing. Drawing on the study of Kaplan (1966), the paragraph development favored by Anglo-European speakers/writers is a linear development. In contrast, an indirect-turning movement is favored by speakers/writers of Oriental languages. Kaplan's study results drew criticisms for categorizing four different language families, including Chinese, Korean, Thai and Japanese in the same group. Nevertheless, they shed light on the significance of explicit teaching of writing conventions to students. Promwinai (2010, p. 4) asserted that...

To ensure communication success, when a student's first language (L1) has different writing conventions from those of the target language, knowledge of what is expected in a given writing task is essential.

Like other EFL students, the writing of Thai students is affected by their L1 transfer (Bennui, 2008; Pongpairoj, 2002; Noom-ura, 2013). Further, the educational context where they learn to write contributes considerably to their metaknowledge about writing (i.e. view of audience and goals of writing) as well as linguistic and textual knowledge, influencing the ways in which they process and produce writing (Chuenchaichon, 2014; Rinnet & Kobayashi, 2009). Kakandee and Kaur (2015) investigated the challenges in teaching an argumentative essay of two Thai lecturers in two public universities. The results supported the above statements in that, due to lack of exposure to an argumentative genre and insufficient writing practice in school, the students were unable to write argumentative texts successfully. Their texts did not contain a clear thesis statement. Nor did they include well organized ideas and credible evidence to support their point of view. The study results suggested that writing teachers need to keep themselves abreast of writing approaches so that they could systematically assist their students to become successful writers.

To improve the students' writing skill, a wide variety of areas of writing research had been conducted in the Thai EFL context. Some of which were L2 writing errors, writing assessment, writing feedback, and approaches to teaching writing (Chuenchaichon, 2014). Chuenchaichon (2014) pointed out that future researches which are likely to be carried out are online writing/new technology and writing, and genre-based writing instruction. This is to find ways to improve Thai EFL learners' writing abilities and support them to pursue success in their academic and professional endeavors. Genre-based instruction has played an important role in various contexts (e.g. schools, universities, workplaces, and international companies) and it concerns different types of writing (e.g. report, academic journals, and business correspondence). As each type of writing requires particular writing abilities, it is essential to assist Thai students to master these.

This present research aims to investigate Thai university students' control of a generic structure of a discussion genre. It focuses specifically on a discussion genre because the research into this in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, particularly in Thailand is still scarce. A literature review revealed that a small number of studies were carried out in EFL contexts; some of which were by Ting and Tee (2008), Srinon (2011), Ting and Chai (2013), Hasibuan (2015), and Nagao (2019), respectively. In fact, Ting and Chai (2013) pointed out that research concerning discussion texts does not gain as much attention as

argumentative)or persuasive(texts. Derewianka and Jones)2016(explained that although the social purpose of discussion and argumentative is similar, that is, they both aim to argue a case, discuss an issue or challenge a position, their generic structure differs. While a discussion puts emphasis on both sides of the issue)pros and cons(, an argumentative essay focuses only on one side)either pros and cons()Knapp and Watkins, 1994(. In attempt to contribute to this under-researched area, this present research was carried out. The detailed analysis of the sample essays would reveal the extent to which the students are knowledgeable of a generic structure of a discussion genre and are able to execute it to construct their essays.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Discussion is a kind of factual genre which presents two or more different viewpoints or perspectives on an issue. Each viewpoint or perspective is then elaborated and supported with convincing, reliable and logical information. In the end, the writer makes his/her own judgment or recommendation (Derewianka & Jones, 2016; Thomson & Droga, 2012). Its generic structure consists of four parts: [I] Issue; [II] Arguments For; [III] Arguments Against; and [IV] Conclusion/Recommendation (Dirgeyasa, 2017; Knapp & Callaghan, 1989; Thomson & Droga, 2012). The position of arguments for and arguments against is by no means fixed. The writer can choose to start presenting the discussion either from arguments for or arguments against depending on his/her view about the issue. The details of the four sections of the generic structure and their functions (Dirgeyasa, 2017; Knapp & Callaghan, 1989; Thomson & Droga, 2012) are as follows.

The 'Issue' usually contains background information to the topic, introduces the issue to be discussed, and provides a preview signaling the arguments to be discussed in the following paragraphs. For 'Arguments for and against', the writer develops a series of arguments in the abstract to represent opposing positions. Each argument is presented in a separate paragraph consisting of a clearly stated topic sentence and supported with reliable details based on facts, statistics, examples, or expert opinions. The number of paragraphs of both arguments for and against varies depending on the writer's desire and the content. The final part is "Recommendation" where the writer summarizes the arguments presented in the previous paragraphs and, based on the weight of evidence, makes a recommendation that may be a suggestion or a demand for action

(Humphrey, Droga, & Feez, 2015; Thomson & Droga, 2012). The following essay exemplifies the generic structure of a discussion.

The Advantages and Disadvantages of Artificial Intelligence	
Issue Background information (1-2)	¹ Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the modern technology that has been used by humans as a facilitator to support their lives for decades. ² Nevertheless, there have been some arguments about adverse effects of the use of AI. ³ Artificial Intelligence

Preview (3)	has tremendous advantages, but it can bring about negative issues at the same time.
Arguments for 1 Topic sentence (4)	⁴ <u>To begin with the advantage of Artificial Intelligence, AI can be applied to support tourism.</u> ⁵ In Japan, foreign tourists are often amazed by AI robots when they visit the country. ⁶ There is a robot named RoBoHon created by The Sharp Corporation in collaboration with the tourism company JTB Corporation (Kyodo, 2018). ⁷ He can be a tour guide for tourists when they travel around Kyoto. ⁸ He can explain historical information about tourist attractions, and can communicate in Japanese, Chinese and English. ⁹ Similarly, a hotel named Henna uses AI robots as hotel staff and a receptionist to get attention from revelers. ¹⁰ Kikuchi (2017) stated that robotic staff of Henna hotel can speak Japanese, English, Chinese and Korean. ¹¹ They can do many tasks such as carrying customers' bags and cleaning rooms. ¹² Being impressed and excited by the amazing high-tech robots, revelers would want to visit Japan again.
Arguments for 2 Topic sentence (13)	¹³ <u>Another advantage is that Artificial Intelligence is highly beneficial to medical industry.</u> ¹⁴ Physicians can use AI technologies as assistants to diagnose their patients. ¹⁵ According to Rogers (2013), a machine called Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) can examine diseases such as bird flu and malaria. ¹⁶ Because the PCR machine has a lot of medical information and can detect virus that cause diseases, physicians do not have to spend much time on diagnosis. ¹⁷ The machine can help physicians analyze diseases accurately in a short time. ¹⁸ With the assistance of Artificial Intelligence, physicians can perform difficult tasks proficiently and successfully.
Arguments against 1 Topic sentence (19)	¹⁹ On the negative sides, <u>Artificial Intelligence can cause unemployment.</u> ²⁰ A study by Saranya and Phil (2018) revealed that employees are likely to lose their jobs since their companies may use AI instead of human labor in the future. ²¹ AI is developed to be able to work like humans and to do complex tasks. ²² One of the jobs that can be displaced with AI is the cashier. ²³ Some stores and supermarkets provide self-checkout machines for customers. ²⁴ One example of this is a convenience store named Amazon Go in the United States

	(Harris 2018). ²⁵ The store does not need a cashier. ²⁶ Customers have to check out and pay for their purchases through an application in smart phones.
Arguments against 2 Topic sentence (27)	²⁷ <u>Another disadvantage is that the development of Artificial Intelligence costs a lot of money.</u> ²⁸ AI is the technology that has to be upgraded all the time in order to be readily applicable and able to perform more complex tasks. ²⁹ Large IT companies have to spend a lot of money in AI experiment and improvement. ³⁰ AI adoption can go up at a cost of 100,000\$ if the development is a huge project and the AI is to perform very difficult tasks
Recommendation Summary (33) Conclusion (34)	³³ Artificial Intelligence has both positive and negative sides. ³⁴ To consider critically, if AI is properly used, it will give great benefits for users, and can reduce damaging effects on humans.

(Lunsin, 2019, pp. 73-74)

As previously mentioned, research on discussion writing has been carried out in some EFL contexts. In Malaysia, Ting and Tee (2008) analyzed 12 discussion assignments written by undergraduates in the Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESL) program in the University of Sarawak. Drawing on the frameworks of Feez (1998) and Derewianka (1990), the results showed that six assignments exhibited a good control of the generic structure, containing all required elements: Issue, arguments for and against, and an assessment of arguments. However, four other assignments were considered moderately successful, with one that was poorly organized and another that was too badly structured to be considered a discussion. The results also revealed that their arguments in various stages were not effectively developed. Rather than providing evidence in the form of statistics or quotes from authorities in the field to support the arguments, which is expected in academic writing, they relied greatly on their personal opinions. Consequently, the arguments were not convincing and persuasive. Ting and Chai (2013) evaluated 100 discussion texts of university students who enrolled in an English for Academic Purposes class. The results showed that about half of the students did not have a good control of generic structure of a discussion. One of the problems was that in the introductory paragraph they did not clearly identify the issue. As a result, the reader was uncertain what exactly would be discussed. Further, in a conclusion the students did not assess the issue based on foregoing arguments which was expected of a discussion. In the Indonesian context, Rizka, Suharni, and Yendra (2015) explored second grade students' problems in writing a generic structure of a discussion text. The generic structure taught encompassed: general issue, arguments for, arguments against, and recommendation. Of all 27 discussion essays, it was evident that 21 students had difficulties writing the issue. They did not clearly state the writer's position on the issue and provide a

preview, signaling both sides of the issue to be discussed in the next paragraphs. Further, students 20 and 22 could not effectively put forward their arguments 'for' and 'against' respectively. The problems were that they did not provide convincing details to support their viewpoints. As for Thai context, Srinon (2011) carried out a longitudinal study in a writing course to explore the writing development of six university students. The purpose was to find out whether, after the exposure to genre-based instruction for twelve weeks, the students were able to write a discussion which achieved its social purpose. The results revealed that almost all students (5 of 6) were able to write discussion texts effectively. The in-depth analyses of their final drafts showed that they were well-organized and persuasively coherent. Further, the drafts exhibited the stages typical of a discussion. In an introduction section, background, statement of the issue and preview were provided. In the body, arguments for and against were presented. Each argument contained a point and elaboration. In the final section, the arguments were concluded and the writer's recommendation was made. Drawing on the Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) genre-based approach, Nagao (2019) explored the changes in Japanese EFL learners' awareness of generic structure of a discussion genre. During a 15-week course, students were exposed to a generic structure comprising four paragraphs: [1] topic and issue, [2] arguments for (or against), [3] arguments against [or for] and [4] recommendation. The results showed that students with higher English proficiency had better genre awareness than those with lower English proficiency. Nevertheless, the latter group showed considerably better control of the generic structure in their post-writing texts.

To conclude, previous studies on EFL students' discussion writing ability indicated that many students struggled to write a successful discussion due to their limited control of the generic structure. Nevertheless, it was evident that, through systematic and explicit instruction, their writing skills could be enhanced. To date, research focusing on Thai university students' discussion writing ability has been scarce. This present study, which focuses specifically on the analysis of the students' control of the generic structure, attempts to increase the number of replicable studies towards a greater understanding of this problem.

METHODOLOGY

The discussion texts analyzed in this study were written by 15 English majors enrolled in an Academic Writing course in 2018 Academic Year at one public university in the northeast of Thailand. In the course, the students were required to learn to write three academic genres: exposition, discussion and summary and response. Each academic genre was covered in 15 hours, spread across five weeks. For a discussion genre, they were required to write a 250-300 words essay on the given topic "Should marijuana be legalized in Thailand?" which was chosen because at the time the Thai government was considering the legalization of marijuana.

During the course, the students were taught to write a discussion by the modified genre-based instruction. Originally, the Teaching-Learning Cycle (TLC) associated with the Systematic Functional Linguistic (SFL) Genre-based Approach comprises four stages, namely building up the field knowledge, modelling of text, joint-construction, and independent construction (Jones and Derewinaka, 2016). However, due to the time limitation of the course, the teaching and learning processes involved only two stages of the TLC : modelling of text and independent construction. In the modeling of text stage, the students were exposed to several discussion model texts. The purposes were to enable them to analyze and understand the social purpose, generic structure, and language features typical of a discussion essay. For the independent construction stage, the students were asked to write an essay on a given topic independently and at home. The reason for asking them to do the writing at home was to give them sufficient time to search information necessary for the topic and to review the generic structure. The guidelines for self-assessment (see Appendix 1) were provided so that the students could refer to them while editing and revising their own writing. They were also encouraged to ask their friends to help proofread their essays before submission.

Drawing on Knapp (1989), the obtained essays were firstly analyzed for the presence and absence of the following stages.

Issue ^ Argument (N) for and against (pros and cons) ^ Recommendation
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Note: The symbol ^ means that 'Issue' precedes 'Arguments' and followed by 'Recommendation'. The 'N' means that there can be more than one argument 'for' and 'against.'

Then, the detailed analysis of each stage was carried out to gain insight into the extent to which the students utilized a generic structure to construct their essays. To protect the students' identities, their essays were referred to by codes (i.e. S001 - S015).

RESULTS

Overview

Drawing on the results, it can be said that most (11 of 15) students had a good control of the generic structure because their essays exhibited all three major stages as expected of a discussion genre, namely Issue, Arguments for and against, and Recommendation. Nevertheless, a closer inspection revealed that some essays were considered more successful than the others. The extent to which the students have control of each of these elements will be further discussed respectively.

Issue

The "Issue", which is the first paragraph of the essay, gives general information about the topic and a preview of both sides of an issue. Also, it may state the writer's position on the issue indicating whether s/he is in favor or against it. Of all 15 essays, the "Issue" of 11 essays encompasses background information and a preview. Only 4 of the essays also include a sentence stating the writer's position on the issue whether s/he is in favor of it or against it. The excerpts below exemplify these.

Excerpt A:

[1] Marijuana is still illegal in Thailand because the Thai government is concerned that marijuana legalization might lead to negative effects (Somjittranukit, 2017). [2] Although marijuana is officially illegal in Thailand, several nations have embraced the use of marijuana. [3] For example, the United States and Canada have legalized marijuana for recreational and medical use (Robinson & Berke, 2018). [4] Nowadays, many Thai people mainly agree to legalize marijuana, while some disagree. [5] Although the prospect of legalizing marijuana in Thailand may bring negative effects, some studies show that they may have positive effects in Thailand.

As can be seen in Excerpt A, sentences [1 -3] provide background information to the topic that while marijuana is still illegal in Thailand, it has already been legalized in many countries including the United States and Canada. Sentences [4-5] serve as a preview, signaling the readers that the information in the argument paragraphs will present both sides of the issue of marijuana legalization in Thailand.

Excerpt B:

[1] Whether the Thai government should legalize Cannabis or marijuana is a seriously debated issue in Thailand. [2] People acknowledge that marijuana has both advantages and disadvantages. [3] While some people might think that using marijuana is harmful for their health, ***I argue*** that marijuana has more benefits and should be legalized in Thailand.

Excerpt C:

[1] In Thailand, as marijuana is considered as a kind of addictive substance, there has been a heated debate over whether it should be legalized. [2] It is generally acknowledged that it can cause addiction, memory loss, and poor decision making. [3] While many people think marijuana is harmful to health, ***I argue*** that marijuana can be used to solve a lot of health problems as discussed below.

Unlike Excerpt A, Excerpts B and C contain background information, a preview, and a statement of position on the issue. For Excerpt B, sentences [1-2] provide background information to the topic that cannabis legalization is still a controversial issue in Thailand. Sentence [3] gives a preview informing the readers that the essay will focus on both negative

and positive effects of cannabis. Also, it indicates the writer's position on the issue in favor of cannabis legalization because its health benefits outweigh its harmful effects. Similarly, Excerpt C begins with background information (sentences 1-2) and is followed by a preview as well as the writer's position on the issue (sentence 3) supporting marijuana legalization owing to its health benefits. The readers of both excerpts glean what they expect reading the following paragraphs.

Arguments for and Against

According to the results, this stage appears to be the most challenging to the students. Generally, they could write a topic sentence of each argument well clearly stating the beginning of a paragraph including a controlling idea. However, their ability to develop arguments differed considerably. Many students (11 of 15) managed to provide relevant supporting details based on sources or previous studies to validate their points and justify their claims in all paragraphs. Yet, their details appeared to be simply a series of related information. Consequently, their arguments lacked criticality and expression of their own voice. The following excerpt illustrates this.

Excerpt D:

[1] **Marijuana is used in the medical industry.** According to a research published by the Faculty of Pharmacy, Rangsit University (2018), spray extracted from marijuana can reduce pain from cancer. [2] Researchers of Rangsit University (2018) found that Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) extracted from marijuana has the effect of reducing growth and helping to kill cancer cells, reducing nausea and vomiting, and allergic reactions to chemotherapy. [3] Sayngam (2018) recommended to use it sprayed in the mouth because the mouth is fragile and it will be absorbed well when the drug is absorbed into the body and works with the body like other drugs.

As Excerpt D shows, the topic sentence is clearly stated that is "marijuana is used in the medical industry". To justify this, the writer referred to the study results by Rangsit University (2018) which found that a marijuana extract has benefits like helping to killing cancer cells and improving chemotherapy. In addition, Sayngam (2018) recommended how THC should be used so that it works effectively. While all details are relevant to the topic sentence, there is no indication of the writer's critical evaluation of the sources or her expression of position on them. Like other students, the writer of this excerpt could not yet use information from a literature source for a purpose e.g. to support claims and to indicate her own position.

Further, a smaller number of students (4 of 15) had difficulties developing their arguments. The major problem was that the supporting details of some arguments were misleading. This was probably because of their low English proficiency and their limited knowledge of the

topic. The excerpts below exemplify this. While excerpts E and F illustrate well developed arguments, excerpts G and H display the problematic ones.

Excerpt E:

[1] To begin with the advantage of using extracts from marijuana is that it will inhibit cancer. [2] According to Hickok (2018), Cannabidiol (CBD) is a naturally occurring cannabinoid constituent of marijuana. [3] The CBD chemicals cannot stop cancer cells immediately, but these chemicals can inhibit cancer cells from spreading to the other organs. [4] For example, marijuana substances can cure locally advanced cancer. [5] The researcher found that CBD may control a gene called Id-1 which affects cancer cells and will reduce their cancer (McAllister, Christian, Horowitz, and Desprez, 2007). [6] It is surprising that marijuana can treat our health problems.

Excerpt F:

[1] Another disadvantage is the effect on the heart. [2] A study by Fogoros (2018) found that the heart of people who smoke cannabis beats faster than normally, between 20-50 times per minute. [3] If the smoker mixes cannabis with another drug it will increase the heart beat more than smoking only cannabis. [4] Because of lower blood pressure and faster heart rate, people who smoke cannabis may have a heart attack.

As evident in excerpts E and F, each argument began with a topic sentence which contained both a topic and a controlling idea. These make the paragraphs purposeful, enabling the readers to know exactly what the paragraph is mainly about. The table below illustrates these.

Excerpt	Topic Sentence	Topic	Controlling Idea
G	To begin with the advantage of using extracts from marijuana is that it will inhibit cancer .	extracts from marijuana	inhibit cancer
H	Another disadvantage is the effect on the heart .	disadvantage (of cannabis)	the effect on the heart

Each paragraph must also include supporting details to clarify and strengthen the writer’s proposal indicated in the topic sentence. Without them, the readers will not be able to fully understand the topic since “supporting details bring ideas to life” (Blanchard, 2013, p. 102). In Excerpt E, the supporting details (sentences 2 – 6) explain what Cannabidiol (CBD) is, what its medicinal properties are, and how it works to stop the spreading of cancer. For Excerpt F, the supporting details concerned the effects of cannabis consumption on the heart. To clarify her point, the writer referred to the statistics that the normal heartbeat rate is between 20-50 times per minute. She further explained that if cannabis is mixed with another drug, the smoker’s heart rate will be faster. Consequently, s/he is at risk of suffering from

lower blood pressure and a heart attack. It is evident that the supporting details in these excerpts are based on facts and are from different sources which is expected of academic writing.

Compared to Excerpts E and F, Excerpts G and H were not as successful because the contents of supporting details were misleading. Hence, they did not logically clarify or support the topic sentence.

Excerpt G:

[1] **It is generally acknowledged that smoking marijuana regularly can cause serious effects on a user's lungs.** [2] Like cigarette smoke, smoking marijuana also cause damage to your lungs. [3] The Journal of the American Medical Association (2012) found a slight increase in occasional marijuana smokers' lung function. [4] That increase may be indicative of marijuana smokers taking deep breaths and holding the smoke in. [5] Thus, smoking marijuana is just like smoking something harmful into your body.

Excerpt H:

[1] **Moreover, marijuana can reduce stress in those who exercise.** [2] Some exercises cause stress such as yoga, so you need to use marijuana to help relax with yoga players (Mammoser, 2018). [3] Yoga is an activity that cause stress. [4] Therefore, when a trainer brings marijuana to the gym, it makes people feel more relaxed in yoga....

Similar to Excerpts E and F, Excerpts G and H began with a clearly stated topic sentence, containing both the topic and the controlling idea as shown in the table below.

Except	Topic Sentence	Topic	Controlling Idea
G	It is generally acknowledged that smoking marijuana regularly can cause serious effects on a user's lungs.	marijuana smoking	serious effects on a user's lungs
H	Moreover, marijuana can reduce stress in those who exercise	marijuana	reduce stress in those who exercise

As seen in Excerpt G, the supporting details (sentences 2 -5) were not logically linked to the topic sentence stating that "smoking marijuana regularly can cause serious effects on a user's lung". The information in sentence 2 emphasizes that, like cigarette smoking, marijuana smoking causes damage to smokers' lungs. However, information in sentences 3-4 appears to contradict that in sentences 1-2. The writer claims that "marijuana smoking resulted in a slight increase in occasional marijuana smokers' lung function and this may be indicative of marijuana smokers taking deep breaths and holding the smoke in". The readers are left wondering why "a slight increase in occasional marijuana smokers' lung function" is harmful

(sentence 3). The explanation in the following sentence (sentence 4) further confuses the readers why the smokers' taking deep breaths and holding the smoke in would negatively affect their lungs.

In Excerpt H, the topic sentence states that "marijuana can reduce stress in those who exercise." It is expected that the supporting details would explain the medicinal properties of marijuana which help reduce stress of athletes or people who exercise. However, from sentences 2-4 the writer mentions specifically about yoga that it is an activity which causes stress. But if a trainer brings marijuana to the gym, they will feel more relaxed. Unfortunately, this information contradicts that in the cited article "Here's why working out while high is probably a bad idea" by Mammoser (2018). According to the article, there are some anecdotal evidences that some amateur or professional athletes who use marijuana prior to exercise feel more enjoyment or can push through the pain because of the high. Nevertheless, Mammoser (2018) acknowledged that there had not been any scientific studies to back up those claims. This indicates that the student writer did not thoroughly understand the cited source resulting in integrating contradictory information and consequently, developing unconvincing argument.

Recommendation

This final part of the essay aims to summarize the arguments and give a recommendation. Also, it may state or restate the writer's position on the issue so that the readers are explicitly and clearly informed of the writer's view on the issue.

Drawing on the results, all students could successfully write this part. They summed up the arguments and gave a suggestion or a recommendation. More than half of the students (9 of 15) also firmly stated or restated their position on the issue. Thus, the readers have "a definite idea or impression about the topic" (Blanchard, 2013, 163). The following excerpts exemplify these.

Excerpt I:

Introduction:

Over the past three years, many countries around the world are pushing marijuana to be legalized. We cannot deny that if marijuana, a narcotic, is to be legal, people will use more marijuana. Many people think that marijuana is harmful to health, but some believe that there are several advantages and they use marijuana for many purposes. Marijuana has both advantages and disadvantages. ...

Conclusion:

In conclusion, marijuana use has advantages for health and generates a lot of income. However, too much marijuana use has disadvantages which affect health and increase traffic accidents. So, people would need to think carefully how much they should use marijuana. [S010]

Excerpt J:

Introduction:

It is well known that cannabis is one drug that causes many bad effects to users, especially health problems. However, some people argue that cannabis has many advantages in medicine. So, if cannabis has many advantages why does the government in many countries not legalize it? The discussion below will show about the advantages and disadvantages of cannabis and if it should be legalized or not. ...

Conclusion:

In summary, cannabis has both advantages and disadvantages on health. It would be medicine if used properly and it would be dangerous if used in the wrong ways. However, cannabis is useful in the treatment of diseases and it should be legalized because it can heal many illnesses. But the government must set the cannabis law seriously.

Excerpt K:

Introduction:

Whether the Thai government should legalize cannabis or marijuana is a seriously debated issue in Thailand. People acknowledge that marijuana has both advantages and disadvantages. While some people might think that using marijuana is harmful for their health, ***I argue*** that marijuana has more benefits and ***should be*** legalized in Thailand. ...

Conclusion:

In conclusion, some people claim that marijuana can reduce brain ability and make people addicted. However, it leads to more medical benefits in preventing cancers and soothing tremors of Parkinson's disease sufferers. Therefore, if marijuana is legalized in Thailand, it would decrease a number of chronic diseases. So, ***we should*** legalize marijuana in Thailand to solve certain health problems.

As can be seen in the recommendation of Excerpt I, the writer concluded the major issues indicated in the introduction, which were further discussed in the body paragraphs. Then in the last sentence she gave a suggestion that *"So people would need to think carefully how much they should use marijuana"*. Although her essay addressed both advantages and disadvantages of marijuana, she did not clearly state in the Issue and Recommendation which side of the issue she endorsed. Based on the given evidences, the readers would need to make their own decision whether marijuana should be legalized and how much it should be used.

Similar to Excerpt I, the writer of Excerpt J did not clearly state her position on the issue in the introduction. The preview sentence "*The discussion below will show about the advantages and disadvantages of cannabis and if it should be legalized or not*" only informed the readers that the essay concerns both sides of cannabis. As for the writer's position on the issue, the readers found this out in the Recommendation where she firmly stated that "*we should legalize marijuana in Thailand to solve certain health problems*". The use of modality "should" indicates the writer's obvious support of cannabis legalization.

Unlike Excerpts I and J, the writer of Excerpt K clearly indicated her position on the issue in both the Issue and then Recommendation. In the Issue, she stated "*I argue that marijuana has more benefits and should be legalized in Thailand*". Then she restated her position in the Recommendation that "*So, we should legalize marijuana in Thailand to solve certain health problems*". It is obvious to the readers that she supported the legalization of marijuana. Her strong viewpoint toward the issue was expressed through a reporting verb "*argue*" and a modality "*should*".

The assertion of the writer's position indicates that they preferred to make their personal judgment explicitly known. The readers, thus, are clearly informed of their preferred side. In fact, Knapp and Watkins (1994, p.123) maintained that a discussion is not simply about a commentary on differing viewpoints. The writers need to thoroughly consider both sides of the issue and, based on the available evidence, arrive at a conclusion.

DISCUSSION

It appeared that most students (11 of 15) were aware of the characteristic textual structure of a discussion. Their essays exhibited the three major stages of a discussion namely Issue, Arguments for and against, and Recommendation. The results of this present study contradicted the results of previous studies; some of which (e.g. Ting, Campbell, Law & Hong, 2013; Ting & Tee, 2009) found that that student writers had difficulty with introduction and conclusion. For the introduction, they did not clearly state the issue. Therefore, it was not purposeful and affected the writing of their conclusion in that they could not evaluate the issue based on preceding arguments. The cause of this problem was the emphasis on the teaching of tripartite structure of general discursive essays (introduction-body-conclusion) which does not take into consideration the social purpose of the text (Ting et al., 2013; Ting & Tee, 2009, as cited in Ting & Chai, 2013). However, it is evident that the students in this present study could write both parts (Issue and Recommendation) relatively well although there were some discrepancies as discussed above.

Thep-Ackraraphong (2006, p. 95) observed that, owing to their L1 discourse interference, Asian writers undergo a rhetorical problem because they tend to write a general topic which is then "loosely" supported. Further, the real purpose does not emerge until at the end of the

paragraph. This feature contrasts significantly from the conventional pattern expected by English speaking readers. To them, the topic sentence must contain a clearly stated controlling idea and all of the supporting sentences must be coherently linked with the topic sentence. However, the results of this present study revealed that not all sample essays were affected by L1 discourse interference. As mentioned earlier, each argument began with a topic sentence and is followed by supporting details. It is acknowledged that although the supporting details of most students (11 of 15) were relevant, logical and coherent, they lacked critical evaluation as expected of academic writing. Further, the contents of some supporting details were contentious affecting reliability and credibility of the whole arguments. Nevertheless, it shows that they have an awareness of the required rhetorical structure of an academic text. Their problem lies in their comprehension of the contents which would enable them to develop logical and convincing arguments.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results, it can be concluded that the students would be able to write an essay which conforms to conventional rhetorical pattern if they are explicitly taught or adequately exposed to it. Ting and Chai (2013: 72) insisted that ...

Teaching students the conventional textual structure of common types of academic texts is a good starting point to help them master the conventions as well as understand how the textual structure enable the texts to achieve the intended purpose.

Blanchard (2013) asserted that academic writing requires both special skills and knowledge. It is essential for writers to be knowledgeable of characteristic rhetorical pattern and typical language features differing from other types of writing. To this end, the future academic writing course would need to take the following into account. Firstly, as genre is culture specific, it is essential for the students to have genre awareness. More specifically, the students need to be knowledgeable of the generic structure typical of the genre. Nevertheless, the students need to realize that the generic structure is not simply a template to be replicated. Rather, it is a means to an end. That is, it provides the students with a purposeful guideline to produce a text to achieve its social purpose. Secondly, the students' success in developing their arguments strongly correlates with their understanding of the sources of information relevant to the topic. Thus, the teacher would need to prepare and provide them with exercises or activities enabling them to have thorough understanding of related information. Effective and credible supporting details are not simply a series of ideas, but the critical interpretation and evaluation of facts, statistics, examples or expert opinions.

Although this current research is a small-scale, involving only 15 sample essays, it sheds more light on Thai undergraduates' control of a generic structure of a discussion genre. In future, it would be beneficial if researchers also explore other aspects of a discussion writing

like the students' control of language features typical of a discussion genre and their use of cohesive devices. The results would enable the teachers to be in better positions to help their students to write a quality and persuasive discussion essay.

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Appendix I
Discussion Self-Assessment Guidelines

Criteria	Your Assessment (Very good/ Good/ Fair)	Reasons
<p>1. Introduction</p> <p>1.1. It provides relevant and sufficient background information to the topic and features the following attention-getting introduction: (a) dramatic, interesting, or funny story (b) surprising statistics or facts (c) historical background.</p> <p>1.2. It includes a preview sentence (thesis statement) which (a) lists the subtopics (b) indicates the pattern of organization (c) reflects the writer's clear position.</p>		
<p>2. Arguments</p> <p>2.1. It features 3 arguments; each with a clear topic sentence.</p> <p>2.2. Each argument contains relevant and adequate supporting details, including facts, examples, statistics, research findings, and expert views to justify the writer's point.</p> <p>2.3. All arguments are logically linked and well balanced.</p>		
<p>3. Conclusion</p> <p>3.1. It signals the end of the essay (without new information).</p> <p>3.2. It summarizes the subtopics or paraphrases the thesis.</p> <p>3.3. It provides a final thought that indicates the writer's clear position.</p>		