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Taiwan Association of
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DPU International Conference on Business, Innovation, and Social Sciences 2023



Bangkok, Thailand | 25 - 26 May 2023

ICBISS
2023

DPU International Conference on Business Innovation and Social Sciences 2023

25-26 May 2023

Dhurakij Pundit University, Bangkok, Thailand



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PREFACE

Social sciences are business innovation to a certain extent, business innovation cannot start any activities without doing some research based on social sciences. They must discover a way to communicate in order to promote the value of their work, for instance, through conferences, scientific or specialized journals, and general or specific social networks. The entrepreneurs and the researchers are problem-solvers to innovate by developing creative solutions. Entrepreneurship and research are endless activities by means of digital platforms to face challenge in the post pandemic. Therefore, DPU ICBISS 2022 was a hybrid conference that was run fully on-site and fully virtually online using Zoom and Facebook.

The theme of this conference is ‘Business Innovation and Social Sciences,’ which consists of international and national sessions. Dhurakij Pundit University, Chinese Taipei Comparative Education Society, Taiwan Association of Business Schools are the conference organizers, and co-host with Chinese Teachers (Thailand) Association, Hainan Modern Education Research Institute in China, Eastern New Mexico University in the U.S.A, BinZhou Polytechnic, Hainan Vocational University of Science and Technology, Yunnan Normal University College of Arts and Sciences, Ningxia University, and Zhengzhou College of Finance and Economics, Yantai University, Harbin Engineering University, Weinan Normal University in China, National Taitung University, National Chung Cheng University, and National Ocean University in Taiwan, Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University, Mae Fah Luang University, Nakonsawan Rajabhat University, Chiangrai Rajabhat University in Thailand, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University and University of Newcastle in Australia.

This proceeding has 69 papers in the international sessions, 35 papers in the national sessions after peer-review that were presented in the DPU International Conference on Business Innovation and Social Sciences 2022, which was held from 25th to 27th May 2022 in Bangkok, Thailand. These papers cover the following areas, including but not limit to wellness, future workforce, Thai-China, China-ASEAN studies, business innovation, tourism, hospitality, aviation and services, information technology, marketing, business and management, innovative finance and accounting, innovative communication arts, public administration, economics, education and teaching innovation, and other social science topics.

We thank all the authors who submitted papers to this conference. We also very much appreciate the committee members and peer reviewers who are highly competence and enthusiastic, spending their time and suggestions during the preparation of this conference. We invited more than twenty professional reviewers to evaluate and select the submitted papers.

Thank you very much to all the people who have participated in this conference, especially to the invited speakers from the National Chi Nan University, Taiwan and University of Sunderland, School of Business and Management, United Kingdom. We also thank all the presenters and participants. Last but by not least, who contributed to this conference, we would like to thank our team for putting in much effort in formatting the manuscripts, removing the typos, and checking the references.

We hope this conference has benefited the academics, researchers, students, and practitioners generating new ideas for future research. We look forward to seeing you next year.

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Thai University Students' Problems in Writing Opinion Essays

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Abstract

Writing essays is one mode of writing tasks usually used as writing activities for EFL students due to its benefits to develop students' critical and logical ideas. To produce a good opinion essay relies on several elements, two of which are content development and organization. However, many EFL students still encounter problems to develop ideas and arrange their information whenever they write opinion essays. This study therefore aimed to investigate the types of content and organization problems that students encountered when writing opinion essays. Also when the given topics were different, the researchers wanted to find out whether the problems between the two were similar or different, and the reasons behind them. Two sets of 30 opinion essays—each set with a different topic—written by 30 Thai undergraduate students were collected and analysed with qualitative content analysis methods. The results show that opinion essay problems are different if the given topics are different. Students who were not familiar with the given topic had more problems in terms of content development such as problems in writing thesis statements. Meanwhile students seemed to have problems in arranging information when they had little or no experience in writing opinion essays; that is, students faced this kind of problem when writing the first topic more than the second.

Keywords: opinion essay, writing problems, content development, writing skill, essay organization

1. Introduction

1.1 Background, Review of Literature and Importance of the Problem

It is widely known that academic writing is importantly necessary for EFL students, especially those at the tertiary level. They are often required to take courses in academic writing while one of the writing tasks is usually writing essays. This may be because developing essay writing abilities can help students communicate better, get higher grades, and be a better professional (Okpe & Onjewu, 2017). To produce an essay, these students must go through a number of stages which are challenging and complex as one essay consists of several key elements. Oshima and Hogue (2006) pointed out that an essay is composed of one main topic with sub-topics discussed in several paragraphs. One essay should contain (1) an introduction paragraph consisting of general statements to the readers' attention and a thesis statement that states the main idea of the essay, (2) body paragraphs that discuss the main idea as each sub-topic is supported with additional details in each paragraph, and (3) a conclusion paragraph that summarize the main points discussed in the body.

To perfect the ability to write essays, university students must communicate their thoughts in writing while paying close attention to a variety of factors, including language, grammar and content (Knap & Watkins, 2005). The lack of one or several of these factors indeed leads to students' inability to write a well-produced academic essay. Meanwhile, many university

students have experienced various difficulties in their processes of writing (Bulqiyah et al., 2021). A number of studies (Asadifard & Koosha, 2013; Hosseini et al., 2013; Hajeid, 2018; Toba et al., 2019) have shown that the content—the ideas or arguments to develop the essay and the organization—how to arrange information in the text, are among major difficulties in writing academic essays that EFL tertiary students worldwide, including those of Thai universities, have encountered.

The researchers, English instructors in a Thai university, have found from many years of teaching English writing that many students have struggled to develop content and organize it in their writing including opinion essays. This kind of essay benefits university students in developing their critical and logical thinking abilities but to master writing opinion essays is not easy. This is because a good opinion must provide convincing ideas of the writer to persuade the readers for their agreement. Also, the writer must provide facts and supporting evidence that help make readers believe the presented opinions and attitudes (Setyowati, 2016). This has resulted in numerous problems when they have engaged in opinion essay writing production. As a consequence, this study was conducted to find out the types of problem in writing opinion essays, in terms of content development and organization according to the important three parts of an essay pattern (Oshima & Hogue, 2006) as of the research questions below.

1.2 Research Questions

- 1) What kind of content and organization problems did these students encounter when writing opinion essays?
- 2) Were there any different problems when the given topics were different?
- 3) If there were any different problems when the given topics were different, what were the causes?

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Population, Sample and Scope of Study

The subjects of the study were thirty fourth-year undergraduate students of the School of Architecture and Design (SoAD) of King Mongkut's University of Technology, Thonburi (KMUTT), Thailand. All of them enrolled in LNG 107: Academic Reading and Writing which is a compulsory English courses of SoAD. Their English proficiency levels ranged from intermediate to upper intermediate (according to their standardized test scores submitted to SoAD during their enrollment). Their written assignments were selected for this study to analyse problems often found in writing opinion essays. The selection focused specifically on the essays that contained several mistakes.

LNG 107: Academic Reading and Writing

The course is one of compulsory courses for students who study in international programmes of KMUTT. It aims at developing learners' academic reading and writing skills. Students will learn to write two types of essay: opinion and cause and effect. They also learn to use references and citations throughout the writing process. In addition, paraphrasing and summarizing are included in the learning topics for this course. After studying the course, the students are expected to be able to communicate their ideas logically and write well-organised essays with appropriate citations.

2.2 Research Methods, Data Collection and Data Analysis

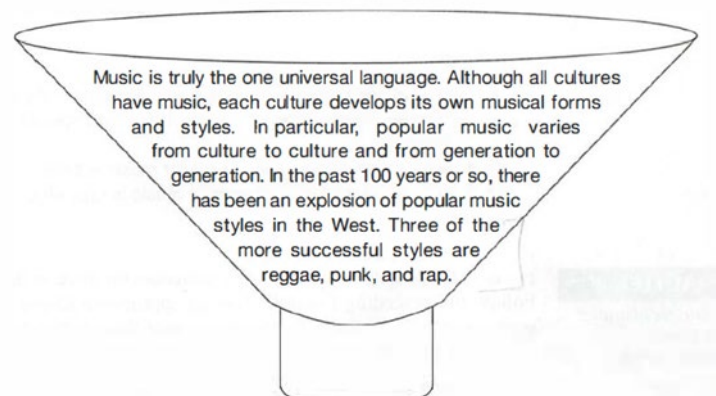
While studying LNG 107, each of the subject had to write two opinion essays under two different topics: 1) Should schools in Thailand reopen for on-site classes in this new term? 2) Do you agree or disagree that Thailand can become a real cashless society? The first topic was purposely assigned to correspond with the situation that the students were encountering at that time. Then their total 60 opinion essays were analyzed based on the essay writing principles thoroughly described in the book “Introduction to Academic Writing third edition” by Oshima and Hogue (2007). The book was used as the main textbook for teaching and learning LNG 107 course. In addition, the analysis focused particularly on writing problems in terms of essay content and organization.

According to Oshima and Hogue (2007), an essay consists of three main parts: The introductory paragraph, body paragraphs, and the concluding paragraph.

The introductory paragraph is the first paragraph of an essay that introduces the topic. This book uses a kind of introductory paragraph called a “funnel” introduction. The funnel introduction begins with general statements that provide background information about the topic. The general statements gradually lead to a very specific idea which is stated in the last sentence in an introductory paragraph. The sentence is called the thesis statement. For an opinion essay, the thesis statement is the sentence that the writer clearly states his/her opinion about the essay topic.

Figure 1

The diagram by Oshima and Hogue (2007): an example of a funnel introduction



Body paragraphs of an essay support the thesis statement. In each body paragraph there are a topic sentence and several supporting sentences. A topic sentence generally introduces one main idea that relates to the thesis statement, and supporting sentences support the topic sentence by providing more information to explain it. In an opinion essay, body paragraphs give reasons to support the writer’s opinion stated in the thesis statement. Furthermore, the given reasons should be proved by details such as quotations, statistics, and summaries of information from outside sources.

The concluding paragraph is the last paragraph that signals the end of an essay. It restates the thesis statement or summarizes the main points already discussed in the body paragraphs. In addition, the writer leaves a final comment in this paragraph as it is the place for expressing opinion, making a judgment, giving a recommendation, or calling for action. However, new ideas must not be added in the concluding paragraph.

The researchers analysed the content and organization in these students' opinion essays by using the Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) method. Each essay was examined thoroughly as to how each part supported each other, whether or not the students' opinions were strengthened. Also, each essay was investigated in terms of how problems found in each writing topic were different or similar through comparisons. Each problem was counted and classified based on the types of problem that occurred in each element of an essay: the introductory paragraph, body paragraphs and the concluding paragraph.

Apart from analysing students' essays, informal interviews with the students were also conducted in order to know their opinions regarding difficulties in writing the two different essay topics. The results obtained from the interviews would help the researchers to have deeper understanding about the problems found in the students' essays.

3. Results

The results of the study were obtained from the content analysis of students' two opinion essays. The first is titled, "*Should schools in Thailand reopen for on-site classes in this new term?*" The second is titled, "*Do you agree or disagree that Thailand can become a real cashless society?*" The analysis shows obtained results categorized due to the elements of an essay (Oshima & Hogue, 2006): an introductory paragraph, body paragraphs and a concluding paragraph.

Introductory Paragraph

For the introductory paragraph, the analysis revealed the results due to two elements of the paragraph: 1) General Statements and 2) Thesis Statement

1) General Statements

Topic 1

It was found that nine out of thirty students wrote only a few general statements that did not provide enough background information to lead to the thesis statement. Moreover, seven students did not write general statements at all and they had only the thesis statement in the introductory paragraph. Example of too inadequate general statements:

Recently, the Covid-19 situation continues happening. So, it makes kids in this generation have to study online courses (General Statements). In my opinion, I agree to allow the children to join on-site study more than online study because Covid-19 is not serious anymore and I believed physical studying is the best learning for children, also it is important to making kids having Socialization (Thesis Statement).

In this example, the writer had only two short general statements that did not give enough background information about the essay topic.

Topic 2

There were a few problems of writing general statements for this opinion essay topic. Four students were found writing too few general statements while 3 students wrote no general statements in their essays. Also, there were another three students who misplaced their general statements.

2) Thesis Statement

Topic 1

More than half of the students made mistakes regarding this part. Eight of them did not write the thesis statement in one single sentence. Six students gave too much detail in their thesis statements.

Example of a thesis statement that had too much detail:

I agree on the reopening and returning to school because it has impacts on opportunities to learn, mental health and experience with other along with the extent to which the education can be delivered via the online learning model separately, and the widespread vaccination help reduce the harm to people.

In addition, four students misplaced the statement, for they put it as the first sentence in the introductory paragraph. The worst mistake about thesis statement was that two students did not write it at all.

Topic 2

There were many problems of writing thesis statement for this opinion essay topic. Thirteen students were found writing no thesis statement while eleven of them wrote unclear thesis statements. Furthermore, there were seven students who misplaced their thesis statements.

Example of no thesis statement:

Nowadays, our world has grown so fast because of the pandemic which we called "COVID-19". Many countries in the world have policies to protect an infection of COVID-19. Therefore, a "Cashless society" has emerged which is a new way to decrease the infection. But in Thailand, not all of area in the country that become a cashless society.

This student began the introductory paragraph without writing any thesis statement.

Body Paragraph

For body paragraphs, the analysis revealed the results due to three elements: 1) Topic sentence 2) Supporting sentences and 3) other issues.

1) Topic sentence

Topic 1

The most significant problem in this part was about writing broad or unclear topic sentences. The problem was found among seventeen students. For example, "*On the other hand, studying at school is preferable.*" Generally, a topic sentence states only one particular idea that directly supports the thesis statement of an essay. However, this example topic sentence failed to state

a particular point to be discussed in its paragraph.

Another significant problem was writing topic sentences that were too detailed, meaning revealing too much information. Then the students almost had nothing to explain in the supporting details. This problem was found in nearly half of the students' essays. Here is an example:

One reason that reopening the school is a good choice is that it can create a classroom atmosphere to help students focus on lessons because in online classes it is hard to control all students with one teacher.

There were also other relevant problems such as writing a topic sentence that did not support the thesis statement in the introductory paragraph. In addition, some students did not have a topic sentence in some of their body paragraphs.

Topic 2

Students were found having several problems in writing topic sentences. Seven students were found writing no topic sentences while four of them wrote misplaced topic sentences. Lastly, there were five students who had a problem of mentioning irrelevant/unclear topic sentences.

Example of no topic sentences:

What is the good thing about cashless society. First user don't need to carry cash around and worried about is the cash going to be enough in each payment or not and also reduce the crime.

This student started this body paragraph with a question without any topic sentence and then wrote the supporting sentence.

2) Supporting sentences

Topic 1

It was found that most of the students had difficulties writing this part. The major problem was that they failed to provide evidence such as statistical facts to support their ideas.

Example of supporting sentences that do not support the topic sentence:

Socialization of kids makes them grow up effectively. *Social in children period is very important for kids. Being assertive is one thing that makes children have more opportunities to learn new things or new experiences that affect directly their learning system.*

The topic sentence focused on socialization of kids, but the supporting detail did not directly explain this point.

Topic 2

The most serious problem of writing supporting sentences is that there were seventeen students who did not provide enough details in supporting sentences. Meanwhile, five students were found that their supporting sentences did not support the topic sentences.

Example of not enough details in supporting sentences:

Nowadays, technology plays a role in all aspects of human life, especially electronic devices like smartphones that facilitate payment. Shopping applications and online banking are suitable for a cashless society nowadays.

This body paragraph contains only two sentences. The first is the topic sentence and the second is a supporting sentence—not enough to provide details to support the main idea in the topic sentence.

3) Other issues related to body paragraphs

Topic 1

There were other few problems such as writing body paragraphs that were not consistent with the thesis statement, discussing more than one main idea in one body paragraph.

Topic 2

There are other problematic issues in writing body paragraphs. There were nine students whose whole body paragraphs are not consistent with their thesis statements. Also, eleven students mentioned more than one main idea in one body paragraph.

Example of the whole body paragraphs are not consistent with their thesis statements:

In Thailand, we are a partly cashless society and still in the developing phase that has a potential to be a fully cashless society in the future. (Thesis Statement)

On the other hand, there are still some of institutes, mostly states which are controlled and organized by the government do not accept the e-payment and stick with the old traditional cash society for some reason.... (The second body paragraph)

In this example, the thesis statement says Thailand has potential to become a full cashless society. However, the second body paragraph discusses the obstacles of Thailand becoming a cashless society.

Concluding Paragraph

Topic 1

Almost half of the students did not leave final comments in their concluding paragraphs. Moreover, one third of them did not rephrase the thesis statement or summarize the main ideas discussed in the body paragraphs. Eight students wrote too short conclusion, for they only rephrased the thesis statement and wrote a short sentence of final comment.

Topic 2

For the concluding paragraphs, nineteen students were found that they did not summarize the main ideas in body paragraphs while fifteen of them wrote too short summary or provided inadequate details in the summary. Also, ten students included irrelevant information in the concluding paragraph. These problems seemed to be one major weakness of writing this topic.

Example of not summarizing the main ideas in body paragraphs:

If we see another country's cashless society might be store cash not accepted. But Thailand become a cashless society by a user don't want to pay cash and prefer QR code payment.

This concluding paragraph does not summarize the main ideas in body paragraphs. The first sentence mentions a point not existent in any body paragraph (Another country's cashless society).

Misinterpretation of the writing topic

Topic 1

It was found that eleven students misinterpreted the topic; therefore, their content did not comply with the assigned topic. This also led to writing in wrong essay types. For example, the assigned topic required the students to express opinions on reopening schools when the covid-19 situation improved, but some of them discussed advantages and disadvantages of online learning instead, using a discursive essay style, not an opinion essay.

Topic 2

There are nineteen students who either used other different essay styles instead of the opinion essay or used the mixed style in one essay. Also, twelve students seemed to misinterpret the writing topic and write the whole essay in the wrong direction.

Example of writing a different essay style as well as misinterpreting the writing topic

Nowadays, people are easily connected from the stability of the internet. It makes the payment procedure more convenient. However, the cashless payment system has an indirect influence on the customer as well as drawbacks for sellers who lack technological skills. (Thesis Statement)

This thesis statement shows the essay is an argumentative rather than an opinion essay, making the rest of the essay written in the wrong direction since it discusses the advantages and disadvantages of Thailand being a cashless society, instead of showing if the writer agreed or disagreed with the topic.

4. Conclusion, Recommendations and Implications

4.1 The comparative analysis of both opinion essays

When comparing the results of the two essay topics, it can be seen that they were completely different. From interviewing the students, writing the thesis statement for the first topic was less challenging, compared with that of the second. One reason students mentioned was that the first topic was the issue that they knew really well, for it had been an important part of their daily life in the past few years. Once they had a clear idea about the topic, they could define the thesis statement more clearly (Pablo & Lasaten, 2018). It could be seen that the mistakes they made regarding the thesis statement were rather relevant to essay structure, not ideas.

In contrast, the second topic which was relevant to financial and technological issues seemed complicated to them, causing them to be uncertain on what opinion they should have expressed. This was reflected in their thesis statements as many failed to provide qualified thesis statements. According to McClain and Roth (1999) and Wijaya (2017), a thesis statement functions as an answer to the essay topic question, so failure to understand and interpret an essay topic surely leads to problematic thesis statements—not answering essay topics. It can be concluded that if

students clearly understand the topic, they will be able to define the clear thesis statement and vice versa.

For the topic sentences, almost all of the students had difficulties writing this part for the first topic. Some wrote the sentences which looked almost the same as the thesis statement, for they were confused about these two parts as both communicate main ideas of an essay. Many students wrote either too detailed or broad topic sentences while some did not include any topic sentences in their body paragraphs. This might result from the lack of knowledge of essay organization; that is, they did not know they needed to provide the topic sentence (Toba et al., 2019). Meanwhile, students appeared to face fewer problems on providing correct topic sentences in the second essay topic since they perhaps already had better knowledge of applying the correct essay organization from writing the first topic.

When considering supporting sentences, this part was the most problematic for students when they wrote the first topic but became less for the second topic. This can be explained that when writing the first topic, the students might be ignorant about giving enough details to support each main point. They knew that they had to share their points of view but did not realise that it was also important to strengthen their opinions with factual evidence. This phenomenon also concurred with the problem of writing topic sentences for the first topic. All in all, students seemed to understand the essay topic but were unable to develop good body paragraphs out of it. In short, they appeared lost in providing good supports for their main ideas (Nenotek et al., 2022). On the other hand, it was found they had fewer problems in supporting their ideas with related details when writing the second topic. It can be said that they might use things they had learnt from the previous task to improve the second.

Lastly, when students wrote their concluding paragraphs, for the first topic, several students did not follow essay writing rules as they neglected to write a concluding paragraph or wrote too few details. This may be because they considered this part unimportant. That is, they had no clear purpose in writing (Dalsky, 2007). They perhaps thought they already discussed the main points in the body paragraphs; thus, they wrote this part only for the sake of essay completion. Meanwhile, for the second topic, many of the students failed to provide good summaries to end their essay as a number of them wrote irrelevant information which was not the main points of the topic. This perhaps resulted from the inability to fully understand the essay topic as those who fell into this category mostly were the same persons who wrote unqualified thesis statements. From the analysis, it seems that students have problems to provide good concluding paragraphs in writing both topics, making both of their essays lack the good essay construction as Rao, Chanock & Krishnan (2007) mentioned that the conclusion is one key element of an essay. Therefore, it cannot be removed or badly written (Eripuddin, 2016).

4.2 The conclusion and recommendation of the study

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the students had difficulties in terms of content and ideas development if the topic given was not familiar to them as can be seen from problems in writing thesis statements in the second essay. Also, while writing the first opinion essay, they seemed to face some other problems such as providing inadequate supports for their main points. This perhaps results from their unfamiliarity of the essay style as it was their first time of writing.

There are several recommendations that can help improve these problems. More exposure to the target skills should be encouraged as students should practice more various writing activities as well as read more academic essays as samples for their own essay writing guidelines. Meanwhile, students should be encouraged to be exposed to more world knowledge through researching and reading so they can be more familiar with more various topics outside their

study fields. Also interventions and regular feedbacks from teachers are as necessary as improved materials for writing lessons for better development in their academic writing skills.

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