

**ANALYSING EFL STUDENTS' ARGUMENTATIVE
WRITING DIFFICULTIES AND TEACHING
STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY LECTURERS
IN SELECTED UNIVERSITIES IN THAILAND**

MALEERAT KA-KAN-DEE

UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

2015

**ANALYSING EFL STUDENTS' ARGUMENTATIVE
WRITING DIFFICULTIES AND TEACHING
STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY LECTURES IN
SELECTED UNIVERSITIES IN THAILAND**

by

MALEERAT KA-KAN-DEE

**Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctoral of Philosophy**

August 2015

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, my utmost appreciation goes to my supervisor, Associate Professor Dr. Sarjit Kaur, for her insightful advice and constructive comments in every stage of my thesis. Throughout the course of my PhD research, she never failed to provide me continuous encouragement and invaluable advice. Her professional guidance and clarifications tremendously contributed to the completion of the thesis.

This research study would not have been possible without the kind support and help of Khon Kaen University and Khon Kaen University, Nong Khai Campus that supported me with the scholarship to complete this research study. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to my university.

I would also like to express my special gratitude and thanks to all the participants who took part in my study. In addition, I am also indebted to the raters for grading the Thai EFL students' essays.

I would like to thank senior lecturers from Khon Kaen University who provided me with academic guidance and support during the process of data collection and students' verbal report transcription process.

My deepest gratitude goes to my parents and my husband for their understanding and encouragement during my difficult time. Finally, all thanks to Allah for listening to and answering my prayers, Alhamdulillah.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Appendices	vii
List of Tables	viii
List of Figures	ix
List of Abbreviations	x
Abstrak	xi
Abstract	xiii
CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION	1
1.0 Background of the Study	1
1.1 Challenges in Teaching Writing in ESL/ EFL Contexts	4
1.2 Overview of Thailand	7
1.2.1 The Education System in Thailand	9
1.2.2 Role of English in Thailand	12
1.3 Profile of Mahasarakham University	17
1.3.1 Department of Western Language and Linguistics at Mahasarakham University in Thailand	18
1.4 Profile of Udon Thani Rajabhat University	19
1.4.1 Department of English Language and Literature at Udon Thani Rajabhat University	20
1.5 Statement of the Problem	21
1.6 Objectives of the study	24

1.7	Research Questions	25
1.8	Scope of Study	25
1.9	Significance of the Study	26
1.10	Limitations of the Study	28
1.11	Definition of Key Terms	29
1.12	Summary	31
CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW		32
2.0	Introduction	32
2.1	The Writing Process	32
2.1.1	Approaches to the Teaching and Learning of EFL Writing	35
2.1.2	The Structure of Argumentative Essays	43
2.1.3	Rhetorical Structure of Argumentative Essays	46
2.2	Argumentative Writing	57
2.2.1	Definition of argumentative writing	57
2.2.2	Concepts of Argumentation	62
2.2.3	Theoretical Foundations of Argumentation	64
2.2.4	Argumentative Schemata Theory	66
2.2.5	Aristotle's Rhetorical Triangle	68
2.3	Teaching Theories	72
2.3.1	Krashen's Theory on Language Acquisition	72
2.3.2	Flower and Hayes' Theory	78
2.3.3	Constructivist Teaching Strategies	88
2.4	Conceptual Framework of Study	93
2.5	Related Research on think-aloud protocols	95

2.6	Related Research on Writing Difficulties	100
2.7	Related Research on Argumentative Writing Difficulties	107
2.9	Summary	111
CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY		112
3.0	Introduction	112
3.1	Research Design	112
3.2	Population and Sampling	117
3.3	Research Instruments	119
3.3.1	Think aloud protocols	121
3.3.2	The Semi-structured Interviews	124
3.3.2.1	Semi structured interview for Thai EFL English Lecturers	125
3.3.2.2	Semi structured interviews for EFL English major students	127
3.3.3	Classroom Observations	128
3.3.4	Stimulated Recall Interviews with two lecturers	131
3.3.4.1	Features of Stimulated Recall	132
3.4	Data Collection Procedures	135
3.5	The Pilot Study	141
3.6	Validity and Reliability of Research Instruments	149
3.6.1	Validity of the Research Instruments	149
3.6.2	Validity and reliability of qualitative data	150
3.7	Analysing Data	151
3.7.1	Analysis of Qualitative Data	151
3.8	Ethical considerations	156
3.9	Summary	157

CHAPTER FOUR	FINDINGS OF THE STUDY	158
4.0	Introduction	158
4.1	Difficulties in argumentative writing	158
4.1.1	Results of Students' Interviews after the Think Aloud Protocols	168
4.2	Difficulties in Teaching Argumentative Writing	181
4.3	Teaching strategies Used to Teach Argumentative Writing	184
4.3.1	Results of Stimulated Recall Interview (SRI)	189
4.4	Results of Classroom Observations	194
4.4.1	Results of Field notes	197
4.4.1.1	Results of Field notes in Pailin's classroom	199
4.4.1.2	Results of Field note in Manee's classroom	203
4.5	Summary	206
CHAPTER FIVE	DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	208
5.0	Introduction	208
5.1	Difficulties encountered by students while writing	209
5.2	Thai EFL English major students' need help from their lecturers	211
5.3	Difficulties in teaching Argumentative Writing	212
5.3.1	Teaching strategies from the Stimulated Recall Interview (SRI)	213
5.4	Teaching strategies to help improve Students' argumentative writing	218
5.4.1	Results of Classroom Observations	219
5.5	Triangulation the Results from Various Sources	223
5.6	Summary of Major Findings from Triangulation	224
5.7	Pedagogical Implications	226

5.8	Recommendations for Future Research	227
5.9	Summary	228

REFERENCES

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A	List of Publications and Conference Presentation
APPENDIX B	Approval Letter to Conduct Research
APPENDIX C	Approval Letter from Two Public Universities
APPENDIX D	Consent letters to Participation from Lecturers and Students
APPENDIX E	Interview Questions for Lecturers
APPENDIX F	Interview Questions for Students
APPENDIX G	Classroom Observation Checklist
APPENDIX H	Selected Sample of TAP Transcription from a student
APPENDIX I	Selected Sample of Transcribed Verbal Reports from Students and Lecturers
APPENDIX J	Written Tasks
APPENDIX K	Selected Sample of Students' Written Essays
APPENDIX L	Argumentative Writing Difficulty Codes
APPENDIX M	Academic Writing Course Syllabus

LIST OF TABLES

		Page
Table 1.1	The Basic Education Core Curriculum of a Foreign Language Learning Time	14
Table 2.1	Four common argument genres in students academic writing	60
Table 3.1	Research Methods and Procedures	120
Table 3.3	The Amended Interview Questions for Lecturers	145
Table 3.4	The Amended Interview Questions for Students	146
Table 3.5	Argumentative Writing Difficulty Codes for Coding Transcripts	148
Table 4.1	Argumentative Writing Difficulties Faced by Students	160
Table 4.2	Writing Difficulties (gathered from interview session)	169
Table 4.3	Students' Expectation from their EFL Writing Lecturers	178

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page	
Figure 1.1	Map of Thailand	7
Figure 1.2	Thai Education Systems	10
Figure 2.1	Different Writing Stages in Product Orient Approach	36
Figure 2.2	Different Writing Stages in Process Oriented Approach	38
Figure 2.3	The Process of Genre Oriented Product	39
Figure 2.4	Aristotle's Rhetorical Triangle	68
Figure 2.5:	Rhetorical Triangle	71
Figure 2.6	An Adaptation of the Hayes and Flower's (1980) Model	81
Figure 2.7	The Conceptual Framework of the Study	94
Figure 3.1	Research Design of the Study	115
Figure 3.2	Procedures of Applying Think- Aloud Method	136
Figure 3.3	Layout a Classroom Teaching	140
Figure 3.4	The Process of Qualitative Data Analysis in this Study	152
Figure 3.5	A Process for Approaching a Qualitative Project	156

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APA	American Psychological Association
CAQDAS	Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EQA	External Quality Assurance
ESL	English as a Second Language
FL	Foreign Language
IBE	International Bureau of Education
IELTS	International English Language Testing
IQA	Internal Quality Assurance
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
MOE	Ministry of Education
MSU	Maharakham University
NNES	Non-native English speakers
OHEC	Office of the Higher Education Commission
ONESQA	Office of the National Education Standards and Quality Assessment
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SRI	Stimulated Recall Interview
TAP	Think aloud Protocols
UDRU	Udon Thani Rajabhat University

MENGANALISIS KESUKARAN PENULISAN ARGUMENTATIF DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR BERKHUSUSAN BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA ASING (EFL) DAN STRATEGI PENGAJARAN YANG DIGUNAKAN OLEH PARA PENSYARAH DI UNIVERSITI TERPILIH DI THAILAND.

ABSTRAK

Matlamat utama kajian ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti kesukaran yang dialami oleh para pelajar pengkhususan Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL) dalam proses penulisan karangan berbentuk argumentatif. Kajian ini juga menyelidik strategi pengajaran yang digunakan oleh dua orang pensyarah Thai EFL untuk membentuk kemahiran penulisan argumentatif dalam kalangan pelajar mereka. Kaedah TAP (Think Aloud Protocol) telah digunakan sebagai alat atau wadah untuk menganalisis kesukaran penulisan argumentatif yang dialami oleh 16 orang pelajar pengkhususan Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL). Temubual berstruktur separa, temubual ransangan ingatan dan pemerhatian dalam kelas digunakan untuk mengumpul maklumat yang terperinci daripada dua pensyarah Thai EFL untuk mengetahui kesukaran yang mereka hadapi semasa mengajar karangan berbentuk argumentatif dan strategi pengajaran yang digunakan untuk memperbaiki kemahiran penulisan pelajar mereka. Kajian ini menggunakan teori proses kognitif yang dipelopori oleh Flower dan Hayes (1980) dalam menganalisis proses penulisan para pelajar di samping mengendalikan kaedah TAP. Teori pemerolehan bahasa dan strategi pengajaran konstruktivis yang dibentuk oleh Krashen (1983) digunakan untuk memerhati strategi pengajaran yang digunakan oleh kedua-dua pensyarah EFL tersebut semasa mereka mengajar penulisan karangan argumentatif. Data kualitatif yang diperolehi dianalisis melalui kaedah “grounded theory” di mana data yang diperolehi telah disalin dan dikodkan mengikut tema. Hasil kajian dari kaedah TAP

menunjukkan bahawa para pelajar mengalami kesukaran penulisan dari segi: ketidakbiasaan dengan ciri penulisan argumentatif, kekurangan pengetahuan tentang hukum tatabahasa, kekurangan kosa kata berunsurkan akademik, kesukaran menghasilkan pernyataan tesis yang jelas, ketidakupayaan untuk memberikan bukti yang kukuh, membentuk idea yang bernas dan menulis kesimpulan yang berkesan, serta kurang peka terhadap permintaan dan elemen motivasi pembaca, kurang kesedaran mengenai proses perancangan penulisan dan ketidakupayaan untuk berfikir secara kreatif. Perolehan kajian daripada temubual berstruktur separa, pemerhatian dalam kelas dan temubual ransangan ingatan menunjukkan bahawa kedua-dua pensyarah EFL tersebut menggunakan strategi yang berbeza dalam pengajaran penulisan argumentatif. Hasil kajian ini memberi manfaat dalam membantu pembentukan program dan arahan pengajaran untuk meningkatkan proses pembelajaran para pelajar EFL di Thailand dalam penulisan argumentatif. Di samping itu, perolehan kajian ini boleh digunakan sebagai garis panduan bagi para pelajar untuk memperbaiki kualiti penulisan argumentatif mereka. Implikasi kajian ini mencadangkan agar pihak yang bertanggungjawab dalam merancang kurikulum dan menulis serta mereka bahan pembelajaran menyatupadukan komponen yang menekankan kaedah TAP dalam penulisan argumentatif untuk memahami kesukaran yang dialami oleh para pelajar semasa menulis karangan. Pemegang taruh berkenaan kemudiannya dapat menggunakan kaedah yang bersesuaian untuk meningkatkan kemahiran penulisan para pelajar dalam konteks pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL) di Thailand.

**ANALYSING EFL STUDENTS' ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING
DIFFICULTIES AND TEACHING STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY
LECTURERS IN SELECTED UNIVERSITIES IN THAILAND**

ABSTRACT

The main aim of this study was to identify the argumentative writing difficulties encountered by Thai EFL English major students. This study also investigated the teaching strategies used by two Thai EFL lecturers to develop their students' argumentative writing competence. Think aloud protocols (TAP) were used as a tool for analysing argumentative writing difficulties encountered by 16 EFL English major students. A semi structured interview, stimulated recall interviews and classroom observations were used to collect detailed information from two EFL lecturers about the difficulties they encountered in teaching argumentative essays and the teaching strategies they used to help improve their students' writing skill. This study draws on the cognitive process theory developed by the Flower and Hayes' (1980) in analysing the students' writing process while conducting Think aloud protocols. Krashen's (1983) theory on language acquisition and constructivist teaching strategies were employed to monitor the teaching strategies used by the two EFL lecturers to teach argumentative writing essays. Qualitative data were analysed through grounded theory in which data were transcribed and coded thematically. Findings from the students' think aloud protocols reveal that they faced the following specific writing difficulties: unfamiliarity with argumentative rhetorical features, insufficient knowledge about grammar rule, insufficient academic vocabulary, difficulty in writing a clear thesis statement, inability to provide solid evidence, generate well organised ideas and write effective conclusions, lack of awareness about audience expectation and motivational elements, lack of awareness of the

planning process of writing and the inability to think creatively. The findings from the semi structured interviews, classroom observations and stimulated recall interviews reveal that the two lecturers used different types of teaching strategies to teach argumentative writing. The findings of the study provide valuable insights to help develop teaching programmes and instructions to more effectively support EFL students' argumentative writing development. Additionally, the findings can also be used as guidelines for students to improve their argumentative writing. The implications of this study suggest that curriculum planners and material writers and designers can integrate components that focus on argumentative writing which use think aloud protocols to comprehend the difficulties students experience when they compose written compositions. Such stakeholders can then use appropriate methods to develop students' writing competence in the Thai EFL context.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the Study

Weigle (2002) opines that writing is an essential part of the curriculum in schools from the earliest grade to university level. Argumentative writing is considered as an important mode of written discourse. However, argumentative writing is a difficult type of text for both ESL and EFL students. The main rationale why argumentative writing is difficult arises from the complexity of argumentative writing features. Argumentative writing is a complex task in which the writer takes a stance on a controversial issue and offers reasons and supporting ideas to persuade the audience to accept his or her position (Anker, 2004). In the same vein, Connor (1987) posits that writing an argumentative essay is an intricate cognitive process that is associated with the writer's purpose, the audiences' expectations, the expected rhetorical patterns and the contextual position.

Furthermore, argumentative writing is represented by Flower (1979) as a reader-based approach or referred to by Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) as a knowledge-transforming approach that are largely similar as they both concentrate on the audiences' expectations. However, it is difficult for unskilled students to write based on these two approaches as each requires a rhetorical pattern of argumentation, the integration of content and critical thinking from student's point of view. Galbraith and Rijlaarsdam (1999) suggest that argumentative writing is difficult

even for expert writers due to the innate difficulty of self-expression and the existence of a set of external constraints; in an effort to meet the external constraints, the writer is likely to forget what he/ she needs to write.

In L1 contexts, Crowhurst (1991) figured out the problems that occur in argumentative writing and revealed that native English speakers also have poor performance in writing an argumentative essay in the school system. The problems in argumentative writing analysed in those studies were insufficient context and ideas, shorter texts than narration, failure to support the point of view, poor organisation due to a lack of knowledge, concerns of stylistic inappropriateness and argumentative structure.

In Thailand, students need to study various types of written discourse such as narration, description, exposition and argumentative writing. Argumentative writing is considered as the most important task for students as they need to use it in exams. Therefore, writing an argumentative essay has been set as a common type of assignment for students at the tertiary level. Unfortunately, most Thai students at tertiary level struggle with a variety of difficulties in English writing because of their low competence in English. According to a Thai writing lecturer, “when students are assigned to write essays or research reports, most of them are unable to write because they neither have adequate knowledge of grammar nor do they know how to generate and manipulate ideas” (Praphan, P., personal interview, September 27, 2013). Numerous researchers (Chaya, 2005; Kongpetch, 2006; Boonsiri, 2007; Prommas and Sinwongsuwat, 2013) also confirm that most Thai EFL students struggle to compose effective argumentative essays because of their weaknesses in English

language. This is because they have inadequate exposure to argumentative writing structure and have little knowledge of this genre. Therefore, they are unable to write well organised argumentative essays. In other words, most Thai EFL students do not know how to handle syntax and ideas in their argumentative essays because of the drawback of language teaching methods of the past in which most writing programmes are still taught using the traditional teacher-centred model, emphasising grammatical structure, accuracy and vocabulary. Moreover, Thai EFL students have very few actual opportunities to present their ideas and knowledge in a written mode. Because of this, most EFL students have linguistic problems, lack vocabulary knowledge and do not know how to vary purposes and audience. Furthermore, they do not acknowledge rhetorical patterns and organisation of ideas when they engage in argumentative essay writing (Siriphan, 1988; Wongsothorn, 1994; Clayton & Klainin, 1994).

In a Thai context, there is much detailed information relating to students' difficulties in writing an argumentative essay. According to Udomyamokkul (2004), it is recognised that Thai EFL students tend to write narration and build up their own pattern to write an argumentative essay. Besides, insufficient implicit knowledge about argumentative conventional pattern is revealed in students' writing. Consequently, they do not know how to write a good argumentative essay. They are unable to write an essay clearly and convincingly. In other words, EFL students do not know the importance of audience awareness in order to write an explicit supporting evidence and refutation.

According to Chaya's study (2005), Thai EFL students' problems in writing an argumentative essay are similar to those of native speakers. The students' problems comprise an unclear focus, no awareness of audience expectations, insufficient evidence to support the point of view, insufficient supporting details, inappropriate transitional words and lack of explicit thesis or claim. Most students write an argumentative essay by narrating, explaining or informing only facts to the audience.

The researcher expects to gain a detailed description about students' difficulties throughout the writing process. With the knowledge of the argumentative writing process, EFL lecturers might learn of the effective ways to enhance their students' argumentative writing competence.

1.1 Challenges in Teaching Writing in ESL/ EFL Context

Teaching writing is still considered a problematic matter in the area of Second and Foreign Language instruction. Although, there are a number of methods for teaching writing in English as a Second Language (ESL hereafter) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL hereafter) contexts, not many ESL/ EFL writing instructors have a clear insight on writing approaches. Therefore, they still prefer to concentrate on using traditional approaches in their teaching. In traditional approaches, the teacher provides knowledge about the structure of language and sample texts for students to imitate the form of writing (Badger and White, 2000). ESL/EFL writing is a difficult, intricate and demanding procedure (Alsamadani, 2010). This hardship and intricacy in ESL/EFL argumentative writing arises from the reality that writing

comprises searching out a proposition, fostering evidence for the claim, formulating, modifying and finally revising the proposition to ensure an effective and productive piece of writing (Langan, 2005). Furthermore, ESL/EFL argumentative writing is one of the most crucial genres of language instruction. As claimed by Coffin (2004, p.3), “students academic writing continue to be at the centre of teaching and learning in higher education, but it is often an invisible dimension of the curriculum; that is, the rules or conventions governing what counts as academic writing are often assumed to be part of ‘common sense’ knowledge students have, and are thus not explicitly taught within a disciplinary course.” To provide an effective ESL/EFL academic writing instruction is the prime responsibility for lecturers, researchers, textbook writers and programme coordinators in the area of foreign language instruction (Lee, 2003), but producing a textbook for most ESL/EFL students is a difficult task because the writing procedure requires an extensive domain of cognitive and linguistic approaches which ESL/EFL students are largely incognizant of (Luchini, 2010). Moreover, research about ESL/EFL writing has evolved over the last 40 years. As a result, writing has shifted into a multidisciplinary area (Matsuda, 2003). Writing an argumentative essay is considered a common assignment at the tertiary level. This genre of writing calls for students to argue for and against a proposal. Most tertiary students (whether L1, L2 or EFL) are unable to argue or propose a convincing thesis statement (Nemeth and Kormos, 2001; Boonsiri, 2007; Qian, 2010). Argumentation is a procedure to compose an argument by looking for actual evidence to back up the claim or thesis statement. To write a good piece of argumentative writing is often difficult for EFL/ ESL students. Basically, writing an argument begins with taking a stance and giving evidence in order to convince the readers to execute the action or to accept the idea based on a controversy. Nippold

and Ward-Lonergan (2010, p. 238) note that “argumentative writing is a challenging communication task that needs sophisticated cognitive and linguistic abilities.” Likewise many research studies (Ferretti, Andrews-Weckerly & Lewis, 2007; Neff-van Aertselaer & Dafouz-Milne, 2008; Lertpreedakorn, 2009; Promwinai, 2010) confirm that an argumentative writing essay is the most difficult genre for both ESL and EFL students. Most Thai EFL students are unable to produce good argumentative essays because of their lack of readiness for English argumentative writing and insufficient writing practice during classroom instruction.

As stated by Crowhurst (1991, p.314) arguing a case is particularly challenging even though “it is important both for academic success and for general life purposes”. Knudson (1994, p.211) also asserts that, “argumentation is one of the genres which is essential for full participation in society”. This genre of writing is the most crucial in academic writing especially at the tertiary level. Students are supposed to argue for their stand point in order to convince the readers. However, most ESL/EFL students struggle with the various difficulties in writing argumentative essays. They are unable to write due to insufficient skills in argumentative writing.

1.2 Overview of Thailand

Thailand is very proud not to have had colonial rule among the countries in Southeast Asia. This is due to the virtue of the monarchy; the military and the Buddhist religion which have supported the embodiment of its social and political practices. Thailand is well known for its tourism industry which brings a great income to develop the country. However, the recent unrest in the south and the tsunami of 2004 has posed barriers to development (Croissant, 2005; Zurick, 2010). Currently, political unrest is a major obstruction to develop the economy, society and education. Figure 1.1 below shows the map of Thailand:



Figure 1.1: Map of Thailand

Source: <http://www.divetheworldthailand.com/map-of-thailand.php>

As shown in Figure 1, Thailand is situated in Southeast Asia, neighbouring Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia and Myanmar. Thailand lies in the heart of Southeast Asia with an area of approximately 514,000 sq km. The population of Thailand is approximately 66,720,153. There is a diverse range of ethnic groups: Thai, Chinese, Malay, Khmer, Mon. Around 80 per cent of the population are ethnic Thai people. The remaining 20 per cent comprise Chinese, Malay and other minority ethnic groups, particularly in the north, whereas there is a large Malay population who reside in the south. Thailand consists of 76 provinces that are segmented into districts, sub-districts and villages. Bangkok is the capital city which provides various activities and employment for many people. Thailand is known as “The land of Smiles” and it is this attribute that attracts foreigners to enjoy Thailand’s beautiful natural scenery and cultural diversity (MOENet Thailand Service, 1998).

In relation to the Thai economy, the World Bank has raised Thailand’s income classification from a lower income economy to an upper income economy this year. This is due to Thailand’s improvement in social and economic development, despite experiencing serious political problems. Owing to this reason, Thailand has a record of good achievement with maintained robust growth and remarkable poverty deduction (The World Bank Group, 2012).

Thailand is an agricultural country. The main crops in Thailand are rice, rubber, maize, sugar cane, cassava and oil palm. About 9 percent of the gross domestic product is gained from the agricultural sector. Agricultural products in Thailand have not been produced for their own consumption but are also a major source of income from exporting. The value of agricultural exports is increasing

every year and it is still a major source of export earnings. Currently agricultural exports constitute about 25 percent of the total export value. The Thai government is attempting to enhance agricultural productivity. Therefore, Thailand is a major exporter of a wide variety of food and agricultural products. The income accrued from tourism contributed substantially to the Thai economy in 2008, accounting for 14.96 percent of the country's GDP. Unfortunately, the number of tourists largely decreased from 12 percent to 6 percent during the coup d'état in 2014 (The Wall Street Journal, 2014).

Thailand is one of the best performing economies in East Asia. It has well-developed infrastructure and facilities, free enterprise economy and pro-investment policies. However, the overall growth of the economy has fallen as persistent political instability delayed infrastructure and facilities mega-projects. Eroded investor and consumer confidence has damaged the country's international reputation (The Wall Street Journal, 2014).

1.2.1 The Education System in Thailand

With reference to the government of Thailand, education is considered one of the main priorities that the government takes into account due to the reality that education is the backbone for development and betterment of the society. Therefore, there is a need for educational reforms in various levels of education such as school and tertiary contexts. The government has introduced several educational reforms with the purpose of developing Thailand as a knowledge-based society. These educational reforms will yield the Thai public equal access to lifelong education and

training, empowering them to gain knowledge and funding in order to produce income and to curb further economic and social crisis. Figure 1.2 shows the structure of the system of education in Thailand:

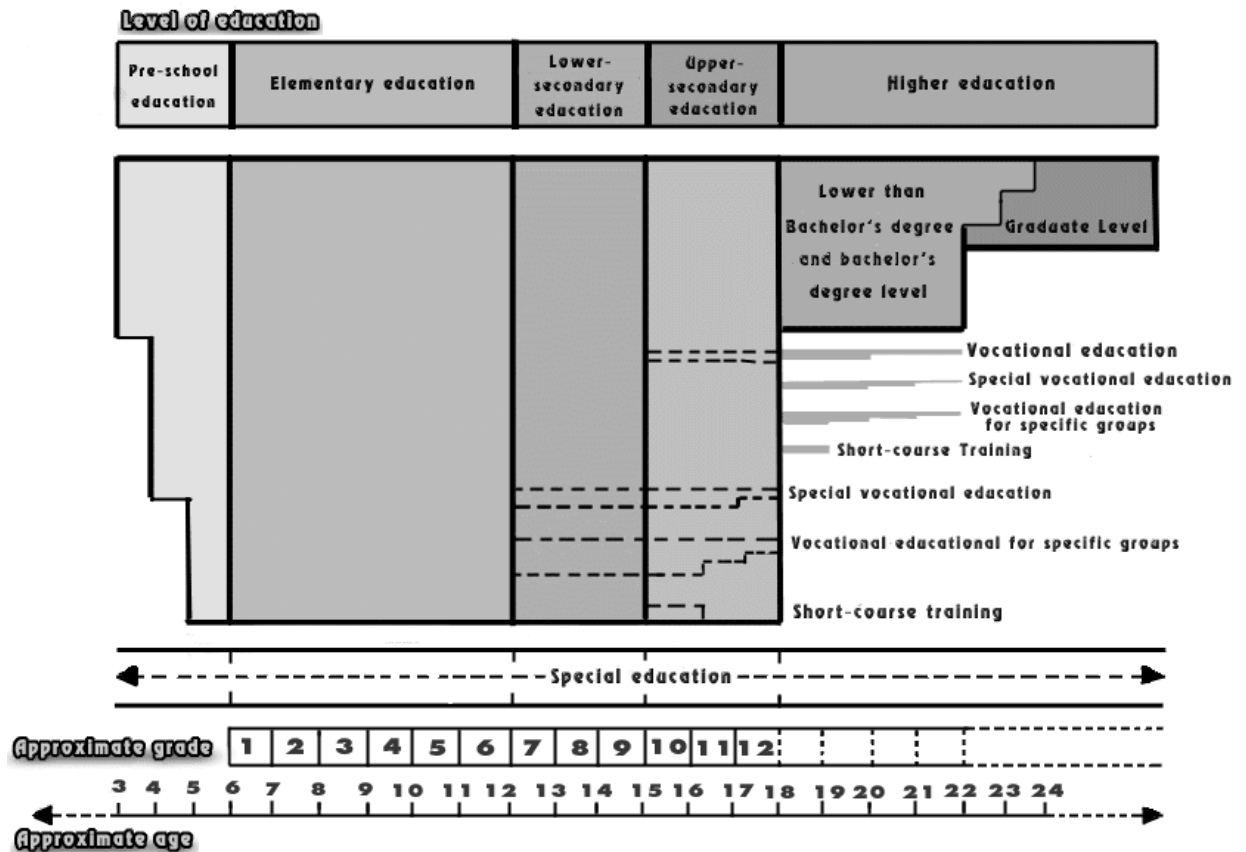


Figure 1.2: Thai Education System

Source: Thai Education System, MOE (2012)

As illustrated in Figure 1.2, the education system in Thailand comprises 12 years of basic education. Students spend three years to study in lower secondary level and three years to complete the upper secondary level. In addition, preschool education is provided for children aged between three and five years to complete the course in order to continue to the basic education (MOE, 2012).

Basic education is mandatory for all children who permanently dwell in Thailand. It targets to support all children to achieve a specific educational standard. The mandatory education equips students with six years of primary education to complete their education. Students spend three years of lower secondary education and three years of upper secondary education to complete the target course. With reference to the above mentioned, finishing the course satisfactorily at a level of education is commonly a prerequisite of heading to the next education level. Students who complete the elementary education level can proceed to the secondary level in which they study for three years at the secondary level. Vocational and technical training is available after completing basic and secondary education (Office of Education Council, 2004).

In higher education in Thailand, students spend four years for most bachelor's degree programmes whereas the field of engineering takes five years to obtain the qualification. In the area of medicine, students spend six years to complete the course (International Bureau of Education (IBE), 2011). As illustrated in Figure 1.2, students spend two years to complete Master degree programmes meanwhile doctorate programmes take three to five years to complete (IBE, 2011).

The Ministry of Education also offers special education courses for individuals who need them. The structures of these courses are often in the form of short courses and training courses in vocational education for students who do not want to study in lower and upper secondary schools (Office of Education Council, 2008).

1.2.2 Role of English in Thailand

The Thai government acknowledges English as an essential medium for exchanging knowledge, making contacts and fostering relations with other countries (National Education Act 1999). Therefore, a good command of English is highlighted and English is taught in Thai schools and also in all universities as a foreign language. In other words, English is taught as a mandatory course in basic education and secondary education (Luanganggoon, 2001; Muangkaew, 2006).

English courses have changed from elective to compulsory courses in primary school since 2001. The Thai government announced English is taught as a compulsory course in every school in Thailand because there is a difference in terms of English language competence between students who studied English in private schools and those who studied in government schools. Therefore, a modified proficiency-based curriculum was employed to offer students a favourable chance to pursue their English education without disruption and to promote life-long learning as well (Khamkhien, 2006). With reference to this stage, the emphasis was set on the improvement of the students' language competence to fulfil a number of aims such as communication, knowledge acquisition, use of English in socio-cultural employment and career development. With reference to language teaching, communicative language teaching with an eclectic adaptation was primarily centred for teaching in Thai tertiary education (Wongsothorn et al., 2003).

English language is considered an important medium in Thai society and it is taught as a compulsory subject in the school curriculum. The current English

curriculum was proposed in 2001 when the Ministry of Education announced that English is regarded as the national foreign language in all institutions to meet the demands of future work. The motive for this initiative was in line with the effects of globalisation. It is necessary that all Thai students understand the importance of the English language because it is one of good indicators for organisations to select new personnel.

Thai children have the rights to 12 years of basic education. With this shift, the 2001 system combined primary and secondary into a single level. The integrated courses were arranged as follows: Grades 1-3 and Grades 4-6 are in Primary Education, whereas Grades 7-9 are in lower secondary education and Grades 10-12 are in upper secondary education. In this regard, six English credits are required as part of the general education programme. Under the current curriculum, English is taught one hour per week in Grades 1-3 (40 hours in each academic year). Students in Grades 4-6 need to study English two hours per week (80 hours in an academic year). Meanwhile in lower secondary education, English is taught three hours per week (120 hours in each academic year) while students need to study English six hours per week in upper secondary education (240 hours in an academic year). Table 1.1 below shows the basic education core curriculum prescribed in the framework for a foreign language learning time:

Table 1.1: The Basic Education Core Curriculum of a Foreign Language Learning Time

Learning Areas	Learning Time (in hours)											
	Primary Education Level						Lower Secondary Education Level			Upper Secondary Education Level		
	Gr1	Gr2	Gr3	Gr4	Gr5	Gr6	Gr7	Gr8	Gr9	Gr10	Gr11	Gr 12
Foreign Language	40	40	40	80	80	80	120	120	120	240	240	240

At the tertiary level in Thailand, both public and private universities revised the English language curriculum in order to meet the demands for English language competence at the workplace. According to Foley (2005), twelve credits of English instead of six credits are required in tertiary education. Students need six credits in general English and another six credits in English for academic or specific purposes before they complete their course and obtain the required qualification. Moreover, Wongsothorn et al. (2003) state that the English language curriculum in Thailand can be regarded as a change of paradigm from English as an elective subject to English as a compulsory subject. This shift focuses on individual work and self-governing learning. Furthermore, innovations and new technology in English language teaching (ELT hereafter) are emphasised in the new curriculum. ELT now consists of self-access learning, performance standards of general English and English for academic and specific purposes. In the new curriculum, English is regarded as a compulsory foreign language course. In other words, English is taught as a foreign language course from primary education to tertiary education. It is one of the eight mandatory courses that students need to take in the core and elective courses in learning English. (Wongsothorn et al., 2003; Foley, 2005).

Multiple approaches are used in English language teaching and learning that centres on learners and communicative purposes. The Communicative Approach is still applied but this approach mainly centres on the listening and speaking skills. Meanwhile, other approaches such as integrated, cooperative, holistic learning, content, task-based and problem-based learning are also employed in teaching and learning. With reference to course descriptions, each education level sets up both standards and benchmarks to assess the students' English language acquisition. Teachers are needed to write their own teaching materials related to real-life situations (Office of the Education Council, 2008).

The Thai government has put prime importance on setting up several development policies and plans to promote English language proficiency. However, Promwinai (2010) states that there are some controversial problems which work to impede students from achieving English language proficiency. First of all, primary students from grade one to grade four often focuses on sets of simple vocabulary. Second, it is common that one teacher is responsible for teaching many subjects, which means that the English teacher might not be well-trained in the subject. Third, one teacher may be responsible for a large class (40 students or more) and thus may not have time to provide feedback to every single student. Fourth, Thai students study English as a foreign language. Although English is considered important for the reasons stated above, students generally study all other subjects in Thai. Finally most English language courses in Thailand mainly concentrate on grammar, vocabulary and reading. Thai teachers prefer to write tests in the form of multiple choice questions instead of writing task performance. Rappa and Wee (2006) add

that Thai EFL students face the difficulties in writing due to insufficient learning resources and less effective teaching. Importantly, there is a lack of qualified English lecturers who clearly understand on teaching strategies.

With reference to the background of English language stated above, it is not surprising that a large number of Thai tertiary students are unable to produce good essays. In relation to academic writing in English, these tertiary students are commonly required to write essays or research reports which they find difficult to write. Furthermore, it is worth noting that students are also not familiar with writing argumentative essays. Writing argumentative essays is considered a crucial feature for academic writing in various countries. However, it is not typically contained as a section of English writing courses in universities in Thailand. Very few universities teach this type of writing in their advanced writing class for English major students. In some universities, argumentative essay writing is excluded from the course objectives. Only descriptive, narrative, process and cause-effect essays are taught in writing courses. It can be said that Thai EFL students have been trained with explanation genres (Martin & Rose, 2008) but have not improved their ability to argue through the written genres of their foreign language.

1.3 Profile of Mahasarakham University

Mahasarakham University (MSU hereafter), where the research study was carried out is located in Maha Sarakham Province in the Northeast region of Thailand. MSU was established in 1968 as the college engaged to produce qualified teachers to work for schools and universities. It was originally set up as the College of Education Mahasarakham. It was later renamed a regional campus of Srinakharinwirot University which contained only four faculties: Education, Humanities, Social Sciences and Science. In 1994, the university obtained an independent status and was renamed Mahasarakham University. In terms of both facilities and academic services, MSU has developed very quickly. It has become an all-inclusive university, providing undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in three academic fields such as Social Sciences, Pure and Applied Science and Health Science. In response to this development, Khamriang Campus was set up in Kantarawichai District in 1998. Currently, there are 18 faculties and 2 colleges providing academic services. MSU is considered as one of Thailand's fastest-growing universities. The university currently has more than 40,000 students enrolled in various courses. With reference to broadening its academic services to remote communities, MSU has launched 15 academic service centres located in North eastern provinces.

MSU is known as a community-based university of knowledge and wisdom, academically providing the community with diversity of educational systems and appropriate technologies. MSU has made a decision to take a leading role in research and integration of local wisdom for international recognition.

1.3.1 Department of Western Language and Linguistics at Mahasarakham University in Thailand

The Department of Western Language and Linguistics (DWLI hereafter) at Mahasarakham University has developed rapidly. It provides the opportunity for its students to expand their knowledge and communicative skills as English language teachers through the nation. DWLI mainly aims at improving and enhancing the students' linguistic ability and skill by providing them with high proficiency in language skills. However, students still have a problem in producing argumentative writing. According to Lertpreedakorn (2009), Thai EFL students take several years of studying basic writing courses at tertiary level but still face many problems when attempting to write academic writing in particular argumentative essays. Generally, they have a problem with the structural issue including appropriate words, correct grammar use, creating ideas and developing ideas in writing.

The purpose of the basic writing curriculum at the Department of Western language and linguistics is to assist students to write and express personal ideas, views and feelings and use correct and appropriate English. It aims at assisting them to write well-organised written texts. Despite a number of writing courses provided at Mahasarakham University, it is found that their EFL students still have many language problems and difficulties in producing argumentative writing. It is crucial to point out that English writing education at tertiary level in Thailand does not equip students to write at postgraduate level (Glass, 2008).

1.4 Profile of Udon Thani Rajabhat University

Udon Thani Rajabhat University (UDRU hereafter), where the current study was also carried out, is located in Udon Thani province. UDRU was set up on November 1, 1923. It was originally set up as a Teacher Training School in Agriculture Udon Thani. It provided a two-year certificate programme to people who wanted to be a teacher in the local area. In 1930, it was officially shifted to a Teacher Training school for Men and later it was changed to a Teacher Training School for Women that provided a two year certificate programme in general subjects to obtain the teaching qualification. In 1958, it was renamed Udon Thani Teachers' Training School and was promoted to be Udon Thani Teachers' College in 1960. A remarkable shift took place when the Rajabhat University Act was passed and officially approved in 2003. Therefore, Udon Thani Rajabhat Institute was legally changed and achieved a university status since June 15, 2004. It was renamed Udon Thani Rajabhat University (URDU). This new university comprised five faculties and a Graduate Studies School. There are five faculties in UDRU such as Education, Science, Humanities and Social Sciences, General Management Sciences and Technology. UDRU also offers degree programmes at the diploma, bachelor, master and doctoral levels in several academic disciplines.

UDRU is regarded as one of the fast growing Thai universities. There are more than 22,000 students enrolled in various courses. It has 478 teaching staff members and 310 supporting staff members to serve its academic functions. UDRU is considered as a university offering international and local knowledge to meet the demands of the community. With reference to its origin as a teacher education

institute, UDRU keeps on its specialisation in teaching and learning areas as it continues to expand its specialties in the area of education.

1.4.1 Department of English Language and Literature at Udon Thani Rajabhat University

The Department of English Language and Literature at Udon Thani Rajabhat University strives to develop its students to master English because most students do not pass the entrance exam. This is a difficult task for English lecturers to shape their students to become proficient in English language use. In this regard, the language centre provides remedial courses. It is compulsory for all students to sit for the English proficiency test when they register to study at UDRU. Students, who do not pass the English proficiency test, are required to take a remedial course before enrolling in the Fundamental English course (EN 101). The remedial course mainly aims at improving and enhancing the students' linguistic ability at UDRU by providing them with proficiency in language skills.

1.5 Statement of the Problem

Argumentative writing has been confirmed by many researchers to be the hardest genre in writing (Ferretti, Andrews-Weckerly & Lewis, 2007; Neff-van Aertselaer & Dafouz-Milne, 2008). This genre of writing is important for university students to express their own points of view in academically appropriate forms and patterns. Unfortunately, both ESL and EFL learners at the tertiary level often encounter difficulties in the use of complex syntactic patterns and appropriate elements in composing argumentative writing (Applebee et al., 1994; Nemeth and Kormos, 2001).

Based on the literature review on argumentative writing difficulties, most research studies have focused on how to examine students' structural features of argumentative writing (Kubota, 1998; Hirose, 2003; Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2008; Uysal, 2008; Chandraegaran, 2008; Qin & Karabacak, 2010). There are only a few research studies that emphasised instructional strategies designed to help improve students' argumentative writing (Varghese & Abraham, 1998; Yeh, 1998; Emilia, 2005). Although these research studies have provided evidence of students' weaknesses in terms of structural features of argumentative writing, the research studies conducted were limited to second language classroom settings. Therefore, these studies have not been able to explain the difficulties in learning and teaching argumentative writing in a Thai context.

Based on preliminary interviews with two Thai EFL lecturers about students' argumentative writing difficulties, both of lecturers confess that their EFL students are unable to write argumentative essays because of students' insufficient knowledge about the structural features and the writing process. In other words, they neither have adequate knowledge of grammar structure nor do they know how to generate and manipulate ideas. It is difficult for EFL lecturers to teach argumentative writing to their students because they are not familiar with this genre. Argumentative writing requires students to search out a thesis statement, foster evidence for the claim, formulate, modify and finally revise the thesis statement to ensure effective writing. However, students do not know how to project their voice in their writing. It can be said that they do not know how to write a thesis statement. Importantly, EFL students do not have the analytical skills to manipulate a well organised idea which is the main barrier to effective argumentative writing.

Only a few research studies (Kongpetch, 2006; Promwinai, 2010; Saito, 2010) have been conducted to investigate Thai EFL students' structural features of argumentative writing and genre-based teaching strategy was suggested as a way to help improve argumentative writing. According to Saito (2010), Thai EFL students have both linguistic and rhetorical insufficiency. Their writing has variant areas of weaknesses such as poor organisation including a lack of knowledge about argumentative structure and a failure to elaborate reasons to support the arguments. The other weakness is stylistic appropriateness so students produce inappropriate styles of writing by using inappropriate registers of language as well as the wrong connectors. Thai EFL students have insufficient exposure to argumentative writing

and receive little explicit instruction (Siriphan, 1988; Wongsothorn, 1994; Clayton & Klainin, 1994; Udomyamokkul, 2004).

Because of these reasons, there is a need to know more about the specific problems encountered by Thai EFL students when composing argumentative writing essays. Moreover, there is a lack of research on argumentative writing difficulties that have focused on the holistic problems in producing argumentative writing through the process of think aloud protocols. Therefore, this study aims to investigate students' argumentative writing difficulties through the process of think aloud protocols. Furthermore, this study intends to explore the teaching strategies used by Thai EFL lecturers to teach their students. Although, there are numerous teaching strategies available for writing in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL hereafter), not many EFL writing teachers have a clear understanding about writing approaches. Therefore, much of teaching writing still focuses on a traditional approach that is mainly concentrated on the knowledge about the structure of language and writing improvement as the result of the imitation of input, in the form of texts provided by the instructors. Knowledge about argumentative teaching strategies is not adequately descriptive to effectively instruct EFL students to be proficient in writing. Therefore, there is a critical need to investigate the use of teaching strategies to develop students' writing competence. This study also used stimulated recall interviews and classroom observations to collect detailed information from two Thai EFL lecturers about the teaching strategies used to help improve their students' writing skill. The types of teaching strategies used by the Thai EFL lecturers can help them further develop their teaching activities to meet the writing needs of their students (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Leighton & Gierl, 2007).

The study would provide useful insights on Thai tertiary students' writing difficulties with a complete description of the writing problems and teaching strategies used by EFL lecturers to teach their students.

1.6 Objectives of the study

The main aim of this research study is to identify the argumentative writing difficulties faced by Thai EFL learners when writing argumentative essays and teaching strategies used by two Thai EFL lecturers. In relation to this, this study aims to:

1. identify the difficulties faced by Thai EFL English major students when writing argumentative essays
2. examine the extent to which Thai EFL English major students need help from their lecturers to enhance their argumentative writing competence
3. investigate the difficulties experienced by Thai EFL lecturers when teaching argumentative writing
4. investigate the types of teaching strategies used by Thai EFL lecturers to teach argumentative writing